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# GENERAL IMPRESSIONS

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY  
NEW YORK · BOSTON · CHICAGO

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY  
OF CANADA, LIMITED  
TORONTO

# **GENERAL IMPRESSIONS**

**BY**

**E. M. DELAFIELD**

**MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED  
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON**

**1933**

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# JEAN RAVEN-HILL

My thanks are due to the Editor of *Time and Tide* for permission to reprint these sketches.

E. M. DELAFIELD

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# GENERAL IMPRESSIONS

## GENERAL IMPRESSION OF A COUNTRY-TOWN HOUSE-AGENT'S OFFICE

General Impression, derived from photographs and bills plastering every wall and window within sight, that most of the houses in the neighbourhood are to be Sold, and the remainder to be Let, giving rise to intelligent speculations as to the consequent whereabouts of the previous tenants.

AN EARNEST LADY. You see, what we're looking for is a *Home*. Something not too *large*, and yet not too *small*, and with a good *garden*, but not too much for one man to manage, and of course a garage, and my husband would *like* an orchard.

THE CLERK. Quite so, madam. Have you inspected "Lauderdale" or "Fleet Mount"?

THE E. L. (consulting an exhausted-looking piece of paper covered with pencil notes). Let me see, "Lauderdale" was the one with the *gas* laid on, and we wanted electric light, and anyway the bathroom was downstairs. I'm afraid that's no good. And isn't "Fleet Mount" a house that faces the wrong way?

THE CLERK (with an air of astonishment). The *wrong* way, madam? Hardly that, I think. Perhaps it doesn't face exactly the way your *present* residence faces, and that may have confused you, if I may say so?

General Impression that he has accurately gauged the extent to which his client is the victim of a not uncommon feminine inability to Understand the Points of the Compass, as she murmurs something vague about her Husband Liking the Windows to Look South or Something, and then changes the subject.

AN ASTUTE PERSON (who has insisted upon seeing the Head of the Business). Now those houses in Cleveland Road, for instance—I suppose I should have to pay a pretty high rent for one of *them*?

H. OF THE B. Well, sir, of course they're extremely difficult to get hold of. I assure you that I could let every one of them that passes through my hands a dozen times over. You see they're new houses, with every labour-saving device and modern convenience, standing high on gravel soil, facing south, adjoining the golf-course, and in an excellent residential neighbourhood.

THE A. P. Ah. Not much hope then.

H. OF THE B. I wouldn't say *that*, sir. Of course, there's a waiting list for them—especially for rent, unfurnished—but I should be pleased to see what we can do for you, if I may have the particulars. I can't *promise* anything, the demand for unfurnished houses being what it is, but we could bear your requirements in mind.

THE A. P. Well, I'm very glad to hear what you tell me because, as a matter of *fact*, I'm the *owner* of a house in Cleveland Road—No. 20—and from what you say, I imagine that you'll have no difficulty whatever in getting me a really good let.

General Impression that the A. P. has scored heavily, which is, however, dispersed after a few tense moments during which the H. of the B. recovers from the shock of his client's duplicity.

H. OF THE B. Of course, you must bear in mind, sir, that I'm talking of six months *ago*. Things were *very* different, then. You don't need me to tell you *that*, sir, I feel sure. *Very* different, they were, six months ago. We shall be delighted to take down your particulars, and do what we can for you, of course. But now let me see—No. 20—that's the *wrong* side of the road, isn't it, sir?

General Impression that the H. of the B. has rallied gamely, and may now be confidently backed to win.

A DEAR OLD LADY (in the Outer Office). Thank you so much for sending that young man to show me over Babberley Castle. *Most* interesting, I'm sure, especially the *dungeons*. And I should like an order to view The Court, please.

THE CLERK. The Court is a good deal smaller than Babberley, madam, if that's any objection?

D. OLD L. Oh, not the least, thank you. I don't really want to *buy* a house, you know, but my daughter in India may be coming home next spring, and I thought in case she wanted to settle anywhere in the country, with the children, you know, it would be so nice—though really, I think she likes *London* best....

General Impression that the Clerk is doomed to hear the whole of her family history sooner or later, and may just as well make up his mind to it at once.

## GENERAL IMPRESSION OF A HOUSE REMOVAL

Unspeakably depressing General Impression of innumerable sheets of newspaper spread, apparently at random, over carpetless floors and naked-looking staircases, and pallid walls on which appear sudden irregular squares and oblongs of un-faded colour hitherto concealed by pictures and furniture.

Every floor and ceiling liable to shake suddenly and violently beneath the tread of what appears to be a herd of wild buffaloes, but is in reality The Men. These, in altogether phenomenal Boots, and green baize aprons, finally resolve themselves into three: the Foreman, Bill, and Old Baker, none of whom ever utters a syllable in anything below a shout.

THE FOREMAN. Ease her up, Bill—ease her up.

BILL (with frightful abruptness). Hi! look *out*!

THE F. Careful, there! Now then—*Up* she goes!

General Impression that the Grand Piano must somehow have become wedged on the back stairs.

Subsequent anti-climax when Bill appears, carrying a towel-horse and two tin candlesticks.

BILL. *Now* we shan't be long! What about that Blue Ware in Bedroom No. Five?

The less reputable articles of the Blue Ware from Bedroom No. Five are thereupon escorted down the front stairs, and through the front hall, by Old Baker, progress being broken not infrequently whilst he exchanges mysterious and fragmentary shouts with the Foreman upstairs, during which intervals the Blue Ware reposes conspicuously at his feet.

OLD BAKER. All through, up there?

THE F. The Gent's Mahog. isn't down yet.

OLD B. (thoughtfully). Ar.

THE LADY OF THE HOUSE (who deals with the situation by keeping her hat on, and drinking a Hot Cup of Tea in the Hall instead of having lunch in the ordinary way). Directly the Last Van is full, I think we'd better *leave*. We can lock up the Back, and perhaps you'll see to the Front, and leave the keys at the lodge.

OLD B. We haven't come to *Keys* yet, mum—not by a very long way.

THE L. OF THE H. I thought this was the last load?

OLD B. (at the top of his voice). Bill, I say, is this the Last Load?

BILL (also at the top of his voice). Eh?

OLD B. (surpassing himself in vocal effort). This the LAST LOAD, the lady wants to know.

BILL. Ar, I couldn't hardly say, as to that. That's as it may be. Rain's coming down, too.

General Impression that this last catastrophe has probably thrown out the whole thing, and that although The Beds have Gone, we may have to Stay On Another Night after all.

THE COOK (suddenly appearing out of chaos). I'm sorry to say I can't find *Pussy*, madam. I'm afraid the Men's Boots may have frightened him.

MORE OR LESS EVERYBODY. Puss ... Puss ... Pussy. Where are you, puss?

Answer comes there none. General Impression that Pussy is going to take his revenge on the Men's Boots by hanging up proceedings as long as possible.

*At the Other End.*

General Impression that the unloading of the Vans is being done on a curious system that leads to the immediate appearance of a rocking-horse, a quantity of flower-vases, hundreds of Drawers divorced from their Tables, one broken chair, five Bedside Tables, and the total inaccessibility of everything else.

THE FOREMAN. The Ash is coming out now, sir. Where would you like it *put*?

THE HEAD OF THE HOUSE. Is that the Large Wardrobe?

THE F. The ash *suite*, sir—that has the crack in the panel, and the leg of one chair broke.

General Impression that he is wisely introducing the mention of these calamities at a moment when they will pass comparatively unperceived.

THE LADY OF THE HOUSE. I don't see the China Cabinet, anywhere. If we could get at the China Cabinet, I do believe we should have *all* the Drawing-room things *in* the Drawing-room.

OLD BAKER (encouragingly). That's right, mum. All the heavy stuff is in the drawing-room. There's only the *carpet* to come now.

THE COOK. If you please, madam, me and Sarah are very sorry, but we think we'd better tell you at once as we don't intend to *stay*. We don't feel the house is likely to suit us, either of us....

THE CAT (unexpectedly appearing between the Foreman's feet just as he is lifting up a roll of carpet that apparently weighs five ton and measures sixty feet long, and which will be disposed of on the top of the drawing-room furniture, instead of underneath it). MIAOW!

## GENERAL IMPRESSION OF THE ZOO

General Impression that Whatever we want to look at is a very long way from where we are now, and if only we could see a keeper, he might direct us—but when we do, and he does, it's all rather vague and complicated, and there are so many things on the way to distract our attention, that we can't remember if he said Past the Monkey-house and right round to the left of the Smaller Mammals, or Through the Tunnel, and just behind the Kangaroos.

AN UNCLE. And now, Peter, here are the lions at last.

PETER. They're not so *large* as I thought they'd be.

THE U. (raising his voice for the benefit of adjacent strangers). You'd think them large enough, my boy, if you'd been with me in *Africa*, never knowing whether one was going to spring up from behind a rock and make a *rush* for you. I remember once, when I was out——

PETER. But I *know* that story, Uncle. I wish you'd tell me one about *pirates*, instead.

*In the Monkey-house.*

A PERSON WITH A SMATTERING OF SCIENCE. Well, I must say, it does make you see what Darwin *meant*, doesn't it?

HIS COMPANION (austerely). I can't say I care about Darwin, myself.

Unescapable General Impression, as the Blue-bottomed Ape dawns upon the view, that this is a not altogether unreasonable prejudice.



THE PERSON WITH THE S. OF S. You may not *care* about it, ole man, but what I say is, you can't get away from the Proven Facts. You and me may act like civilized beings now, but there *was* a time when we looked exactly like these little fellows here, and *behaved* like them too.

THE C. (with finality). Not in *my* case, there wasn't.

\*

*In the Parrot-house.*

THE PARROTS (in dissonant chorus). Squawk—wauk—*wauk!*

A SIGHT-SEER WITH A GRASP OF THE OBVIOUS. Noisy in here, isn't it?

\*

*On the Mappin Terraces.*

AUNTIE (who is giving a treat to a collection of small nephews and nieces). Those are the *Bears*. Stand well back, dear, there's nothing to prevent their jumping right over the ditch, as far as I can see, to the very spot we're standing on.... Better take Auntie's hand, Willie, in case you're frightened. Joan, I wouldn't go up there, dear, or you may fall over and break your neck. Keep together, chicks, and don't lose sight of Auntie whatever you do. There's many a poor child got lost in the Zoo through lagging behind, and never been heard of again.

WILLIE (green with alarm). And what *happened* to them, Auntie? Did the lions get them?

AUNTIE (absentmindedly, but anxious to please the child). I expect so, dear.

\*

*Outside the Pigmy Hippo's Cage.*

AN ENTHUSIASTIC LADY. Oh, what a little *darling*! Isn't he *too* sweet? But where's his mother? Surely he's too young to be taken away from his mother?

A KEEPER (sardonically). She'll be brought in to say *good-night* to him, madam, a little later on.

\*

*In the Aquarium.*

AN EXACTING SIGHT-SEER. Fancy! they haven't got a whale. You'd think they'd have a whale, wouldn't you? I always thought they had *every* animal at the Zoo.

ANOTHER SPECTATOR (in front of the Electric Eel). Did you ever see anything *like* that? It doesn't seem like an animal, does it? I mean the way it's made, and that. How they ever think *up* the things, is what beats me.

HER FRIEND (slightly dazed by staring through glass and water at a succession of utterly improbable creatures). I wouldn't like to have the job of sorting them all out, I know that.

\*

Recrudescence of Auntie and her troop, most of whom are now in tears; and all of them in an advanced state of exhaustion.

AUNTIE (more in sorrow than in anger). And all I can say, Joan, is that if this is the way you behave when you're taken for such a lovely treat, you'd better stay outside while the rest of us go and look at the snakes. There's one of them sixteen feet long, and one touch of its fang is poison—and deadly poison, too....

General Impression that the thought of missing this fascinating sight will prove only less agonizing than the prospect of beholding it.

AUNTIE. And what about the buns for the elephants, now?

Answer comes there none.

Painful General Impression gradually gains ground, that the Buns have been eaten by Willie and Co.

Scene closes in as this distressing discovery dawns upon Auntie, who is by this time far too worn out by two hours of solid walking to endure it with equanimity.

### GENERAL IMPRESSION OF A TENNIS PARTY

First, practically invariable, General Impression that with any Luck the Rain will Keep off till Later. Second General Impression that It's only Spitting, third General Impression that This isn't going to be Anything Much, or, alternatively, that The Harder it comes down at *first*, the sooner it'll be over.

Dramatic appearance of a young player in a sleeveless frock, with a green shade over her eyes.

AN ONLOOKER. My dear, *look* at Helen Wills!

A WIT ON THE COURT. Hallo, is this Helen Wills?

A FRIEND OF THE Y. P.S. My dear, you look exactly like *Helen Wills*!

A NEW ONLOOKER (aside). Do tell me who that is. Does she think she's Helen Wills, or what?

General Impression that this highly original comparison will continue to be made, throughout the afternoon, by more or less everybody present.

As, indeed, happens; varied only by an occasional murmur about Suzanne, alternatively referred to as Longlong, Lenglenn, and Langlan.

*Just Before a Sett.*

A YOUNG GENTLEMAN IN FLANNELS THAT APPARENTLY REQUIRE PERPETUAL HITCHING, TO A YOUNG LADY IN MAUVE STRIPES. I'm afraid I'm fearfully rotten.

THE MAUVE STRIPES. Oh, I'm putrid.

On the Other Side of the Net, a BANDANNA HANDKERCHIEF is remarking to a WHITE WASHING SILK that he is Absolutely the World's Rabbit. To which the W. W. S. returns:

Oh, so'm I, never hit a ball in my *life*, except sometimes into the net.

After which encouraging preliminaries they settle down to a perfectly good game.

*Just After a Sett.*

A HOSTESS. Now let me see—who hasn't played? Will *you* play, and *you*, and—let me see—you haven't played at all yet, have you, Margery?

MARGERY (with two racquets, a bandeau, and all the appearance of being a tournament champion). Oh, I'm *quite* happy looking on. In fact, I really would *rather*. What about Mrs. Jones?

MRS. J. (quite obviously blue with cold from prolonged sitting still). Oh no, no, really not. I'm so dreadfully bad—do play instead of me. I'll play later, if I may, when everyone else has had a turn.

GENERAL CHORUS. Oh, do play instead of me ... do let me look on for a little while ... yes, really, I'd so *much* rather.... (Until one longs to know why any of them have troubled to bring racquets or shoes at *all*, if the only thing they really want to do is to sit still and look on....)

THE HOSTESS (after seven or eight minutes of this contest in unselfishness). Then, Mrs. Brown, if *you'll* play with Captain Jones, and Mrs. Jones with the Rector, I think that ought to be *quite* a good sett.

General Impression that she does not really think this, nor indeed does anybody else, but has merely selected, in despair, the four people whose resistance is most nearly worn down.

MRS. BROWN }  
MRS. JONES } I'm afraid you'll find me *frightfully*  
CAPTAIN JONES } feeble, partner.  
THE RECTOR }

Or words to that effect, as they hasten on to the court, which has been empty for the last twenty minutes or so.

A PLAYER WHO LIKES TO WIN. Send that girl as many back-handers as possible, partner—she simply hates them. And when you're serving to the Rector, I should pitch them rather *short*, if I were you—he can't get across the court very quickly.

*At Tea.*

THE MOTHER OF A DAUGHTER.... And as I said to her, it really is ridiculous to talk of not having enough to do down here, when there's tennis in the summer, and the Girl Guides, and any number of garden fêtes and Jumble Sales and so on, going on practically the *whole* time, besides the dances and things at Christmas....

General Impression that We'd better go out on to the lawn again, perhaps, as they'll have finished that sett now—a movement encouraged by the Hostess, who knows that a fresh supply of Plates and another Kettle are waiting to be rushed on for the second instalment of Tea.

\*

Practically every Hostess in the Countryside: My dear, I can't *tell* you what it's like, trying to get up a tennis party ... there are simply NO MEN to be had.

## GENERAL IMPRESSION OF A LADIES' COMMITTEE MEETING

Regrettable, and not even original, simile relating to Parrot-house at the Zoo—but this painful General Impression immediately dispersed when the hour strikes and the chairwoman takes her seat, giving place to admiration for such perfect punctuality.

A MEMBER (rather defiantly, in an undertone). I suppose we can *smoke*? *Men* always do. (Lights up.)

General Impression that this is a perfectly logical attitude. The Smoking Member is supported by half a dozen others, and the atmosphere would be even more masculine than it is, if so many of those present did not produce little blue or pink or purple pocket-combs and make use of them, carefully placing their hats on the table—where they become inextricably entangled with Agendas and Memos and Things.

THE CHAIRWOMAN. I will call upon the Secretary for the Minutes of the last meeting... Oh, I think I'd better read them *myself*, if nobody minds, because poor Miss Kay has such a cold. Will that be all right?

General Impression that it will.

A COUNTRY MEMBER (who has a little dog upon a chain concealed under the table—suddenly and sharply).  
Hush!

Tendency on the part of the whole Committee to look under the table and exchange indulgent smiles.

*After some Discussion.*

AN EMPHATIC MEMBER. You see, what I feel so strongly is, that if we do anything of that kind, we're simply bringing discredit on the *Whole* Movement, and *Ruining* our own Cause. That's really all I mean.

General Impression that she could hardly have been expected to mean much *more*.

A DIFFIDENT MEMBER. I must say that I do, in a way, see the *point* of what the last speaker has just said, although of course one knows so well that there's more than one *side* to a question, so to speak. I mean to say, isn't there?

THE CHAIR (not unreasonably). Are you speaking *for* the Resolution, or *against* it?

THE DIFFIDENT MEMBER. I really don't feel we've fully thrashed it *out* yet, quite, in a way.

A MEMBER (who has an engagement elsewhere, suddenly and strongly). I move that the question be now *put*.

General Impression that this is worthy of the best masculine business traditions.

THE CHAIR. We want to consider our Leaflet, too, and especially that paragraph on page 2 about propaganda.

A MEMBER (who, judging by appearances, is almost certainly a University Woman). There are no less than two split infinitives in that leaflet, and the whole thing ought to be rewritten.

A universal rustle indicates that the Split Infinitives are being pursued by the other members of the Committee,—some of whom, alas, will fail to recognize them when they do find them.

*After a Financial Statement.*



THE TREASURER. ... so that our balance in the Bank amounts at present to one hundred and six pounds fourteen shillings and eightpence.

Subdued applause, quelled by the usual qualifying clause that invariably follows any announcement relating to any balance on the credit side.

... Out of which we actually have to pay office rent, fifty pounds, expenses of the Show, twenty-four pounds three shillings and tenpence, and to meet an account for wear and tear of office furniture in the past six months, amounting to four pounds two shillings and three halfpence.

General Impression that the more ingenious members of the Committee can work out quite an interesting problem from the question: How, exactly, is wear and tear to office furniture computed? And what, exactly, was the three-halfpenny worth of damage?

THE CHAIR. ... Then, if that meets your point, Mrs. Way, I think we can put it to the vote——

A VOLUBLE MEMBER. Ah, but I think there, again, madam chairman——

A gradual depression descends upon the Meeting as the Voluble Member goes on and on, and the hour of whatever meal is due draws nearer and nearer. Even the little dog of the Country Member begins to fidget, and is not, this time, requested to Hush!

THE VOLUBLE MEMBER (at the close of a most eloquent speech). And that, really, is why I ask you to vote for this resolution.

Resolution voted for with entire unanimity and much pushing back of chairs. General Impression prevails, however, that this mightn't have been so, in spite of the Voluble Member's eloquence, if the session hadn't been quite such a long one, and hadn't taken place on such very uncomfortable chairs.

## GENERAL IMPRESSION OF A COUNTRY AUCTION-SALE

General Impression—founded on several printed Notices affixed in and out of doors—that the Sale will begin in Room No. 1 at 2.30 Sharp. Gradual waning of confidence as time passes and nothing at all happens. By 3.15 the entrance to Room No. 1 is securely blocked by people.

A RAUCOUS VOICE. The Auctioneer will now put up for sale the first Lots in Bedroom No. 8, *up* the stairs. Please don't push. There isn't any call to *push*, I assure you.

Call or no call, pushing prevails, and presently some hundred people more than it can reasonably accommodate are wedged into Bedroom No. 8.

The Auctioneer, wearing a tweed suit and a bowler hat, is standing like a rock on a very high stool, and two men in aprons, with arms bared to the elbow, are hovering solicitously near, as though to catch him if he should later on overbalance into the crowd.

THE A. Now, ladies and gentlemen, we want to get to business, and I warn you that I'm not going to 'Ang About. I've some very nice little lots here, and I don't intend *them* to 'Ang About. The articles will go to the highest bidder, and once more I warn you, there'll be no 'Anging About. Here we have lot No. 1, Solid Deal Chest of Drawers, in excellent condition. Just lift up Lot No. 1, will you, Albert?

Lot No. 1 is heaved into sight, minus its drawers, by Albert and his companion.

A NAÏVE VOICE. Why, wherever is the drawers?

THE A. Just lift up them drawers, will you, Albert, I want everything perfectly straightforward and above board. Pleasure, madam, I assure you.

General Impression that this amiable view is not shared by Albert and Co.

THE A. Now, who'll give me a start for this Solid Deal Chest of Drawers? This is good, pre-war stuff, this is——

A VOICE IN THE CROWD. 'S matter of fac', I was with Old Williams when he *bought* that chest, a matter of four and a half months since——

THE A. Now then, gentlemen, please, now then, I shan't 'Ang About, what am I bid for this chest of drawers, I'll start anywhere you like, what shall I say, shall I say a pound, a pound am I bid, we won't 'Ang About, start at ten shillings, if you like, shall I say ten shillings....

A TIMOROUS VOICE. Nine and sixpence.

THE A. Thank *you*, sir, nine and sixpence, nine and sixpence am I bid, shall I make it ten shillings, come, come, gentlemen....

The Chest of Drawers gradually climbs up the scale of value till it stops at three pounds two shillings and sixpence, and is knocked down at that figure.

THE A. Lot No. 2, Quantity of Books, one Enamel Slop-pail, Milking-stool, and Roll of Linoleum.

General Impression that it would be interesting to know on what system these particular objects have been inseparably grouped together—which becomes intensified later on when a further Lot appears, consisting of Zinc Hip-bath, Framed Engraving of the Late Prince Consort, Quantity of Felt Strips, and Mahogany Pedestal Cupboard in Good Condition.

*Downstairs.*

THE A. (now completely in the swing of it, and more determined than ever that there shall be no 'Anging About). Circular-top Marble Table, *as* described in the catalogue—one pound am I bid one pound shall I call it a guinea thank you twenty-four and sixpence, thirty shillings, thirty-two and six, thirty-five shillings, it's against you at the door madam, thirty-seven six, forty am I bid....

And so on, apparently deriving information as to bids from the wink of an eye or the turn of a head, until a General Impression gets about that it isn't safe to stir a finger in his direction.

AN OLD HAND. No use hoping to get anything really *good* here, I don't expect, as the *Dealers* have been poking about. They'll come anywhere on the chance of picking up some really *old* stuff—*anywhere*.

A FACETIOUS SPIRIT. Tell 'em to go for the Wool Mattress in Lot 285, then. *That's* old enough for anybody.

A GENTLEMAN WHO HAS BEEN OUTBIDDEN. That fellow must have been a *dealer*, you know. That's what they do—they make a *Ring*, you know—simply a Ring—no one else has a chance.

General Impression that he doesn't really know what he means by this mysterious accusation, but that anyway the Dealers are an unpopular feature of the Sale, and They oughtn't really to be Allowed.

A LADY WHO HAS RATHER LOST HER HEAD. O Charles, that sweet little stool! I really must have that. Couldn't I bid for it, Charles?

THE A. (fixing her with a compelling eye). Oak Jacobean carved antique stool, now this is probably a collector's piece, shall I start at a pound, one pound, going at one pound, twenty-five shillings, thirty, thirty-two and sixpence—you'll lose it, madam, shall I make it two guineas—thank you—going at two guineas——

And so on, until the Lady has been hypnotized into acquiring the Stool at something approaching five times its actual value, without so much as noticing that it is, as usual, inexplicably coupled with One Aluminium Frying-pan, two Waste-Paper Baskets, and one Child's Wicker Armchair, with two castors missing.

Scene closes in, as Albert and his mate hold up to admiration an American Parlour Harmonium and two China Mugs, leaving everybody in a state of heat and exhaustion, except the indefatigable Auctioneer, still repeating in a voice of

cast-iron:

"Gentlemen, I'm not going to 'Ang About over this little lot, what shall we say for a start?"—and so on until we do say something.

## GENERAL IMPRESSION OF A BANK

First, perhaps rather unfortunate, General Impression distinctly reminiscent of the *Zoo*, with a number of bored-looking animals strongly confined behind a high grill. Second General Impression, also reminiscent of the *Zoo*, that those behind the grill are completely indifferent to the requirements of those on the other side.

Effect of colossal and business-like ink-wells, and handsome supply of penholders laid along the counter.

A CLIENT (needless to say, female). Oh—would you mind cashing this *crossed* cheque for me, please—fourteen shillings and sixpence three-farthings? It seems an odd sum, in a way, but it just gets my balance *even*. I'm funny in that way, I'm afraid; I do like my balance to be an *even* sum.

General Impression—(perhaps derived from the expression on the Head Cashier's face as he meticulously counts out this remarkable sum?)—that this is not the only way in which the client is "funny".

*In the Manager's Office.*

AN EARNEST YOUNG GENTLEMAN (who has asked for an interview, but does not appear to know how to get on with it). Perfectly marvellous weather, isn't it?

THE MANAGER. Yes, indeed, Mr. Bates. Quite wonderful.

MR. B. (unhappily). That's what I think. Wonderful.

THE M. (encouragingly). I often think the British Climate is very much maligned.

MR. B. Rather! Oh yes—*rather*.

General Impression that if he isn't helped, he will go on like this all day.

THE M. Anything I can have the pleasure of doing for you, Mr. Bates?

MR. B. (starting in false astonishment). Oh yes—by Jove, I'm glad you reminded me—there *was* a little matter—I—I think I had a letter from you, about my *overdraft* or something—

THE M. (disregarding Something as a mere puerility—which indeed it is). Would you like me to ascertain for you Exactly How Things Stand, Mr. Bates?

General Impression that they both of them know to a fraction Exactly How Things Stand—or, more probably, do not Stand—but that amenities had better be preserved.

*Later in the Day.*

A CONSCIENTIOUS YOUNG CLIENT. I just called because I wanted to explain about my account. You see, I'm afraid you'll think I'm overdrawn, and of course I am in a way—at least if the Gramophone Record People pay in my cheque at once, I am. But I thought I'd better tell you that *it'll be all right*, because it happens to be my birthday next week, and I always get a cheque for five pounds from my father, and if I send it to you *immediately*, that'll put me straight again. But *till* then, I'm afraid I'm about one pound six shillings and a few pence, I don't know how many, overdrawn. If the Manager *says* anything, will you explain to him, please?

THE CASHIER. Certainly, madam.

General Impression that the Manager will, at all costs, be reassured on this subject before there is any serious danger of the Bank closing down. The Conscientious Young Client withdraws with effusive thanks, and an air of relief.

*In the Manager's Office once more*, Mr. Bates having departed in great disorder, and an Elderly Gentleman with a Bald Head having succeeded him.

THE E. G. So you see it's a mere temporary accommodation—simply a matter of convenience.

THE M. Quite, quite. Now in regard to *security*, Sir William...

General Impression that the crux of the matter has here been reached.

THE E. G. (airily). Ah, yes. Well, *there*, to be perfectly candid with you, I find myself in a slightly anomalous position. As a matter of absolute fact—*actually*—it's hardly convenient, at the moment, for me to do very *much*, as to securities.

THE M. (with unabated suavity). I quite follow you, Sir William. Quite. Now—if I may ask—exactly how far are you prepared to go?

General Impression that he knows, and Sir William knows, that the latter is prepared to go exactly no distance at all, and that the consequent negotiations are likely to be fraught with difficulties for all parties concerned. As, indeed, is too often the case in these post-war days in which we live....

## GENERAL IMPRESSION OF THE JANUARY SALES

First General Impression—which subsequently, one regrets to say, has to be modified—that the usual jokes as to the resemblance between a Sale and a Football Scrum are now completely *démodés*; an almost sinister politeness prevailing amongst those present. (There are, as usual, about a hundred customers to one sales-lady.)

1ST PERFECT STRANGER. Excuse me—I'm afraid this is your piece of net?

2ND P. S. Oh, it doesn't matter at all. I was really only *looking* at it.

General Impression that she must—judging from the condition of the piece of net—have been looking at it with both hands, and a strong set of teeth.

AN EXPERIENCED SALES-GOER. I'll take the navy coat and skirt in the window marked three guineas, and the red evening cloak in the same window, and half a dozen of these towels and three of the shop-soiled Hose Bargains in the Ladies' Wovens on the second floor, please. Would you kindly get down the Wovens at once, please, while I look after these other things?

(The result of this masterly firmness is that she is at once attended to, and moreover places her purchases upon the only chair visible anywhere in the vicinity, and sits down upon them.)

An Inexperienced Sales-goer, on the other hand, is left repeating timidly at intervals: I wonder if I might trouble you to let me look at a *hat* in one of the *windows*, please?—without receiving the slightest notice from anybody at all.

*In the Millinery Department*. Briskness, almost amounting to violence, prevails.

A MATRON. But these are all so *drab*. What's the scarlet one, over there? Or that little gold turban?

THE SALES-LADY. The Turban is one of the very newest models from Paris, moddam. The scarlet one, by *rights*, oughtn't to be in the sale at all—but it's just one of those daring little *chapeaux* that scarcely a dozen people could wear, if you know what I mean, moddam.

Presumption is that moddam *does* know what she means, as she instantly wedges the scarlet hat on to the extreme back of her large, respectable-looking head, and gazes at the result in the mirror with excited hopefulness.

THE MATRON. You wouldn't call it too *vivid*, would you?

THE SALES-LADY (registering scandalized astonishment). Vivid, moddam? That little hat *vivid*? Oh, moddam, it's *the* colour, just now. Why, it's positively *macabre*, I assure you, compared to what's being worn in Paris, just now.

General Impression, not to be avoided, that this may or may not be true, but that this particular Sales-lady has never in her life been nearer to Paris than the Hammersmith Palais de Danse.

A DETERMINED VOICE. I beg your pardon—but I've already Decided on this Hat.

A LESS DETERMINED VOICE. Excuse me, but——

THE D. V. I'm really very sorry, but you should have been quicker. The moment I saw that hat, I made up my mind. I always make up my mind very quickly, I'm afraid, and I knew *At Once*, that was *My Hat*.

THE LESS D. V. But I'm afraid it's *mine*. I——

THE D. V. Please don't let's have any unpleasantness. I assure you that I'm one of those people who *never argue*. I'm not at all annoyed, I assure you, but it's quite useless to argue. If you'd seen the hat first, I should have been the first person to ask you to take it——

THE LESS D. V. But I *must* take it. I brought it here. It's the hat I came in, and I only took it off to try on another hat.

*Just about an hour after the official closing-time:* Collection of Young Ladies now transformed by means of coats, hats, and the absence of Floor-Walkers, into ordinary Young Londoners, preparing to go home.

"I thought we'd never get rid of that last old trout! You'd have thought she'd *see* the place was practically closed."

"Coo, what price my *feet* to-night? Red-hot, they are."

"Worse by the end of the week, dear!"

"That boy's waiting for you *again*, outside the side entrance, Lily."

"Good-night, all. Sorry I can't offer you a lift in the Rolls, but my shovver's got the influenza, and so I shall be taking the Tube...."

General Impression that there's Nothing Like a Joke to Brighten Things Up a Bit.

## GENERAL IMPRESSION OF A DENTIST'S WAITING-ROOM

First General Impression that this—like so much else—has changed, and there is no longer the old amount of Clean, Wholesome, English Fun to be derived from the whole subject of Dentistry ... since no one's head is tied up in a handkerchief, no one is in tears, and no one says a word about False Teeth. *O tempora! O mores! Mais où vont les neiges d'antan*—and so on and so forth ... reflections that spring inevitably to the Thoughtful Mind in contemplating a careless generation....

Temporary revival of the Thoughtful Mind at sight of the same old periodicals on the table, survivals of the old order of things ... a copy of the *Sphere* of seven years ago, two numbers of *Punch* dating from the Armistice, an *Illustrated London News* with most of the leaves torn out, and a mountainous erection of a strange little periodical—never encountered anywhere else in the civilized world—entitled *How to Tell the Wild Flowers from the Birds*—or *something* like that, anyway.

A VERY SMALL CHILD (brightly). Don't you *love* coming to the dentist, Mummie?

MUMMIE (with that lack of candour so characteristic of a parent). Very much indeed, darling.

THE V. S. C. I do *hope* he'll use that nice *buzzer*, don't you, Mummie?

MUMMIE. I dare say he will, darling, if you ask him nicely.

General Impression that in the *old* days, a dentist on receiving such a request as this, whether made nicely or otherwise, would certainly have suffered a severe nervous collapse from sheer astonishment ... but there you are—neither children nor dentists are what they used to be.

A LADY IN A RAFFIA HAT (to a Friend). Well, as I was telling you: I simply didn't answer one word. Not a single word. In fact, I couldn't have spoken, if it had been to save my life. I simply said: "Charles," I said, "I'm a woman of the world. Nothing shocks me. *Nothing*. But," I said, "what I saw this morning with my own eyes, *with my own eyes*" I said, "has so absolutely horrified me, that I simply can't speak of it."

THE FRIEND (to the relief of everyone else in the room). My dear! But what exactly was it that you saw?

THE RAFFIA HAT. *You* know, darling—what I was telling you about in the taxi.

THE FRIEND. What—About the H?

General Impression that the friend isn't playing the game at all with this mysterious reference, and has let down the rest of the room badly.

Appearance of the Dental Parlourmaid (with—as is usual in all Dental Parlourmaids—quite the worst and most projecting set of discoloured teeth that ever disfigured human countenance)—enquiring if You will Kindly Step This Way, please.

\*

*In the Dentist's Surgery.*

A NEW PATIENT. ... And I think the little gauze mask you're wearing such a *good* idea, too.

THE DENTIST (an infinitely tactful personality—as his singular choice of a profession indeed necessitates). All our modern men are going in for them. It's really more agreeable for the patient....

General Impression that, although he so charmingly puts it like this, there may be another, and exactly converse way of looking at it, although Wild Horses wouldn't induce him to put it into words.

\*

AN OCTOGENARIAN FEMALE PATIENT. I'm almost certain that some of these upper teeth are rather *loose*. Now I wonder why that is?

THE DENTIST (in tones of concern and astonishment). Just let me make certain which ones you mean... Well, certainly, there *is* a tendency.... Of course, even modern science hasn't entirely got to the *bottom* of these things, you know ... there really seems no accounting for the slight Receding of the Gums that sometimes overtakes The Jaw in quite early Middle Life....

General Impression that this could hardly have been better—even if more accurately—worded.



\*

A VOLUBLE GENTLEMAN IN THE CHAIR. My experience of Government work, I may tell you ...

Deft interposition, by the Dental Operator, of a gag, a small tube, a pad, a wedge, a quarter of a pound of Cement Stopping, three anonymous Instruments, and a couple of his own fingers.

THE D. O. (with the utmost suavity). Just a minute....

General Impression that Government Work simply isn't in it with this kind of thing.

## GENERAL IMPRESSION OF A SERVANTS' REGISTRY OFFICE

First General Impression, that the inventor of a Noiseless typewriter ought to make a fortune. Humiliating conviction of one's own significance—amounting, indeed, to invisibility—in the eyes of painted and efficient young persons.

VOICE (abruptly). Can I direct you?

A VERY APOLOGETIC LADY. Well—I'm looking, really, for a Kitchen-maid.

General Impression that the Apologetic Lady is more fool than knave. She is conducted pityingly to a suave black-satin woman sitting at a large desk.

THE BLACK-SATIN WOMAN (discouragingly). Yes?

THE V. A. LADY. Well, I know it's not easy to find them, of course, but I—well, as a matter of fact, I'm *really* looking for a kitchen-maid.

THE B.-S. WOMAN. Town or Country?

THE V. A. LADY. Oh, London.

The V. A. Lady revives a little, as she says this, evidently feeling that it's a point in her favour.

"We don't do London here. Miss Dalrymple! Take Madam to the Bureau for Town Situations."

Madam follows Miss Dalrymple to another desk, presided over by auburn hair and a pince-nez.

THE PINCE-NEZ. For London? (Suspiciously) Not suburbs, is it?

V. A. LADY. Oh no. Nothing like that. Eaton Terrace.

THE PINCE-NEZ. Ah! Right off the bus route, isn't it?

General Impression that the V. A. Lady has been shown up as an impostor, and that Eaton Terrace is a poor address to boast about, anyway.

THE PINCE-NEZ. Did you want a kitchen-maid? They're very difficult to get, you know.

THE V. A. LADY (faintly). I'm offering *good* wages.

THE P.-N. (sharply). What do you *call* good wages, Madam?

THE V. A. LADY (temporizing). Well, what would you suggest yourself?

THE P.-N. (evincing an iron determination not to help her in any way). Quite impossible to say, Madam. What have you been giving?

THE V. A. LADY. Well, the last girl had thirty-four.

The Pince-Nez lady shuts up the ledger with an air of finality and sketches a pitying smile. General Impression that the Apologetic Lady had better go, before worse befalls.

THE V. A. LADY (hysterically). But I *would* go to forty. (The Pince-Nez maintains a brassy silence.) Or even forty-two. Perhaps—if she was experienced—I *might* say forty-five. (Slight symptoms of relenting on the part of the Pince-Nez lady and the ledger. Negotiations resumed.)

In another Department an interview is progressing between a Mother and a candidate for the post of Nursery Governess, who has described herself on paper as young, bright, and willing, but gives rather the impression of being elderly, depressed, and unwilling to the point of stubbornness.

THE MOTHER. It's really not at all a hard place, especially for anyone who likes the country. The children are out a great deal. I like them to walk for an hour or two every day at least, in all weathers, and in-between-times you could just run about and play with them, don't you know—the three boys are very active and the little girls rather tomboys—and of course we mustn't neglect the *lessons*. I want the boys thoroughly well grounded for school, and they all do callisthenics, and those nice eurhythmic, you know, and then I should like you to teach them all five music, and drawing for the three eldest. Oh, and needlework for the girls. Then, of course, there's just the mending, and I always ask my governess to make the baby's little things. You see, you have the evenings quite to yourself. I'm afraid I'm out a good deal myself, but the children will keep you quite lively, you know. They're never still, which I always think is such a good sign.

THE N. G. (who has applied unavailingly for seven posts in the last five days and knows that she can't pay for her lodgings any longer). And what salary are you offering?

THE MOTHER (airily). Forty to fifty—but as you haven't got any French——

THE N. G. (hastily). I'm quite ready to take forty-five——

General Impression that she has bitten off a good deal more than she can chew, but is lucky to have got the chance.

*At the Desk of the Presiding Deity—enthroned behind glass.*

THE P. D. Anything to-day?

A CLERK. That woman we sent to Lady Poker is leaving.

THE P. D. (unmoved). Ah, they've found out she drinks, then. Send her name to the gentleman in Belgrave Square who's offering eighty, and you might let those American Ladies have it, and anybody else who's offering over eighty. That'll keep them quiet for a bit. No applications from permanent cooks, I suppose?

THE CLERK. Not one.

THE P. D. Then answer this letter from Curzon Street and say we're giving the lady's name and requirements to some first-class cooks, and that she ought to hear from them in a few days.

Business proceeds briskly. General Impression that the whole question of Domestic Employment is in a rather parlous condition, and that it ought to be looked into.

## GENERAL IMPRESSION OF A WEST-END DRAPER'S

First General Impression, that an extraordinary and unnatural amount of electric light is being cast over goods that it would be a good deal easier to select by daylight.

A LADY IN A FUR COAT. Which way are Stockings, please?

A GENTLEMAN IN A FROCK COAT. Ladies' Hose, moddam? Through the Wovens and Round to the Right, moddam, just opposite Perfumery, you'll find them.

The Fur Coat obediently goes through the Wovens and Round to the Right, and having with difficulty disentangled Perfumery from Drugs and from Ladies' Hairdressing, finds herself in Stockings.

A YOUNG LADY. Can I help you, moddam?

THE F. C. Stockings, please.

THE Y. L. (very kindly, but in a faintly astonished voice). *Stockings*, moddam? Oh certainly, moddam. Any particular colour?

THE F. C. Brown, please.

General Impression amongst all the Young Ladies that moddam is a complete amateur at this kind of thing.

THE Y. L. (gently). What shade did Moddam wish? Nigger, fawn, sunburn, beige?

THE F. C. (with almost unbelievable strength of mind). *Brown*, I said.

THE Y. L. (distantly). Of course, moddam, brown isn't being worn this year. I doubt if we have anything in brown. But if you'd care to see the new tones of bronze, or tango, or nut, we have a very good selection.

In the Inexpensive Evening Dress Department, where it is almost impossible to avoid a General Impression that Colour, at our present stage of British Civilization, is considered to be of more importance than Cut.

An elegant young Mannequin is parading in a scarlet tea-gown before two ladies of matronly build.

FIRST LADY (enthusiastically). There, that's what I mean, dear. That delightfully slim line.

THE FRIEND. Yes. Unless perhaps ... You don't think the *colour* might be a tiny bit trying?

THE SALES-LADY (very firmly indeed, and with a good deal of musical laughter). Oh no, moddam. The *Colour* isn't trying. Not in the very least. It's really a wonderful colour, *in that way*, if you see what I mean. No one could call it *trying*, moddam. (This is apparently true, as, after this, no one does.)

*On the Second Floor.*

AN EXHAUSTED SHOPPER. I want the Lift, please.

The usual directions as to going Straight Through, Round to the Left and the Lift will be facing you, follow.

LIFT ATTENDANT (impassively). Going up, please. Blouses, jumpers, ladies' underwear, children's outfitting, third floor, Elizabethan Restaurant, Tropical Lounge, Mannequin Parade, fourth floor.... Going *up*, please.

HALF A DOZEN VOICES (entirely regardless of this). I want to go downstairs, please. The Ground floor.

L. A. (looking straight through them and in a still more impassive voice). Going up, please.

Disappearance of Lift. A fresh throng of exhausted shoppers hastens to the gate to await its reappearance. When this eventually takes place, the workings of some strange law entirely incomprehensible to the general public compel the L. A. to proclaim exactly as before:

L. A. Going up, please. Blouses, jumpers ... and so on. Going up, please.

Second disappearance. A rumour spreads that there is another Lift, just round the Department to the Right, and this will be Going Down, please. General Impression that if one makes a rush for it, the first Lift will inevitably reappear, this time on its way to the basement. The majority of Exhausted Shoppers give it up and go down by the Stairs.

In the Coat Department a Gentleman is helping his wife to choose a winter coat. Fifteen of these garments are strewn on surrounding chairs and sofas, and a sixteenth is being Tried On.

THE LADY. I like this one, Robert. (*She has said this about almost all of them.*) What do *you* think?

ROBERT. Very nice, dear.

THE LADY. But which do you think suits me best, Robert? This one, or the navy-blue, or that one with the fur collar, or the green?

ROBERT (quite at random, but in the faint hope of hurrying things up a little). The green, I think, dear.

SALES-LADY (enthusiastically). Moddam looked marvellous in the green, I thought. Won't you slip it on again, moddam?

Robert is assailed by an intimate and painful conviction that the Green will turn out to be the most expensive of the lot, and that his wife will insist upon having it because he *said* it was the one he really preferred her in, and anyway it's always an economy in the end to get a thoroughly good thing.

And this, indeed, is exactly what happens.

## GENERAL IMPRESSION OF A HUNT BALL

General Impression (that we perfectly well remember registering last year, and the year before, and the year before *that*) of the large number of ladies who fail to realize that pink, red, orange, and scarlet frocks are a Mistake at Hunt Balls.

A VERY YOUNG THING. Hallo, Edward, you idiot! You're nearly too late; I'm practically booked up.

EDWARD. I don't really give a dam' if you are. There are any number of leading hearties here that I want to dance with.

THE V. Y. T. Don't be so putridly off-hand. What about 7 and 8?

EDWARD. All right, if you want to. See you later, then.

General Impression that the mutual admiration of Edward and the V. Y. T. has, if anything, been increased by this sprightly passage of wits.

A WIFE. What about *dancing*, dear?

HER HUSBAND. Oh, must we?

THE WIFE. Well you see, dear, I don't really know how to *do* these new dances, and certainly *you* don't, so I think we'd better just dance with one another till we pick it up a little.

THE HUSBAND. It isn't really what I call *dancing* at all. Just walking, *I* call it. (They walk accordingly.)

THE WIFE. Simply splendid, dear—you see it's quite easy—one and two and three and—the *time* is just a little bit tricky, every now and then—you didn't happen to notice if this one is a waltz, or a foxtrot, or *what*, did you?

Painful conviction that he *didn't* gradually invades them both, as it does everyone else in the vicinity.

ONE OF SOME TWENTY SUPERFLUOUS YOUNG WOMEN, TO ANOTHER (brightly). I simply *love* watching a scene like this—it's almost more fun than *dancing*, I always think. All the little things one sees and hears, don't you know!

SECOND S. Y. W. (even more brightly). I know. People are simply *killing*, aren't they? I always try and keep a dance or two free, just for the sake of watching.

General Impression, as the evening wears on, that she is getting almost more than she bargained for, of this form of amusement.

*An Elderly Gentleman in a Pink Coat, approaching a contemporary Lady in Vermilion Chiffon.*

THE E. G. And which of your daughters is here to-night—or have you brought them *both*?

THE V. C. *Neither*, I'm afraid. Mollie had a Girl Guide Meeting, don't you know, and she wouldn't miss it for the world—she's *so* keen about her Guides—and Dollie is giving a raffia demonstration at the Women's Institute. So I'm here quite by myself.

THE E. G. Then let's *dance*, shall we? Topping band, this.

THE V. C. Too marvellous.

*On the Stairs.*

A VOICE. ... Frightfully heavy going, but I got well away, and kept in sight of hounds pretty nearly all the way....

ANOTHER VOICE. But I *said* to him, "The mare may be a good fencer," I said, "but *does she like water?*" I said. Of course, between you and I and the gate-post, that little mare, as I know very well ...

YET ANOTHER VOICE. My dear, she *always* has her skirt a *good* eight inches longer behind than in front, and a petticoat showing below that! Of course *that's* the result of marrying a parson, and living in the country all the year round.

A COUNTY MATRON. *He* married a Sock—a *Yorkshire* Sock—her mother was a Boote, you know, a daughter of old Lord Hatt—there's some connection with the Westcotts, of Somersetshire....

HER NEIGHBOUR. Ah yes—through the *Coats* family. One of them married a ... (And so on.)

General Impression that they have happily solved the frightful problem of What on Earth to Talk About.

This is being dealt with in various other ways by various other people—the Floor, the Band, the Weather, Prohibition (look at *America*, my dear), the Garden, and the Depression in the City all playing their usual parts, until a General Impression that the English Countryside takes its pleasures perhaps rather *solemnly*, is triumphantly overlaid by the strains of "John Peel".

## GENERAL IMPRESSION OF A SECOND-HAND CLOTHES SHOP

First, and most unpleasant, General Impression that there must be a Decaying Mouse somewhere in the immediate vicinity of the discoloured and shapeless garments that lie in heaps All over the Place, or else drip dejectedly from moth-eaten clothes-hangers suspended by a sagging piece of grey tape above the counter.

The Proprietor, in a stained and mustard-coloured waistcoat, is thoughtfully, but thoroughly, making use of a Hairpin to explore his Back Teeth, and at the same time giving contemptuous attention to a client.

THE CLIENT (recklessly throwing open a large Black Bag). How much for *these*?

THE PROPRIETOR. Very little doing nowadays. But let's have a look.

He has a look at three old pairs of boots, two bowler hats, a pepper-and-salt suit, and a large pile of miscellaneous underwear.

THE P. (in accents of despair). There's nothing *there*, you know. Not a thing.

THE C. Come, come. Don't say that. It isn't as if you and me weren't old friends.

THE P. I know, I know. It isn't that I *won't*, but that I *can't*. You can see for yourself that there simply— isn't— anything—whatever—*there*.

They both gaze with the extreme of gloom at the multiple contents of the Black Bag, now spilling all over the counter.

THE C. (rallying). What about these *Boots*, now? There's always a demand for a good *Boot*, you know.

In order to emphasize this point, he picks up one of the Boots and poises it on the fingers of one hand, looking at it admiringly with his head on one side.

THE P. Ah, there's Boots, *and* Boots. Now if this had been a *Hunting-Boot*, I don't say—

The Boot, however, declines to transform itself into a Hunting-Boot, and the Client wisely transfers his attention to the Bowler Hats instead.

THE C. I'm not saying it to *influence* you in any way, ole man, but it is a Fact that Top-hats are absolutely Gone Out—*absolutely*—and nach'rally there's a demand for Bowlers. It *follows*. You know that as well as I do.

THE P. Ah, but what about *Felts*? Now I could get rid of any number of Felts, easy enough, but when it comes to *Bowlers*—well!

General Impression that Bowlers represent the lowest depths of degradation in the sartorial world.

THE P. (at last, and after much discussion). Well, for an old friend like yourself, let's say Seven Shillings and Sixpence.

Feint on the part of the Client of scooping everything back into the bag again.

THE C. I couldn't do it, ole man. I'd rather Go Elsewhere. There's Twelve Shillings here if there's a penny.

THE P. Twelve Shillings? Twelve *Shillings*?

THE C. (firmly). Every penny of Twelve Shillings.

They glare at one another for some moments. General Impression that a deadlock has been reached when the Proprietor suddenly thinks better of the whole thing, produces a ten-shilling note and a florin, and sweeps the black bag and all its contents beneath the counter with a single gesture of contempt.

THE C. (mysteriously, as he departs). I may be round again, in a week's time. He's off for Winter Sports, he is, and that'll mean *another* new outfit, I suppose.

*Later in the Day.* Entrance of an uncertain-looking Female, with a large cardboard box and a newspaper parcel.

THE F. Good afternoon. A—A friend of mine, who's had to go into *mourning*, you know, has asked me to—to dispose of a few *Things* for her.

THE P. (who knows all about that kind of Friend). She *has*, has she, miss? And what kind of Things *are* they?

General Impression that they are particularly mildewy, disreputable, and out-of-date kind of things, and consist mainly of old Feather Boas, well-worn Evening Dresses, and Corsets of Queen Victoria's date.

THE P. (unerringly). The Moth's been in *here*, miss. *Still* in, as like as not ... ah, I thought so. And of course the dresses—well, there, you can see for yourself. Gone under the arms, every one of them.

THE F. Of course, they've been *worn*—but then they're *good* dresses. I mean, they're from a *good* place. A person could easily alter them a little, to bring them up to date.... (Her voice falters into silence under the pitying Eye of the Proprietor.)

THE P. Well, miss, of course there's really nothing there that's of the slightest use, to me or anyone else, but as I don't want to disappoint a lady—What were you asking?

THE F. I'd rather you made me an offer, please.

THE P. (inexorably). What are you *asking*, miss?

THE F. I don't really know, I'd rather *you* said.

THE P. (with sudden righteous indignation). But I can't be buyer and seller *both*, can I?

This, of course, defeats the Uncertain Female at once. General Impression that it is only a question of time before she caves in completely and crawls out of the shop, leaving everything behind her sooner than do up her parcels again beneath the Proprietor's Eye, and with the sum of One Shilling and Sixpence in exchange—for which, in all probability, she has meekly said Thank You.

#### GENERAL IMPRESSION OF AN ATLANTIC LINER (FIRST DAY OUT)

First, regrettable, but quite unmistakable, General Impression that every individual passenger on board is commenting unfavourably on the appearance of every other passenger. This stage, fortunately, modifies itself after the first twenty-four hours.

A NAÏVE LADY (excitedly, to her husband). Henry, I've found out about the Purple Jersey. She's the *sister* of the Plus Fours, not his wife, and they're going out to visit an old *mother*, who's married again and lives in a town called something-or-other—quite a large place, I gather. And just fancy, the mother is seventy-three!

HENRY (of a sardonic humour). And what date is her birthday, and what did they send her for a birthday present?

*Amongst the First-class Passengers*, a gentleman with a Fur Coat and a cigar is looking down at the third-class passengers on the lower deck, in the company of a lady in a Fur Coat and a Rope of Pearls.

THE ROPE OF PEARLS. I never can imagine where they all *come* from, can you?

THE CIGAR. Never. Nor where they're all *going* to, don't you know.

THE ROPE OF PEARLS (tolerantly). Oh well, I daresay they have their own interests, you know. What I always say is, that it takes all sorts to make a world.

In less exalted regions, the second-and third-class passengers are remarking to one another that they really wouldn't care about travelling first, even if they could afford it, because—"My dear, look at the *people*. They're simply too Awful. And half those pearls aren't *real*, everyone wears *Woolworth* nowadays."

#### *In a Four-berth Cabin.*

A LADY WHO HAS HAD A PERMANENT WAVE PUT IN HER HAIR BEFORE STARTING AND IS ANXIOUS TO DRAW ATTENTION TO IT. The worst of a sea-voyage is that it's so difficult to keep *tidy*.

A LADY WHO (and is conscious of being All Over the Place). You should tie your head up in a handkerchief, as *I* do.

THE P. W. I suppose I shall have to. That's the worst of *curly* hair, isn't it—the sea air, you know——

General Impression that she has drawn attention to her curls at the expense of her popularity with the other ladies, and will live to regret it.

A GENTLEMAN IN A BERET (walking briskly round the deck). I believe in *exercise*, you know, on board ship. The only way to keep *fit*. I do this round fifteen times every morning and five times every afternoon. That's the equivalent of a five-mile walk....

*In the Dining Saloon.*

ONE PERFECT STRANGER (to another). And is this your first time across the Atlantic?

THE OTHER P. S. I've crossed sixteen times already.

1ST P. S. (not to be outdone). Well, it's my twenty-first trip.

A LADY. Will it get much rougher than this?

HER HUSBAND. It isn't rough at all yet.

THE LADY. But is it going to be?

THE H. Well, of course, dear, the Atlantic is the *Atlantic*.

General Impression that this is perfectly incontrovertible, and that his wife had better resign herself to the Worst.

*At a Port of Call.* General Impression that we are taking on nearly a Hundred New People here, and disposition on the part of the original passengers to resent this violently, and despise and dislike the new-comers. This attitude not incompatible with a frenzied desire to see them come on board, and a general rush to the side for the purpose.

A CRITIC. My dear, I *ask* you, *Is* there a decently-dressed woman amongst them? And really, you know—*children!* I always think children are so *out-of-place* on board ship.



Usual agitation in regard to cabins, hand-luggage, and deck-chairs and rugs. Melodramatic atmosphere introduced by the striking of a gong, and repeated adjurations to any Passengers for the *Shore*, please. In spite of this, two elderly people prolong their farewells to their friends, and realize too late that We Have Started.

1ST ELDERLY PERSON. But we aren't *going*! We have to get *off*!

A STEWARD. The launch will have left, madam...

ONLOOKERS (in an explanatory manner to one another). Those people have got left behind! They only came to see someone off ... they're being taken on by mistake....

Variety of General Impressions: That they will have to go All the Way to America Now—that they will be Lowered over the ship's side by Ropes—that a Special Boat will be launched to take them back to shore—that they will have to pay a fine of A Hundred Dollars—and so on. General Anti-climax when it turns out that the launch *hasn't* left after all, and they're in Plenty of Time if they Look Sharp.

### GENERAL IMPRESSION OF A CHILDREN'S PARTY

First General Impression of dispassionate onlooker: that it is a mistake to mix Children and Grown-Ups. First, Second, and Final Impression of every Mother in the room: that her own children are better-looking and better-behaved than any others—combined, however, with a completely illogical and yet wholly rational conviction that Nannie ought never to have been allowed to cut John's hair herself, as he is a Perfect little Sight like That, and that Joan is pretty certain to disgrace herself by Bursting into Tears if they have to stand about waiting for tea much longer.

THE HOSTESS. We ought to play a nice *game*, oughtn't we? Oh, how-d'y-do—and *how* d'y-do, Teddy dear—it *is* Teddy, isn't it?

MOTHER OF THE NEW ARRIVAL. No, this is *Archie*.

HOSTESS. Oh, *Archie*, of course. Stupid of me—of course I remember Archie perfectly.

General Impression, to which the Hostess is by no means insensitive, that she is not speaking the truth.

A SMALL BOY (suddenly and loudly). I want my Tea, Nurse.

NURSE (rashly). You shall have it in a minute, dear.

SPECTATORS (to one another). *Did* you hear that little chap saying he wanted his tea? *Aren't* children refreshing ...? Isn't he quaint ...? Don't you call that rather sweet ...? and so on.

MOTHER OF THREE (to a Lady Unknown). Which are *your* dear little people?

THE L. U. None of them, I'm afraid. I came with the Browns.

M. OF T. Really? I hope you love children, as they've brought you to such a *very* baby-party.

General Impression that the L. U. is now in a delicate position, from which, however, she extricates herself by a small, civil, and entirely non-committal laugh.

THE HOST. I've just been talking to your boy, Mrs. Brown—the big fair-haired fellow in the Eton suit. Is that your *youngest*?

MRS. BROWN (aged thirty-three, and having always been told that she looks younger). *My* little boy is the one crawling on the floor, in the blue silk smock, and I *haven't* any youngest. He's the only one, so far.

*At the Tea-table*, from which the Grown-Ups have been wisely excluded, but from which no human power can keep about a dozen Mothers from hovering like flies.

A LITTLE BOY (proudly). *Last* time I went to a party, I was Sick in the Night. *Five* times.

HIS NEIGHBOUR. Once I was sick *eight* times, when I had whooping-cough.

THE L. B. Ah, but mine was *pink* sickness!

The Neighbour, recognizing that she can produce nothing from her past to compete with this achievement, subsides.

A MOTHER WHOSE CHILD HAS CURLS. Dear me, how very untidy Pamela looks! It's *so* difficult to keep her hair tidy for five minutes together.

Mothers of Straight-haired Children express polite admiration of Pamela's curls—which is exactly what Pamela's Mother meant them to do.

A GOVERNESS (who is in imperfect sympathy with her charge). If you can't behave better than *that*, Johnnie, what do you suppose people will say?

JOHNNIE (artlessly). That my governess doesn't teach me manners, I suppose, Miss Smith.

*In the Drawing-room.*

A MOTHER. ... But I've *tried* punishment, and I've *tried* coaxing, and I've tried reasoning, and I've even tried taking no notice whatever—but it doesn't make *any* difference.

HER FRIEND. Really? Now with *Mary*, you know, I never have the least difficulty. It isn't that she hasn't plenty of *spirit*—but it's just ...

General Impression that the rest of this conversation will not be worth listening to—which is perhaps as well, since neither lady is paying the slightest attention to what the other is saying.

A LADY WHO HAS DOMESTIC DIFFICULTIES. So I said, "Nurse," I said, "what is the Meaning of This? Didn't I *distinctly* tell you, *Milk* for Baby's supper, and *Not* Extract?" I simply asked her, straight out. I was determined to show her once and for all *who* the child's Mother was. And of course she gave notice next day.

A SYMPATHETIC LISTENER. I know of *such* a good Temporary—absolutely trustworthy, and lets one into the nursery *whenever* one likes, practically, and does all her own dusting—a perfect Treasure.

THE LADY WHO HAS D. D. Oh, *do* give me her address. I'd simply give her *any* wages she liked——

THE S. L. Oh, she's with some people in *Australia* just now, I believe—at least she was three years ago. But I know she's a perfect Treasure.

*At the End of the Party.*

A NUMBER OF DUTIFUL VOICES. Thank you very much for having me.... Thank you for my nice party.... Good-bye, I've enjoyed myself very much, thank you....

HOSTESS. *Good-bye*—I hope you'll come and see me again one day.

A YOUTHFUL GUEST (literally). When?

General Impression that it's all been a great success, and if we don't have the windows of the car up, Betty will certainly catch cold, but on the other hand if *we do*, Billy is quite likely to be sick. Mothers and Nurses, as usual, grapple with these and other problems, to which the Einstein Theory is as nothing, but for the solution of which they will receive no credit whatever from anybody.

## GENERAL IMPRESSION OF A LADIES' CLUB

First General Impression that the whole establishment is owned, managed, and generally kept going by the Hall Porter.

*In the Lounge*, where a Very Young Gentleman sits bolt upright on a sofa in an obvious agony of alarm, and where a dozen ladies are all talking at once.

A LARGE LADY IN BLACK (very earnestly indeed). So I said to her: "But life is so *Beautiful*," I said. "There's Beauty Everywhere, if you only have Eyes to see it. It's *all* Beautiful." (With a spacious gesture, she knocks over a small ash-tray at her elbow, with disastrous results.)

HER FRIEND. It doesn't matter a *bit*, dear—no, really, I *like* it—this is only an old frock, anyway—quite all right—do go on about Beauty. It's all so *true*.

A WAITER (approaching the V. Y. Gentleman). Miss Wells is not in the Club, sir.

THE V. Y. G. (blankly). Isn't she? Er—it was really Miss *Winter* I asked for.

THE WAITER. Miss Winter, sir? Perhaps you'd speak to the Hall Porter, sir?

This is the last thing that the V. Y. G. wants to do, but he meekly conforms, and is obliged to cross the lounge under some twenty pairs of female eyes, whilst a complete silence descends upon the room for the space of nearly ten seconds.

THE HALL PORTER. Miss Winter? No lady here of *that* name, sir.

THE V. Y. G. Isn't this the Minerva Club?

THE H. P. It's the *Minerva*, right enough, sir.

General Impression that if the V. Y. G. knows Infallibility when he meets it, he will do well to retire at this point. Instead of which, he murmurs a faint suggestion about Looking Up Miss Winter's name in the Book.

THE H. P. (very sharply indeed). Twelve years hall porter of this Club, sir, and I know the name of every member. I expect it's the Ladies' Tribune Club *you* mean, sir.

Although it is patent that there is no particular reason why the V. Y. G. *should* mean the Ladies' Tribune Club, this defeats him, and he goes away still murmuring wistfully.

*In the Dining-room.*

A MEMBER. Really, the food is disgraceful here. I never have a meal here if I can help it, and one simply can't invite a guest.

A FELLOW-MEMBER. I know. Look at the lunch to-day. It's really too bad. One feels one ought to complain to the Committee, or something.

1ST MEMBER. I know. One ought to, really.

They both appear to meditate on this in silence, nevertheless a General Impression is unmistakably afloat that neither of them intends to do anything at all about it, and that in consequence the service will remain at its present low level.

*Upstairs.*

A SPECTACLED MEMBER. I'm looking for the lecture on *Art*. Where *is* the Art lecture going on?

A CLUB SERVANT. The Hall Porter could tell you, madam.

The Spectacled Member goes to the lift, which is a self-working one, and rings the bell, when it descends, and she is confronted by an extremely aged and rather offended-looking Member.

THE AGED MEMBER. You brought me down from the third floor. I hadn't *time* to get out.

Apologies from the S. M.

THE AGED MEMBER. I quite understand. It's only a little *disappointing*, that's all, when one had just gone all the way up, to be brought all the way down again.

*In the Smoking-room.* A Member, after ringing the bell five times, manages to arrest a waiter on his way through, and ask for Saxon Cigarettes.

THE WAITER. No Saxons, madam. I can let you have some *other* kind—these, or *these*.

The Member instantly and meekly acquiesces, and says no more except: Thank You Very Much.

*In the Hall* a Country Member enters, and enquires if a gentleman has asked for her.

THE HALL PORTER. Let me see—the name, Miss?

THE C. M. Miss Winter.

THE H. P. (without a quiver). A gentleman did call, Miss, but said he couldn't wait. He didn't leave his name.

*In the Drawing-room.*

A NEW MEMBER (triumphantly). And what I always say is, Why shouldn't a Woman's Club be just as comfortable, and well run, and efficient, as a man's?

General Impression that there *is* an answer to this, but that nobody is going to give it.

## GENERAL IMPRESSION OF A CHRISTMAS SHOPPING CENTRE

Christmas comes but once a year.... General Impression, waxing stronger every hour, that even this is rather overdoing it.

*In Our Oriental Bazaar*, which displays a profusion of brass ash-trays, raffia bags, hand-painted almanacs, and an occasional carved blackwood elephant to add local colour, about eighty-five ladies, one gentleman, and a sprinkling of children, are competing for the services of Two Young Ladies.

A SHOPPER. What about Uncle *Ernest*? He doesn't *smoke*, and he doesn't *drink*.

HER FRIEND (understanding that this handsome testimonial merely denotes the limitations imposed upon choosing a present for Uncle Ernest). That makes it so *difficult*, I always think. What about a fire-screen? For when he sits over the fire in the evenings, I mean.

THE SHOPPER (doubtfully). Well—he might like it. But I think he always goes to his Club in the evenings, and he wouldn't want to carry it *about* with him.... This orange china frog is rather quaint, isn't it?

THE FRIEND. Sweet. But I like the hand-screen *better*, I think. I mean, I think it's more *useful*.

THE SHOPPER (severely). Still, dear, it isn't what *you* like, is it? It's what Uncle *Ernest* would like.

She realizes too late that this pungent snub has, in some mysterious way, the effect of committing her to the Orange Frog, for which she subsequently pays, with great reluctance, the sum of seven shillings and sixpence. General Impression that if she expects any enthusiasm about it from Uncle Ernest, she is being unduly optimistic.

A SOLITARY GENTLEMAN (timidly). I'll take these Christmas cards, please.

A SALES-LADY. Sign, please.

Sign, in the person of a Gentleman in a Frock coat, materializes, bowing affably from the waist.

THE SALES-LADY. Six at six-three, two at nine and a half, one Pock-Cal. at one-eleven-three, and six at a penny-three. Sign, please.

General Impression that Sign hasn't the faintest idea what she means, but will willingly execute a perfectly illegible flourish with a pencil on the bill, in order to get the whole business over and done with.

*In the Toy Department*, the floor being entirely packed with shopping Mothers, Aunts, Grandmothers, nurses, governesses, and children, a Christmas Novelty is displayed in the shape of a dejected-looking Santa Claus, driving a Real Sleigh drawn by eight Real Ponies.

PRACTICALLY EVERY MOTHER IN THE PLACE. Oh, look, darling. Why, there's *Santa Claus*!

General Impression that half the infants present are in tears, between fatigue, bewilderment, and alarm at the appearance of the ponies, and that the other half are only to be held back by brute force from wrecking the whole equipage in their excitement.

*In the Groceries.*

A POLITE VOICE. And what can I have the pleasure of doing for you, madam?

A VAGUE LADY. I really want a *Biscuit*, that I used to know very well years ago, but that one simply never *sees*, nowadays.

A pause, as though either the owner of the Polite Voice or the Lady herself might here break into a short poem—*Amitié d'Autrefois*, or something like that, after the style of François Villon, suggested by the subject. Instead of which:

THE V. L. Not a *Cheese* biscuit, and yet not exactly a *Sweet* biscuit. Something between the two, if you know what I mean.

THE P. V. (with more suavity than sincerity). Perfectly, madam.

THE V. L. (confidentially). We used to like them so much as *children*, you know, and I've always wanted to get a tin of them for my *own* children. I'm afraid I can't remember what they were called, but the *shape* was oval—rather a *small* oval.

The P. V. continues to assent to these, and similar, pieces of information with unabated brightness and readiness. General Impression that between them they will probably run the lost gems to earth in the end, but that it will all take *Time*.

*On the Ground Floor*, the Jewellery Department, unlike any other, exhibits more salesmen than customers. A Moleskin Wrap is, however, talking to a Nutria Coat in the centre aisle.

THE M. W. My dear, they're really rather twee—long ruby drops, you know, set in platinum—Peter's Christmas present.

THE N. C. My dear—he *doesn't* wear ear-rings, does he?

THE M. W. My dear, what an idea! His Christmas present to *me*, of course. He does so hate shopping in all the crowd that I always do it *for* him, you know.

THE N. C. My dear, how sweet of you! I wonder if Paul would like *me* to do that——?

General Impression that whether he would or not, this is what will happen.

MOST PEOPLE (sooner or later). Well, what one always feels is that Christmas is the *children's* festival....

Exeunt, to engage usual table for the usual dinner-dance at the usual London restaurant.



# **MEN, WOMEN, AND CHILDREN IN FICTION**

# MEN IN FICTION

## PROFESSIONAL MEN

Novelists, although they do not much like one to say so, are terribly conventional, especially when they write about men. Take professional men in fiction, for instance. They may be all kinds of things, but there are also all kinds of things that they may not be. Who, for instance, ever made his or her hero a dentist? The present writer does not want to be harsh about this. Beyond a doubt, it is difficult to visualize the scene in which a young man comes to the knowledge that his true vocation lies in fumbling about inside the open mouths of his fellow-creatures—but there must be ways of getting round this, and of making this very important and necessary calling sound as interesting as it really is. Writers, however, have as yet made no attempt to find out these ways.

Doctors, on the contrary, are numerous in fiction. Mostly, they come out well, but not in detective fiction. In detective fiction, the doctor is only put in because it is absolutely necessary that, after one glance at the corpse, he should look up and say with quiet certainty:

"The squire has been shot through the left lung, and his head battered in by a short, blunt instrument, almost certainly a poker like the one lying on the floor in a pool of blood beside him. The bruise on his left side was caused by a hobnailed boot. Death must have occurred exactly six hours and fifteen minutes ago, which fixes the time of the murder at precisely quarter-past-eight this morning. There is nothing to be done for him now."

After this, the doctor leaves the police in charge, and it isn't till hours afterwards that someone or other finds out that the old squire's injuries were all inflicted after death, which was really due to drowning.

It is never said, in the detective story, whether the doctor's practice suffers heavily from this professional carelessness in failing to notice that the old squire's lungs were full of water all the time.

When the story is not a detective story, but a long novel about a doctor's whole life, he is a very different type of person. He is never called in to a murder case at all, and, indeed, the only cases of which much notice is taken in the book are confinement cases. These take place usually in distant and obscure farm-houses, in the middle of the night, and to the accompaniment of a fearful gale, or a flood, or a snowstorm, or any other convulsion of Nature which will make it additionally inconvenient for the doctor to attend the scene.

Authors like obstetrical details, but the present writer does not, and knows, besides, that in real life doctors are quite as often called out in the night on account of croup, or pleurisy, or even a bilious attack if sufficiently violent, as on account of child-birth.

The doctor in this kind of book always has a frightful financial struggle. He never attains to Harley Street, or anywhere in the least like it. His wife is almost always a perfectly lovely young creature with extravagant tastes that help to ruin him, or else she dies young, leaving him to a housekeeper who never puts flowers in the sitting-room. In the latter case the doctor thinks about his wife when he comes in, from one of his perpetual baby-cases, at three in the morning, with the prospect of the surgery before him at seven. (Doctors in books never get more than four hours' sleep on any night of the year, and often none at all. But they always persist in opening the surgery at this unreasonable hour.)

One could go on for a long while about doctors in fiction, but theirs, of course, is not the only profession dear to authors, although certainly one of the most popular.

Business men are much written about, and curiously enough are treated in an almost exactly opposite way to doctors, since they nearly always have helpful and endearing wives, who would never dream of dying and leaving them to housekeepers, and they end up highly successful, and immensely rich, although starting from a degree of poverty and illiteracy that would seem to make this practically impossible.

The early parts of the book are almost entirely given up to the most terrifically sordid and realistic description of their early surroundings, the language—one word and two initials—that their fathers and neighbours used when intoxicated, the way in which their elder sisters went wrong, and the diseases that ravaged their mothers. But by degrees, this is worked through. The situation lightens, and the business—which started as a stall in the Warwick Road, or something like that—begins to prosper. Its owner turns his attention to social advancement, and in the course of it marries a pretty,



innocent, but extremely practical young thing with quite a short name, like Anne, or Sally, or Jane. They rise in the world together. Then another woman, with a much longer name—more like Madeleine, or Rosalind—and of more exalted social standing, interferes.

The lengths to which the affair subsequently proceeds depends entirely upon what the author feels about his public: whether that's the sort of thing they want from him or whether it isn't. (Publishers are usually helpful about this, although biased on the side of propriety, as a rule, because of the circulating libraries.) Anyway, Anne, or Sally, or Jane takes him back in the long run, absolutely always.

Unlike real life, affairs of this kind, in books, never lead to the complete wreck of the homestead, or of the business. On the contrary. So that novels about business men have at least the advantage of a happy ending—a thing which some readers like, though others would go miles to avoid it.

## LOVERS

The well-known saying that All the world loves a lover, is, like so many other well-known sayings, quite inaccurate. There are numbers of people who find lovers more annoying than almost anything, and these include employers, doctors, many parents and grandparents, and others too numerous to mention. Authors of fiction, although such income as they achieve is largely derived from the exploitation of lovers and their various reactions, do not really care much about them in real life, for authors, unfortunately, are usually more than a little egotistical by nature.

In fiction, however, there is no doubt that lovers are popular. In fact it almost seems, sometimes—judging by the way editors and publishers go on about what they call the love-interest—as if, but for that, fiction wouldn't ever be read at all, in which case there would be little point in writing it. We will not, however, dwell upon this improbable and melancholy contingency. Instead, we will get started about the men in fiction who are lovers—which, of course, most of them are. And we are bound to say that the first thing that strikes us about nearly all of them is that they attach much more importance to love than do the ordinary men of everyday life.

Take the agricultural lover—since authors are extraordinarily fond of writing about the passions of farm labourers, although comparatively indifferent to those of navvies, engine-drivers, or stokers.

The agricultural lover is seldom less than six feet tall, and he wears his shirt open at the neck whatever the weather, although there are many months in the year when a woollen muffler would be a sign of greater common sense; and if the novel is at all a modern one, he takes about with him a smell of soil and sweat wherever he goes. (In our own experience, brilliantine is much more noticeable, at any rate on Sundays, but of this nothing is said.)

Well, this son of the soil is invariably fated to fall in love with somebody too utterly unsuitable for words, either because she lives in London, which constitutes—for reasons unstated—an immense social gulf between her and the farm labourer, or else because she is so frail and frivolous by nature that anyone, except a lover in a book, would have seen through her at the first glance.

In the first case, the outlook is bad, but not hopeless. The girl from London either writes, paints, dances, or does all three. She is probably engaged, or semi-engaged, to a talented youth of her own social standing, and they exchange immense letters, full of quotations and similes and things, which are very often given in full. She has, to all appearances, never been in the country in her life before, because she always does something amazingly unpractical, like falling down an old mine-shaft—with which authors seem to think that the countryside is freely peppered—or setting out alone to cross the moors just when a snowstorm is coming up. Then, when she has got herself into serious difficulties, the agricultural lover pulls on his boots—boots play an enormous part in these idylls of the soil—and takes one look at the sky and says with great confidence: "Reckon the moon should be up over the quarry by the time the cock crows from Hangman's Hill," and goes off, finding his way unerringly through pitch darkness, and floods of rain, and drifts of snow, and anything else the author can think of to show how well he understands Nature. And by the time he has found the girl and carried her into the farm as though she were a child, the whole thing is settled.

Though, personally, we have never thought, and never shall think, that that sort of girl is in the least likely to make a suitable wife for any farm labourer.

The other kind is quite different. She is a village girl, and is referred to by those who are taken in by her artifices as a

"lil' maid," and by those who aren't as "a light o' love" or "a wanton lass". Her chief, sometimes her only, characteristics are vanity and sex-appeal. In the end, after the agricultural lover has fought somebody in a pub. for using a Word about her, and has thrown various other fits, she usually goes off and marries his stepbrother from the Colonies, or a rich widower forty years older than herself; and the lover, instead of realizing that this is all for the best, walks out into the night. Common sense tells one that sooner or later he will be obliged to walk out of it again, but before this inevitable, though unromantic, point is reached, the author usually brings the book to an end.

Lovers in books that are not agricultural are, of course, numerous, but there is not enough space to deal with them all in one article.

## HUSBANDS

Authors, beyond a doubt, go very wrong indeed when it comes to husbands in fiction. They only seem to know about two kinds. The first and most popular of these is quite young, and most deadly serious. He has a simple and yet manly sort of name, like John or Richard or Christopher. He marries, and his wife is lovely, and he adores her. Instead of getting accustomed to her charms with the rapidity so noticeable in real life, and taking her comfortably for granted by the end of the second year, he adores her more and more, although on every page she is growing colder, more heartless, and more extravagant. She lives, in fact, for nothing except cocktails, night-clubs, clothes, and the admiration of other men.

(The present writer, who has been married for years and years, often wonders very much what makes authors think that any man ever looks at a married woman when there are unmarried girls anywhere within miles. The present writer is not complaining—only just wondering.)

To return to John:

He puts up with things that no husband outside the pages of a book would either tolerate, or be asked to tolerate, by even the most optimistic wife. He sits up at night over the bills that his Claire has run up. He always does his accounts at night, and they always take hours and hours. He never seems to have any bills of his own, although in real life it is usually six of one and half a dozen of the other.

One might suppose, after two or three of these nocturnal bouts, that John would either put a notice in the papers disclaiming responsibility for his wife's debts, or have the sense to separate from her. But neither of these courses so much as presents itself to him. He tells her that he is overdrawn at the bank, and so on (and makes as much fuss about it as though no one had ever before been in this painful, but thoroughly familiar, quandary), and explains that he is already working as hard as it is possible for anybody to work. And then he goes and spoils the effect of all of it by suddenly telling her how much he adores her.

In real life, very few English husbands ever say at all that they adore their wives—and absolutely none at the very moment when they have been scrutinizing bills that they cannot pay.

Sometimes John and Claire have a child, and Claire is not at all pleased about it. As she makes no secret of this, it is not reasonable of John to be filled with incredulous dismay and disappointment when she neglects it—but all the same, he is. After this, things run a rapid down-hill course, and Claire goes off with somebody else, and John is plunged into an abyss of despair, although it is perfectly impossible that there shouldn't be times when it must occur to him that he is thoroughly well rid of her.

But if so, we are never told about them.

And the child grows up, and adores her father, and they are perfectly happy together; and after about fifteen years Claire wants to come back again, and John has the incredible idiocy to let her do so, and she turns out to be dying, and he forgives her.

And if that is the author's idea of being a successful husband, it does not coincide with ours.

The other type of husband in fiction has really only one noticeable characteristic, and that is a most phenomenal and cast-iron stupidity. He is, in fact, rather out of place in this article, because in the books where husbands are of this kind, it is naturally the wife upon whom the author has concentrated. A good many pages are given up to her struggles between Love and Honour, and in the end she decides that the brave, straightforward, and modern thing to do is to go to the man she loves. (This is not the husband, needless to say.) And authors, strangely enough, very seldom tell one what the husband feels about it, or what happened to him afterwards. Though, after all, he has to go on living ordinary everyday life, just like anybody else.

On the whole, husbands are not particularly well viewed by authors. It is not, perhaps, for us to judge, but the thought does occur to one that possibly this may be because authors themselves very, very seldom make good husbands.

## FATHERS

In books, fathers are almost always called "Daddy", because this is somehow more touching than just "Father". And fathers in books are nothing if not touching. Unless they are absolute monsters of cruelty or stupidity. We will, however, deal with the touching ones first.

Their chief characteristic is a kind of whimsical playfulness, that would be quite bad enough taken on its own merits, but is made much worse by masking a broken heart, or an embittered spirit, or an intolerable loneliness. Fathers of this sort, conversationally, are terribly fond of metaphors, and talk like this:

"Life, sonny, is a wild beast. Something that lies in wait for you, and then springs out and tears you to pieces."

Or:

"Grown-ups have their own games, dear, just like you kiddies. Sometimes they pretend to be heroes, and princes, and wear glittering armour and go about looking for dragons, and lovely princesses. But the armour has a way of falling to pieces, and when they find the princess, somebody else has got there first and carried her off, and there is only the dragon left."

"And is the dragon real, Daddy, or does he fall to pieces, too?" asks the obliging child, who never misses its cues.

"Yes, little one, the dragon is real enough," says Daddy, with a strange, far-away expression. "You'll learn that some day. The dragon is always real. It's only the prince and princess who are not real."

Also—this is our own addition—the entire conversation, which is not real. Because a flesh-and-blood father who went on like that would find his children quite unresponsive.

"Now," they would say, "tell us something sensible, about an aeroplane, or a cat-burglar."

But in books, the relation between the father and his child, or children, is a good deal idealized, so that the kind of conversation given above may take place frequently. Also, the children ask questions. Not the sort of question that one hears so frequently in daily life:

"Father, why can't we get a nicer car, like the one the Robinsons have?" or "Do you have to brush your *head* now, instead of hair?" or even "*Why* aren't we allowed to stay in the bathroom more than ten minutes and you have it for nearly an hour?"

But questions that give openings for every possible note to be struck in the entire gamut of whimsical pathos or humour:

"Has *your* heart ever been broken, Daddy?" and "Why do your eyes look so sad, even when you're smiling, Daddy?"

The answer to the first one is: "Hearts don't break very easily, girlie. Sometimes we think they're broken, but Time has a magic wand and mends the pieces, and we go on—not quite the same as before, ever, but able to work a little and dream a little, and even—laugh a little."

The answer to the second one is—but there are many alternatives, for it really is an admirable question, in the amount of scope that it gives. Daddy can talk about the lady called Memory, who looks out of his eyes, and about the Help that a smile is, and all that kind of thing; or he may be of a more virile type—a clean-limbed, straight-gazing Englishman—and then he just says something brief but pregnant, about White Men who Play the Game and Keep Straight Upper Lips and Put their Backs into It. And, in any case, whatever he says sinks deeply into the consciousness of his child, and returns again and again to its assistance on strange and critical occasions, as when it violently wants to cheat at an examination, or—later in life—is in danger of sexual indiscretion.

Fathers in books are almost always either widowers, or else unfortunately married. This leaves them free to concentrate on their offspring, from the page when, with clumsy, unaccustomed fingers, they deal with unfamiliar buttons and tapes—(why unfamiliar? their own shirts and pyjamas have buttons, anyway)—till the end, when either the daughter marries, or the son is killed in India, and the father left alone. They are, indeed, a lesson against putting all one's eggs into a single basket.

The other type of father is generally either a professor, a country clergyman, or an unspecified bookworm—and always very, very absent-minded. His children are usually daughters, and he calls them "my dear", and everything he says, he says "mildly" or "absently".

The daughters of real-life professors, country clergymen, and bookworms must wish to goodness that their fathers were more like this, instead of—as they probably are—the usual quite kind, but interfering, domestically tyrannical and fault-finding, heads-of-the-household.

Finally, and fortunately not very often, we get the absolutely brutal father. He is usually lower-middle class, and his daughters have illegitimate babies—since this is the one thing of all others that infuriates such fathers—and his sons run into debt and then hang or shoot themselves sooner than face the parental wrath; and his wife dies, or goes mad, or deserts him. Books about this kind of father are compact of gloom, and are described by the reviewers as being Powerful.

On the whole, fathers in fiction are a poor lot, and bring us, by a natural transition, to the subject of the next article, which will be Criminals in Fiction.

## CRIMINALS

When it comes to criminals, authors of fiction completely let themselves go. They endow their heroes with qualities that they simply wouldn't dare, for one moment, to bestow upon any respectable, law-abiding citizen—qualities like chivalry, and tender-heartedness, and idealism. You feel that they absolutely adore them, and admire their crimes far more than they would anybody else's virtues. And we will at once forestall the remark that shallow-minded readers may feel inclined to make, by saying definitely that it is *not* women writers who usually indulge in this kind of hero. On the contrary.

Well, the things that jump to the eye about the criminal of fiction are several. To begin with, he has no Christian name, but is just known as Jaggles, or Ginger Mac, or Flash Ferdinand. And he is always frightfully, frightfully quiet. Not so much when he is actually on the job—because then, after all, quietness would naturally be taken for granted—but in his manner, and appearance, and behaviour, and voice. And this quietness merely denotes his immense reserves of fire and fury, all of which come out later when the blackmailer is threatening the helpless girl, or the heavily armed householder is getting ready to shoot. But, even in his gravest straits, or most heated moments, the criminal hero never shouts. He just says, very, very quietly, things like: "The game's up, I think," or "Check-mate—Colonel." And he always remembers to smile a little, with the utmost nonchalance, whilst covering his man, or, if necessary, men, with a six-shooter, or heavy automatic, or machine-gun, or whatever it is that he carries about with him.

Curiously enough, the criminal of fiction is rather good at love-making. He takes an interest in it. This is probably because, as a rule, he seldom has any contacts at all, except with devoted but intellectually inferior male followers, detectives and victims. One is never told that he has parents, or brothers and sisters, or ordinary social acquaintances. So, naturally, he can concentrate on the one woman he ever seems to have anything to do with.

And either she loves him and says that she will wait—(meaning until he has finished his sentence at Wormwood

Scrubbs)—or else she throws herself between him and the detective's gun, and dies of it.

Either *dénouement* is rather unsatisfactory.

In real life, people who serve sentences in prison very seldom come out quite the same as they went in, and it isn't every woman, unfortunately, who improves by waiting.

As for throwing oneself about in front of bullets, this is not really as easy as it sounds, and might quite well end in a mere flesh wound, and would anyhow almost certainly bring down the most frightful curses on the person who got in the way, for men like to settle things for themselves, unhampered by feminine interference.

A delicate question to those who have the interests of morality at heart is: Do these criminals of fiction ever repent? The answer is—as so often in life—both Yes and No.

If the book is to have a happy ending, Ginger Mac, just before embarking on a final enterprise, says: This is the last time—the very last! and then kills off somebody so unspeakably bad that it is almost a good deed to have rid the world of him, and then goes to find the woman he is in love with, and says that he is utterly unworthy of her, which is probably very true. And the book ends with some rather ambiguous phrase, as it wouldn't quite do for criminality to triumph openly. So the author just says something like:

"But as she turned away, he saw that there were tears in her beautiful eyes."

Or:

"In a year's time," she echoed. "In a year's time, *who knows?*"

Well—the author knows, and so does Flash Ferdinand, and so does the least experienced reader. So that's all right.

When the criminal does not repent, he dies. This rule is never violated. To the mind of the fiction-writer, there seems to be nothing whatever between reformation and death. The possibility of persistence in wrongdoing does not apparently occur to him. So Jaggles, gentleman-buccaneer, or burglar-sportsman, or whatever he may be called, either jumps off the highest sky-scraper in New York to avoid capture, or is shot at the very last minute, and dies saying that it was a Great Game after all.

There are, of course, other types of criminals than the ones we have indicated. There is the criminal in the detective-novel proper, for instance—but the writing of detective-novels proper has now been brought to such a fine art that nobody can possibly tell who the criminal is, till the last paragraph but one. And then it turns out to be the idiot grandmother, or the fine old white-haired magistrate, or the faithful servant.

Lastly, there is the criminal in those short, powerful, gloomy, sociological novels that have pages and pages without any conversation at all, and that are so full of little dots.... In these cases, there is never any doubt as to guilt. The criminal committed the murder all right, but the guilt lies with almost everybody else in the world—the rich, Society, the Church, politicians, the older generation, the younger generation, the men who administer the law, and so on.

It is all very painful and realistic, and ends up with the execution, and more dots, and then some utterly irrelevant statement like: "Outside, a small, orange-hued dog was nosing in the gutter——" and then a final crop of dots....

## WOMEN IN FICTION

### I

Fiction is always full of women, and it seems rather a strange thought that so few of them are really at all like ordinary everyday women in real life. Authors, unfortunately, divide women into types—the Modern Girl, the Prostitute—(these are two separate types, *not* one and the same), the Country Woman, the Mother, and so on.

Let us begin with the dialect novel.

There are about three kinds of women in a dialect novel: two young and one old. The old one is almost always a

grandmother, and either full of silent wisdom or else of crafty malignancy. The silent sort just look, with far-seeing eyes, at the distant hills, or the rolling tide, and say very little until the absolute end of the book, when they suddenly sum up the difficulties in which all the other younger characters have become involved.

"Ah, my dears," they say quietly, "it isn't the *law* that matters, it's whether you're found breaking it or not."

In this way a new light is cast on the whole situation, and everybody realizes that great-great-grandmother has acquired wisdom and tolerance and kindness, and all those sort of things, in the course of her ninety-seven years. And when they have realized this, somehow everything looks absolutely different, and in a way the book might just as well never have been written at all, because whatever the problem was that has occupied its three-hundred-odd pages, it now completely melts away in the illumination cast by grandmama. Nor does she in the least lose her head after this achievement, but just quietly—she is always quiet—brings the whole book to a conclusion with something very simple and homely:

"Put up the shutters, lad, whilst I broil thy grandfather's slice of bacon."

And picking up her pattens, or her Bible, or her darning, she walks—still quietly—into the old farm-house.

The malignant grandmother is—naturally—quite different. She dominates the book, and all the people in it, and the destinies of every one of them. Briefly, it is the general rule that her sons should be weaklings and degenerate and her daughters neurotic victims of sex-repression, but her grandchildren, curiously enough, are fearfully strong characters, and end by defying her. Grandmothers of this description end either by having strokes—brought on by their suddenly getting on to their feet in an access of rage, after being bedridden for nigh on fifty years—or else by being found dead, usually by the old dog, or the village idiot, or somebody quite unexpected like that.

The younger women in dialect novels have the most terrifically strong passions. Either it's the old homestead, or the moor, or George who is married to somebody else, or the Squire's oldest son, or perhaps their own oldest son. But whatever it is, they are unbridled about it, they never change, and it leads them to every sort of length. This rather singular tenacity has something to do with the soil. Country women, especially in dialect novels, are very closely connected with the soil, and it has this extraordinary effect upon their characters. Their conversation is also unlike that of other women, in that it abounds in agricultural similes.

"My hair is like the red bindweed, that the curlews nest in come April," they say, as if it was the merest matter of course.

Or:

"To be jealous is like eating the young leaf of the rhubarb-plant that grows below the monkey-puzzle tree."

Nor do they ever give a straight answer to a straight question, for even if asked something quite simple, like the time, or the date, they have to reply that it's the best part of an hour since the sun sank behind the top of Dead Man's Rock, or it'll be a fortnight come Lammas since the old sow farrowed.

Most of the women in dialect novels seem to be mothers—sometimes in wedlock, sometimes out of it. But in or out, their method is seldom very successful. They take the whole thing too seriously. (Probably this is the soil, again.) If married, they take that seriously as well, and are never happy about it, but usually fall in love soon after the wedding with the husband's younger brother, or the travelling man who comes round with lisle-thread stockings, and this immediately leads to trouble.

Humour is one of the qualities that women in dialect novels hardly ever possess, and when they do, it is of a very obscure description, and difficult to distinguish from their other characteristic conversation, because it, also, consists mainly of agricultural similes.

"Children in the house be like onions in a stew: a little of 'em goes a powerful long way."

"Husbands allus puts me in mind of feyther's old donkey: the more you urge 'em the less they heed."

Things like that—all terse and epigrammatic, and yet at the same time profound.

Nor are country women usually allowed to end up happily, in dialect novels. They are very often murdered—(which is, in a way, understandable)—sometimes by a husband, sometimes by a lover, but almost always in some rough, unpleasant way, such as strangulation, or the old-fashioned blunderbuss that hangs up over the chimney-piece in the living-room.

Having now shown that the dialect-novel type of woman is almost altogether encompassed in gloom, we will turn our attention to the greatest contrast afforded to her in fiction—the heroine of the Pseudo-Historical volume.

## II

The pseudo-historical book can be recognized at a glance by its title. This is almost always alliterative, and quantitative as well: *Twelve Terrible Termagants*, or *Horrible Harlots of History*, or *Virgins of the Vatican*. That kind of thing.

The women in this type of book are Simply Awful. There is no other way of describing it. If they weren't, people wouldn't want to buy the book. No book of this kind has ever yet been called *Seven Sinless Spinsters*—or if it has been, nobody has taken the least notice of its publication.

Sinless women have no place whatever in the affections of those who read pseudo-historical books. Such readers only want *Depraved Duchesses*, or *The Thirteen Worst Women of West Wickham*, or else the life-stories of peculiar creatures who for years pass themselves off as Admirals, or Foreign Legionaries, or even Popes, and then give the whole thing away by suddenly producing a baby.

Let us leave them to it, and turn to another branch of the pseudo-historical. The kind of book that begins something like this:

"How now, Fabiola!" exclaimed a tall youth in a toga one morning of spring in the year A.D. 400 as he strode across the tessellated marble pavement to the plashing fountain where sat the maiden Fabiola, of noble Roman birth and pensive mien. "How now, Fabiola! Art thou not coming to see the dogs of Christians thrown to the wild beasts in the presence of the Emperor and the whole Court?"

Fabiola, however, backs out. She does not say, in a straightforward manner, that she has just become a Christian herself, because if she says anything like that, she knows, and the reader knows, that it is asking for trouble. The kind of trouble, moreover, that will bring the story to an end too soon, and is being kept for the last chapter.

So the tall youth in the toga goes away discouraged, and enjoys the entertainment without Fabiola beside him. Fabiola, who takes her pleasures quite differently, borrows a black lace scarf from a faithful peasant-girl called either Maria or Lucia, which serves to disguise her completely, and goes off to the Catacombs.

And that, practically, is all we ever get to know about Fabiola. It has been evident from the first that she will come to a violent, painful, and heroic end, and that the sight of it will certainly revolutionize the view-point of the youth in the toga, the faithful peasant-girl, and several rough centurions, coarse jailors, and renegade Christians. And this, though very fine, is not as interesting as it might be, from the point of view of feminine psychology.

It must, however, be admitted that the Fabiola type of book is not in fashion nowadays, and is seldom seen except at school prize-givings. (School Prizes, strangely enough, are not selected by their winners. If they were, Fabiola would never stand a chance against Mickey Mouse, Wilfred, or Bulldog Drummond. School Prizes are selected by Schoolmasters—than whom there are no worse judges of juvenile likes and dislikes in the whole world—and with them Fabiola continues popular.)

The historical novel proper usually contains about two women, one of whom is thoroughly bad, and the other one thoroughly good. Neither of these states bears any relation to any known condition prevalent in human beings, and therefore we are again reluctantly obliged to suggest that these female characters are lacking in interest. There *is* a third variety—usually an international spy—who starts thoroughly bad, but, rather unfairly, makes a bid for compassion at the end of the book by falling frantically in love with an English Gentleman, or some quite hopeless person of that kind, who naturally won't look at her.

(Why should he, when there is a good, pure, English girl who has been marked out for him from the very start?)

So the female spy either commits suicide, by a direct method, or gives up her life for somebody else. There aren't any alternatives, like getting over it, or falling in love with somebody else, such as are so readily to be found in everyday life. Historical-novel characters are nothing if not thorough.

Finally, we come to a type of woman in fiction only too terribly popular nowadays. Not historical, exactly, because the story doesn't go back as far as Beshrew me, and Oddsbodikins, and Nay, my liege, rather let me lose my life than my virtue. Not present-day either, because the whole point of the book is to show how extraordinarily well the author has recaptured the atmosphere of Victorian days, and with what astonishing diligence he or she has looked up the old-fashioned illustrations of the period, so as not to mix up crinolines with bustles, or pork-pie hats with Dolly Vardens.

The result is usually very sartorial. The reader learns more about the heroine's frilled drawers, leg-of-mutton sleeves, wreath of white camellias, and so on, than about her disposition. Her relations with her parents are made a good deal of, since it is well known that all parents living under good Queen Victoria and/or King Edward VII. were unconscionable tyrants. Her relations with men fill the last half of the book—sometimes more—and are gloomy in the extreme, and all the fault of the Victorian period. The chief merit of this sort of woman in fiction is that she gives her creator an opportunity for working off all the repressions and resentments of youth.

### III

In allegorical fiction there is almost always a character called the Woman, another one called the Man, and hosts of minor ones, such as the Child, the Dog, the Spirit of Charity, the Essence of Ammonia, and so on.

It is, unfortunately for ourselves, the Woman with whom we are concerned. Unfortunately, because she really is more wholly intolerable than almost any other female in fiction. In fact, nothing will do justice to her except a short excerpt from the type of book in which she is to be found. (And usually it is an expensive little book, though small and thin, bound in a bilious green, with a ribbon marker that comes off after about a week, and all its T's and C's linked together at the top in an affected style.)

The Woman, as often as not, is a mere stumbling-block in the way of the Man, and then she goes on something like this:

SCENE. *The Garden.* (Allegories are always given an out-door background, we do not know for what reason. Why not an allegory in a tea-shop at Ealing, or the out-house of the golf-course at Burlescombe? But no, it has to be in a garden, or an orchard, like Adam and Eve and the Book of Genesis.) Very well, then:

*The Garden*—or *A Garden*. The Man is standing at the Gate—(always a Gate in allegories, though in real life more often a hedge of Portuguese laurels, or two cement posts and a wall with a door in it)—and on his shoulders he is carrying a Pick—which is the allegorical symbol for work, not Grave-digging—or a Burden, or a Wounded Stag, or a Naked Child, or any other utterly improbable article that he almost certainly wouldn't be seen dead with in real life. The Woman, who always has long hair, regardless of fashion, and wears something rather unpractical like a tunic, or draperies, or sometimes nothing at all, is standing at the Gate too, usually on the other side of it, because she is certain to be either luring him in or keeping him out, and either course will turn out to be treacherous and bad.

The Man begins by saying: The time for play is over, the buttercup wreaths have all faded, and the work of the world is calling me. Let me go. (This is the allegorical way of saying: Don't keep me, dear, or I shall be late at the office.)

Stay, replies the Woman, and help me gather wild asphodels. (There's nothing like asphodels, in an allegory, unless perhaps it's amaranth. Sooner or later, one or other of these turns up, whatever the season, in every allegory.)

The Man says some more about the work of the world.

Stay, repeats the Woman, and help me gather wild asphodels.

Then the Man has usually quite a long speech, recapitulating all the things it is necessary for the reader to know, about his previous relations with the Woman, and the buttercup wreaths, and his inward certainty that the time really has come now to make a break, and get a move on with the work of the world.

And at the end of it all, the Woman just says, all over again, "Stay, and help me gather wild asphodels". And if she says this once, in the course of the allegory, she says it a hundred times. Allegories are rather like anthems, in the way they go on reiterating one single phrase. To the ordinary mind this is an aggravating trick.

Well, they just go on and on like that. The work of the world—wild asphodels—backwards and forwards like a rocking-



horse. In the end the Woman wins. That is to say, the Man puts down whatever he is carrying, and joins her. (Nothing is ever said about what happens to the discarded Pick, or Wounded Stag, or Naked Child. And yet either of the two latter, if left about too long, would get him into serious trouble with the police.)

And the end of the Allegory is the slamming of the Gate by the Woman. To the strange mind of the allegory-writer, there is evidently something frightfully final about the slamming of a gate. No doubt he, or she, is not in a position to realize that the slamming of gates is an effect that can be, and constantly is, produced all over the place either by defective latches or careless children.

The mention of children brings one at once to another type of woman in allegory. She is, either actually or potentially, The Mother.

She has little in common with the Woman, except that her clothes and her hairdressing are equally unusual. Her conversation is more extensive, and she makes extraordinary and inaccurate generalizations:

"When a sunbeam falls on a lettuce-leaf, it means that, somewhere in the world, a baby has hiccupped."

Or:

"Every time a little child weeps, a cloud passes across the face of the moon."

Common sense and statistics alike revolt at the statements of the allegorical Mother. But, in the allegory, she gets away with them every time, and the other characters seem to think that she has said something significant and moving.

The Old Man passes his hand across his furrowed brow, and mumbles that *his* Mother told him that, bending over his cradle in the middle of the night and stirring the red embers of the peat, close on ninety years ago.

The Little Children press close to her, and look wistfully up into her face. (Well they may, poor little things, probably hoping that they were hearing the beginning of a Grimm's Fairy Tale, with robbers and wolves in it.)

And The Man is there, too, because all allegories have some of each sex in them, and in fact sex is usually the main interest in allegories, though it would not do to say so.

The worst type of allegory of all is disguised as a children's story, and is called *The Kiss of the Rainbow* or *How Bunnie the Rabbit found a Soul*, and no ordinary, normal kind of child can endure that sort of story. The children in the allegory have names like Little Mirth, or Gentleheart, and walk about in woods and gardens hand in hand, looking for ridiculous things like The Purple Flower of Happiness, or the Great God Pan, or Eternal Love. And when they've wandered about for pages and pages, exchanging the most sickeningly whimsical, wistful, quaint, and utterly impossible conversation, they find a dead bird, or a trapped butterfly, or God knows what, and some Spirit or other surges up out of nowhere, and explains that this is really what they were looking for all the time.

Enough has now been said to show that the present writer does not care much about allegories, nor the female characters in them.

## IV

Of almost all the women in fiction, prostitutes get the best treatment nowadays. They are credited with every kind of virtue, but especially generosity, courage, and good-heartedness. The respectable women haven't got a chance in the same book as a prostitute. The best thing they can hope for is that they may have their eyes opened by her to the utter futility, selfishness, and triviality of an ordinary breadwinner, wife or mother, when compared to a heroine of the streets.

Stories about prostitutes are mostly written by young writers. It helps them to feel grown-up, and it makes the female ones—we regret to say—hope that reviewers will mistake them for men.

Prostitutes, for reasons not fully understood by the present writer, are tremendously associated with pink. (Not, of course, the official "pink" that people wear out hunting, but just the ordinary colour, pink.) Their bed-sitting-rooms are entirely decorated in pink, their own underwear—always a good deal insisted upon by the author—is a dingy, flimsy pink, so are the lampshades, the bedspread, the cushion-covers, and the flowers—if any—on the table.

From a psychological point of view it is difficult to take the prostitutes in books very seriously, first of all because they are all so exactly alike, and secondly, because the books hardly ever tell one the really interesting thing, which is how they originally entered the ranks of their profession. Sometimes, of course, the prostitute tells the hero of the book the story of her life, beginning with the old Rectory garden and the artist who came to lodge in the village in a long-ago May, just when the apple-blossom—and so on. But even that story, moving though it is, doesn't really account for everything, because, after all, one swallow needn't necessarily make a whole summer, and in fact in real life it hardly ever does. This continual discrepancy between women in real life and women in fiction is nowhere more apparent than in stories that have anything to do with prostitutes, and discourages one quite a lot from reading them. At the same time it doesn't do to be unjust, and there *are* writers who go in for the most terrific realism, and produce long-short, or short-long, stories that almost always contain prostitutes, sailors, boxers, negroes, and climatic peculiarities, such as torrents and torrents of unceasing rain, waves of unparalleled heat, or spells of Antarctic cold. These stories are very modern, and don't have any plot at all, and just as you get interested in one of the characters, three little dots appear ... and you have to turn your attention to somebody quite different.

They don't have any beginning or end either, because that wouldn't be modern; they just kind of drop on to the page with some statement, usually of a thoroughly unpleasant nature, like: "He knew that he was going to be sick" or "She loved him so that it made her long to strangle him and then trample his body under foot". (Yes, I know, when ordinary people in everyday life love anybody, they do not have these unhallowed impulses, but there it is again—women in fiction bear but little resemblance to anything human.)

Almost all the stories of this type show a strong resemblance to one another, even though some—only too many, in fact—have a Russian background, and perfectly impossible names, all several syllables long and indistinguishable from one another, and others take place in squalid and sordid parts of London, and almost all the rest in some bit of New York called the Bronx, or Chinatown, or Harlem, and end inconclusively, and are compact of solid gloom from start to finish. (Shakespeare, of whom all writers always say that they think so highly, took quite a light-hearted view of harlotry, but modern novel-writers never attempt to imitate him in this. However, that may have something to do with their chance of selling their film-rights—which after all didn't exist in Shakespeare's day—so one must not judge hastily.)

The single point on which the authors of all these books and stories are absolutely at one, is that every prostitute has a heart of gold. There is apparently something about her way of life that makes it inevitable. And really, having said that, there seems very little else to say about the prostitute in fiction. Little or nothing is told one about her other characteristics. Either she is unutterably young, and entirely devoid of paint or even powder—which is perfectly ridiculous, in reality, and only male writers ever put it in—or else she is quite elderly, with a raddled face and dyed hair, and drinks.

But neither age, youth, drink, nor anything else interferes with the heart of gold. A prostitute and a heart of gold just seem to go together naturally, like country-women and aphorisms in a dialect novel.

On the whole, prostitutes add but little to the average person's enjoyment of novel-reading. On the other hand, authors like writing about them, because they are pretty well the only topic left on which it is still permissible for the modern writer to be thoroughly sentimental.

## V

Detective novels, nowadays, are very highly thought of by publishers, who are as a rule the last people to think highly of any book, whatever they may say in their advertisements. (We are writing from inside knowledge, having had both interviews and correspondence with various publishers, on the topic of our own books. And we have subsequently been astonished at the difference between what the publisher eventually puts on the jacket of the book, and what he said about it to us, firmly and regretfully, when we were trying to persuade him to let us have twenty-five pounds in advance of royalties.)

Detective novels, then, are the mode. All sorts of eminent people confess—usually to one of the daily papers, always a good medium for confession—that when they are over-worked, or unable to sleep, or worried about super-tax, they read a detective novel. Naturally, after this, authors who wouldn't otherwise have thought of such a thing, sit down and write a detective novel, and some of them do it passably, but most of them don't, and a very, very few do it really well.

All of them, however, seem—as usual—to slip up when it comes to the female characters in their books. No doubt the writers concentrate on the murder, and the necessity for keeping the identity of the murderer, and the method employed, concealed from the reader until the last page but one. And such powers of characterization as they may display are always lavished on the amateur detective. The other people in the book have to be content with labels, and are just the peppery old Colonel, the voluble charwoman, the querulous invalid, or the wealthy, relentless, and extortionate blackmailer. As for the detective himself, he may be anything, or do anything, or have any number of extraordinary idiosyncrasies, like being able to see in the dark, or play the trombone, or disguise himself as a Chinaman so that his own mother wouldn't know him. And if, in addition, he has a broken nose, or an eye-glass, or a foreign accent, then he is absolutely firmly established as one of the most real and vivid creations in detective fiction.

What, therefore, *can* be hoped for, in the case of the women in detective books, when this is the best that can be managed for the men—who are always vastly in the majority in this type of book?

Not so very long ago there were only two women to be found in any detective story, and one was called Mary, which meant that she was the heroine and would have to be rescued from sinister and extraordinary machinations, and the other was called Mrs. de Lacy, or Señora da Silva, or any other name suggesting un-English connections, masses of blue-black hair, and a discreditable past, sprinkled with lovers.

This convention has now passed away. Instead, we get something very very young, and modern, and colloquial, called either Jane, or Susan, or Ann, and far from having to be rescued, she usually does all the rescuing, and a good deal of the detecting, herself.

Let us suppose that the body of her uncle and guardian, with whom she has always lived, has just been found sprawling across the library table, with a dagger between the shoulder-blades, the face mutilated beyond recognition, the room spattered with blood, the clock stopped at 2 A.M., a loaded revolver on the blotting-paper, a hideously sharp Malay *kris* from the collection on the wall lying on the floor, and the poker, all covered with human hairs, clenched in the corpse's hand. (Besides all the doors being locked, and the shutters fastened from the inside, and the fire burning on the hearth so that nobody could have come down the chimney.)

Confronted with all this, Ann may, or may not, exclaim: Oh, poor uncle!—but if she does, it's as far as she goes. The next moment she is examining the blotting-paper for clues, and noticing some frightfully significant detail, such as that one candle has been burning longer than the other, or that the uncle's left shoe-lace is done up wrong.

She says nothing about this, at the moment, because all the rest of the house party is also in the library, but later on, usually about tea-time the same day, she confides the whole thing to the amateur detective of the party—a young man of about her own age—and they decide to unmask the murderer themselves, from amongst the guests. The guests, we may add, do not disperse just because their host has been found murdered. They stay on and establish cast-iron alibis for themselves, and break up the cast-iron alibis of one another, and on the evening of the very day on which the crime was committed they all come down to dinner in their usual evening clothes and are put through the third degree by Ann and her friend, in a modern, colloquial, and thoroughly flippant style.

Readers of detective fiction will not require to be told that the criminal is by these means unmasked, usually within twenty-four hours, and that Ann and her collaborator decide to become engaged—their love scene probably taking place in the identical library, with uncle, *kris*, poker, and all, still uncleared away.

We can but leave it to our readers to decide whether even the youngest, and most up-to-date, feminine nervous system is really up to this sort of thing. Personally, we know very well that at no time in our career could we have done any of it, nor could any of our friends, relations, or acquaintances.

Apart from these extraordinary young girls, detective novels also have less-young, but still young, wives. The main thing about them is that they are such prize liars. They have to be, partly so as to confuse the evidence and make it more difficult for the detective, and partly because they always have: (a) a lover, (b) a collection of fearfully compromising letters, (c) a secret connected with their past which must, at all costs, be kept from their husbands.

So that these young wives, really, although so necessary to the plot, are not terribly interesting as studies in human nature, being all so very much alike, and actuated throughout by the instinct of self-preservation and absolutely nothing else.

The only remaining type of woman in the detective story is the domestic servant, and anything less like human flesh and blood it would be practically impossible to find. She drops her H's, she listens at doors, she wipes her hands on her apron, and is verbally comic under cross-examination, and generally behaves after a fashion that would ensure her instant dismissal within half an hour from any house in which she might have taken service.

It seems fair to add that detective stories, in the main, form a most desirable addition to any library, and those who write them are, in the opinion of the present writer, faced with a task that requires an almost superhuman degree of intelligence, accuracy, and ingenuity. So that really it seems unreasonable to ask much in the way of feminine characterization.

## VI

Years and years and years ago somebody published a novel elliptically, but intelligently, entitled *The Woman Who Did*. This created quite a fuss at the time, and it is a curious and interesting thought that, in order to create any similar amount of fuss nowadays, a novel would have to be about a Woman who Didn't—because anything else is now so frightfully unoriginal.

The only question in a modern novel is *why* she did, and this is usually explained in pages and pages of dialogue between the woman and some man with whom she either is, or isn't, in love.

Because—(and this is what makes it so difficult to write this article so that it can be read in the Home Circle)—the modern woman in fiction views life, apparently, simply and solely in terms of sex.

It makes no difference that she usually has a career. That's only just thrown in for local colour. She may be living in a flat in Chelsea with another girl, or married and looking after her husband and children in the suburbs, or running a house of ill-fame in New York—but, sooner or later, this overrated question as to her relations with men will take the bit between its teeth, and we shall hear of nothing else for the whole of the remainder of the book.

Well, the present writer feels rather in despair about the whole situation. Quite evidently, falling in and out of love is very important and interesting, and readers like reading about it, and authors, God knows, appear to like writing about it. But from the point of view of ordinary, everyday life, there are quite a lot of other things going on, and if we *are* going to be psychological and analytical, their effect upon the modern woman should really not be so completely ignored. What, for instance, about the absolute impossibility of ever finding a petticoat that is not either too long or too short to wear under a thin frock, and the perpetual difficulty of getting any attention in any restaurant unless accompanied by a man, and the state of one's overdraft, and the fear of starting a cold, or having to have a tooth out, and the strain of fitting in a shampoo-and-set once in every ten days?

These things, and millions of others exactly like them, are going on all the time, whereas the vagaries of passion, even in the most exotic careers, do ebb and flow quite a lot. But to read the great majority of novels about modern women, you'd think they never gave a moment's reflection to anything whatever except emotional considerations.

It will not, after this, come as a surprise to anybody if we add that the modern woman in fiction shows practically no sense of humour whatever. When she does laugh, it is an affair of bitterness, and is caused by the discovery that her lover has run off with her best friend—or that her husband, for whom she has sacrificed everything in the world, doesn't really love her after all—or that the only man she ever cared for has just been killed at polo.

*"She put down the letter, and sat perfectly still. The crumbs upon the table-cloth ... she found herself counting them ... one, two, three.... Presently a strange sound broke the silence. Like the buzzing of a dental drill...."*

*"She realized that she was laughing."*

That kind of thing. Of course, there may be women who will recognize these symptoms—to whom it all comes home—who will exclaim, as they read about the crumbs on the cloth, and the dental drill, and everything: "Goodness me, yes! That was *exactly* what happened when I heard about Daddy having gone off with that woman and left me and the children to face the creditors.... I remember the way I laughed, just like that.... Human nature is the same all the world over, doesn't that just show?"

And if so, of course, it is one up to our modern novelists. But if not, on the other hand, it begins to look as though the last word hadn't yet been written, in psychological novels about women.

Sometimes the author takes the woman about whom he is writing from the cradle to the grave. Usually, then, it is all very introspective, and melancholy, even in the very earliest chapters of all, and long before an ordinary person would have thought it possible, we are all mixed up with sex again, and never get really far from it until the last few pages—by which time the heroine has become a grandmother.

There is yet another type of modern woman in fiction, and she is usually quite young and does practically nothing except drink, dance, and go about with men. It is a gay life to read about. But literal-minded people get quite worried, wondering where on earth the young men came from, when everybody knows quite well that there isn't such a thing to be found, as a rule, and especially not in the country. And even if found, they don't want to be making love all the time, but would rather be out in the nice fresh air, killing something, or playing with a ball. But in the books, they drift about from one party to another, and talk endlessly, and make love to women, or get tired of them and break their hearts. Or else it's the other way on. Whichever it is, one would like to see women in fiction rather more realistically, and less conventionally, treated.

Of course, it might seem prosaic, after all the strange types of womanhood now irrevocably associated with modern novels. But then, why not let's make up our minds to admit, once and for all, that real life, and real people, women included, *are* prosaic?

## CHILDREN IN FICTION

### I

If Women in Fiction, why not Men in Fiction, and/or Children in Fiction? There is no reason why not, except that there are fewer of them.

Children in fiction are, by comparison, quite rare, and this is really a very good thing, because they are almost always very depressing, and quite extraordinarily unlike children in real life. (Not that children in real life are not very often depressing, especially to their parents, but that is for quite different reasons.)

Dividing children into types—since it is the mistaken, but almost universal, custom amongst authors to do this with the characters they write about—we find that there really are only two types of children in books: the sort that the author believes him- or her- self to have been and the sort that he or she is perfectly certain that he or she never was. Both kinds are often to be found in the same book, and it is usually a very long one.

Sometimes it begins with a genealogical table, which is a comparatively simple expedient, but sometimes it goes back to the most ungodly lengths, and starts by saying: Hardly had the last shot been fired at the Battle of Bosworth Hill, when young Homfray Rook, then aged twenty-two, ran away with the wife of his elder brother, Nigel Rook of Rookscliffe, a lovely red-haired creature of scarcely seventeen.

(The lovely red-haired creature is, of course, the wife—not Nigel Rook, who is as black as his name, and probably drinks, or makes himself unpleasant in other, worse ways.)

Well, one may or may not be interested in lovely red-haired creatures, scarcely seventeen, who let themselves be run away with by their brothers-in-law. The present writer is never terribly enthusiastic about them, but very likely this is simply jealousy, since almost everybody would like to be lovely, and red-haired, and seventeen, but very few of us ever are, and then not for long. But anyhow, one does one's best to follow it all intelligently—only to find that after about fourteen pages, Mary, or Nancy, or whatever her name is, has been rushed successfully through motherhood, grandmotherhood, and very likely widowhood as well. Years and years have rushed by, and have been crammed with places and people, and descendants, and the original children of the original couple have married complete strangers, and had children of their own, and these have repeated the process, and it is absolutely impossible to remember who anybody is. And then, at the end of the fourteen pages—which the reader has had to turn back many more than fourteen times, in order to try and find out the relationship between any single character and any other—*then*, it turns out that the whole intricate and breathless accumulation is simply there in order to lead up to the birth of one particular baby, round whom the rest

of the book will revolve.

Nothing, in fact, could be more disproportionate than the way in which whole long lives are compressed into tabloid form,—and then every single detail of the hero, or heroine's, infancy and childhood is spread out upon the page. Every single detail, that is to say, which seems relevant to the author, for there are many things readers would like to know that authors leave for ever unrevealed, and still more things that readers care very little about, but that authors are determined to put on to paper.

We are, however, straying from the child in fiction; and we are first of all going to deal with the little creature as presented to us by the author who is secretly convinced that it accurately represents the childish self of the writer.

Two things about this child immediately spring to the eye: it is phenomenally sensitive, and it has entirely preternatural powers of observation. Things that an ordinary child in real life would take in its stride, or overlook altogether, make the most terrific impression on the child in fiction. Scenery, to which in everyday life children are coldly indifferent, has the most extraordinary effect upon it. For it is always a most intelligent child, and often very gifted as well, and its naughtiness is an affair of temperament, and of obtuseness on the part of everybody else. And it has interesting faults like temper, or pride, or obstinacy, but it is never untruthful, averse from washing, or addicted to teasing animals. Yet in everyday life, as every mother knows ...

As for its powers of observation, they really border on the miraculous. The little thing, from a cot in the night-nursery, overhears astonishing, and often very improper, conversations between its parents, or the servants, and not only remembers every single word of them, but draws from them the most distressing conclusions, which turn out to be perfectly correct.

Time goes on—though not very fast—and the child goes to school. The whole scholastic question, in this kind of novel, revolves round one single word; and it is a word, we are afraid, that any reputable printers would certainly refuse to print. So we will only say that if the school is a Public School, things are worse and more lurid than if it isn't. This convention is an absolutely cast-iron one amongst authors.

Soon after these searing experiences, the child passes into a slightly more mature stage, and is no longer a fit subject for this article. But we have said enough to show that authors, as usual, have loaded the dice heavily, and that children in fiction, however interesting, bear little resemblance to ordinary ones.

For one thing, they never talk about their food, and real children prefer this to almost any other topic.

## II

The best and most popular novelists do not, as a rule, have children in their books at all, and this is wise. Parents are about the only people who are interested in children, and they merely in their own ones. Doctors, dentists, and teachers, indeed, have to be interested in children, whether this comes naturally to them or not, but they do not carry their interest into the realms of fiction, as will readily be understood.

There are, however, authors who think that they can, and in fact must, write about children. Many of them have a passion for what they call fantasy—(and we should like to take this opportunity of saying, once and for all, that it is a passion wholly unshared by the present writer).

They begin with what seems like a straightforward statement of fact:

"It was Peter's seventh birthday" or "Jean had found a robin's egg that morning".

Well, that's all right. But what does it all too often lead on to? The most extraordinary and improbable revelations, such as Peter's invincible determination to find the crock of gold at the foot of the rainbow, and his preliminary passage through Halls of Fear, and Towers of Truth, and other, similar, architectural impossibilities. And at the end of it all, as like as not, there isn't any crock of gold at all, but only some not-very-original discovery to the effect that Courage overcomes Cowardice, or Kindness is better than Cruelty. Common sense tells us at once that Peter could have found this out much more easily by staying at home and looking it up in his copy-book.

As for Jean and the robin's egg, the whole thing is a plant. There is nothing for ornithologists, and nature-lovers, and people like that, to get excited about. The robin's egg will turn out to be symbolical, or not really there at all, and Jean will do nothing but talk about Mothers, and Little Furry things that Live in the Woods, and Love making Everything Easy. (As we all know, it usually, on the contrary, makes everything extremely difficult.)

Authors do not seem to like writing about children as they really are. This is, in a way, understandable, because in real life children are seldom picturesque, and almost always disconcerting. But all the same, the present writer thinks that there ought to be *some* limit to the extent to which authors draw upon their imaginations when dealing with child-psychology.

Almost the worst type of child in fiction is the silent, intelligent, determined, sensitive little boy—usually called either John or David, although Thomas is creeping into fashion—with the utterly worthless mother. (Fiction writers take no stock in the theory that great men have remarkable mothers. Remarkably foolish and frivolous, perhaps, but nothing else.)

Well, this mother does everything she possibly can to mess up David's life. Sometimes the father is dead, sometimes he is merely unsatisfactory, and sometimes he, also, has his life messed up by this wretched woman. In no case does he ever do the only sensible thing—get rid of his wife and send his children to boarding-school.

David struggles on, the mother like a mill-stone round his neck, and long before anybody would have thought it possible, he has established himself as a well-known writer, or financier, or whatever it may be.

In the second half of the book, he falls in love with the sort of girl whom one would expect him to avoid like the plague, since she is merely another, younger edition of his mother, and this girl always ends by going off with his greatest friend. (From the very minute that David meets this greatest friend, on his first day at school, it may be taken as an absolute foregone conclusion that the friend will eventually take away either his wife or the girl he is in love with.)

In the end, David marries somebody with grey eyes and a fearless outlook, called Elizabeth or Anne, and they have a baby, and it is a silent, determined, intelligent, sensitive little boy—and so it all goes on *ad infinitum*.

We must not exclude girls from this rather unenthusiastic review of children in fiction. There are not, perhaps, quite so many of them, but in their own way they are just as exasperating.

Very often they have Irish blood in them—which, in itself, to the non-Irish, seems unnecessary. It does, however, provide an excuse for their being named Patricia, which they usually are.

The main point about Patricia is that she attracts the attention of men at a very early age. Often and often, the reader cannot see why this is so, but it *is*. Also, she dances beautifully, and can, and does, quote obscure poetry. We do not think that in real life this would please any man we have ever met, unless he happened to be the actual author of the quoted poetry—and perhaps not even then,—but in books Patricia gets away with it, and the man not only recognizes her quotation, but admires her for making it. In real life these would not be his reactions at all.

Patricia is very fond of the open air, and walks for miles and miles, and at the same time talks about sex with whoever is walking with her. Anybody would think that sex was the only subject in the whole world, to read about Patricia, because she never seems to take any real interest in anything else, from the time she is four years old and asks her mother, How do babies come? and the mother declines to give her any intelligent reply. But as we have said before, mothers in fiction are like that.

We often wonder how the author supposes that Patricia and David and Co. grow up into the pure, sane, honest, modern, and clean-minded creatures that they are said to be, when their childhood is one perpetual handicap.

# >HOME LIFE RELAYED

## I

Good-morning, everybody, good-morning. We are now taking you over to No. 74 Floral Crescent, Highgate, where Mr. Clarion Vox will give us his impressions of everyday life as it is lived by so many of us.... MR. CLARION VOX.



\*

Good-morning, everybody, this is Clarion Vox speaking from No. 74 Floral Crescent, Highgate. No. 74 Floral Crescent is situated in one of the most residential parts of Highgate and I am speaking from there. I'm going to do my best to describe to you everyday life as it is being lived every day. ... Clarion Vox speaking.

It is just breakfast time now ... at least if the black marble clock on the dining-room mantel-piece is right it is, but on the other hand, the cuckoo-clock in the hall ... but listeners can hear for themselves what the cuckoo-clock is saying....

Mother is coming into the room now ... she has on a blue jumper and skirt ... she is saying something about the bacon ... she is trying to get it said before Father comes into the room.... Father is on the stairs now ... he can be heard quite distinctly ... I am sorry to say that he seems to have tripped over something.... I'm sure listeners will agree that the front stairs is not the proper place for the cat at eight o'clock on a Monday morning.

Now the bacon is being taken out of the room by Norah ... it looks as if she would run straight into Father on his way to the dining-room ... but she may clear him.... Yes ... she'll do it.... Father has another three steps to go.... Now Norah has practically got her foot on the swing-door ... she's through it.... No—no—she's not.... I'm sorry, everybody, but in the excitement it was a little bit difficult to make sure ... but Norah and Father have now definitely fouled one another on the linoleum....

Listeners can hear for themselves what Father is saying.... No, no, I'm sorry, everybody, but the B.B.C. has to consider the susceptibilities of listeners all over the country, and on the whole, just at the present juncture....

Now the children are coming into the room.... I'm sorry I can't tell listeners what they're saying, because Father is still talking about Norah and the bacon ... still talking ... not quite finished yet.... Now I think he's drawing to a close.... No, no ... not quite yet.... Now it's dying away. ... All over now.

Mother has just begun to pour out ... she is asking Dickie if he has washed his face ... she wants to know why not ... she is speaking very quietly so that I find it difficult to hear ... she has one eye on Father all the time.... Now she is making signs to Doris to go out and get the bacon whilst Father is still occupied with his porridge. Doris has gone out. Listeners must have heard the door bang for themselves, and I'm very, very sorry to say that this has upset Father all over again.

Now Baby is at the door asking to be let in, and Father wants to know if this is the nursery or what, but the return of Doris with the bacon is diverting his attention again, and Baby is crawling quite unobtrusively under the table.... Listeners will very probably agree with me that this is a thoroughly short-sighted policy, and will almost certainly lead to trouble later on.

At the moment, everybody seems to be concentrating on the bacon, which appears to be rather over-cooked ... in fact a piece chipped off by Dickie has just gone on the floor ... he is grinding it into the carpet with his heel....

Now Father is talking about the bacon again ... he still seems to have plenty to say about it ... everybody else is perfectly silent.... Father is still going on.... I can hear Mother murmuring Hush, dear, to Doris, who has made a crunching sound with her teeth....

I only wish that listeners could hear for themselves the extraordinary number of times that Father is bringing in the word "bacon" without ever saying the same thing about it twice.

I must beg everybody's pardon for having forgotten about Baby all this time ... he is still under the table ... he has found the piece of bacon chipped off by Dickie and is quietly eating it....

Father has reached the marmalade stage now.... Doris has had a misfortune with her tea, and I'm sure listeners will all join with me in hoping that this may escape notice from the head of the table.... I'm afraid it's caught his eye.... No, it's all right, Mother is drawing his attention away ... she is saying that it looks like more rain....

I'm sorry to say, everybody, that my time is now drawing to a close, but I hope to resume my running commentary on home life at No. 74 Floral Crescent very shortly.

We have just a moment or two left, I see, so listeners may like to know that Father is just starting for the office ... there has been rather a tense moment or two relating to the absence of his boots, but I see that Norah has rushed them up from

the back premises just in time.... Now Mother is helping him into his overcoat.... She is reminding him that they have promised to go to supper at the Laurels with Grandpapa and Grandmama to-night.... Father has gone off, slamming the door behind him.... Listeners will draw their own conclusions as to the significance of this gesture.

Mother is going back into the dining-room again, where I am afraid that Baby is becoming very seriously involved with the table-cloth.... Yes, I was afraid so....

I am sorry to say, everybody, that my time is up.... Clarion Vox speaking.... Good-bye, everybody, for the moment. Good-bye.

## II

Hallo, everybody, hallo. This is Clarion Vox speaking, and before we go over to No. 74 Floral Crescent, Highgate, for my running commentary on home life there, I should like to say a few words to those listeners who have so kindly written to me about my last talk.

The suggestions received have been very helpful indeed, and later on it may be possible to carry them out, or at least some of them. I'm afraid the idea of a running commentary on the daily round at Pentonville is not quite practicable at the moment, and the same thing applies to the relaying of home life at the Vatican ... but I hope listeners will realize how grateful I am for these, and similar, suggestions.

I am now going to take you over to No. 74 Floral Crescent, Highgate, where everyday life is going on in a thoroughly everyday spirit.... Clarion Vox speaking, from No. 74 Floral Crescent, Highgate.

I am going to do my best to give listeners an impression of what is going on all round me ... this is Clarion Vox speaking....

The breakfast things are just being cleared away from the dining-room and Mother is asking Norah to be careful.... I am afraid this is not a very successful remark, as Norah is flouncing out of the room and shutting the door with her foot rather sharply.

Now Mother has turned her attention to the canary ... she is saying that the state of the cage is a disgrace ... the canary is chirping.... Mother is speaking seriously to Doris, and Doris is kicking the leg of the bamboo table ... Mother is still speaking, and Doris is still kicking ... the canary has stopped chirping. The table with the cage on it rocks every time that Doris kicks it ... the canary is clinging to its perch.

I wish I could convey to listeners the feeling of suspense that is invading the atmosphere ... very nearly over, then, but not quite ... the situation is still unchanged ... Mother is still speaking seriously, and Doris is still kicking. Still going on ... still....

I'm very, very sorry, everybody, but the catastrophe always seems to be averted at the eleventh hour, just as one expects ... this time it really *must* be.... No, no—not yet ... the canary is practically upside down, but—

Listeners may possibly have heard the crash for themselves ... the scene is one of great confusion, but I'm sure everyone will be glad to hear that the canary is still alive. Doris is in tears, and Mother is picking up bird-seed from the floor.

Now things are more or less *in statu quo*, except for the canary's chirp, which is, unfortunately, quite extinguished for the time being. A little later on, I shall hope to inform my listeners as to the progress of our little feathered friend.

Now Dickie has come into the room, and is saying that he and Doris will both be late for school. I am inclined to the opinion that he is perfectly correct, as it is past nine o'clock already.

Mother is telling them to take their mackintoshes, and they are asking Why.... Now she has got them to the front door ... they're off.

No! I'm sorry, everybody, but Dickie is jibbing badly at the mackintosh. I think he's going to win. ... No, Mother is holding firm ... he's taken it.... Now Doris has come back to say she's sorry about the canary.... They really *are* off this time.

Mother is going to the telephone with a list of groceries in her hand ... she has been given the wrong number ... now she's being told that the number is engaged ... the Exchange is saying that it will ring her.... Listeners who may have had similar experiences in their lives will know how far this statement is to be depended upon.

I can see Baby coming into the room, and I am glad to be able to say that I can hear the canary twittering faintly once more. Baby has left the door open, and now the cat is walking in. This, I am sorry to say, has completely silenced the canary again.

Now Mother is making a fresh attempt ... she has the receiver in one hand and the list in the other ... she's asking for the Home and Colonial ... she's got them ... she's starting on the list.

Baby has produced a small tin trumpet and is blowing it.... Norah has come back and is taking away the rest of the breakfast things, and Mother is still in touch with the Home and Colonial. She is having some difficulty in making clear her requirements in the way of sardines.... Now Norah is breaking into the discussion with a reminder about cheese ... she declares that the master likes Gorgonzola ... Mother is ordering a quarter of a pound of Gorgonzola.

It's a little difficult for me to hear everything that's going on, because the laundry van has just driven up to the door, and the man has left his engine running and is talking with Norah on the front-door step, but I can positively assure listeners that Mother is keeping up her end well with the Home and Colonial ... the sardine question is settled, and they have got on to furniture cream. ... Baby is still blowing the tin trumpet spasmodically.

Well, everybody, I'm very sorry to say that my time is drawing to a close, but I shall look forward to another talk a little later on. One last little piece of good news to end up with is that the canary.... No, I'm very, very sorry, everybody, that wasn't the canary at all—it was simply the Home and Colonial ringing off.

### III

This is Clarion Vox speaking—good-evening, everybody, good-evening. We are now going to switch you over to the Laurels,—which is simply a twopenny fare from No. 74 Floral Crescent, Highgate,—where, as I am sure listeners will remember, Grandpapa and Grandmama are expecting their son and daughter-in-law to supper to-night.

This is Clarion Vox speaking from the Laurels. ... I am going to do my best to describe to you what is taking place here this evening....

In the first place, I'm sorry to say that it's a very, very wet evening ... there is a depression off the coast of Ireland that is rapidly ... I beg everybody's pardon, I was announcing the Weather Forecast last week, and for the moment I forgot.... But this is really Clarion Vox, in a running commentary on home life....

As I was saying, the weather is most unfortunate, and Grandmama is laying down sheets of newspaper over the linoleum in the hall.... I'm sure listeners will realize that, with every desire to make the talk as full as possible, it is quite impossible for me to give them the actual names of the newspapers.... The B.B.C. has to make very stringent rules as to anything of that sort, and naturally....

Very well, then, Grandmama—as I was saying—is laying sheets of anonymous newspaper over the linoleum. Grandpapa is ... well, at the moment, Grandpapa doesn't seem to be doing anything very much ... perhaps later on in the evening I shall be able to tell you rather more about this side of things....

Now there's a ring at the bell ... they're just arriving ... they are all saying that it's a wet evening ... they're all saying it.... Now they're saying it again, in different words.... Now Grandpapa has said it, all by himself, but the others have got on to something else—I think it's the children—and nobody is taking any notice. They're all moving into the drawing-room now and saying how nice it is to see a fire. Grandpapa is sticking to his guns, and going on about the weather.... I'm sure listeners will all agree that this is the spirit that has made England what she is to-day.... Nothing very much is happening ... things are going on quickly.... Now supper is taking place and Grandmama is carving the beef... Everything still very quiet ... the stewed rhubarb and custard are on the table now ... cheese and celery ... port.... All over now, and they've gone back to the fire.

A suggestion has been made as to a game of Bridge ... yes, I thought so, they're going to play.... Grandmama is saying that

she and Grandpapa will play together ... he seems to be objecting.... Yes, he's quite definitely objecting ... still holding out ... firm as a rock ... he'll carry his point.... Yes, he's done it. Grandmama is dealing ... now we shan't be long.... I'm sorry, everybody, it was a mistake ... it'll be another moment or two before ... *Now* I think we're off.

I do really beg everybody's pardon.... I should like to describe the position of every card in detail, but it's quite difficult to see any hand excepting Grandmama's, and hers, rather unfortunately, can be seen by everybody ... she's being asked to hold it up.... Grandpapa has gone no trumps ... now it's two hearts ... three no trumps ... four clubs ... things are moving so rapidly that it's rather difficult to follow ... but the upshot of the whole thing is that Grandpapa has been left with three no trumps doubled ... he's not looking quite as confident as one would wish.... No, things are not going very well for him ... now they're going still worse ... and Grandmama is perhaps rather making the most of the situation.... Wait a minute, though ... she's played out of her turn ... Grandpapa says that this entitles him to call a lead ... listeners may very well have heard him say it, he's very much excited ... he's being supported by his daughter-in-law ... the whole situation is becoming involved.... Now Grandmama has flung her cards all over the table and is saying that this is simply a friendly game, played for amusement.... I'm afraid she's in tears ... nobody can do anything with her—the game is breaking up in confusion.

I don't quite know what my listeners would feel about Grandpapa if they could see him at the moment ... he's picked up all the cards and has begun to play Patience rather ostentatiously ... this is really reducing Grandmama to a state practically bordering on insanity ... it's almost too distressing to describe.... I'm so very, very sorry, everybody, but it's really quite doubtful whether I can go on.... But wait a moment ... things are clearing up a bit ... yes, I think the situation is improving ... the servant is bringing in cocoa, and Grandmama is being persuaded to drink a cup ... I think this ought to restore her *morale*, beyond a doubt.... Yes, she's quieting down now ... a question is being raised as to a new line of printed linen bedspreads, eight-and-eleven-three, at Harper's Sale in the High Street ... she says she's thinking of going to look at them to-morrow ... her daughter-in-law is offering to go with her. The conversation is now becoming almost entirely feminine, and I'm really not quite sure whether ... Besides, as a matter of fact, it's really time for our talk to come to an end, and it almost looks as though Grandpapa felt the same about the visit of his relations.... No, that *wasn't* Clarion Vox.... It was Grandpapa saying Good-night, everybody....

#### IV

Clarion Vox at the microphone, everybody, and we are taking you over once again to No. 74 Floral Crescent, Highgate, for further glimpses of home life.... Clarion Vox speaking....

Now this morning I'm going to begin by reminding listeners of the dear old familiar quotation, so peculiarly applicable to the daily round as lived in the family circle:

In every life some rain must fall,  
Some days be dark and dreary.

This, I am sorry to say, is rather markedly the case at No. 74 Floral Crescent just now, both literally and figuratively. A depression off the Hebrides, which listeners will remember from recent weather forecasts, is making itself felt in a very inopportune manner, as to-day happens to be Father's birthday.... Perhaps I'd better say that again. This is Father's birthday, and his birthday treat is to be a day in the country ... the rain is falling very steadily indeed and the barometer in the hall ... In point of fact the barometer in the hall is not working, but if it were it would certainly be falling rapidly. The children have their faces pressed to the window-pane.... Mother is cutting sandwiches without very much enthusiasm....

I can see Father's presents on the dining-room table ... there is a penwiper, cut out in red flannel and shaped like a cat's head ... and a small brass ash-tray ... and something that looks rather like a drawing of a steam-roller, that I fancy must be Baby's effort.... Now Father is examining these offerings ... he is saying Thank you ... he is listening to an explanation about the steam-roller, which turns out to be a lion.... I'm sorry, everybody ... it is, definitely, a lion and not a steam-roller.

Now there is a discussion going on ... well, perhaps it's rather too one-sided to be called a discussion. Father has just said that when once he's made up his mind, he's not the sort of man to alter it again.... I'm sure listeners will hardly require to be told what Mother's reply is.... Yes, she's said it, just as I thought.... "I know, dear" ... just that traditional

note of resignation, too.... It's the wives and mothers of dear old England who've helped to make her fathers and husbands what they are, as we all know.

The position now is that Father has *said* he's going to take them all to spend a day in the country, and he's going to stick to that, whatever happens.... Mother is obviously very much against it, and keeps on referring to wet feet and Baby's catching cold.... Dickie and Doris are saying very little, but each is standing first on one leg and then on the other, which I think denotes anxiety.... Baby, I'm afraid, is making it rather difficult for me to ascertain exactly what his point of view may be, because there are things in his mouth, but I think on the whole I can safely say that he's backing up Father ... yes, I'm sure he is.... Not that Father really requires any support, because, as he says himself, when once he's made up his mind ... Yes, he's just said it again.

Now Norah has burst into the room... I'm sorry, everybody, but that really is the only way to describe the way that girl comes in and out. ... Norah, as I say, has just joined the party, and says she supposes they'll want dinner as usual and there's nothing, only the mutton, in the house. ... Listeners will, I know, be glad to hear that it is being made clear to Norah that this sort of discussion must be conducted in the kitchen.... Father has perhaps put this a little more forcibly than I should have done myself ... but I daresay it's ...

In any case, the main issue is still entirely unchanged, and I can assure listeners quite definitely that Father is sticking to his original programme of an expedition into unknown Hertfordshire. In fact, he is, at the moment, going to fetch the car round.

Now Mother is in the room again ... she is talking to the children, and the word "goloshes" is plainly audible ... it's coming almost regularly. ... I think she's finished with it now.... Doris and Dickie are going off to get ready, and Mother is shaking moth-balls out of all the warm wraps she can find in the chest in the hall....

The rain, I'm very, very sorry to say, is coming down harder than ever, and the wind, which is blowing from the north-east, is unusually piercing.... Father has just brought the car round ... it looks a little as though the hood might be blown inside out by the wind, but I hope not.... Now he's coming up the path, and whilst I can see his lips moving, I am not able to hear exactly what the words ... Of course, listeners will realize, as I do myself, that the situation is, under certain aspects, rather a trying one. Here we have Father, nothing if not a man of his word, committed to a certain course of action, and the elements, as it were, attempting to defy him.... Mother, whilst not going quite so far as the elements, is yet making a final effort to dissuade him.... Listeners will hardly require to be told that this is not a success....

Here come the children ... Doris is protecting a picnic-basket under her waterproof, and Dickie is holding an umbrella over Baby.... Now Doris and Dickie are on the little back-seat, where listeners will, I know, be sorry to hear that they have no shelter whatever except that of the umbrella, which they will almost certainly be unable to keep open.... Mother is in front, beside Father, and Baby is on her knee ... they're just off.... No, there's a hitch somewhere ... Mother and Baby have had to get out again, so that Father can leave the driving-seat.... Yes, I see what it is: he's forgotten the waterproof rug.... Now we're all right, though I'm afraid everybody is very wet already.... Father's stopped the engine, but he's started it again almost directly.... Now they really are off.... I daresay listeners can hear the splashing of the rain for themselves.... The very last words I can hear from Father are that he's not the kind of man who changes his mind....

Good-bye, everybody—good-bye.

## V

This is Clarion Vox, everybody, calling you from one of our great London termini, where various scenes are being enacted that are very closely connected with our usual running commentary on home life ... for instance, there is a little party from No. 74 Floral Crescent, Highgate, and I can actually see Grandmama ... listeners will remember Grandmama, from the Laurels ... making her way towards them....

Now Grandpapa can be heard. I can't see him, as yet, but I can hear him distinctly.... He is saying things about seeing other people off and ... But perhaps it is hardly fair to follow Grandpapa too closely at the moment. The crowd is very dense indeed, and he is finding a difficulty in keeping up with Grandmama.... Now he's drawing level ... he'll catch up in another minute.... No, no, he won't ... there's a paper-boy in the way ... Grandpapa has dodged him very skilfully ... but I'm afraid it's only to find himself rather badly mixed up with a lady who has a little dog on a chain.... Things would, I'm

sure, be simplified if Grandmama would only look round ... but no ... she's forging ahead steadily. I think her objective is Platform 1 ... she's asking a porter where the boat-train starts from... As I thought, he says No. 1. Now Grandmama is asking a second porter ... she has received the same answer. Grandpapa has cleared the lady with the dog and is making slow but steady progress.... Grandmama has caught sight of a ticket-collector ... she's making straight for him.... Now she's asking him which platform ...

Listeners would perhaps like to turn now to another aspect of the situation.... Clarion Vox speaking, as I said before, from one of our great London termini. The boat-train is due to start in another eight and a half minutes.... I can see our friends from No. 74 Floral Crescent, Highgate, just taking their places ... that is to say, Mother has taken hers, and Baby is on her lap ... Dickie has been told to keep a look-out for Grandmama and Grandpapa, and he is certainly at the carriage window, though I am inclined to think that he is giving the greater part of his attention to a neighbouring engine. One of the most active figures in this scene of activity is undoubtedly Father. Just now he is engaged in a rather sharp altercation with a French gentleman who has appropriated a corner seat to which Father feels that he has a prior claim. It is a little difficult for me to give listeners quite as clear an impression as I should like, of this rather unique little episode, as things are moving rather quickly ... the French gentleman is difficult to follow ... he is getting more difficult to follow.... Now Mother is intervening, and begging Father to give over, dear.... Father is taking little or no notice of this, but the French gentleman is lifting his hat and bowing.... I only wish that listeners could see for themselves this very typical example of the famous Gallic courtesy ... *toujours la politesse*.... Now he and Father are at it again ... the guard is approaching ... I feel very nearly certain that he will be called upon to adjudicate.... Yes, I thought so.... The guard is hearing both sides ... still hearing them ... still. ... Now he's breaking in.... I think it's going in Father's favour.... Yes, everything seems to be tending that way ... the French gentleman is out of it ... definitely ... he's leaving the carriage altogether ... his voice is dying away in the distance ... Father's, on the other hand, is just as audible as ever ... though I don't actually know that anyone is paying very much attention to it at the moment, as Grandpapa and Grandmama have just joined the party.... I am sorry to say that Grandmama is predicting a bad crossing ... she says that a gale is blowing up.... Several people in the vicinity are looking at her with evident resentment and dismay, but it has no effect on her.... I don't think I've mentioned Doris, yet. She is here in navy-blue serge, and just at the moment seems to be absorbed in a paper with coloured illustrations and very inferior print, but no doubt as the moment of departure draws near ... Yes, she's roused herself now, and is being warned by Grandpapa not to drink a drop of water anywhere in France before it's been boiled and filtered.

Well, I think they'll be off in a moment or two now. Listeners will very probably realize, from experience, that few people are quite at their best in a scene of this kind, and that a certain amount of rather stale repetition becomes almost inevitable. This is the fourth time that Mother has said they won't be long now.... Grandpapa has said it twice, and now Grandmama is saying it. The children have each said it once. Now a green flag is being produced by the guard, and everyone is looking distinctly relieved. However, it isn't unfurled yet ... Grandmama will have time to put in a reminder about hoping to get a picture post-card from Boulogne. Yes, she's said it.... Now, I really *do* think that in a moment or two ... Mother has sent her love to several people ... I'm afraid she's doing this to fill in time ... the whistle has just sounded ... the train is beginning to move ... Grandpapa seems to be making a determined effort to keep pace with it ... he's shouting a last remark ... it is to the effect that they're really off now ... the train is gathering speed and Grandpapa is dropping behind ... Grandmama is saying a few short, sharp words as to his folly in trying to ... But really, I don't think the B.B.C. can quite ...

I sometimes wonder whether listeners altogether realize the strain of following home life so very, very closely as one is obliged to do for the purposes of this talk ... there seems to be something about home life ... though one doesn't for a moment mean to imply anything in any way derogatory ... this is still Clarion Vox speaking....

\*

*There is just one S.O.S. to-night: Will the relations of Mr. Clarion Vox go at once to Hanwell Asylum, where he is lying dangerously ill.... Perhaps we'd better have that again: Mr. Clarion Vox at Hanwell A S Y L U M.... Good-bye, everybody, good-bye.*

# STUDIES IN EVERYDAY LIFE

## MOVEMENTS

Most of us, at one time or another, have been drawn into Movements, sometimes in the capacity of promoter, sometimes merely as one of the objects that the Movement is out to benefit, or suppress, or transmute into something quite different. For the great aim and object of all Movements is to alter existing conditions. The promoters do not, as a rule, say why this is so necessary: they just set to work.

A great deal is accomplished by speaking, but this part of the good work is always done by the promoters, and never by the objects, of the Movement. Probably this is one of the reasons why hardly anybody ever knows what are the reactions of those who are the objects of a Movement's benevolent offices.

Speaking is done on Committees: a good deal of it, usually, by the person in the chair, some by the secretary, and still more by such of the ordinary Committee members as are determined and self-assertive by nature. There are also professional speakers.

These usually have an address in London (though sometimes in particularly inaccessible parts of the North of England instead), but they live in railway carriages, in cars sent to meet them, or fetch them, or take them away, and in the houses of other people. A speaker, whether coming for one night or for a fortnight, carries a little bag, which apparently contains nothing whatever except papers. The present writer does not know what they do about night-attire, but female speakers usually have the kind of hair that requires, or at any rate gets, no brushing, and male speakers are frequently bald, so that the problem of a brush and comb is practically eliminated.

It generally happens, either through the peculiarities of the railway time-table or by the apparently deliberate choice of the speaker, that he or she arrives at the house from which the Meeting is being organized, at a time which makes it almost impossible to have either tea or dinner at anything approaching a normal hour. A meal has to be arranged that is neither one thing nor the other, at which everybody usually drinks coffee and eats eggs.

This is one reason why speakers are, for the most part, unpopular with men, especially men who are husbands and accustomed to consideration. Speakers do not consider anybody, excepting Our Chairman, concerning whom they are very loyal and hearty, and Our Secretary, whom they like much less, but against whom they wouldn't say anything for the world.

It might very reasonably be supposed that the Movement, its progress, aims, and objects, would be the one subject that speakers would wish to avoid, on the few occasions when they are not obliged to be mentioning them from a platform. But this is not so. They do not ever want to talk about anything else. This, of course, makes it easy to entertain them—indeed, it may be said that they entertain themselves—but on the other hand, it makes it difficult to reconcile other members of the household, or ordinary visitors, to their presence.

Movements in general are usually associated with Meetings—Committee ones or ordinary ones. The psychology of the former kind is so strange that it requires an article to itself.

Ordinary, or general, Meetings take place in a hall, or a drawing-room, or if in the country, in a garden. These last are very apt to finish either under umbrellas, or in a general rush to the Vicarage dining-room.

Meetings, really, vary very little, whatever the Movement may be. Sometimes they begin with a song. The person on the platform who starts the song does not usually possess what is known as perfect pitch, and so a severe strain is put upon the Meeting at the very offset. However, half of those present do not sing the high notes at all, and others drop their voices an octave lower and hope that they are really singing seconds, and it is over quite quickly.

The speeches, especially if political, are not over at all quickly. Very often a speaker has to go on and on at political meetings, because it is the custom of Our Member, or Our Parliamentary Candidate, as the case may be, to pledge himself to appear at two different ends of the county at one and the same time, and this naturally leads to a certain delay in his arrival at whichever place he leaves to the last.

Meetings, unless dispersed by the police, end with Votes of Thanks. The system by which these are at present conducted,



is not really a very good one. Someone on the platform proposes a vote of thanks to the speaker, for coming here to-day and giving us such an interesting address, and nobody has ever yet succeeded in restraining a meeting from, at this point, breaking into quite premature applause. Because immediately afterwards, someone else on the platform has to stand up, and say exactly the same thing, only if possible in rather different words, in order to second the vote of thanks. And then the chairman stands up, and gathers the thing together as it were, and calls for the customary demonstration—but by that time the first impulse of relief that the whole thing is over has died away, and people are beginning to tread on other people's feet, and look for the things they have dropped—and such applause as there is, comes as an anti-climax.

Anti-climax, as a matter of fact, is the great danger of all Movements. It is a frightful thing for any Movement, when its object is accomplished, for such reason as it had, or felt itself to have, for existence is then gone. Providence, however, working as usual, in a mysterious way, arranges that very few Movements ever do succeed in accomplishing their object.

## LOOKING AT SCHOOLS

Sooner or later most parents do this, but the supreme example is the mother of an eldest, or only, boy. The father comes too, but he is usually silent, and walks a few paces behind the mother and the Headmaster on the tour of inspection, although at the end of it he sometimes puts a single, shrewd question about the Drains.

The mother, on the other hand, puts hundreds of questions, and generally answers a good many of them herself.

She says: "Don't you think that *every* boy needs absolute *individual* attention? I always feel that so very strongly myself. And with John, I've always found ..."

It is not necessary for the Head to listen to the next bit, and indeed he never does. He knows what John's mother has always found, with John, and if he doesn't, it makes no difference to him. Nothing that any mother ever says makes any difference to any Headmaster—but fortunately few mothers realize this. Headmasters, naturally, conceal it, politely.

They say:

"Quite, quite. That is so true. I may say that in the experience of thirty years, with hundreds of boys passing through my hands term after term, I have never yet failed to understand each one thoroughly and individually, through and through. I wish I could show you some of the letters that I receive by every post from boys who were under my care twenty years ago...."

Then it is the mother's turn to stop listening. Quite possibly she takes the opportunity of turning to her husband and hissing through her clenched teeth: "Demandez-lui s'il fait un *reduction* pour les frères."

The husband, dazed, will simply reply: "What did you say, dear?" and there, for the time being, the matter rests.

"Here we have our hot-air cupboard ... Matron is very particular ... wet stockings ... The Sanatorium—(not that we ever have any of the boys *ill*, I am thankful to say)—... the Dining-Hall.... One of our Dormitories ... another of our Dormitories...."

All this kind of thing is mere advance-skirmishing.

The real encounter begins when the school has been seen, and the mother has said "Yes, I see, that's really delightful" a sufficient number of times, and the Head has affably invited the parents to sit down, either in his own particular study or in his wife's drawing-room.

He knows that the moment has come, and opens with: "And how old is your boy?" in the most interested voice that he can command.

No mother has ever been known to answer this question by the simple statement that John is six, or seven, or eight, as the case may be.

She says that he is six and a half, but very much in advance of that age in some ways, whilst on the other hand, in *other* ways—but all that it concerns the Head to know is whether John is under seven or over seven.

If the former, he replies: "Ah, then you've time before you, still." If the latter: "Ah, then you want to come to a decision

fairly soon."

In either case, the mother rejoins: "Oh yes. But—I know you'll understand what I mean—we do feel that it's most important to get the *right* school for John. In some ways, he's so unlike other boys."

Some Headmasters allow the mother a free rein at this stage—others do not. They interrupt. They try and prove to her that they know more about her little boy, whom they have never seen, than she does, simply from their vast experience of other, exactly similar, little boys. But this is never a success. All mothers know that their little boy is different to all other little boys.

In any case, it is almost always the mother who wins in the end.

If the Head has known many parents—and what Head has not?—a word here and there will give him all the necessary clues, and he need only attend from time to time.

"From the day he was three years old ... clockwork mouse ... Meccano ... really quite wonderful ... engines ... wireless ... pulling things to pieces ... a brilliant engineer cousin of my husband's so much struck...."

(A destructive child, interested in seeing the wheels go round because he is deficient in imagination and initiative.)

But on the other hand:

"Almost too fond of reading ... bookworm ... tells Baby the most wonderful stories ... goes on for hours and hours ... bound to write, one of these days...."

(Probably a poor physique, spectacles, and might even walk in his sleep.)

"John, I'm afraid, is *not* fond of his lessons. Just a regular *boy* ... anything to do with a ball ... so delightfully keen ... really what I call sporting...."

(The average dunce.)

The experienced Head takes these notes in mental shorthand, dismisses them from his mind, and never, in any circumstances whatever, refers to them again.

In exactly the same way, his wife, if he has one, listens when her turn comes to injunctions about John's physical welfare.

"As a rule, he's very good about his food—I've always been most strict—but about parsnips, I really have found that he can't manage them. What I mean to say is, he really can't manage them, I've found. As a matter of fact, I was exactly the same myself at that age."

This last is an argument that all mothers look upon as being entirely conclusive.

"Yes, I see."

The wife of the Headmaster also sees, about John's tendency to colds in winter, his inability to do without nine hours of sleep every night, and his peculiarly rapid growth. She knows that the curriculum of the school will not be deviated from by a hair's breadth to suit any individual John, and she does not for a moment believe one single word of what John's mother is saying.

But the hall-mark of all Headmasters and their wives is scepticism, just as that of all mothers is a profound suspiciousness.

Nevertheless, they all part from one another with earnest and graceful cordiality.

John's father asserts himself at the last by bringing off his question about the Drains, and is answered effusively, since all school drains are always bran-new and absolutely up-to-date having been entirely relaid the term before last, and John's mother says: "Then may I write to you?" with a smile full of hopefulness.

"Do—do," replies the Head, equally hopeful. And the parents, so indistinguishable from all other parents, depart; and the Head says: "Thank God that's over."

So does the father, who does not really feel that it matters where John goes, so long as he goes there soon, and gets plenty of cricket and football. But he knows very well that he has not heard the last of John's school yet.

"You see, dear, although I quite liked *some* things about the place, I do feel that, with a boy like John, one has to remember that one isn't dealing with a perfectly ordinary boy, exactly like other boys...."

And they go and look at the next school on the list—which will differ from the last one about as much as the Headmaster from all other Headmasters, the parents from all other parents, and the boy from all other boys.

## BEING PARENTS

This, like so many other jobs, is no longer what it used to be. The bottom has dropped out of the market since the days of Edward VII., son of good Queen Victoria.

Parents, after booming for many years, have now slumped. It looks, indeed, as though they were unlikely ever to rise again.

In the old days there was an *ipso facto* meritoriousness about being a parent (within the bounds of wedlock) at all. The oftener, the better. Now, it is not a case of the oftener the better. On the contrary, the fewer the higher. Twice, certainly—three times, perhaps. Anything beyond that, and you are a case for Dr. Marie Stopes.

The children, when they are there, give less trouble than they used to give, in one way, but more in another. There is no trouble about naughtiness, because they never are naughty—only highly strung, mismanaged, or repressed. It is often difficult, however, for a mother, especially when in a hurry, as mothers so often are, to distinguish between the highly strung, mismanaged, or repressed child and the old-fashioned naughty one. But there are hundreds, if not thousands, of little books to be a help. They say things like—

"Never raise the voice, in rebuking a child."

"Punishment should rarely, if ever, be inflicted. When it is, let it be the logical outcome of the fault."

"Never use force, to coerce a child into obedience. Reason with it."

Sometimes it seems almost impossible to obey the little books literally. If the child that is being rebuked is itself roaring, beating a drum outside the door, kicking the furniture, or blowing a trumpet in one's ear, it becomes imperative to raise the voice—to raise it, indeed, more than a little—in rebuking. Again, it is very, very difficult for some mothers to feel certain what punishment, exactly, is the "logical outcome" of spitting over the banisters, or putting small shells down the baby's ear.

To avoid the use of force in coercing a child into obedience is comparatively easy—especially as the child grows older and force, from the average mother, would seem likely to prove even more unseemly, and less efficacious, than the little books suppose. Fathers, however, even nowadays, have few scruples about force. They do not read the little books. Neither do they reason with their children. For one thing, children almost always win, in a reasoning match, and fathers dislike being defeated in argument; and for another, being just as often in a hurry as are the mothers, and far less conscientious, they prefer to save time. But less is expected—now as always—of fathers than of mothers.

Modern fathers do not always realize how much they have to be thankful for. In the days of Miss Maria Edgeworth, or those of Mrs. Sherwood, their rôle was a far more strenuous one than it is nowadays. Take Mr. Fairchild. At any moment his four-year-old son Henry might say to him: "Pray, Papa, what has the Bible to say for and against the practice of dancing?" or Emily enquire: "What is the process, Papa, by which iron is extracted from its ore?" Mr. Fairchild had not only to be prepared to answer these intelligent enquiries, but he had to answer them at immense length, with illustrations, and edifying examples, and quotations, and to devise conundrums of his own, designed to prove whether or no Henry and Emily had listened to, and fully understood, his explanations. He had to set a good example, in word—or rather, in many words—and in deed;—he had to read aloud (from Paley's *Evidences*, or kindred works); he had to take his whole family for walks—(in the course of which they almost always met some Poor Person, to whom Mr. Fairchild gave pious admonition);—and he had, when necessary, to administer punishment to the children with a rod.

These strenuous obligations were imposed upon him by the convention of parental infallibility. It would have been entirely impossible for Mr. Fairchild to say simply in answer to any question, however abstruse, "*I don't know*". The cosmos of Henry, Lucy, and Emily would have been shattered—to say nothing of that of their parents. Even Mrs. Fairchild, though less omniscient than her husband, never went further, when cornered by her children, than to say: "My love, these are matters which our poor finite minds are not intended to understand".

Parents, nowadays, are never asked the kind of questions that the Fairchild parents were asked, so they are not confronted with the frightful necessity of replying to them. On the other hand, they are asked other sorts of questions, mostly of a personal nature, and beginning with Why, and to these it is necessary that they should return adequate and rational answers.

It is, very rightly, no longer considered either adequate or rational to reply, "Because Father says it will be so" or "Because Mother thinks it best".

So that much time is spent in explanation.

On the whole, modern parents make up on the swings for what they have undoubtedly lost upon the roundabouts. The ones who do not get it either way are those, rather less modern, who were once children under the old régime and are now parents under the new.

## MR. FAIRCHILD

One has, perhaps, been accustomed to look upon Mr. Fairchild too exclusively in the light of a Parent—and an Early Victorian parent at that. But just as clergymen so often say that they are Men first and Parsons afterwards, so Mr. Fairchild must have been a Man first and a Parent afterwards.

It is possible to spend hours in conjecturing what Mr. Fairchild was like (*a*) as a baby, (*b*) as a young gentleman, (*c*) as a suitor for the hand of the future Mrs. Fairchild.

How, for instance, did Mr. Fairchild propose? One may safely assume that he said it with texts,—but here imagination is hampered by the fact that nowhere is Mrs. Fairchild's maiden name revealed to us. During the years of their married life, Mr. Fairchild called her "my dear" and spoke of her as "your mama" or "your mistress" according to the persons whom he was addressing. The baptismal name of Mr. Fairchild himself is shrouded in similar obscurity, but it was probably Percy, Herbert, or Henry. Perhaps all three.

I have seen only one illustration to *The History of the Fairchild Family* that conveys any real feeling of authenticity to my mind. It is in an edition published by Messrs. Routledge, in or about the year 1898. Mr. Fairchild, with side-whiskers, and wearing a very small pork-pie hat, a morning-coat, and a long, very tight pair of white trousers, sits upon the extreme edge of a rustic bench beneath a tree, holding a small book. Underneath the picture is printed the simple, straightforward legend: "Mr. Fairchild reading his Bible".

It was a good moment to choose. Far better than "Mr. Fairchild taking his children to gaze upon a gibbet" or even "Mr. Fairchild returning thanks for cold raspberry and currant tart"—characteristic though either of these episodes might have been.

This business of the gibbet is still, after all these years, brought up against Mr. Fairchild on almost every occasion that his name is mentioned. [And it is, I may add, mentioned a great deal oftener than might be supposed.]

The facts of the scandal are these:

When Lucy, Emily, and Henry Fairchild were respectively aged nine, eight, and six years old, they had a quarrel. They fought, and were separated by Mr. Fairchild, who explained to them the evils of violence, whilst at the same time he whipped, with a little rod, the hands of all the children till they smarted again. "After which he made them stand in a corner of the room, without their breakfasts, neither did they get anything to eat all the morning. When John came in to lay the cloth for dinner, Mr. Fairchild called the three children to him and asked if they were sorry for the wicked things which they had done."

It will readily be believed that they were very sorry indeed.

It is a relief to know that Mr. Fairchild, after forgiving his children, gave them leave to dine with him as usual, for a severe ordeal lay ahead of them.

Their papa took them to a very thick and dark wood, in which they were assured that "something very shocking" awaited them. So, indeed, it did, in the shape of a gibbet, "on which the body of a man hung in chains: the body had not yet fallen to pieces, although it had hung there some years ... the face of the corpse was so shocking, that the children could not look upon it".

The unfortunate children begged to be taken away, but Mr. Fairchild—always thorough—replied: "Not yet. I must tell you the history of that wretched man before we go from this place." And so he did.

Mrs. Fairchild had wisely declined to associate herself with this expedition.

A very few days later, Henry so far forgot himself as to steal an apple, and then deny having done so. With some lack of judgment, he committed this misdemeanour before breakfast, and was immediately "shut up by himself in a little room, at the very top of the house", where he remained, without food as usual, until night-time, when his mama came to him and enquired whether he had been thinking of his great wickedness.

Upon Henry's assurance that he had been thinking of it a very great deal, he was once more restored to the family circle. Mr. Fairchild kissed him, cut him a large piece of bread-and-butter, and explained that he had punished him "in order to save his soul from hell".

It was not an argument which admitted of reply, as Henry, between his bites at the bread-and-butter, probably realized.

Mrs. Fairchild, upon all occasions, supported Mr. Fairchild, and occasionally made spirited contributions of her own to the sum-total of the children's information, as when Henry made enquiry of her concerning Roman Catholics.

"The Roman Catholics, my dear, are called Christians," said Mrs. Fairchild, "but there is much in their religion which the Bible does not approve. They make images and saints of holy men and worship them; they whip their own bodies, and keep long fasts, and make long and painful journeys to the graves of saints; thinking by all these things to save themselves. And now, my dear, you understand in part what the Roman Catholics are."

One is grateful to Mrs. Fairchild for "in part". Mr. Fairchild would not have said "in part". It was his masculine prerogative to be infallible, omniscient, and uncompromising in his judgments.

Who can forget his attitude towards his unfortunate friends, the Crosbies?

"I am sorry," said Mr. Fairchild, "that Mr. Crosbie still thinks so much about eating. It always was his besetting sin, and it seems to have grown stronger upon him as he has got older."

It must be admitted that the subsequent behaviour of the entire Crosbie family, when they came to spend the day with the Fairchilds, afforded an excellent opportunity for the study of Besetting Sins. No wonder that Mrs. Fairchild, escorting her guests round the garden, found an early occasion to tell them that "no family could be happy in which the fear of God was not the ruling principle".

It is impossible not to regret that we are not allowed to follow Mr. Fairchild into old age, or to see the results of his efforts on behalf of Lucy, Emily, and Henry in after-life. We are reluctantly compelled to take leave of him after his accession to a handsome property, in the vicinity of Reading. The last, and most characteristic, performance recorded of him is his gift to Henry of five shillings, to be expended at Henry's sole discretion, for the benefit of twenty of the village schoolboys. Upon the production, by the infant Henry, of twenty packets, each one containing a twopenny ball and a pennyworth of string, Mr. Fairchild forbore to comment more severely than by observing that he was not angry, but he wished Henry to understand "that he has fallen into what is wrong to-day not in having judged amiss by spending a sum of money, which might have been made really useful to the poor boys, on useless and inappropriate presents, but in giving way to that self-sufficiency which set him above the advice of those whom he knew to be wiser than himself".

This is the last recorded speech of Mr. Fairchild, although it is impossible to doubt that his family and dependants were given many other opportunities for profiting by his eloquence whilst he continued in their midst.

The rest must be conjecture—a field that is of unending fascination to the true lover of the Fairchild Family.

## THE NON-GARDENER'S GARDENING CALENDAR

People in England who do not like gardening are very few, and of the few there are, many do not own to it, knowing that they might just as well own to having been in prison, or got drunk at Buckingham Palace.

But curiously enough, the Gardening Calendar, which I have only to-day discovered (rather unfortunately, since it is already July), is likely to hold more appeal for those who know nothing about gardening than for those who make it the hobby of their own lives and the bane of everybody else's.

It is one of those Calendars that has a little text for every day, and on July 14th it says, quite quietly and simply:

*"If Seedling Turnips are attacked by fly, dust with soot when the dew is on the leaf."*

What a train of thought the whole thing rouses! The Seedling Turnips attacked by fly—the Calendar, I *think*, means flies, not only just one fly, but "fly" reads more dramatically—and the owner, warned by some mysterious instinct, hastening to collect soot. What happens if there is no soot? It is July—all the fires may be out. Probably, however, true gardeners have reserves of soot that ordinary people do not know about. They collect the soot, therefore, and dust either the Seedling Turnips or the Fly, or both—whichever the Calendar means—"when the dew is on the leaf".

Of all the pretty touches! It reminds one of "When the bloom is on the rye".

Non-gardeners do not so much as know what the dew looks like, on the leaf of the Seedling Turnip. But it is easy to imagine what the garden-lover looks like, crawling out of bed before the sun has had time to interfere with the dew on the leaf, and dusting the soot about all over the place.

Then again: "*Onions should be ready to pull and dry in the sun*", says the Calendar, rather peremptorily. Onions *should* be ready. If they aren't, the whole thing is evidently all off, because the very next day we dash off into:

*"Continue to bud Roses"*, and nothing more is ever said about giving the Onions a second chance.

Naturally, with 365 days in the year, it is almost impossible for the Calendar to assign a definite task to every one of them, so sometimes it just says things like:

*"Stocks and Pansies will be ripening their seed"* (which has a Biblical flavour), and *"Geranium Cuttings will not strike freely in open ground"*.

The gardener-born, on reading this, looks at once to the Geranium Cuttings, and if by any frightful chance they *are* striking freely in open ground, knows that something is wrong somewhere and rushes them all away to whatever is the opposite of open ground.

Much later on—for it is impossible to resist looking on ahead—a faintly reproachful note is sounded:

*"If not yet done, sow Onions to stand the Winter"*.

There is something about "*if not yet done*" that should strike a chill to the heart of anyone who has put off this business of sowing the Onions to stand the winter. They will obviously only have themselves to thank if the Onions break down at sight of the first snowflake.

There is something more hopeful about "*Celery may still be planted*", on August 21st. There has been procrastination, and even slackness, the Calendar means, but it isn't too late.

*"Dis-bud Chrysanthemums"* has an element of Dr. Marie Stopes about it that makes one unwilling to dwell upon the topic.

It is depressingly followed by the command to "*Sow Cabbage for winter and spring supply*". Winter and spring! Will one have to eat cabbage for months and months?

Evidently one will.

"*Lift Potatoes as soon as the Haulm has died back*" leaves me cold. For one thing, I have no idea what the haulm is, or how I can tell when it has died back; and for another, I do not want to lift the potatoes, then or ever, for I do not know where, or to what heights, the Calendar means them to be lifted. For once, it has overreached itself, and I shall do nothing.

"*Gather Tomato fruit as it ripens*" is much simpler, and might almost be called obvious, but "*Mulch and earth up Celery*" is not, unless one has a previous acquaintance, which I unhappily have not, with the verb *To Mulch*.

Quite late in September is the briefest entry of all: "*Harvest Onions*". Not Harvest Home, but Harvest Onions.

The Calendar, in fact, has a weakness for Onions. They get more texts to themselves than any other product of the vegetable world.

The most engaging one of all comes in August: "*Bend down the heads of well-grown Onions to help the development of the bulb*".

Perhaps garden-lovers have always known about this, but for my part it would never have entered my mind to set about bending down the heads of my well-grown Onions to help the development of the bulb. But it strikes me as a very pretty, gracious, and generous action, symbolical of the strong helping the weak, and many other things of the same kind.

Right at the end of the Calendar, as far as I can see without tearing, I *think* it rather slacks off, with generalizations, such as "*Violets will need careful attention*", which simply makes one anxious about them, without giving one a lead.

And "*Leave Parsnips in the Ground*" on November 13th is ridiculous, since I shouldn't ever have thought of moving them, if the Calendar hadn't said anything.

One is also inclined to carp at "*Rock Gardens may now be made*" with its casual plural. However, "*Dig and Manure all vacant ground*" is much worse, and opens up unlimited fields of really hard labour. One turns with relief to "*Watch the ventilation of your greenhouse*", which is, anyway, a passive, quiet way of spending the time.

On the whole, the Gardening Calendar is calculated to brighten the day of the non-gardener. All its mysterious counsels are probably as clear as daylight to the real garden-lovers, who take all this thinning, and dis-budding, and covering of crowns, and lifting of crops, in their stride.

The non-gardener, however, in a quiet way, can extract quite a lot of clean, healthy English fun out of trying to guess what it all means.

## LOOKING AT THE CLASSICS

Experienced writers are always being asked to advise inexperienced writers—without receiving any fee for doing so, and usually at a vast expenditure of valuable time and energy—and one of their favourite—because one of the shortest—ways of doing it, is to say: Look at the Classics! Read your Shakespeare! Go to the Great Masters!—and things like that.

Very well—one goes to the Great Masters—one looks at one's Shakespeare. Or one would, if there was ever time. And the result would be perfectly extraordinary.

We will suppose that a young gentleman called Vavasour is writing a play, and has been told, by three out of the eight experienced playwrights whom he has already pestered, to Read his Shakespeare. Vavasour has done this (and had the usual shock on discovering that his Shakespeare is responsible for various sayings that Vavasour had always attributed to his aunt), and having completely soaked himself in the Classics, sits down to his own rather elusive masterpiece.

Construction, hitherto, has presented difficulties. But Vavasour's visit to the Classics has simplified all that.

For the purposes of his plot, A has to overhear a conversation between C and B. Does Vavasour rack his brains for a plausible situation by which A can, without the vulgarity of deliberate eavesdropping, assist unseen at the tête-à-tête between C and B? Not at all. He evolves a garden scene, with C and B making love, or plotting an assassination, or arranging a practical joke, on a rustic bench. Whilst they are in the midst of it he brings on A, who strolls behind a little hedge, right-centre, and remains there, continually looking round it, above it, through it, or—if practicable—underneath it—without ever being observed by C and B, who are, indeed, particularly careful not to glance in that direction. They just continue to plot, or to make love, or both, at the tops of their voices, and A says Ha! or Foul hypocrites! or anything else he likes, and is not, apparently, heard by anybody except the audience.

Again, the subtleties of psychology are much modified by the Great Masters. Mrs. B and Major C, in a triangle play, are in love, but young Vavasour, anxious to score a popular success, rightly sees that by the end of the Third Act it will be advisable for Mrs. B's affections to have reverted to her lawful husband. Is it necessary to indicate the dawns of this change of heart through pages and pages of dialogue? Not if he continues steadily and faithfully to Look at the Classics. He waits till five minutes before the last curtain, and lets passion ramp to the very furthest of the limits imposed by the Censor and then—quite suddenly—introduces a bran-new character. Say an innocent young girl, bringing home the washing or something. Major C observes her, falls in love with her on the spot, and says so. Mrs. B says What! Faithless? and instantly realizes that the only person she herself really loves is her own husband. At the same moment, the husband, who has been away at the North Pole, returns quite unexpectedly by aeroplane, and enters the drawing-room. In less time than it takes to get one's hat out from under the stall of the theatre, the four characters are happily paired off, and the best classical traditions have been followed.

But supposing Vavasour to be a reactionary, and romantic. He is determined to have a happy ending. Major C and Mrs. B love each other, so do Major C's wife and Mrs. B's husband. So do hosts of other minor characters, all more or less mismatched. After engineering the most desperate complications, young Vavasour remembers the Great Masters. As a result, in Act III. the butler comes into the room where all these agitated people are gathered together and announces quietly that Major C's wife has just fallen into a river which has risen in flood and has been drowned, and that Mrs. B's husband, who was just then passing, has been thrown by his horse and killed, and that several minor characters who happened to be playing golf on the adjoining links were so upset at these occurrences that half of them collapsed and died, while the remainder decided to emigrate and have already left to catch the boat at Tilbury.

Thus is the coast cleared for Major C and Mrs. B.

Nor do the Great Masters fail their disciple when it comes to those delicate and difficult pieces of psychology without which young Vavasour knows well that his play can never be acclaimed as the remarkable Human Document that it really is.

Vavasour has created the figure of X—a morbid and perverted creature, in whom Vavasour has let loose all the strange impulses that he can himself never indulge in because if he did he would probably be kicked out of his Club, and so on.

X, throughout Three Acts, has wrought untold damage and messed up the lives of everybody within reach. His only logical destination is either the asylum or five years' hard. But will the Box Office stand for that? It will not. Young



Vavasour again flies to his Shakespeare. He comes back quite calm, and resumes Page One hundred and thirty-five. The situation is as involved as possible: all is gloom, impropriety, and horror.

But X walks on, practicable door O.P., and informs all the other characters in the play—who have suddenly foregathered from the four corners of the earth for the purpose of hearing him—that he has been asleep in the garden, and awakened with a complete change of heart. It has quite suddenly come over him that all this wickedness is a mistake. There is to be no more of it. He is, in fact, going into a monastery in two hours' time. But meanwhile, he will make his will. (The man who has come to wind the clocks, by a coincidence, here turns out to be the family solicitor, who just disguised himself for a joke, and has a Will-form in his pocket.) X distributes the whole of his fortune amongst the people who need it, to make them happy—and the Classics, once more, have done their job.

The only thing that really remains to be seen is whether the managers to whom young Vavasour submits the result of so much thought and effort will fully appreciate the example from which all these inspirations have been drawn.

Even if they do, there will still be the public to reckon with. And if they do not, the whole fabric of classical literature as an example more or less crumbles to the ground, surely... ..?

Now let us look at the Classics again—this time not so much for what we can get out of them in the way of actual construction, as for ideas in regard to plot.

(It is a well-established convention amongst writers that to lift a plot wholesale out of the Classics and use it does not constitute plagiarism. No writer has ever yet been misguided enough to try to find out on exactly what basis it is that this convention is so well established.)

Let us assume that young Cathcart-Symington—as we will, for the sake of convenience, call our dramatist—has it in mind to write a rather brilliant comedy, of the kind that is likely to appeal to a London audience. Of course, one must realize that plenty of other people beside Cathcart-Symington have exactly the same scheme in mind, but most of them haven't actually tried to write a play, on the grounds that they haven't got time, so for the purpose of this article they will be ignored. We can write another one for them, on totally different lines, as soon as they have really got down to the writing-table—if they ever do.

Cathcart-Symington is one of those authors—there are many such—who can write reasonably sparkling dialogue with comparative ease, and who can also create reasonably convincing characters, that he vows aren't taken from any persons now living—but to whom the invention of a plot presents the most appalling difficulty.

Let us suppose that *Act I. Scene 2: Lady Isobel's Drawing-Room in Mayfair* is already inscribed on Cathcart-Symington's typescript. He has gone so far as to add: *Enter Harris Faulkener, M.P.*—and there is little doubt in his mind, or indeed in ours, that Lady Isobel and Harris Faulkener are about to have a terrific scene together. The author can handle terrific scenes perfectly all right, and audiences simply love them—but the drawback to a terrific scene is that it has got to be *about* something. It must have a *raison d'être*, a *cause célèbre*, a *modus operandi*—anything of that kind.

This is the moment for going to the Classics. The Classics abound in everything of that sort.

Cathcart-Symington goes to them. And What, reader, does he find?

He finds that Lady Isobel and Mr. Harris Faulkener are passionately in love with one another, but have just made the frightful discovery that they are really, owing to the indiscretion of an earlier generation, Grandmother and Grandson. Unfortunately, when they find this out, it is already—— Well, anyway, it would have been a great deal better—although less poignant—if they had found it out several months earlier.

As, however, they didn't, Harris Faulkener has the classically sound idea that it will improve the situation very much for Lady Isobel, blindfolded and with flowers in her hair, to be burnt alive in the courtyard, and for himself, after watching her die, to make the chauffeur drive over him at full speed in the largest and heaviest car to be found in the garage.

And there you have a plot straight from the Classics.

\*

Of course, one has to pause and think. Cathcart-Symington may have in his mind what Judges call a reasonable doubt as to the reception awaiting this masterpiece from a first-night audience. He may have in his mind something resembling a reasonable certainty, rather than a reasonable doubt, as to whether it will ever have any audience *but* a first-night audience.

He may even feel that the Censor will care but little for the central situation of his play. Censors will allow almost anything to be said or done on the stage by characters named Cassio and Herodeta—but they take a very different view if the characters wear ordinary evening-dress, instead of wreaths and togas, and are called by ordinary English names.

So that Cathcart-Symington, perhaps, may wonder whether this plot is absolutely the happiest selection that could have been made. He may try again, and the result of his second effort may be quite as odd as that of his first. The Classics are nothing if not odd.

\*

This time Harris Faulkener is again passionately in love with Lady Isobel, but she is not in the least in love with him. Some people, not classical writers, might think this is all to the good, because Harris Faulkener and Lady Isobel are each of them married to somebody else.

The husband of Lady Isobel is ninety years old, and has, as the euphemistic saying is, lived his life to the full. The wife of Harris Faulkener is young, and rather inclined to talk about Taking the Veil—which, as a matter of fact, is far more easily said than done, especially in the case of married women.

Well, Lady Isobel is definitely sorry for Mrs. Harris Faulkener, and also terribly wants to teach Harris Faulkener a lesson, and get rid of him once and for all. So she chooses a large, open terrace, with plenty of marble pillars about, and Mrs. Harris Faulkener meets her there, and they have a cosy little talk about it all, and finally decide that Lady Isobel is to pretend to be in love with Harris, and that she and Mrs. Harris Faulkener are to change bedrooms that very night, and then ... Well, they go into all sorts of details that wouldn't be at all suitable for these pages and not only do they go into them, but in the next act the bedroom actually appears on the stage, and so do Lady Isobel and Mr. Harris Faulkener, and it is difficult indeed to say whether this scene should or should not be played in pitch darkness.

All is additionally complicated by the fact that the ninety-year-old husband has hidden himself—not for any sound reason, but by a mere caprice of senility—in a large cupboard in a corner of the room. By a coincidence, Mrs. Harris Faulkener has had exactly the same idea, and there they both are ... and if the classical tradition is really to be followed faithfully, the results should indeed prove singular.

\*

There are several possible *dénouements* to this strange situation, although at least two of them, unfortunately, cannot possibly be detailed here. But it would be quite in keeping with classical tradition to have either a happy, or an extremely unhappy, ending.

In the former case, the nonagenarian can fall in love with Mrs. Harris Faulkener, and Mrs. Harris Faulkener, after a very short attack of coyness, returns his passion, and suddenly explains that she and her husband have never been really married at all, and, therefore, she is perfectly free. Meanwhile Lady Isobel realizes that Harris Faulkener ... Exactly what she realizes is, as a matter of fact, rather difficult to explain, but, anyway, she sees that she hasn't ever done him justice before, and they call in the chaplain, who is always on the premises, day and night, for just this kind of emergency,—and all get married then and there.

The alternative, or unhappy, ending starts with the murder of the nonagenarian by Mrs. Harris Faulkener, who accomplishes her purpose with the help of red-hot branding-irons, kept on the landing because the Harris Faulkeners own a sheep farm in Australia—and immediately afterwards throws herself out of the window.

The next part concerns itself with Harris Faulkener's revenge on Lady Isobel, and the publishers of this book say that it is not to be put in—which in itself really practically proves that the thing wouldn't go down with a West-End audience—and the last curtain of all is Lady Isobel strangling herself with her own hair—which cannot, naturally, be either bobbed or shingled.

\*

It will now perhaps be understood that there may be a certain element of doubt in young Cathcart-Symington's return to the Classics. What he finds there will be—but perhaps really the best word to describe what he finds there is just "classical".

# THE SINCEREST FORM ...

## THE SUPREMACY OF MR. PONDS

Take Sir Woodcock Wells, for instance. When you stopped talking—if you ever did—about Art, Militarism, God, Fascism, Feminism, this League of Nations business—Sir Woodcock Wells would say: "Cheep".

He was always saying it. Like a canary.

"Cheep!"

But Mr. Ponds could not allow himself to be divorced from Sir Woodcock by "Cheep". Needed him. That they might make History. World History. History like the Conquest of Babylonia by the Persians, the Removal of the Papal See to Avignon, the Burning of the Cakes by Alfred, the formidable careers of Solomon, Ninon de Lenclos, and Horatio Bottomley.

You *needed* Sir Woodcock.

You needed him in Fleet Street. To buy up all the dailies, weeklies, monthlies, in one vast conglomeration of printer's ink, and to reissue them as one. Making you its Editor.

"Why," said Mr. Ponds, "not?"

Mr. Ponds became the Omnipotent of Fleet Street.

And Fleet Street recognized it. Mutely accepted his stupendous, and yet unstupendous, domination. Rotherbrook and Beavermere ate out of his hand. *The Times* crawled to him. The whole of the monthlies threw up their pens. Of the weeklies only *Ebb and Flow* held out.

"*Ebb*," said Sir Woodcock, "and *Flow*?"

"Put," said Sir Woodcock, "an end to it."

"It," said Sir Woodcock, "what-I-mean-to-say *Gets my goat*. Cheep."

"The Press," said Mr. Ponds, "was evolved originally as a fighting, competitive thing. It was made so. It is still made so. It competes instinctively. Like a woman dressing for a party. Or an actor-manager on the stage. Or a frog trying to swell itself into an ox. Anything like that. Take Prohibition, for instance, or the Einstein theory. Take the South Pole. Take *Russia*. Size. Space. A Gray Deal of it," said Mr. Ponds.

"*Cheep!*"

Mr. Ponds vanished instantly.

How to defeat *Ebb and Flow*. Just to defeat it. Thoroughly.

An attempt had been made to buy it up. Useless. Mr. Ponds went himself to interview the Board of Directors. It was a feminine Board, and therefore to be conquered *en masse* by the beauty of his slight, but permanent, wave, the eloquence of his language, and the extraordinary quality of his sex appeal.

A formidable contingent of reporters was present.

The Editor of *Ebb and Flow* was in the Editorial Chair.

"That Chair," said Mr. Ponds. "Mine."

"No," said the Editor.

Round the chair, clustering thickly, were the Directors, the Office Staff, a handful of Direct Subscribers. Obstinate, idealistic, socialistic, democratic, antagonistic. Some, even, feminine. Talk, thought Mr. Ponds. Talk to them.

"Take the Government," said Mr. Ponds. "Or take the Lambeth Conference. Take Agriculture. It's like a pincushion that's been stuffed with marbles. All wrong. This *Ebb and Flow* business. *Look* at it."

He found the word he wanted.

"*Zinziberaceous*" said Mr. Ponds.

You went on talking. On. And on. And again on. About Disarmament, and the Coal-crisis, and Birth-control, and Politicians. You heard the Direct Subscribers drop away, making low, unimaginative sounds, rather like bullocks. You could see the Office Staff retreating down the office stairs, gesticulating, rather like penguins. But the Directors, and the Editor, stayed. Rather like mastodons.

"*Cheep!*"

You became excessively aware of Sir Woodcock Wells. In the office. Carrying a glass retort. And the liquid in the retort was seething and swirling, here totally stagnant, and there wildly ebullient, and wherever the retort was not convex, Mr. Ponds observed that it was concave.

"Ugh," he said.

"Microbes," retorted Sir Woodcock. "If I let them loose out of that glass container,—well, Fleet Street goes west. It isn't only *Ebb and Flow*. That too, of course."

Mr. Ponds was unable to refrain from looking at the Editor, and the still clustering Directors.

"Not ready to die." That was the illuminating phrase.

Unready.

"The microbes," said Sir Woodcock, "will devastate the universe. Kingdoms, Empires. Homes. Institutions. Newspapers, with their Editors and Directors. They'll have to go. Then we shall build. New. Clean. Untraditional. Sociological. Building."

A strange conflict prevailed in the mind of Mr. Ponds. He found the thought of the microbes disconcerting, for who knew where they might stop? But devastation was necessary. For the elimination of *Ebb and Flow*.

"*My world*," said Sir Woodcock. "*Run on Words*."

"*Cheep!*"

A crash, as the glass retort broke. Another crash—louder. As Fleet Street went west. Several crashes. All at once. The Editor and the Directors. A universe of sound pressed upon Mr. Ponds. The words of Sir Woodcock, building up his New World.

"*Cheep!*" Like a canary. And again "*Cheep!*" Almost more like a parrot than a canary, perhaps.

"*Done it*," said Sir Woodcock Wells.

Then Mr. Ponds went off at a tangent.

"The *Ebb and Flow* people. What-I-mean-to-say, where *are* they? You've been in too great a hurry. Exterminating them like that.

"What-I-mean-to-say, take Work. If you and I are talking all the time, who's to *do* it?"

Sir Woodcock glanced at Mr. Ponds.

"*Cheep!*" he said at last.

Never before had Mr. Ponds heard a "Cheep" so fraught with indecision, so unconvincing.

"It isn't," said Mr. Ponds, "good enough."



The illuminating word flashed upon him.

"Not Woodcock," said Mr. Ponds. "*Poppycock*."

## ARNOLD PROHACK

### *Journal 1929*

NOTE.—Most of the Hotels mentioned here bear no name. I have censored the names, sometimes for reasons understood only by myself, and sometimes for fear of sending the prices up.

#### *London.*

I resolved not to drink cocktails any more. Champagne is better, because more expensive. I went to a party, and talked to a very famous rich man. He said: "Drink is a very great evil". He drank five cocktails. My own consumption was limited to three.

#### *Paris*

I took a young friend out to lunch. I ordered a magnum of champagne. They said they had only half-bottles. So I ordered two magnums. Then they brought them. The fish was good, and served with two sauces poured on it together. I sent for the manager, and told him that I should not be prepared to pay separately for each sauce; it was absolutely out of the question.

Then my young friend confided to me that she wanted to buy a pair of ear-rings, so we went by car to a large expensive jeweller's shop, containing millions of pounds' worth of jewellery. The lovely, ridiculous, mysterious, acquisitive creature spent two hours choosing what she wanted—one hour for each ear-ring. I thought: Men and women are entirely different. They conduct the business of living differently.

#### *Rome*

A very large Hotel, with very large prices. I engaged a large double bedroom with private bathroom, and had a fire all the time in each. One of the pillow-cases had been darned. I got this changed.

Food good.

Lighting indifferent.

No dirty-clothes basket.

Heating bad.

Drink ruinous, but worth it.

Lavatory lined with porcelain.

Went by car to Frascati, where there is a Grand Hotel, with uniformed porter.

#### *Sunset in Rome*

I ignite a most excellent cigar, on the top of the Pincio. An Earl of my (intimate) acquaintance once said to me that a Corona-Corona is better smoked after dinner than before it. I agreed with him.

I look down on the scene below me. There are people, cars, buildings. Most of the cars are cheap makes. I look at the sky. The sinking sun reminds me at once that the hour is ripe for the drinking of cocktails. I send for two cocktails and one olive. Later, two olives and one cocktail.

### *New York*

I met an American millionaire, who asked me for the address of my tailors. I replied that it would be impossible for him to afford their prices.

### *Antibes*

A party of sixty-five of us went for a picnic, which included motor-boating, driving in cars, flying in aeroplanes, yachting, eating, drinking, sleeping, and drinking again. The only picnic I have ever really enjoyed. Women enjoy picnics, although men do not. But then women are like that.

After lunch we had tea. After tea, dinner. After dinner, supper. After supper we found a night-restaurant where they served salads and coffee. After that it was breakfast-time.

### *London*

I went to see a famous play. It seemed to me poor. The stage-door-keeper failed to recognize me as I went in: Why? I am constantly being photographed for the Press. Before the play, the longest lunch that I have ever attended, lasting from 2 P.M. to 8.5.

### *Copenhagen*

A good Hotel. The one defect of the town is that the cafés are too far apart. Also there were only unpadded coat-hangers in the bedroom.

### *Berlin*

If you tell a woman that women are charming, inferior, irresponsible, ridiculous creatures, who cannot understand food and wines, she will resent it. The foolish, pretty thing!

Charlotte Brontë may not have been a great novelist, but at least she was unhampered by sex appeal. What an entirely futile creation on the part of Providence!

### *London*

I dined in Park Lane. The food was bad. No caviar. No out-of-season fruit. Yet there was a good fruit-shop no further off than Piccadilly. I went home so hungry that I was obliged to order soup, sandwiches, and a bottle of champagne. I am troubled with insomnia. I cannot understand *why* I should be a bad sleeper.

### *Tokio*

The great Hotel de Luxe is a very solemn subject. In my opinion, a unique, tremendous, colossal subject. Volumes should be written about it.

### *London*

Cup Final, and the streets full of charabancs carrying football enthusiasts. One charabanc was labelled "From the Potteries". I was struck by this nad've self-revelation. I asked myself what I remembered in connection with the Potteries, the life of the Five Towns. *Nothing*.

**SUPER-SUPERLATIVE**

It was two and a half minutes to 4 A.M. The managing director of the greatest luxury-hotel on earth or in Heaven crossed the enormous foyer, in which the chandeliers—twenty-five lights apiece—blazed. The Reception counter had only twenty lights. The Enquiry Bureau fifteen. The Grill-room one hundred, that were kept burning day and night.

The night-manager was at his post. He was an Italian, of French extraction, with a Polish father, no mother, and some Anglo-Indian cousins.

The eight hall-porters, on duty from 6 A.M. to 6 A.M. all the year round, sprang to attention as Cecil, perfectly correctly dressed, appeared. Four of the hall-porters were Jugo-Slavs, two were agreeably Irish, and the remainder came from a place called Putney, of which the hotel knew naught.

Some millionaires and a young girl were coming in at the immense revolving doors as Cecil went out at them. He was obliged to make a complete circle and follow them in again. Mysterious compulsion! He had seen the vivacious, agreeable back of the young girl, and had instantly visualized her as his mistress. And similar reactions to the backs, or fronts, of scarcely seen young women are entirely natural to all men.

The lift-man—a naturalized Bulgarian on his mother's side—rushed to press the central switch that brought all the twenty-eight lifts of the greatest luxury-hotel in the world to attention at once. Each millionaire entered one of them and was wafted out of sight.

The young girl and Cecil gazed calmly at one another.

"Now," thought Cecil, "this is all very well, but the ridiculous, inconsequent, womanish creature must know well that this will cause talk amongst my secretaries, housekeepers, managers, sub-managers, floor-waiters, head-waiters, ordinary waiters, and hall-porters."

(The eight-thousand-odd fellow-creatures below the rank of hall-porter who worked day and night in the service of the Super-Superlative, he reckoned as naught.)

Ingratiatingly, intimately, amazingly, she stepped up to him.

"Come with me to Paris for the week-end. At once!" she commanded.

Astonishing creature! She had guessed at once that he intended to allow her to seduce him!

And he was delighted, provided that she did not expect to interfere with his career, his work for the greatest luxury-hotel in the universe.

Cecil was a serious man with a conscience. His career came first. And he knew women. "They" were all alike. "They" made a fuss if they were neglected, they thought about appearances, they disliked being ill, or unhappy, or cruelly treated. Nevertheless he was ready to concede to the exquisite, entrancing, stimulating daughter of one of the hotel's millionaire clients a week-end in Paris with him, so long as she was prepared to give everything and to ask nothing.

"Miss Prowler!" said Cecil curtly—Napoleonicly.

Miss Prowler was the hotel's head-Housekeeper, and her suite was on the roof-garden of the hotel, whence she could look down on the tower of Westminster Cathedral far below.

Efficiently, miraculously, instantaneously, Miss Prowler appeared. She had been on duty without a break since midnight of the previous Saturday fortnight, for such was the devotion of its employés to the greatest luxury-hotel in the world.

"I want an aeroplane," said Cecil as casually as possible.

And Miss Prowler, equally casual, replied:

"Certainly, sir. I'll telephone to the Works at once."

Admirable creature! She knew as well as possible that the Works might be shut at 4 A.M. Nevertheless, she disappeared, and in an instant returned, followed by twenty of the fourteenth-floor valets, carrying a disused aeroplane that had once been left at the hotel by an absconding Sultan in lieu of payment. The amazing, resourceful Prowler had remembered it!

"Thanks," said Cecil negligently, and was secretly thrilled to see tears of joyful gratitude spring into the eyes of Miss Prowler at his acknowledgment of her faithful service.

Nevertheless, in another instant he had forgotten the very existence of Miss Prowler, as he found himself being piloted through the air at a hundred miles an hour by the millionaire's daughter—the magnificent, cajoling, alluring Gracie.

"Where are we going to stay?" he ventured to ask.

"Oh, at the Railway Inn at St. Cloud," she answered carelessly.

The astonishing girl had realized that he would not want to stay at the Ritz, where he was well known as the managing director of the greatest luxury-hotel in the whole of creation!

Women were all alike. "They" had intuition—impossible to deny it.

He would have to reward her. "They" needed rewards, notice, occasional kindnesses. "They" also needed quarrels, scenes, blows, reconciliations. Poor, feeble, exquisite things! Gracie, for a week-end, should be permitted to minister to him, to be his slave.

At the St. Cloud Railway Inn, Cecil sought the telephone. He must needs enquire after the welfare of the Super-Superlative.

It was naught to him that Gracie expected him to remain at her side. She was his toy, his distraction, his delectation. But not to be compared to his career as managing director of the greatest luxury-hotel ever known.

It took Cecil nearly an hour to get into telephonic communication with the Super-Superlative. Monstrous outrage! It should have been instantaneous. When at length there came a voice across the wires, it was unintelligible. Yet it was that of his own third secretary, a young, fluffy Eskimo girl of Swiss origin, who knew scarce a word of English. Strange how women were all alike! Unable to make themselves intelligible in languages that they had not yet learnt to speak.

He saw that he must return instantly.

He would have to arrange for his third secretary to receive lessons in English from his head Banqueting-Manager, a Franco-Russian with international blood in his veins. They could meet in the vast basements of the Super-Superlative, between four and five every morning, when it would be at its least active.

Cecil thought: "I am a matchless director. There is no detail beneath my personal attention where the hotel is concerned."

He walked away from the telephone-box in search of a special train.

He recked naught of Gracie, left alone in a strange Railway Inn at St. Cloud without a word. Masculine, implacable, omnipotent, he re-entered the Super-Superlative less than five hours from the time that he had left it.

Breakfast cocktails were being carried in every direction as he walked into the restaurant: every one of the eight hundred tables was occupied: every one of the nine hundred waiters—the exact nationality of each one of whom, however hybrid, was known to Cecil—was also occupied.

The greatest luxury-hotel in any of the four quarters of the globe had survived the unexplained absence of its managing director.

But only just.

## **STILL DUSTIER**

**PUBLISHER'S NOTE.** (Not in Music.)—Here is the successor to a very remarkable best-seller. The author's theme is the complete physical, mental, and moral degradation of middle age in the provinces, contrasted with the bright, brilliant decadence of quite utterly modern youth, straight from the 'Varsity and London.

## PART I

How could one stop one's husband from talking about county families? The habit was growing on him. As for her, she knew that she was the only woman left, even in the provinces, who wore elastic-sided shoes, with black lisle-thread stockings. Her hat, even, was a three-and-elevenpenny one bought at a sale just before her marriage, fifteen years ago. She gave it a kick before carefully putting it away in the wardrobe....

Yet she was really a lady, even if not county. Somewhere inside her there was blue blood. She wondered exactly where, and thought of trying to find out with one of her old-fashioned hat-pins. But she was too tired, and it didn't seem worth while. Better go to the cinema.

## PART II

She—(not the same she—another one, shingled, but still provincial)—had relations who hunted. At least, they had been relations once, but that was before she married a man of a different class. Now, probably, they wouldn't even have returned the calls that she was never able to pay, because she could not afford engraved visiting-cards, and yet knew that one couldn't use printed ones. Seeing a young man in a pink muddy coat and muddy breeches, without a horse, limping along the road, she realized instantly that he had been thrown, out hunting. Once she had known people like that almost quite well. She offered him a lift. She offered him a boiled egg for tea, knowing from the past that nothing else would really do.

## PART III

He and she and it were visible a long way off, all three walking with imperious self-confidence. Everyone in the public gardens turned round to look at them, their drab, middle-aged eyes nearly dropping out of their old-fashioned heads as they saw the young man's plum-coloured georgette shirt and broad yellow handkerchief, carefully knotted round his head in place of a hat, the young woman's pure gold lip-stick case that she was using as she walked along, and the spaniel's ribbon bow, embroidered with a small cipher.

They had come.

Presently they would be gone.

Just now they were still here.

## PART IV

They—the he, she, and it ones—took the others, those queer, middle-aged, middle-class ones—out for the day. To a country-house. With the democratic tact of true aristocrats, they took special pains not to introduce one to the relations who owned the house—not even to the illegitimate son. Quite right. They knew, in their careless, confident, brilliant way, that one wasn't up to the mark. After lunch and tennis and tea the host appeared, crawling across the lawn. He looked away from them, shuddering and retching.

One guessed that he was not, really, pleased to see one there.

## PART V

It was over.

They had looked in and been given tea for the last time. This time to-morrow it would be cocktails.

Where?

One saw them on the Lido, or in the Land of the Midnight Sun, or on the top of the Woolworth Building in New York, while one remained at home, thinking about county families, and eating chocolate shape for supper, while one's husband sang in the bath as he always did. Habit.

One must tell him.

"Please listen ..."

He listened.

Immediately one began to think. Seeing oneself at forty, at four-and-twenty, at fourteen, at four ... one could feel the feel of one's first pair of stockings against one's four-old legs ... where were they now? (The stockings, not the legs.)

One remembered the whole of one's life clearly and in detail.

But he did not wait to hear about it.

While one was still remembering the exact sound of the squeak made by one's first slate-pencil on the slate given one by one's grandmother, he had tired of waiting, and gone away.

They—he, she, and it—had vanished—gone back to London, to the 'Varsity, and to a society where people hunted and had boiled eggs for tea afterwards, and were presented with gold cigarette-cases from the tenants.

## PART VI

Over. No. Yes. Quite.

He was singing in the bath *again*.

He was gone. (Not the same he, but the other he. One's pronouns ... how was one to disentangle them, even?)

Giving it up, one slept.

Over, as they said in county cricket.

## PLATFORM SWEEPERS

By ALBERT HALL

### CHAPTER I

All the Sweepers have genius: it is their characteristic. No Sweeper has ever been known to fail in any undertaking, just as no Sweeper has ever acted any part in Shakespeare less than perfectly.

The first Soot the Sweeper was born just after that very successful piece of play-acting by one Jacob—acting that played his brother Esau clean off the stage, over the footlights, and into the very back of the pit—and indeed it is possible that it was the story of that histrionic achievement which first inspired young Soot to adopt that career that was to send all post-Flood civilization clean, stark, staring mad about him.

"For why should I sweep chimneys?" demanded Soot the Sweeper, who was to become the father of Master Soot the Sweeper's son, the grandfather of Tom, Dick, and Harry Sweeper, the great-great-great-grandfather of countless other Sweepers, the remote ancestor of a long line of faultless Hamlets and inspired Othellos.

## CHAPTER XX

Sweepers always get what they want. Dick Sweeper wanted at fifteen to play *Lear*—wanted to badly. Play it in London, to a house that should scream, sob, stamp, roll all over the stage itself in a very frenzy of appreciation. No Sweeper ever put up with anything less than that from any audience. That had been the reception accorded to Carpet Sweeper, whose acting in tragedy—she could never touch comedy—had driven every other actress of her day to instant suicide.

So *Lear*, at fifteen, Dick needs must play.

And—"It's not a part for a fifteen-year-old. Fifteen should still be playing utility in a fit-up on No. 3 tours."

Thus Dick's mother, born and bred in the prompt corner, able to speak her lines as Volumnia before she was well out of swaddling-clothes, nurtured on a stick of grease-paint.

But Dick was right. He played *Lear* as *Lear* had never been played before, and Europe went mad.

"Capture, Rapture." (The old saw of the Sweepers, come true for the thousandth time, as Dick took his five hundred and eighty-first call on the successful first night of his *Lear*, that was to be spoken of throughout the world for the next fifty-four years.)

Merry, Very.

## CHAPTER L

It is a fact that in 1891 there was not a woman in England or in America capable of playing Juliet to Tom Sweeper's Romeo.

He went to the most recently acquired of the Sweeper wives—a duchess in her own right. No aristocracy has ever been anything but gratified at alliance with the Sweepers.

"Frankly, I'm at my wits' end. I've tried out three-and-a-half-dozen women. Not one of them has charm. I've never met any woman, except a Sweeper, who has."

"A Sweeper by marriage acquires Sweeper characteristics," said a brilliantly evasive Femina, deliberately letting the suggestion come from him. For she knew her Sweepers, did Femina.

And Tom leaped at the hint like a hungry shark at a bather's foot.

"I can get away with it," declared a confident Tom (forgetting for a moment that the expression was not in use at that date).

Clever, Ever....

He flung Femina into Juliet, lock, stock, and barrel, as a cook flings rice into stew. Day and night he rehearsed her, worked at her with the brilliant efficacy of the Sweepers, brought her to the point at which he wanted her.

The result justified him hand-over-fist, head-over-heels, one-over-the-eight.

Femina was the rage of five continents—would have been the rage of ten had there been ten continents.

## CHAPTER CXIV

Later in his career, young Chim Sweeper—a brilliant, dare-devil Chimney had demanded, and obtained, the abbreviation—was to declare that he had always known that every star on the post-war London stage was the mistress of either his father, or his uncles, or one of his brothers.

Mocking, Shocking....

He himself married old Femina Sweeper's third boy's niece-by-marriage, and swept her instantly into the talkies. The success that she achieved there is still the talk of the five-and-ten-cent stores of Ohio.

But he had reckoned without the previous generation of Sweepers. An outraged generation that had never heard of talkies, never intended to hear of them.

It was the talkies that killed Harry Sweeper, in the reign of King George V., just as it was the movies that had killed Dick in the nineteen-hundreds, and the musical-comedy craze that had killed Tom in the late 'nineties.

Fashion, Passion....

## CHAPTER CCCLXV

Clean Sweeper, the epitome of all the Sweepers, leapt into stardom at two years old, as an active mouse leaps away from a pursuing cat.

Hurry, Skurry....

(Are there many more Chapters to come?—EDITOR.

As many as there are Sweepers. And the Sweepers run to children. There is still the illegitimate branch, started by the original Soot the Sweeper and now sweeping the *revue* stage, yet with an occasional brilliant throw-back to *Timon*, or one of the *Henry*s.—AUTHOR.

Well, I'm afraid if there are as many of them as all that, we can't afford the space.—EDITOR.

But I wanted to go on till I could put January 1, 1900—December 31, 2000, on the last page.—AUTHOR.

You can do that now, straightaway. In fact you'd better.

Stop it, Hop it.—EDITOR.)

## WOMEN AND CHILDREN LAST

**(But journalistic young gentlemen don't, for very long)**

### FOREWORD

If I reopen the stale old question as to whether women have souls, I shall be accused of writing journalese, and that accusation becomes a trifle monotonous when it is repeated in every one of the eighteen hundred letters, five thousand post-cards, and two hundred and fifty telegrams that I receive for every paragraph of mine that appears in the Press. But at least it proves that women, everywhere, are gnashing their teeth and tearing their hair—two things, I may shrewdly observe, that no man ever does—at the thought that I, who am, after all, known all over Oxford and the part of London that counts, have seen through them as a sex. I may observe that I am, I believe, the first man, and very possibly the only one, to have done so.

I suppose that if I were really to give my opinion about women to the world, pandemonium would be let loose. All kinds of women would commit suicide. A few would emigrate. Others would go mad. Hundreds would write to me, and have appalling nervous breakdowns when I sent no reply, and still worse ones when I did. It would be hell let loose.

Yet why should a simple statement of fact cause all this despair? It is more than time that women realized exactly what I think of them. I have been thinking it ever since I was six years old—when I may observe that my mentality, outlook, and vocabulary were almost precisely what they are now. (Men are often like that. Women never.)

Let us therefore take my statement in its broadest sense. Women cannot possibly have souls. This fact, to me, is so



obvious, that only the unceasing popularity of this woman-theme in our daily Press could have induced me to write about it. These pages will therefore contain the epitome of all the eternal verities that I have hitherto given to the world in mere columns and half-columns of newspaper.

### **(1) *What I shall do to make my wife happy***

(a) I shall insist upon having an exact account of every penny of mine that she spends. A wife cannot expect to be treated with either the confidence or the open-handed generosity that a man shows to his mistress. *And yet some of them do!*

(b) Three times a week I shall catch her by the shoulders, shake her, bite her in the calf, and then kick her down the cellar stairs. All women are masochists, and any psychologist will tell you that this sort of treatment keeps them bright and contented.

(c) I shall make her face the truth, long ago discovered by myself, that every year a woman lives she becomes a year older than she was the year before. I don't want the woman I love to find that out abruptly. I shall remind her of it every day. Perhaps twice, on some days.

### **(2) *Mothers with a capital M***

Thousands of mothers write to me. I suppose it must be because my mind is quite fairly superior to that of anybody of my generation, or their generation, or any other generation. Perhaps they know that whenever I see a mother—silver-haired, tremulous, in the dear, old-fashioned bonnet and shawl of a bygone fashion—I instinctively realize that here is tragedy. Here is a woman who has nothing left in life. She has had children, and those children have grown up. A tragedy! If my own mother were asked whether she did not view her son in the light of a tragedy, I sometimes wonder what she would reply. But I have never asked her.

### **(3) *Where women go wrong***

The supreme error of all women is that they do not know how to give a man everything he wants, always, at the exact moment that he wants it. That is why I have never allowed even the greatest courtesans in Europe to make love to me. *They cannot do it well enough.* Probably they know this, and are afraid of me, for so far they have not attempted to conquer me.

### **(4) *Where I myself go wrong***

Sometimes I have asked a woman out to dinner, and found that she expected me, simply because I happened to be the host, to pay for her dinner as well as my own. This makes me very angry. Yet it is surely pure, incontrovertible logic that if a woman smokes like a man, she ought to be prepared to pay for her own dinner, and his, too. If you let a woman look at the menu card in a Lyons restaurant, she will almost certainly choose to have her tea brought in a tea-pot, which costs fourpence more than if it was in a cup. I have seen this colossal ramp perpetrated time and time again by women who would absolutely disagree with you if you told them that they were dishonest, fraudulent, immoral, and deserving of at least fifteen years' penal servitude.

Contrary to what is believed all over the world, I am not a woman-hater. It is because I want to give women a chance of earning my approval that I write the truth about them. Sometimes after I have written the truth, I have been called vulgar, and at other times I have been called vulgar without my having written anything at all. But I have never known why.

The other day, I was sitting in a public lounge (I always use this word, although I know perfectly well that refined people do not, because it seems to me prettier than the alternative, vestibule), when I saw a sight that seems to me to sum up the entire question of the relationship between the sexes.

*I saw a man get up and open the door for his wife.* The thing was horrible. It was the negation of all the most sacred principles of masculinity. I don't say that the wife ought to have opened the door for the husband. These are questions that all individuals must thrash out for themselves. But I must say, once and for all, that in no circumstances whatever, when I

am a husband, shall I open the door for my wife. And if you reply that I am *not* a husband, I can sum it all up by saying that the woman whom I shall marry has not yet been found.

But I am always there—waiting.

## **(NOT) FOR FRIGHTENED PEOPLE**

**(As it will only make them feel worse)**

(PUBLISHER'S NOTE ABOUT THE AUTHOR.—The Author's birthday is in June. She has a natural Permanent Wave and weighs exactly eight stone in her bathing-suit. She has twice been mistaken for a film star—a different one each time.

The author is a very keen hiker; she crochets a good deal. Her previous novels—However, never mind about that. The Personal Note is what readers want. If they still insist upon knowing about the novels, they must look on what we in the trade call the Back Flap.)

All day we went on hiking. Later, I was to wonder why we had ever thought it was a good thing to do. At the time, I only thought of keeping level with Arnold's markedly long stride, and of recognizing Stewart's quotations from Osbert Sitwell. Also, three of us were wondering what would be the best and quietest way of murdering the fourth.

Mrs. Mardick never knew what we were talking about. Later, I was to discover that when Stewart, hobbling his twenty miles an hour as best he could on two broken legs, talked about Simpson's in the Strand, Mrs. Mardick thought he meant something by P. G. Wodehouse.

It was this sort of thing that made us feel she ought not to be allowed to go on living. It has always seemed to Stewart and me that the easiest way of avoiding the society of the people who do not speak our own language, is to put an end to them. Later, I was to wonder if there were flaws in this system. I do not know if Stewart ever wondered. On the hike, we neither of us wondered at all. Arnold may have wondered, in the seventeen different languages and twenty-five dialects of which he was master, but in his detached, impersonal way—later, I learnt to love that detached, impersonal way of his—he said nothing.

As it was, Mrs. Mardick could out-hike, out-sleep, out-eat all of us. She could not out-quote us, that was all.

Detachedly, as I knotted the boot-lace that Arnold had broken, with that absent-minded gesture of his that occurred twenty times in each day's march, and that I was, later, to find so endearing—I realized that if we went on hiking long enough, the men were bound to fall in love. Biologically, I knew that both would fall for the same woman. With scientific impartiality, I told myself definitely that this would lead to unpleasantness. Perhaps to rape. Stewart and I have always called things by their right names. Especially things like rape. It was an odd experience, this cold analysis of probabilities.

I was not a woman who liked the idea of sharing her men. Usually, I didn't have any to share. This endless hike of ours—later, Stewart and I were to agree that forty miles a day in shorts, and without hats, was too much—was going to mean that sooner or later the talk about modern poets would come to an end, and then there would be nothing left to talk about except sex. Stewart and I have always agreed, quite frankly, that sex exists.

I told myself, quite impersonally, that I should prefer to be the only woman available when the moment came for the two men to fall in love.

From that time onwards, Mrs. Mardick really had no chance at all.

I am not sure when I took the final decision. It may have been when that boot-lace of Arnold's finally gave way, after I had mended it for the fourteenth time in one morning, sitting by the roadside with the gnats buzzing round my head, and the nettles stinging my bare legs, and the bramble-bushes tearing at my left shoulder-blade. "My dear," she said, "you've tied a *granny*-knot, and that's not really the *best* kind of knot. Let me show you."

I threw the boot-lace in her face.

It was hysteria, of course. Later, I was to recognize that. Arnold, I believe, recognized it at the time. Stewart may have recognized it. About that, I am not absolutely certain. Mrs. Mardick thought that it was temper.

Physically, we were all in a low condition because for forty-eight hours we had been unable to get anything to eat or drink, but Stewart and Arnold had begun to talk about James Joyce, and that sort of conversation has always been more important to me than food and drink. It was not till later that I was to know it was that which stimulated me so that I was able to do what I did do without any compunction at all.

I took Mrs. Mardick's clothes while she was asleep.

It was a dishonest thing to have done, and I am not a naturally dishonest person. But I even removed the nightgown that she always wore at night, although three of us had long ago discarded anything of that kind. I left her there like that.

When she woke she would, I knew, notice nothing. She was not an observant person. I have never heard what actually happened, whether she caught cold or not. After I had left her, I joined the two men, and we went on with the hike.

I still feel no remorse whatever about Mrs. Mardick. That is what prolonged hiking does to one.

## PORTRAIT OF A DARK CIRCUS

### A TALE (Two or three Tails, in fact)

I am aware, I can assure you, that this is the story of the Circus, rather than of those who brought about that shattering, overwhelming, cataclysmic disaster to the performing fleas. They, I fancy, would tell you the same thing, if they could make you understand them, and if they were not dead—gone down all together in that last dizzy crash, with the Clown cowering under the gas-jet—it was part of Massa Johnson's magnificent oddity that he never would adopt electric light—and the acrobats hanging silently, head downwards, from the horizontal bar, looking on.

These details may seem to you utterly trivial, and I can even believe that you will doubt their truth; but to me, at the time, they all appeared inevitable, even to the Clown's red-hot poker, that was to play so great a part in the destinies of all of us before the end. Not, you understand, the end of the red-hot poker—though that came into it, too....

But the performing fleas. The whole troop of them, gathered together in the tent, and Massa Johnson's six foot eight inches hanging over them, as I saw it that night.

You'd have liked him if you'd see him then. You couldn't have helped it. He was such a perfect gentleman. Even the fleas realized that, just before the end came. They didn't bite. Just gazed up at him, fascinated.

And here I must interpolate this—namely, that through all the extraordinary catastrophes that followed, one after another and some of them simultaneously, my own reaction was one of purest happiness. But the different ways in which it took hold of us all was part of its strangeness.

The fleas, for instance, didn't view it with the absolute detachment of the piebald horse—but then the horse wasn't being crushed between that gigantic finger and thumb of Massa Johnson's—wouldn't have *let* itself be crushed, I feel nearly certain.

So we stood, all of us, and watched murder done. Oh, but it was murder. I'm quite clear about that, and so would you have been, if you'd seen that row of fragile corpses, and that massive six foot nine inches towering above them.

"I didn't mean to," he said quietly. "It was a feeling of irritation ..." He stopped, and one of us—I think it was the negro with ears like a dog's and the ruby bracelet on one ankle—quoted in a curious falsetto whisper: "*De mortuis ...*"

And then their trainer came in. Someone—it may have been the cross-eyed dwarf in the spangled tights—attempted to fling an antique purple-and-silver Charles the Second bedspread over the bodies, but not quickly enough. Oh, but not nearly quickly enough.

He saw. The trainer saw. Saw that the performing fleas wouldn't perform again, ever.

That moment did something to all of us. I was to know what, later on. But just then I only saw horror, and chaos, and fierce brilliant colour, and dead fleas, and figures running away, and other figures running after them, and still other figures doing nothing, and those who didn't look like leopards, or sardines, bore the strangest resemblance to pieces of furniture. It is difficult for me to give you an orderly account of the climax.

I can see Massa Johnson's six foot ten inches crashing through the tent, making straight for the three-and-sixpenny seats, and the others following, and I can hear myself quoting from my favourite edition of *Don Quixote* to the trainer.

Then he broke away, without waiting for me to finish the quotation, and plunged straight into the midst of the three-and-sixpenny seats, and I couldn't stop him.

He was going to murder Massa Johnson—the whole six foot eleven of him. They were all in it together, every one of those inches.

The murder was beginning to attract attention. People didn't like it. One or two turned round in their seats and said "Hush!"

A great exhilaration seized me. The circus-ring seemed to be going round and round and backwards and forwards and up and down and in and out, all at once.

Then I saw that the end, then, was that.

Massa Johnson and the trainer, locked together, lurching through the three-and-sixpennies, over the barrier, and into the sawdust of the arena.

There was a silence, a blindness, a deafness, a dumbness....

Then I thought of another quotation from *Don Quixote*.

## FLAMBOYANT

By the author of *Pink Post Chaise*

The sun poured down, hotter and hotter and hotter and hotter.

The *Calos* (gypsies), dark, splendid, rugged, verminous, filthy, swaggering, and honey-dark, lay at rest in the middle of a cactus-bush. A baby had been born there during the night. Two or three babies. Already their mothers were dancing, singing, drinking wine, walking hundreds of miles behind their husbands and their husbands' mules. Sometimes the new-born babies walked too, after the gypsy fashion, sometimes they remained, naked, berry-brown, and forgotten, to fend for themselves amongst the cactus-leaves.

*Australia*

The *Calos* were walking to Australia.

Presently they reached Wimbledon. The Common was of a sombre, wine-dark beauty, and after a wild, wicked dance or two, the *Calos* (gypsies) looked about for some cactus-bushes, for it was there that another baby should be born. The baby—a girl, bronze, upright, honey-gold—arrived without waiting for a cactus-bush to be found.

Almost at once, with a wild, effortless bound into the air, she began to play a *pagandi* (guitar), to dance the *romalis* (dance), and to sing *flamencos* (songs).

The inhabitants of Wimbledon gathered round, staring at the *Calos*. Their own brats, fair-skinned, flaxed-haired mommets, performed no such antics.

Thomas Shovell, lion-headed, mouse-haired, bull-chested, stepped deliberately forward and pointed to the child.

"How much?"

The *Calo* (gypsy) deliberated. He knew that many, many other babies were due to be born before the tribe should reach Australia. At that very moment——

(EDITOR'S NOTE.—Has there been a mistake? This isn't "How a Baby is Born," with nineteen illustrations and an appreciation, is it?)

AUTHOR'S NOTE.—Well, it is and it isn't. Technically it isn't, but at the same time, nothing much else is going to happen, except dozens of these *Calo* (gypsy) babies. And we haven't got nineteen illustrations. As for the appreciation, that's rather a question for our readers, isn't it?

EDITOR'S NOTE.—Something seems to tell me that they won't.

AUTHOR'S NOTE.—Of course, if you really feel like that about it, let's stop. But it's a pity, especially as it's all working up to rather a neat point. I was going to refer to the whole lot of babies as Flam an' Co.—if you see what I mean?

EDITOR'S NOTE (final).—That settles it.)

## HEBRAIC

By STERN. (But not very)

The family lived in Vienna, Constantinople, Paris, London, Putney, Dantzig, and so on. Anywhere except Jerusalem. Great-great-grandmother Czelonitz lived in Jerusalem, amongst gilt candelabra, bonnets trimmed with pink rosebuds, oil-paintings, bustles, crinolines, *marrons-glacés*, relations, great singers, and lovers. Always lovers, from the early Konrad in whiskers and peg-top trousers, to the ultra-modern Gigi, in running shorts and saxophone. Great-great-grandmother Czelonitz—always called Boadicea by the family, from some odd, Jewish, associative idea about bo-constrictors—had taken and discarded lovers lightly, throughout the ninety-eight years of her easy, drifting, reckless progress that Peter's Rachel's Theodosia, doing brilliant work as a plumber-and-fitter in Balham, always said reminded her of the Wandering Jew.

"*Mon Majesté la Roi*" Boadicea always called her lovers—for not a Czelonitz amongst them but was at home in every language, from Hebrew (*goy* and *kosher*) to Hindustani (*mem* and *sahib*).

But a succession of lovers was not enough for Boadicea's gay, exuberant, indomitable vitality, inherited from the famous Nicolai Nicolaivitch Czelonitz, that itinerant pedlar known to have walked from Buenos Aires to the Albert Memorial, and to have picked up five devoted wives in succession on the way, besides laying the foundations of the family fortunes by his persuasive Czelonitz charm of manner in selling rabbit-skins and boot-laces, so that no housewife could resist them.

The whole of that charm of manner had descended to Boadicea, together with the abundant hair of Great-great-great-greatest-grandmother Anabella from Munich, and the embroidered purple-and-gold spangled tights that had belonged to German Trudi's Abraham's Betsinda's youngest, in Cracow. It was that charm, that driving vitality, that whole forceful personality, that had succeeded in bringing together the forty-eight remaining branches of the family, under Boadicea's roof in Jerusalem, for the wedding of young Ernestine Czelonitz to her cousin, young Vladimir Czelonitz Czelonitz, of the second lot of the Bloomsbury Czelonitz.

"Me, I will make you an Appelstrudel," chanted Boadicea, her contralto voice—beautiful, though never at all in tune—booming above all the English, Jewish, German, French, Czecho-Slovakian, Russian, Central-American voices of the Czelonitz clan.

Young Ernestine and young Vladimir, ultra-modern Harlequins looking as though they had been cut out of coloured paper and pasted on to the furniture, sat smoking cigarettes, drinking cocktails, humming Jazz, using slang expressions, and discussing sex—typical examples of the modern type of Czelonitz.

Their great-great-grandmother Boadicea, glancing at the thin, whimsical, ironic, impudent, daring, incredibly sophisticated period-piece that they presented, frowned. The Czelonitz frown. The same frown that Ancestor Adam

Czelonitz had frowned at his wife, Eve, when the gates had been shut behind them...

"Me, I do not approve of this marriage," burst out Boadicea.

Ernestine and young Vladimir, true moderns, shrugged their shoulders. The Czelonitz shrug. The very one, probably, that met Ancestor Adam in return for his frown.

"*Allons! Avanti! Caramba!*" cried Boadicea, throwing out clouds of energy, vitality, and sex appeal. "It is that I will arrange this affair. I have the sagacity of our Grandfather Maximilian, the *flair* of our third cousin Gretchen of Pomerania, the determination of Uncle Fernando and his wife Carolina, who met in an old furniture shop in Madrid and were married next day before the consul in St. Petersburg. I will arrange it all, *mes enfants*."

The Czelonitz looked at one another in despair. The Paris lot raised their eyebrows at the Moscow lot, with whom they had never been on speaking terms since the affair of Aunt Suzanne's fifth girl with Great-uncle Antonio Czelonitz's son by his first wife, picked up on the quay at Marseilles.

"Me," said Boadicea, "I am a widow. Three, five, seven times a widow. It is better that *I* should marry Vladimir. The little Ernestine can live with us, is it not, and any of the family that wish. The more," said Boadicea, "the merrier."

No Czelonitz had ever been known to defy the super-grandmother. It was the Czelonitz tradition to be ruled, root and branch—branches—by a Matriarch.

Young Vladimir, sulkily reluctant, had to yield and be married by Boadicea. Ernestine had to come and live in the Palestine flat. The rest of the Czelonitz clan, from the original Jerusalem lot to the newly discovered Esquimaux lot started at the North Pole by Reuben's eldest early in nineteen-hundred, were obliged to come and settle close by.

As Boadicea, in her magnificent, opulent, daring, Czelonitz way, declared: The more the merrier.

That, indeed, was the family motto of the house of Czelonitz.

## WHITE WICKEDNESS; OR, ON THE WAUGH-PATH

### *One*

"Us, Cain, Emperor of Ruritania, Chief of the Cannibal Tribes of Wogga-Wogga-Wogga, do hereby proclaim ..."

Cain stopped dictating and gazed out at the dhows, the natives, the mango-trees, bazaars, Arabs, monsoons, typhoons, massacres, spirillum ticks, revolutions, and other items of local colour.

\*

(PUBLISHERS' NOTE TO AUTHOR.—What does all this mean? It's not at all the kind of thing your public expects of you.

AUTHOR'S REPLY.—I *think* I want to write that kind of book. You know—bitter irony about the British Empire and those who help to make her what she is.

PUBLISHERS' NOTE.—Well, for Heaven's sake be funny about it. Remember *Vile Bodies*.

AUTHOR'S REPLY.—All right, all right. There are going to be any number of vile bodies about this book before I've done with it. Still, I think I see what you mean.)

## *Two*

BASIL.—Is there a party going on in this house?

THE BUTLER.—Two my lord.

BASIL.—Hallo there's Petunia! Hallo Petunia my sweet could you let me have three thousand pounds?

PETUNIA.—The man who slept with me last night took all my money it's so awkward I don't know who to borrow from next.

A DETECTIVE.—Shall I get a warrant issued for his arrest?

PETUNIA.—That's no good darling the man who brought him didn't tell me his name.

THE BUTLER.—Are the bailiffs to have champagne or not your Grace?

\*

(PUBLISHERS' NOTE.—A welcome return indeed to the meticulous realism and almost photographic accuracy of an earlier style—but what is to be the connecting link between the *haut monde* of Mayfair and the Emperor Cain and all that local colour?

AUTHOR'S REPLY.—I don't know.)

### *Three*

For some minutes the British Ambassador and the Governor-General had been eating salmi of lobster out of tins. Presently the Papal Legate had some too. The Chargé d'Affaires, the First Minister, and a couple of Plenipotentiaries, were eating soft roes on toast, out of other tins. They all called one another by nicknames.

"Toto, where are the despatches?"

"I'm awfully sorry, H.E., the puppy's eaten them."

"Hope they don't make him sick."

"I say, Birdie-boy, is it true that black fellow What's-his-name has been massacred at least three times by some of his own people?"

"I don't think so, Pansy-face."

"Why don't you think so, darling?"

"I don't think it was some of his own people. I think it was all of them."



\*

(AUTHOR'S APPEAL TO PUBLISHERS.—How's that? Rather subtle irony, don't you agree? *That* ought to get under the skins of the Colonial Office and the Foreign Office and the Diplomatic Service all right.

PUBLISHERS' REPLY.—Of course it ought. Rather. Still, from a retail point of view, that really isn't going to help your sales tremendously. Wouldn't it be possible just to tighten the thing up a bit?

AUTHOR'S REPLY.—I've still got one idea left. I can use that.)

### *Four*

Lady Jane Jump and Miss Mary Minns were dressed for the tropics exactly alike in solar topis, khaki shirts and skirts, thick shoes and stockings, and green spectacles. The front teeth of each projected, and both were flat-footed. They represented a Type of English Womanhood.

\*

(PUBLISHERS' NOTE.—It's your book, of course, but isn't this—or aren't these—the least little bit out of date?

AUTHOR'S REPLY.—Very likely. I got them out of the better-class French illustrated comic papers of the late 'eighties.

PUBLISHERS' REPLY.—Quite.)

### *Five*

Evening in Wogga-Wogga-Wogga. The new British Resident sat on the veranda with his mistress drinking sundowners and eating caviar out of tins.

"What happened to that black Emperor, Cain?"

"Oh, we cut off his head."

"Good business."

"Yes, wasn't it."

"What was the end of his Army?"

"Our fellows turned a dozen machine-guns on 'em."

"Very sound. And what about all those secretaries and people?"

"Just hanged—all except a few whom we burnt alive. Do let me have a turn with the yo-yo now, darling."

Night in Wogga-Wogga-Wogga.

\*

(PUBLISHERS' QUERY.—But is that the end?)

AUTHOR'S REPLY.—I'm afraid so. Rotten, isn't it?

PUBLISHERS' NOTE.—That's all right, my dear chap—we're sending it to the Book Society.)

## THE GREATER BRITAIN, BY A GREATER BRITON

*"Up, Guards, and at 'em."*

*(Famous quotation quoted by the author on being relieved of office.)*

### *Introduction*

Romulus and Remus were the founders of Imperial Rome. From them we derive the famous story of the Wolf, symbolizing what the British Empire has now got to keep from the door.

*It is better to be safe than sorry.*

\*

*The New Movement*

All Movements are new at the beginning, although later on they become older. This particular New Movement was not invented in Great Britain, but it easily might have been. It is essentially law-abiding, constitutional, and conservative, but in objective it is communistic, revolutionary, and anarchistic. It is entirely static, and at the same time absolutely progressive.

The author has no apology to offer on the score of inconsistency.

*Systematic System*

Debates, Committees, Tea-fights, Elections, Governments, Old Women and Old Gangs, are one and all likely to prove fatal to the New Movement. They must go.

Perhaps it would be better if the House of Lords, which comes under some if not all of the above headings, were to go also.

*The Citizens of this State and the Author of this Book*

In the opinion of the latter, it is absolutely essential that the former should all take to living athletic lives. In this way only can Great Britain deal with the Indian muddle, the Colonial confusion, the agricultural depression, the falling birth-rate, and the rising tide of taxation.

A general adoption of the athletic ideals of Ancient Greece would mean a return to Ye Merrie England of Good Queen Bess, with ye fine olde British sports of bear-baiting, cock-fighting, drinking one another under ye olde mahogany, witch-burning, and so on. The men—ye mariners of England—who carried the egg of Columbus across the Atlantic, were like that.

*Waterloo was won upon the playing-fields of Eton.*

\*

## *Women*

It has been suggested that hitherto, in the New Movement, too little attention has been paid to the position of women. *But every member of our organization has, at one time or another, and some times at both, had a woman for a mother.* Therefore the part played by women in the Movement is important, although different from that of the men.

To many the idea may seem fantastic, but *men will always be men, and women still more always be women.* In the New Movement, women will be mothers as well, continually and all the time. In this way, the problem will be solved.

*Woman's place is the cradle.*

\*

*Conclusion*

Whether the New Movement is really new, or really a Movement, no one can yet tell. It may be one and not the other, or the other and not the one, or either, or neither, or both.

But whatever happens—or not—the author will still offer no apology on the score of inconsistency.

# WHEN I'M ALLOWED TO BE . . .

## MOTHER THERESA MAKES HER MEDITATION

It's thirty years since I found I'd the holy vocation, and me struggling against it for all I was worth, and saying I couldn't ever leave Tipperary, and the dogs, and the horses, and Jamesie and all. And just to look at the way He works! I can see Jamesie now, like it was yesterday, coming up and hugging the head off me, the way he did, and saying: "Sis, if it's me that's keeping you back from your vocation, you're in danger of mortal sin. And as like as not I'll be getting a vo. meself one of these days."

"Never, Jamesie!" says I, for he was so wild, you'd never have thought he'd a pious thought in his whole body, but that he went to early Church the way I didn't always meself, on cold mornings.

"There's no knowing," says Jamesie.

Well, I was bound to mention, at the end of my next confession, that I thought the Lord wanted me for His very own, and I remember I howled out loud with sobbing at the end of it.

The Abbot was as kind as could be, and it was he who spoke to my Da in the end, and got permission for me to enter the convent.

And after all these years I can remember that last night at home, and all of us sitting at the round table, the way we always did, and the lamp turned too low and smelling awful, and not one of us able to eat any supper.

Father pretended to read, and Kitty sewed for her life at marking my new postulant's handkerchiefs with the little Cross and the big M, and I thinking I'd most likely soak the lot of them through, with crying, in my first twenty-four hours in the noviciate. (So I did, too.) I'd the dogs at my feet, and Jamesie was curled up almost on top of them, with his head in my lap. (His hair was as red as fire, and he'd often been fit to be tied, the way we laughed at him for it.)

But I didn't laugh that night, or the next day when he and father saw me off from Dublin.

For the noviciate was over in England, if you please, although the Reverend Mother was true Irish, glory be to God.

I got the grace given me somehow to go through with it, but there were whiles I thought I'd go mad, with the stiff, prim English all round me, and the postulant's veil, that nearly drove me silly the way it got twisted, and the Novice Mistress refusing to let me cut off so much as one hair of my head till I took my first vows at the end of a twelvemonth.

They all came over from Ireland for my Profession Day—Father, and Kitty, and Jamesie, dressed up in the grandest clothes they could lay hands on, so as nearly to scare the life out of me. We sat in the parlour and talked, I feeling like a fool with the wreath of white flowers pinned on all askew over my novice's veil—God forgive me—and they told me everything that had happened at home since I'd left, but I couldn't tell them much about the religious life in return, for fear I'd be saying what I oughtn't, or bursting out crying for home-sickness, or something. Reverend Mother saw them, and said she hoped I'd the makings of a good nun in me, and my Da gave her his thanksgiving offering, and then they went away.

The very next week I was sent to the Orphanage in South America and stayed there, teaching, for fifteen years. And Kitty married a black Protestant, God help her, and died of it in a year—and Jamesie went for a priest, the way he'd said he should, and my old Da was left all alone at home.

When I went back to England—to London, this time—there was talk of his coming over to see me, but he never did, and it was only Jamesie could get to him when he lay dying. Jamesie wrote and said what an edifying deathbed he'd had, thanking God and Our Dear Lady for the blessing of two religious vocations in the family, and the Abbot administering the Last Sacraments and all. So there was comfort in it.

I saw Jamesie once more, before he went out to the Foreign Missions, and I wouldn't have known him, but for the red



head of him, he'd grown so tall and thin and grave-looking. He gave me a rosary that the Holy Father had blessed.

The religious life teaches one detachment, thanks be to God. But it doesn't take away the human heart of one, and I thought mine'd break when Reverend Mother told me about Jamesie having been killed out in Manchuria.

"You must be proud of your brother, sister dear," she said to me. "Father James gave his life for the Holy Catholic Faith. God rest his soul for a holy martyr."

The queer thing is that it's not any Father James that I find meself praying for—though it's rather I should be asking *him* to pray for *me*, in Heaven where he is now—but Jamesie—the way I used to see him with his red hair all on end, fit to be tied because we laughed at him....

## RETROSPECT

When we were children, and lived at home at the farm, Francie and I were always together. We slept in the night-nursery, where the window overlooked the yard, and every morning we used to hear the long-drawn "cluck-cluck-cluck-a-clu-u-u-ck" of the hens, and then the crow of the cock, much farther away, where the dung-heap was.

We played together, and sometimes quarrelled, but always made it up before going to sleep, because something dreadful would happen if the sun went down upon one's wrath.

We pretended things, that nobody else knew about, and had secret catchwords and allusions.

And we knew one another with the unparalleled intimacy of shared nursery days. After all these years I can still say what Francie's favourite colour was, and why she never liked primroses any more after Dinah, the sheep-dog, died, and how it was that she taught herself at last to remember what seven times twelve makes.... And all that kind of thing.

We remained children a long while, I think—longer than most people. We were, still, always together, even after we'd left the farm, and hadn't a real home any longer, but lived in London in a boarding-house. We even shared our friends, because we always liked the same people, and the same people made us laugh.

We were very happy, and made plans, such as I suppose all young people make, for a very successful and exciting future, that we were to share.

Francie met Hugo whilst I was away on a visit. She wrote and told me that he was a new friend, and that I should like him.

When I came back, after only a week, I found that he and she knew one another well.

I liked him, too, at once.

Hugo was very tall, and he had brown eyes that looked at one with a curious, slanting kind of glance, and when he smiled he showed very white teeth in a sunburnt face.

For a little while I think he could not make up his mind.

Then he fell in love with me. Already, I was more than half in love with him.

And Francie cried. We knew one another so well that we could never hide anything from one another. But she said:

"Nothing could ever come between *us*."

In a way, that was true.

But life takes one away, somehow.

Hugo and I went to India, and Francie married somebody also, and after a time they went to Canada, where she died.

Hugo, my husband, came through the war, and we went back to India, and I took up the curious, divided life of the woman whose man is abroad, and her children at Home.

It was just packing, and unpacking, and one set of clothes, then another, and Army talk, and rushing from school to school in England, and all the time the thought of sailing again just ahead of one.

Just a rush, for all the years of my middle life, and the old sense of always waiting for some kind of finality.

I suppose, in the end, Cheltenham stood for finality. At all events, the rush is all over now. There is no more packing, there are no more schools, the children are quite grown-up and have gone their several ways.

Hugo died very soon after we came to the Cheltenham villa.

Sitting alone, in the evenings, with *The Times* all folded up neatly on the little brass table under the lamp, and no noise anywhere, one's thoughts go back.

Although I think of Hugo, and that time in India, and of the children, and the new Library novels, and the housekeeping, it's those far-away farm days that I remember most often, and the cluck-clucking of the hens under the night-nursery window, and the strong scent of the mint growing in the sun, under the red-brick wall of the kitchen-garden.

It's strange, sometimes, to feel that, after all, it's not Hugo that I miss most now that all the turmoil is over. It's Francie.

## THE GENERATIONS

If it hadn't been for the rain, I don't suppose I'd have gone inside the Cathedral at all. I've never been much of a one for churches. But it was wet, and I'd more than an hour to wait for my train.

It felt chilly in there, and empty—just one or two people, kneeling or sitting. I'd been there myself, sitting in the corner of the pew, quite a little while before I remembered.

It must have been all of forty years ago. But it was in that Cathedral, all that long while back, that I'd been a baby bridesmaid at the Fanshawe wedding.

I was five years old, perhaps, or six. I wore a pink frock, with flowers all over it, coming right down to my feet, and puffed sleeves, and a fancy bonnet—pink velvet, with a little tiny frill inside it. I hadn't thought of it for years and years—and there, all of a sudden, I was remembering it quite plainly. It was just as though I could see myself, as I'd been then, coming down the empty aisle.

And the thing I remembered best of all was the feeling that my mother was there, in one of the front pews, looking at me and smiling, and that in another minute she'd hold out her hand to me and take hold of mine.

It was queer, how the feeling came back to me then. I loved her so much that it hurt. I thought she was the most wonderful person in the world, and the most beautiful, and the kindest. I couldn't imagine ever loving anybody else as I did her.

What happens to it, all that love and confident trust? That's what I want to know.

Looking back, one doesn't know when the change came. One can't say, *Here* is where things altered, or *That* was the moment when it all went wrong.

There isn't any turning-point.

It just changes.

I suppose it's part of what life does to one. Children grow up and their parents don't mean the same any more. It's like that for all of us.

Mostly, one doesn't remember how one felt then, only just sometimes it comes back, like it did as I sat in the Cathedral and somehow saw myself as a little girl, and my mother as she used to look to me in those days.

And I thought of Evadne, as was natural, I suppose, and the way she always comes running to meet me when I get home. She'll throw her arms round me, and be happier than she's been all day, because I've come back, and she'll tell me she loves me, the way children do.

But Evadne'll grow up. It'll be the same for me as it's been for my mother.

One loses them.

Only it seems queer that one can't ever say when it happens, or how.

I don't think about the past much, as a rule, or the future either for that matter. There's never any time. I suppose it was sitting like that, in the Cathedral, quiet and with nothing to do, that brought it all back.

## WHERE HAVE WE GOT TO NOW?

An ex-officer was crawling up Albemarle Street. He was not, needless to say, literally crawling on hands and knees, but he was progressing at the pace of a snail on a wall, owing to the extreme horror that filled his mind at the thought of his errand. But there was nothing else to be done.

He had already spent a frightful half-hour with the manager of his bank, and the last words of the manager had been:

"Then we shall be hearing from you in the course of the next day or two, I may take it? Quite. Exactly. Thank you, Captain Loder. Good-morning. Wonderful weather we're having, indeed...."

Captain Loder, in spite of crawling, reached the house in which his stepsister lived, and compelled himself to ring the bell. Although he was thirty-six years old, it was with difficulty that he refrained from dashing down the steps again and out of sight before it was answered, after the fashion of little street-boys—although not from a similarly light-hearted impulse.

Presently he was in his stepsister's flat—walnut furniture, mostly of the period of Queen Anne, Dresden china, and quantities of silk cushions—and Joan had greeted him affectionately. She was forty-six and quite handsome. She was also very clever, and held some superlatively important Government post that was known to carry a pension as well as a considerable salary. Besides all this, she had a private income that ran into four figures, and she had had the sense not to marry, so that she was able to do exactly as she liked with her money.

"This is very nice of you, Wilfred," she said. "How are you?"

"I'm all right, Joan, thanks. Still amongst the unemployed, unfortunately——" He forced a laugh, that died away under Joan's complete disregard of its existence.

"And how's Chrissie—and the baby?"

"The baby's splendid, thanks. Chrissie's not too fit, poor girl. A bit worried just now." He didn't dare tell Joan, so modern and efficient and rational, that Chrissie was going to have another baby. By the way she raised her eyebrows, he was almost afraid that she'd guessed it, but she said nothing.

"I really came, Joan, to—to——" No, he couldn't. "I say, how awfully nice your hyacinths are!"

"Yes, they're rather good, aren't they? I do them in moss-fibre."

She went on talking about her bulbs, and he said Yes, and I see, without listening to a word.

"You'll have some tea, won't you, Wilfred?"

"Thanks awfully, but I really mustn't stay. I think Chrissie's expecting me."

Joan looked surprised. Well she might, reflected Captain Loder, since he had been living at home with Chrissie in the Maida Vale flat for the past two and a half years, and there could be no possible reason for him to hurry back to it.

"Joan, I wonder if you'd do me a most frightful kindness?"

His heart was thumping in a sickening manner.

"If I can, of course."

Joan's voice was, he could not help feeling, full of the amiability of the person who is in the superior position of granting favours.

"Could you possibly—It's just that—Look here, Joan, I know it's a frightful thing to come to you like this—but Chris and I are in—in fearfully low water just now."

If anyone had told him, ten years earlier, that he would ever try to borrow money from a woman, even if she was his own stepsister—! He clenched his hands, forcing himself to remember Chrissie crying at her typewriter, because her back ached so, and the ghastly pile of bills shoved away into the back of the writing-table drawer.

"Could you possibly lend us a couple of hundred pounds, to try and straighten things out?"

He'd said it now. The worst must be over. She couldn't refuse, and already he projected his mind into the blessed moment when he would be out in the street again, her cheque in his pocket. He compelled himself to meet Joan's eyes.

Into her face had come that mysterious change that always, invariably, came into the faces of rich people when money was in question. It wasn't a look of anger at all, but merely one that suggested the donning of some impenetrable spiritual armour—protecting the precious money from the insidious attacks of sentiment, or pity, or affection. No doubt, he reflected in a detached way, if it wasn't for that armour, and their capacity for donning it at a moment's notice, people like Joan wouldn't be the rich, secure people that they were.

"Wilfred—of course, I'm very glad you came to me. We'd better have a little talk, hadn't we? I'm sorry you and Chrissie are finding things difficult."

"We are, a bit."

"You're not earning anything at all?"

"I can't get a job."

"It's such a pity you left that post with Uncle Ernest's firm."

"I thought I was safe to get that secretaryship—it was promised me, in fact. I was absolutely let down over that——"

"I know, my dear boy, but—However, it's no use crying over spilt milk. You threw up a perfectly safe job, that at least brought you in a small income, and you found yourself high and dry. Do you still get the income from mother's money?"

"I had the most frightfully bad luck over that. I was told of an absolutely safe thing——"

"My dear Wilfred, do you mean you reinvested your *capital*?"

"Well—yes. You see——"

"And lost it?"

"Yes—most of it."

"I see. How much is left?"

"About three hundred was left, Joan. But of course——"

"Are you and Chrissie living on capital?"

"We've had to. We've got to have a roof over our heads, and then the child——"

"Chrissie has a servant, hasn't she?"

"She has to. You see, the baby keeps her awake at night, and——"

"I suppose that costs you about three or four pounds a month. And her food as well. Are you and Chrissie in debt, Wilfred?"

"Yes, we are," he burst out angrily. "We owe money to the tradespeople, and they're starting to dun us, and the Bank

won't let me overdraw any more."

"Have you any securities left?"

"Only my life insurance policy."

"That's mortgaged, isn't it? Have you insured for the child's education—one of those Educational annuities?"

"No—we couldn't have paid the first premium."

"Then you're practically living on credit?"

"Chrissie makes something by typing. I loathe her doing it, but what else——"

"She hasn't anything of her own at all?"

"Nothing. As a matter of fact, she's even sold her jewellery, such as it was."

"You don't get anything at all for jewellery. But, Wilfred—I thought you had a small car!"

"I—we—I did get one on the instalment system, but I couldn't keep up the payments."

"I can't think how you could ever have thought yourself justified in getting one at all. And I must say, Wilfred, I don't know how you can *live*, feeling that you owe money all round like that."

"It's been pretty ghastly," he muttered.

She rose from her chair and went majestically to the writing-table.

"What is your overdraft now, Wilfred?"

"A hundred and thirty pounds."

"I'll pay in a cheque to your account to-night that will put it straight. I don't want you to repay me. The only repayment I ask is that you should keep out of debt in future. It's utterly degrading to owe money."

"Joan, it's frightfully good of you."

"You'd better let me have the bills, and I'll look through them and settle with the tradespeople direct. I think Chrissie must have managed very badly. I'll come and see you, and perhaps we can find out how she can economize."

"Chrissie does her level best——"

"I understand. That'll do. Send me every bill, Wilfred. Do you know what the total is?"

"About—about three hundred, if you count things like doctors and rent——"

"Then the two hundred you asked for *wouldn't* have put things straight. I thought as much. Well, Wilfred ..."

When he had thanked her again and again he went away. He felt curiously cold and weak, as though something vital had been drained away from him.

The debts were to be paid, the overdraft at the Bank to be wiped off.... But there'd still be no job, and no income coming in, and he and Chrissie and the child would still have to find food and shelter and warmth somehow. Now that he'd asked Joan once, perhaps it wouldn't be so difficult to do it again another time.

Horried at himself, he felt the thought creep into his mind, slyly taking up a permanent corner there.

## THE WIDOW

It's queer, now Father's gone, and I know it's an awful thing to say, but in some ways I'm happier than I've ever been

before.

In all the five-and-twenty years I was married to Father, I wasn't ever anything but tired, and I never had a bit of pleasuring. He was a good husband, but he just didn't hold with my going anywhere without I went with him—and not much of that. If ever he saw me with a hat on, he'd ask where I was going and why I couldn't bide home.

And it was only the other day I was thinking that I never had a new hat, not in all the years I was married. Not a *new* one. People where I've worked have given me a hat, sometimes, and I've got one off the Jumble from time to time, but never a new one of my own. Once, when I'd gone out and done a bit of cleaning, I bought a new pair of shoes with the money, and Father flew into such a passion he couldn't eat his dinner. And it was money I'd earned, too, but he thought it meant I wanted to go out somewhere, and that was a thing he couldn't abide.

He'd say, why couldn't I be content home, like he was. But then, Father had his work, that took him out every day, and he could talk with the other men in the dinner hour. I didn't see a soul most times, except the days that baker's van called, from morning till night. Only the children, of course, and children make a lot of work in a cottage when they're little, especially when there's another one on the way—as there mostly was with me, for I've had eight altogether. Many's the time I've said to Father that if the man had to have a child turn and turn about with the woman there wouldn't never be no more than two in any family. And a good job, too. However, Father wouldn't have none of that, and he said it was distrusting God's providence not to believe that He knew best how many children a woman ought to have. It did give me a nice bit of rest, too, when I had to lie up, only it was over so quickly, and meant extra work as soon as I got about again.

I don't know that I've ever minded work, exactly, but I did use to feel that I'd like to get about a bit sometimes. I never went to a concert nor an entertainment until the Red Cross started in the village during the war.

Father couldn't go to the war, because he couldn't pass his medical. They said his heart was all wrong. We hadn't ever known there was anything the matter with his heart, but Father got ever so nervous after that, and I used to think what a pity it was he'd ever been told about it. And in the end he died of pneumonia after all—nearly a year ago now.

Most of the children are earning, and my auntie's taken the little one that's got hip disease, and I can manage nicely with taking in a bit of washing at home and my widow's pension. But this year I'm going to the panto if I have to die for it. The money isn't so very much, and I haven't been to a theatre ever in my life, and I've always wanted to—and I'm going to get a new hat, what's more, to go in.

He was a very good husband to me, was Father, and I haven't nothing to reproach him with. He brought his money home to me regular, and never lifted a finger against me or the children, and I never knew him use language, nor saw him the worse for drink, and it's not every woman can say that, by a very long way.

But he didn't ought to have made that fuss about me getting a pair of new shoes with the money I'd earned myself.

## END OF A HOLIDAY

The Harpers sat in a third-class railway carriage—they had it to themselves, and no wonder, with two children and all that hand-luggage—and Mr. Harper slept—noisily, for he had caught cold on the boat—and Dickie Harper breathed on the window and then drew on it with his forefinger, and Patsey Harper, swinging her short legs against the opposite seat, sucked a piece of moist chocolate and whistled a tuneless air just below her breath. She had been whistling it, intermittently, ever since Dinard.

Mrs. Harper, tensely and quite unconsciously clutching a magazine that she supposed herself to be reading, watched them all.

She was watching, as she had been doing throughout the whole of the journey, and most of the holiday before that, for the moment when Mr. Harper should turn round and be annoyed about something, Dickie suddenly lose his temper in a spasm of nervous irritability to which nobody in the world, except possibly his mother, could assign any rational cause, and Patsey stop whistling, turn pale-green, and announce that she wasn't feeling very well.

The train shrieked and plunged into a tunnel.

Mr. Harper shifted in his corner-seat.

"The last lap now," he muttered.

He had said the same words when they went on board, and also when they landed, and his wife was aware that he would say them again when they reached Victoria, and perhaps also when they got into the taxi that would take them and all the luggage to Hampstead.

It really would be the last lap then.

Mrs. Harper's mind, that resembled nothing so much as a highly-strung mouse in a very small cage, took a flying leap forward and anticipated the arrival at No. 9 Hill Walk.

Had Cook received, read, understood, and acted upon the post-card about a *hot* supper? The post-card had been posted in France, and foreign postal services were unreliable.

Would there—but of course there would—be a small pile of bills on the dining-room table awaiting Harold, and would it be possible to put them out of sight just for the first hour or two? It would make all the difference to the evening.

Would Alice have remembered about getting the man to put a new battery in the wireless?

About winding the clock.

Ordering the newspaper to start again.

Getting in some fruit for the children.

Unpacking the parcel from the cleaners, and putting the clean covers on the chairs.

Airing the beds thoroughly.

Sorting the laundry, and having it waiting in the bedroom.

(At the thought of the little piles of clean handkerchiefs, Mrs. Harper caught her breath. Everyone had run short of handkerchiefs, although they had all borrowed from her. She had washed and rough-dried a good many, but it wasn't at all the same thing.)

"Kin I have a drink please, Mummy?"

Mrs. Harper, in one practised movement, signed to Patsey that the drink should be forthcoming, that she was on no account to wake her father, and that she was to hand her mother the basket from the floor.

In the basket, taken from Hampstead to Dinard, and now in process of being taken from Dinard back to Hampstead, was a collection of articles, small in themselves, of which the aggregate weight mounted apparently into hundreds and hundreds of pounds.

The basket was Mrs. Harper's insurance against emergencies.

It held books for the journey, eau-de-cologne and Mothersill in case of sea-sickness, a pack of cards for the children to play with if they became restless, a bottle of iodine, a roll of lint, a pair of scissors, plaster, a packet of biscuits, a horn mug, a bottle of lemonade, a bottle of Eno's Fruit Salts, a change of socks for each of the children, and a large number of other things.

The basket had disgraced them continually. Its handle had given way, and had had to be lashed with string; the mug had rolled out and been retrieved by a French porter with many ejaculations; on one occasion the current bottle of lemonade had broken, and odorous stickiness and broken glass had pervaded the belongings of the whole party for days afterwards....

Altogether, the weight, appearance, and behaviour of the basket had rendered not altogether unjust the things that Mr. Harper had continually said about it.

Nevertheless, in the opinion of Mrs. Harper, its presence was completely justified at such moments as the present one.

Patsey could have her drink at once, instead of having to wait another hour and a half for it.

"Are we nearly there now?"

"Very nearly."

Mrs. Harper's smile responded to Patsey's, and there was a sympathetic note of eager anticipation, the echo of Patsey's, in her carefully lowered voice. But the mouse in its little cage made another frantic dash forward.

Unpacking.

The dreadful scramble of getting the things out before the children's bed-time—the necessity of throwing all the damp bathing things into fresh water, and rinsing them out, and hanging them up—the lugging of the empty suitcases up to the attic—even the sorting out of the soiled and crumpled linens and cottons that must go straight to the laundry, as opposed to the soiled and crumpled woollens that would have to be done, very carefully, at home—all oppressed her with a despairing sense of mingled fatigue and exasperation.

She became aware that Dickie was moving.

She knew that he would stumble over his father's feet, and made a futile warning gesture—too late.

"I'm sorry, Daddy."

"Can't you look where you're going?" enquired his father—but despairingly, rather than with anger.

"Hullo—we're nearly in!"

They went through the familiar motions of arrival, lifting down suitcases, stuffing mysterious accumulations of paper beneath the seats, looking round for elusive coats and hats and handbags.

"Well, well, well," said Mr. Harper. "Home again, thank goodness. And I only hope you children realize that a great deal of money has been spent on your pleasure and amusement, and it's not every father, let me tell you ..."

Dickie and Patsey were not listening, although they looked up at him so attentively. Their mother knew it well, and she tried to make up for their inattention, and still more to keep her husband from noticing it, by answering for them:

"Yes, indeed. It's been so good of you, Harold."

"I'm not asking for gratitude," Mr. Harper returned, a little inaccurately, "but the children ought to understand that they're a good deal more fortunate than most youngsters of their age. My word, think of it—a fortnight's holiday in France!"

"Why do people have holidays?" idiotically said Patsey.

She meant nothing whatever. Her ear had caught the sound of the word "holiday", that was all.

Mrs. Harper rushed into speech, seeking to avert her husband's attention quickly from his child's tactlessness.

"A really good holiday, a complete change, makes all the difference to the rest of the year," she cried, grasping the basket for the last time.

"That's right," her husband agreed.

He hadn't realized what Patsey had said.

In the extremity of her relief, Mrs. Harper felt tears pricking behind her eyelids.

The sensation passed in a moment, almost unnoticed, for it was many years since she had had either time, or a sufficiently relaxed nervous system, for tears.

Besides, she saw that Dickie was just about to drop an armful of books, and that her husband was looking for coppers instead of crumpled and filthy five-franc notes.

She had foreseen that need—there were plenty of coppers in her bag, if only she could get at it....



## THE MOTHER

From the time when they were all little children Cecil was different. The younger ones would play together, and with the animals on the farm, and when one of them was naughty, it was mostly mischievousness, and soon over. But Cecil wasn't like that. It seemed as if he couldn't ever enjoy himself, or let himself be happy, like they were. Difficult, everyone called him. Only I knew that he couldn't really help it. He was just different.

People said I spoilt him, and that I thought more of him than of all the others put together. It used to make my husband angry. Dad was a hard man, in some ways, though he was always a very good husband to me.

He was proud of the other children—Michael and Tony because they were strong and sturdy, and clever with the animals, and Mary, who could ride anything from the time she was two years old, and Rose for her prettiness. But Cecil used to make him angry, because he didn't like any out-door things, and seemed to be afraid of the beasts, although he'd been brought up amongst them, the same as the others. And he'd argue with Dad, and contradict him, showing off how clever he was.

They said school would make a difference, and we sent him right away to the Grammar School, on a scholarship, but he was very unhappy there, and I think it made him worse. After a time, he didn't tell me things any more, like he'd done when he was little, and I couldn't help him at all. That was the worst.

Sometimes I used to think it would be better if he didn't live to grow up, and have to suffer more.

There were times, I remember, when I even used to feel angry with the other boys for being so good, and happy, and popular, so that people were always saying what splendid lads they were.

Cecil ran away, when he was fifteen and a bit. He sent me a picture post-card of the Hoe from Plymouth, and then I didn't hear anything more. I used to think of him, perhaps far out at sea, on stormy nights when the branches of the big walnut tree behind the house beat against the roof of the woodshed.

Dad and I didn't ever talk about him much. Dad couldn't understand the way I felt, and he thought Cecil had disgraced us all, running away from his good home like that. Once, he said that the boy had never been anything but a misery to himself and us from the day he'd been born.

I dare say it might seem like that, to a man.

He couldn't be expected to remember the time when Cecil was little, and how he was always ready to share his toys and his sweets with anyone, for all his temper, and how he spent the very first shilling anybody ever gave him on a blue mug that had a picture on it of St. Andrew's Church, and gave it to me for a present.

Cecil didn't come home any more, but he wrote to me once, and asked me to send him some money, to some place in America, and I did. I took it out of the Post Office Savings. That was the only time I ever deceived my husband—except for the usual little things, for his own good, like every woman has to sometimes.

Dad lived to see Tony take over the farm, and marry a nice wife, and Michael go into partnership with a big garage-proprietor, in Exeter, and do splendidly. He saw his eldest grandchildren too, for Mary and Rose both married early.

We were in our own house, that he'd bought, when he died rather suddenly.

After Dad's death, I wrote to Cecil at that American address, but I didn't have much hope of his getting the letter, because I'd written there before, many times, and never had any answer.

The other children were very good to me, and Rose wanted me to go and live with her and her husband in their nice place that had three spare bedrooms. But I didn't go.

I just stayed on, in the house Dad had bought. I've been there a long while now, and the grandchildren come and stay.

There was one more letter came from Cecil, ten years ago now, saying that he was quite settled out in America, and

doing fairly well, working in a Bank. He didn't say anything about coming back to England, and he didn't ask about his brothers and sisters, or anyone.

It's strange to think that if I saw Cecil now I shouldn't know him again. He must be a middle-aged man by this time, only I can't realize it, because the last time I saw him he was only fifteen.

His letter never said if he was happy, and I often wonder. It does seem as if life was too much for some people, and they just can't fit in anywhere. But perhaps it isn't like that for him any more, out in America.

I don't suppose I shall ever know, now.

## CONVERSATION-PIECE

"My dear, was it marvellous?"

"My dear, it was absolutely marvellous!"

They sat on Betty's bed and looked at one another and laughed, feeling—and indeed looking—extraordinarily happy and young and beautiful.

Betty's half-filled cigarette-case and Rosemary Ann's half-emptied box of chocolates lay on the bed between them, and as they smoked they ate chocolates and as they ate and smoked they talked, and Rosemary Ann also drank cold water out of the tooth-glass, long and frequently.

"Go on—tell me the *whole* thing," urged Betty.

She was twenty-one, and more earnest than Rosemary Ann, who was only just nineteen. Nevertheless it was the love-affair of Rosemary Ann that was engaging the attention of both at the moment. (The love-affair of Betty was, so to speak, in rather a stage of transition between Kenya and something very, very modern and artistic in Bloomsbury, and there was nothing much to discuss about either.)

"Well," said Rosemary Ann, looking quite amazingly pretty, with her blue eyes shining in her soft face, and her lovely mouth curving every now and then into perfectly involuntary smiles.

"Well, my dear, it was too marvellous. You know how absolutely miserable I've been for the last year?"

"I know," said Betty. "It's been frightful, hasn't it?"

"Too frightful. Honestly—" said Rosemary Ann ("Darling, eat this one for me, will you? I hoped it was a hard one, but I'm sure by the feel it isn't). Honestly, I don't know how I've kept myself from going mad. It's been so awful, having to meet him everywhere, and always with that woman—because she *did* run him absolutely to death, everyone says so—and I believe that's what sickened him in the end. But you can imagine what hell it's been for me, all this time."

"Rather. Something like that time when I thought Nick was keen on Patricia Godden—I simply couldn't *bear* it."

"Darling! That really wasn't a bit the same thing. You only *thought* you were in love with Nick—you know you say so yourself. It didn't last any time at all."

"No, I know, but still it does matter frightfully while it's on, doesn't it?"

"Oh, of course. But the awful thing for me was that mine went on and on—absolutely. I think it's the way I'm made or something. There simply never has been anyone but Robin."

"I know, darling. You've been too marvellous."

"It's not as if I hadn't tried to fall in love with other people. I did my absolute best, with Gilbert, and the Somers man—Heaven knows he's attractive enough—and it simply wasn't the slightest use. I never thought of anyone at all except Robin. I used to think I was getting over it—though I always knew I wasn't really—and the *moment* I heard that thing we used to dance to—'Colorado Baby'—on the gramophone or anywhere, it was just as bad as ever. And, my dear, this is

the really marvellous thing—you won't believe it. On Wednesday, at this extraordinary place in Leicestershire, where Robin was the *absolutely* first person I saw when we got into the ballroom—and Heaven only knows why I didn't faint or something from sheer astonishment—well, you won't believe me, but the band played *that very tune*. You know how frightfully old it is—I remember dancing to it at my first dance—and of course one never hears it now in London. But that heavenly band started 'Colorado Baby' ten minutes after we arrived."

"My dear, it must have been fate or something."

"I know. And Robin came absolutely straight across the room to me and said 'Our tune, Rosemary Ann,' and looked at me, and I simply went straight into his arms and we danced, and we made them give three encores of 'Colorado Baby'. It was absolute heaven, my dear."

"Did he say anything?"

"About the hag? Only that it was all over and he'd been utterly mad or something, and he'd been dying to ring me up but simply hadn't dared. But he said the moment he heard that tune, that we'd *always* danced to together, he somehow knew everything would be all right."

"And it was?"

"Absolutely. We spent the whole, entire evening together. It was the most wonderful dance I've *ever* been to, which just shows you, because really it was absolutely lousy, in itself—all county and huntin' and shootin' people, and the men either terribly ancient or frightfully young, and not a frock in the room except one's own."

"I know the kind of thing. Devastating. Did they have a polka, and all the grandpapas and grandmamas simply leap into the middle of the room and perform the most shame-making antics?"

"Practically. At least, it was a waltz, and a most fearfully good tune as a matter of fact, but one just retired gracefully and let them have the floor."

"I *cannot* imagine why they do it," said Betty pensively. "Do you mind if I drink, darling?—which side *didn't* you use? Chocolates make one so frightfully thirsty, I always think. Well, go on."

"There was one woman there, wearing the most utterly mouldy clothes, with grey hair and collar-bones and things. And, my dear, when this waltz-affair began, she said to the man standing next her—he wasn't bad-looking, but absolutely bald—she said: 'Do you remember, Tony?' all sentimental, and he answered: 'Those were the days, Elisabeth!' And they started dancing together. My dear, I *ask* you!"

"My dear, what *do* they get out of it?"

"God knows," said Rosemary Ann, eating chocolate. "I don't."

## MEN HAVE NO IMAGINATION

Taking it bye and large, I suppose you might say that I've not been a good woman. It depends on the way you look at it, of course, but I'm bound to say that I shouldn't like Evelina to inherit my temperament. Ever since I was about fifteen. Now I'm fifty-six and, of course, it's all over. Has been, for years.

No one, as far as I know, ever loved me as much as Maurice did, although I was over thirty when I met him. We were both crazy, and even now, when I think of the risks we ran, my blood runs cold, as people say.

He was the only person who ever really loved me as much as I wanted to be loved, the only trouble being that he didn't go on long enough.

His love-making was what I call intelligent. I didn't have to think of everything myself, and at the same time make it look as though it all came from him, which is what really takes it out of the woman in most love-affairs. He'd say all the right things, at the right moment. He'd notice when I looked tired, and be terribly sorry, without ever making me feel that looking tired is mostly the same thing as looking plain.

When he gave me violets, he told me that it was because he remembered I'd once said I liked them.

Things like that.

Well, of course I went off the deep end. As I say, we were perfectly mad.

I met him wherever, and whenever, he wanted me to, and I sent him the kind of love-letters that every woman wants to send, if she can only find the man who wants to get them. And he wrote me the same kind of letter—every day.

Looking back, I suppose George knew. He never said anything. Some husbands don't. Not that I should have cared if he had. I'd have left him, and Evelina too, for Maurice, if Maurice had ever asked me to go.

He never did. For my sake, he said—and I believed it when he said it, which just shows what a genius he was in his way. We had two marvellous years. It's a relief to me, even now, to remember that it ended quickly. Maurice's technique, as you might say, was too good to spoil the thing by an inartistic finish. We said good-bye (in a garden, under a harvest moon, and with someone or other playing the "Valse Triste" by an open window) while we both of us cared enough to make it worth while.

\*

I got over it, of course, as one does. And some years later, when Maurice was engaged to a girl straight out of the schoolroom, he wrote and told me that he was going to be married. I'd always guessed that he would marry some day.

George and I sent him a wedding present. I never met the girl.

A very stupid woman, who knew her, once told me that she'd spoken about me—she thought that Maurice and I had been friends—and that the girl said: "Oh! But Maurice doesn't want me to meet *her*. He told me she was a wrong 'un."

Well, of course, it was true in a way. But it does make one feel that men—even men like Maurice—have no imagination.

## THE NIGHT SISTER

Rosewarne is a Cornish name, of course, and it was seeing the little boy's name—Dickie Rosewarne—on the case-sheet that made me think of Constantine Bay all of a sudden.

Just for a minute it was like a breath of wind from the north Cornish shore blowing through the long polished wards and the scrubbed corridors, all smelling of carbolic, and the cement-white stairs.

It's over twenty years since we went to Constantine for the summer holidays. I was only ten years old and Roland was fourteen. I used to call him "Brother".

We used to swim in a place known as The Gully, that was like a long creek of ice-green water stretching away between two great towering walls of rock; and at the end of it was a cave that we called Smuggler's Cave, and a high rock like a giant. Once another boy dared Roland to dive off that rock, and he did it. Nobody else was there except me, and Roland told me afterwards that he hadn't been a bit frightened until he was actually in the air, and knew it was too late to go back.

Those were the best holidays we ever spent.

Later on, it got more and more difficult to afford things, especially after Father died.

Mother said: "It doesn't matter, Cicely, about us, but Roland must have his chance. If only he makes the most of it!"

She didn't understand Roland, although she loved him better than anybody else in the world, poor Mother. He was very clever—but he didn't work, and he didn't seem able *not* to spend money. It all went—everything we were able to give him, and more. Sometimes, when he came down from Oxford, he used to bring us presents, though he'd left all sorts of bills still unpaid, and Mother used to cry and say it was dishonest. But I don't think it seemed like that to him. He was very generous, and he just wasn't able to understand about money, ever. When he was at home, Mother had everything as nice as she could, always, and from the time he was a very little boy she'd give him everything he wanted. Afterwards, she used to say it was her own fault, and that she'd spoil him.

I don't know.

To me there was never anybody quite like Roland. He could make everything amusing, and happy, and lovely just by being there.

When he was at home, I used to feel that it made up for all the things Mother and I had to do without, even for my not going to College, though I'd wanted to very much.

\*

The terrible thing, that made life quite different ever afterwards, happened after he'd left Oxford and we were living in London.

Some people got hold of him—a man and his wife. He owed them money, and I think he'd made love to the wife.

Roland shot himself.

Mother said he hadn't trusted us enough. He didn't understand that we'd have forgiven him everything, and done anything to help him.

But I don't think it was like that.

I think Roland killed himself, like he'd dived off the Giant Rock at Constantine—on a mad impulse, not realizing until it was too late to go back.

It was years and years before Roland's debts were all paid off, but we did it before Mother died. But then, of course, it was far too late for me to go to College. But I got plenty of hospital experience during the war, and a job after it was over.

\*

Time goes very quickly. When I get my holiday I usually go to the East Coast somewhere with another nurse. That time that Roland and I were at Constantine Bay, years ago, seems like another life altogether, and "Cicely" seems quite a different person to "Sister", which is what almost everybody calls me now.

It was the name of the little boy—Rosewarne—in Ward II. that brought it all back to me, and Roland and me swimming in the Gully together, in the days when I always called him "Brother", and we didn't know what life was going to be like.

## FAUNTLEROY

(To A. P. D.)

In due course, and with all the imperceptible speed of such transitions, they passed from middle age into elderliness. From being Daddy and Mummie, they became Father and Mother, and then Grandpapa and Grandmama.

Soon, as it seemed to them, scarcely anybody was left to address them by their Christian names. They had passed into that region of which the inhabitants have no real existence in the eyes of outsiders.

Their daughters wrote them nice letters every Sunday, one from Vancouver and the other one from Lancashire, and told them things about the children, and—in the case of the Lancashire one—the garden.

Their son was married, to a suitable wife, and lived with her and their two little boys, in a house that was only two miles away from the family home. It was understood, in a polite and unspoken way, that whenever either of the old people should die, George and Doris and the boys would come and live with the survivor at the Hall.

Meanwhile, George managed the estate, and Doris came over to tea two or three times a week, and the little boys came up even more frequently throughout their holidays.

Grandpapa and Grandmama had their own routine, and were satisfied with it. They disagreed with one another rather frequently, but to that they were accustomed, and it did not distress either of them in the least.

There was, for instance, the long-standing feud about the cat Fauntleroy. He was a large, square, black stable-cat and had transformed himself, by means of that indomitable friendliness that had earned him his name, into a drawing-room pet. He sat in armchairs, and jumped on Grandmama's knee, and was given milk at tea-time.

The unfortunate thing was that Grandpapa did not like cats.

Grandmama, on the other hand, did, and had allowed herself to become deeply attached to Fauntleroy.

She was unreasonable about him, and would get up and open the bedroom door at half-past six in the morning and let him in, and eventually give him bread-and-butter from the early-morning tea-tray.

"I will *not* have that dam' cat in the bedroom," said Grandpapa, who never could wake up in time to say this at the moment of Fauntleroy's admission, but always opened his eyes to the unwelcome sight of the black monster purring on the quilt, replete with bread-and-butter.

In reality, Grandpapa did not particularly dislike Fauntleroy, who had a good deal of character, but he disapproved of Grandmama's excessive fondness, and had a strange conviction that he could cure her of it by showing an exaggerated bias the other way. (This after being married to Grandmama for forty-eight years, in the course of which she had not been known to change her views more than half a dozen times all told.)

"I shall send the cat out of the house altogether if this goes on," said Grandpapa with tremendous firmness, and ignoring the fact that the cat had been in the house for nearly nine years already.

George and Doris—particularly Doris—supported Grandpapa, although quite amiably, and without attaching any very great importance to the point, in the matter of Fauntleroy. Cats, they said, were all very well, but give them dogs every

time. And in any case—this was Doris—not *up*-stairs.

But the two little boys, Billy and Dan, loved Fauntleroy, and encouraged his assumptions.

When the old lady, after rather a long illness, died, George and Doris were very kind to Grandpapa, although unable to feel that the grief of any very old person could be quite as real an affair as it would have been in the case of a contemporary of their own.

When it was all over, and the funeral accomplished, and the move to the Hall made, and the new régime in full swing, they murmured to one another that the old man would probably be really happier, now that he'd got over the first shock, than he'd been for years.

"Grandmama, poor dear, did rule the roost completely. Poor Grandpapa couldn't call his soul his own."

"Well—perhaps not. But I don't think she ever let him find it out," said George.

"Oh, I'm not so sure. Look at the Fauntleroy business."

"Oh, that. Yes, that was ridiculous," said George. "What are we going to do about that cat? It's all over the place."

"Naturally. It's always been encouraged. Of course, it wouldn't do at all to make an end of it, as it was such a pet of hers, but after a time I should think it would naturally reach the stage when it was kindest to put it out of the way."

Fauntleroy, however, did not look at all like having reached that stage. He continued to stalk in and out of rooms, his tail waving gently, his body every now and then curving into a half-moon round the legs of the furniture and the children.

George sometimes sketched a kick in his direction, and Doris put him firmly out of windows, saying coldly, "Not in here, puss," and Grandpapa ignored him completely.

Apart from Fauntleroy, Doris was managing everything beautifully. Certain changes, of course, had had to be made.

A great deal of the furniture was awful, and the dining-room and drawing-room had needed redecorating for years, and the servants had got into tiresome, old-fashioned ways. But Doris introduced her reformations tactfully, and by degrees, and Grandpapa accepted them all.

He gave no trouble, and never interfered. He wanted George to be the master of the house, and Doris the mistress, and as this was also what George and Doris wanted themselves, the arrangement worked admirably.

The only thing Doris ever felt a little aggrieved about was a want of perfect straightforwardness in Grandpapa. Sometimes, when he had accepted an improvement or an alteration with smiles and polite speeches, it would come out afterwards, through the children perhaps, or some unguarded observation of his own, that he really hadn't liked it at all.

This annoyed Doris very much.

"It isn't as though I didn't *want* to make him happy and comfortable," she complained to George. "He might just as well be honest with me. But he won't be."

Doris was quite right. Grandpapa was not always honest with her, for very old people, equally with very young ones, are driven to deceit, since it is usually the only means by which they can ever hope to get their own way.

Moreover, Doris and George were slightly unreal to Grandpapa, exactly as he was slightly unreal to them, although of this they had no conception.

"Doesn't it just *show*," said Doris, when the novelty of being an angel to Grandpapa had completely gone, "that he really does humbug, rather, dear old man. You know how he used to grumble at the cat, and say he wouldn't have it upstairs, and all that? Well, yesterday when he had his breakfast upstairs, I went in to him, and there was the wretched Fauntleroy, curled up on the bed, eating bread-and-butter all over the quilt!"

"I hope you kicked the brute out of the window," said George, not meaning it.

"Of course I didn't interfere. Grandpapa must do as he likes. But after all the fuss there was, it does make one feel that



perhaps Grandmama may have had something to put up with too. I mean, it must have been just contrariness, his saying that he hated cats so. However, I'm sure it's all to the good that he should spend the morning upstairs. The day is so long for him, at his age."

Grandpapa perhaps thought so too. At all events he spent his mornings in bed, and Fauntleroy the cat always came in with the breakfast, and sprang ponderously on to the bed, and coiled his bulk round on the quilt.

Grandpapa never spoke to him, or caressed him.

But his eye rested on Fauntleroy's glistening black form thoughtfully, and from time to time he gave him bread-and-butter.

He, at least—so closely connected with the past—was quite real.

### QUESTION WITHOUT ANSWER

All-out endeavour on my part, and absolute imperturbability on his. That had been the history of the past three weeks. It had, very nearly, assumed the character of a game of skill. Well—it would have done so, if I hadn't had the misfortune to be very nearly seriously attracted. It was years since that had happened to me—naturally, living as I do, one can't afford emotional luxuries, and it's good enough if the man isn't fat, or a bore.

I don't suppose I shall ever know what it was, about Morgan. Perhaps the fact that he was clever, and wrote books, or just that he didn't talk much, and had a way of listening, with blue, intent eyes and a very serious expression. Anyway—it just got me.

It seemed easy, at first. Just the usual beginning: I sat at my table, in the corner, and looked across at him once or twice having dinner all by himself. I wasn't surprised when he came across to me afterwards, and began to talk. It was just the usual conversation, too, except that he didn't rush things at all.

I liked him for that.

I pulled all the usual stuff—about having had to divorce my husband, and being all by myself, and life was very hard for a woman, like that. It took me exactly twenty-four hours to realize that he was clever—the sort of cleverness that knows all about people. Not that he ever said anything, but I just sensed it.

So then I told him the truth. Well—as much of the truth as a woman ever does tell to a man who's beginning to attract her.

And he listened, just the same way as he'd listened before—very quiet, and attentive, and looking at me all the time with those eyes that looked as if they'd seen such a lot, and yet hadn't lost interest.

(I believe it *was* his eyes—and yet it's difficult to think that I could have been such a fool.)

He took me to the south of France.

He said he just wanted to have three weeks there, before going back to London. He wanted to be quiet, and not have to go out and find amusing places all the time.

Well—I wanted that, too. Wanted it a whole lot more than he realized.

Before we got to Cannes, I knew what was happening to me, and I'd got to the stage when I didn't much mind, if only I could make him care a little bit too.

Looking back, I know I must have got it badly. Incredibly so, for a woman of my experience. I even stopped drinking, because I didn't want to be artificially stimulated any more. That just shows you—I might have been a girl of twenty, thinking about love lasting for ever, and being the greatest thing in the world, and all that.

We used to sit on the rocks, at a place called Agay that we motored to nearly every day, and talk. I don't know that I'd ever done that before, with anyone. I told him more and more things—about myself, mostly—things that I hadn't even remembered, in years. Sometimes he'd talk to me, and I liked it—God, how I liked it! It wasn't the kind of talk that usually gets handed out to my kind of woman—it was the real stuff, about what he'd thought, and done, and written.

That's how I saw it then—I've sometimes wondered, since.

Once or twice we dined at the big hotels at Cannes. I've known those places, and all the others like them, since I was sixteen—but they seemed kind of new—and when I caught myself thinking that, I knew exactly what kind of a fool I was. The trouble was that I couldn't deceive myself into thinking he cared for me, though there were times when I tried hard enough. It used to make me wild, too, to think of being caught in that age-old trap. All the same, I did just what women always do, in spite of being harder, and more intelligent, than most.

I went all out to try and make him care too. And got just exactly nowhere.

It was funny, being with a man and making no demands on him at all. I don't believe it had ever been like that before, with me.

I gave him everything he wanted, when he wanted it, and I didn't let him throw his money about, and I found out, the way one does, how he liked a woman to behave when he took her out, and I played up to that.

It sounds insane when I look back on it, but not so insane as letting him see that I'd fallen in love with him. I did that too. I got the idea, somehow, that it would make him fall in love with me.

It didn't, of course.

The end, when you come to think of it, was funny.

We went out to dinner at a smart Cannes hotel, and it was the last night but one, and I'd have lain down and let him walk over me, by that time. Then we saw a whole party of people he knew—Americans, mostly. They came over to our table, and he introduced me, and I could *see* the three men of the party just looking at me, and wondering. They couldn't be sure—because I was feeling like someone different to what I usually was, and I suppose I looked it too. I can't explain any better than that.

However, the women knew all right—or thought they did—except one, who was only about twenty-five. I don't know whether she was married or not—I expect she was—and she had no looks at all, but any amount of style.

She didn't care what she said, and said it all the time in a voice that was just about as common as mud—and she had more vitality than anyone I'd ever seen.

She made a dead set at Morgan from the very beginning. I suppose I wasn't the only woman, by a very long way, to find those eyes of his attractive.

He asked me to dance, first, and I said No. God knows why. Perhaps it was because I'd got into the habit of knowing exactly what he wanted, and I knew well enough that he wanted to dance with the American girl.

I'll hand it to her that she danced divinely. I'd known all along that she would. She was the kind of woman that everybody in the room looks at, all the time, and women may know that she isn't pretty—but men never find it out at all. There isn't much more to tell about her. She talked and talked to Morgan, and most of what she said was rubbish, and all of it in that awful voice of hers—and he listened, and she made him laugh quite a lot, and they both went on drinking champagne.

It was three o'clock before that party broke up. She'd given him an address in London by that time, and told him she was going there in a week's time, and he'd asked her to have dinner with him and go to a theatre.

You couldn't be surprised. She knew all the rules of the game, and played it right. Where I'd gone wrong was in thinking that Morgan wanted anything different.

Or perhaps I didn't really think it. One believes what one wants to believe.

Anyway, I didn't believe it any more after that night. I just knew I'd been wasting my time. He gave that girl the look that I'd been waiting for all the time, just as he said Good-bye to her. Just that indescribable expression that nobody ever fakes, and that nobody ever makes a mistake about either.

I let him talk about her, afterwards. He didn't say much, only just the amount that men always do say when they're attracted and think that nobody has found it out yet.

Two days afterwards I said Good-bye to him, and we said we'd write, but of course we never did. I've often wondered why I thought he was different, and whether he really was.

**THE END**

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**Transcriber's Note**

Punctuation errors have been corrected.

The following suspected printer's error has been addressed.

Page 227. missing word 'to' added  
(he went out to the)

[End of *General Impressions*, by E. M. Delafield]