

THE  
BERMONDSEY  
BOOK

VOL. VI: NO. 1.

DEC. JAN. FEB. 1928-9

THE WIDOWER                    By JOHN VAN DRUTEN

PRAISE OF THE IMMODERATE

By LOUIS GOLDING

D. H. LAWRENCE'S NOVELS     By J. S. COLLIS

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TWO PLAYS BY THORNTON WILDER

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HARCOURT WILLIAMS

STEFAN ZEROMSKI

DOROTHY ALSTON

I. NEWMARK

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# The Bermondsey Book

## *A Quarterly Review of Life & Literature*

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The Editor will be very pleased to consider contributions, which need not be typewritten. These should be accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope and addressed to The Editor, The Bermondsey Book, 171 Bermondsey Street, London, S.E. 1.

## EDITORIAL NOTES

**W**E are proud to publish, with Mr. Thornton Wilder's permission, two of the plays from his new book *The Angel that Troubled the Waters* (Longmans 6s.). We were allowed to select two of these "three minute plays," as the author calls them, and the task was not an easy one. In our opinion, "Centaurs" and "The Angel on the Ship" are the best, though we would willingly have published each little play from this delightful book.

As far as we know Mr. Wilder's work has not appeared before in an English periodical. In granting permission to publish the plays Mr. Wilder expressed his appreciation of the BERMONDSEY Book and the high standard it strives to maintain.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Bermondsey Bookshop re-opened after the Summer holidays on September 18th.

The first lecture, on Sunday, September 23rd, was given by Mr. H. W. Nevinson. He spoke in his frank and inimitable way on a pilgrimage he had made to the Near East.

The following Sunday, September 30th, Mr. Conal O'Riordan (author of "Napoleon's Josephine") gave a most interesting talk on "Napoleon."

Mr. Leon Goossens, on Sunday, October 7th, spoke on his "Musical Experiences" and, incidentally, delighted his audience with some selections on the oboe.

On Sunday, October 14th, Captain Reginald Berkeley spoke, out of wide knowledge, on "The Craft of Playwriting."

One of the oldest and best of the friends of the Bermondsey Bookshop, Mr. C. S. Evans, gave a most fascinating lecture on "The First Great Queen" (Egyptian) on October 21st.

The following Sunday, October 28th, Professor H. J. Laski told us all there is to be told about "Rousseau" in one of the ablest lectures ever delivered at the Bermondsey Bookshop.

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Among the plays and short stories read during the quarter were:—  
"Many Waters" (Monckton Hoffe), "A Grain of Mustard Seed" (H. M. Harwood), "The Return" (Charles Bennett), "The Philosopher of Butterbiggins" (Harold Chapin), "The Nutcracker Suite"

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(Eliot Crawshay Williams), "Ile" (Eugene O'Neill), "The Little White Thought" (Miles Malleson), "The Witness for the Defence" (A. E. W. Mason), "The Case of Oscar Brodski" (R. Austin Freeman), "Darby Dallow Tells his Tale" (A. E. Coppard), "Wodjabet" (C. E. Montague).

\* \* \* \* \*

### "NIGGER FACE"

"He hath filled the hungry with good things."

These words had slowly formed themselves in the mind of the tramp "Nigger Face" as he lounged in the sun on the steps of a church in a nondescript district of London.

He had been christened "Nigger Face" by the children who were accustomed to his tramping, and begging at their doors. Often they would scoff "Go on 'Nigger Face,' sing to us." Occasionally he would comply, the thought of money being at the back of his mind, only a few halfpence maybe but they meant nourishment, for "Nigger Face" was a veritable tramp having nowhere to lay his head. Whatever the weather he was obliged to seek shelter in a doorway, or under a railway bridge.

Now as he rose with agility from the sun-bathed steps he looked avidly at the shilling, moist with the perspiration as he clutched it in his hot hand, mumbling again the words "He hath filled the hungry with good things." It had taken him a long time to get this phrase fixed. He remembered long ago having repeated this and something similar over and over again. Yes he knew where, it was at school.

Every morning regularly he and thirty-nine other high-spirited young boys had repeated the "Magnificat" in a sing-song tone and he wondered as he gathered his rags about his slender form in spite of the heat of the forenoon, whether any other of those youngsters had come to this. He did not dwell on these thoughts for "Nigger Face" was neither morbid nor retrospective. None the less this platitude seemed eradicably fixed in his memory.

As he crossed the road in quest of a place where he could eat, for he considered he had abstained a sufficient length of time to enjoy to the full a long wished for repast, he muttered a blessing on the head of the fellow who had noticed him a couple of hours previously, and had been moved to toss him that shilling, "Nigger Face" ambled along at a surprisingly speedy pace. True he was somewhat impeded by trousers that were none too safe but he was cheerful and that went a long way, and his limbs were strong in spite of under-nourishment, and exposure to the vagrancies of the weather.

Ben's, the shop that catered with remarkable success for "Nigger Face" and his kind, was in sight. The shilling felt hot in the tramp's hand; his mouth watered. He drew in a sharp breath between parted lips, and quickened his step.

At this moment, as his desire was so near attainment, fool that he was, he stooped to pick up a fag-end (true it was a good-sized one) and in the act,

#### EDITORIAL NOTES

the money slipping from his hand rolled into the very drain from which he was retrieving the half-smoked cigarette. None the less "Nigger Face" recovered quickly. It was a nasty shock and for half a minute he stared despondently into the drain. He bemoaned his ill-luck and his expression was wistful as he stepped back on to the pavement.

Just the resemblance of a smile curled his lips as he moved along, not quite so energetically. His misfortune meant the loss of two meals. "Nigger Face," though a vagrant, was, in his way, proud. The fact that this had happened did not cause him to moan, indeed he could not help grinning as he realised how ironical it was that, a half-smoked but much chewed fag-end should have cost him a shilling.

It was four o'clock, the infant children were crowding out of school "Hullo ere's ol' 'Nigger Face.'" They surrounded the tramp crying "Sing Nigger," "I ain't going to sing to yer, to-day kids, so there." and he trudged off. They could see by his manner that something was wrong.

As the day wore on "Nigger Face" was craving for food, "Oh blast me for a fool" he said, "I could have been filled with good things, and I'm as empty as a starved cat."

Later during the evening he went into a tiny shop and with his coppers bought some cake crumbs.

This purchase consisted of odds and ends of the four-penny a pound cake that is made and sold in certain districts of London for the consumption of children, who are attracted by its sun-like colour, and its amazing quantity of currants. Cake crumbs were very popular, and "Nigger Face" loved them.

Then he went wrong. Willingly. He had figured out the result, and he was longing for a bed to sleep in, just by way of change. As the old sandy grocer stooped for the cake-crumb box which he kept under the counter next to the paraffin can, "Nigger Face" without any deftness took a packet of matches from the counter and proceeded to push them into his ragged pocket.

Sandy bobbing up, red in the face, began to storm at "Nigger Face." "Now I've caught yer at last," he yelled, "them matches 'ave been going like that ever since you first showed yer dirty mug in this 'ere shop, I'm going to send for the copper, he'll learn yer." "Nigger Face" made no attempt to escape. He experienced a certain elation which in the former years of his existence he had never known. Something was going to happen.

The "cop" was perhaps a little rough in handling him seeing that he went along so meekly. Arrived at their destination, the old familiar words from Scripture flashed through his brain again and as he was conducted to the cell, he breathed them aloud. "He's off his nut" said the escort, but "Nigger Face" knew better.

KATHLEEN WELLARD.

\* \* \* \* \*

[The following letter from a boy at St. Edward's School, Oxford, will, we feel sure, be of interest to our readers. The best answer we

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can give him is to publish three of his poems in this number of the BERMONDSEY BOOK.]

As yours is one of the friendliest magazines that I have ever come across, I thought that you might be kind enough to give me a little friendly advice. If you can I will really be most grateful; if you can't, I won't be in any way offended.

The position is this. I am seventeen and a half and have been doing my best to write poetry for the last two years—not quite as a hobby or just an amusement, but because I honestly hope to be able to write it well in the future, and also it seems to me to be the most natural way of "letting off steam" on any subject. I suppose thousands of people have felt the same, carried on writing for a while, and then dropped it as they would golf or tennis or any other game or hobby; but I feel that I can't and I really want to make some progress in it.

But progress is impossible without criticism and it's criticism that I've so far failed to get. One or two friends, of course, and the English masters at school have helped me, and it has been very good of them to do so, but on the whole they've simply said: "Oh, how nice," and left it at that.

Mr. Garrod, the Professor of Poetry at Oxford, showed one of my poems to Humbert Wolfe when he lectured at Merton about a year ago; but he gave no criticism except for writing me a small note (I thought it ripping of him to take the trouble) saying that the technique of the piece was quite good.

I have also sent pieces to magazines such as the *Observer*, *Spectator* and *Argosy*, partly to try to get them into print, but mainly in the hope of getting some criticism. They have all come back, of course, with varying swiftness, but what is worse they have come back uncriticised, and I am still left in the dark.

All this is probably the most self-centred trash that you've ever seen written, and I'm sorry; but I'm going to impose on you still further. I have enclosed a few of my short poems; do you think you could give me some criticism of them? it would be a tremendous help to me and I should be most sincerely grateful to you. If not, could you give me any suggestion of where I could obtain such criticism?

To ask for a lot and give not a scrap in return must seem unfair to you; but, as I said, I rely upon your friendliness.

Yours,

R. GITTINGS.

\* \* \* \* \*

### "HOUSES FOR NOTHING"

In these days of industrial depression and severe economic pressure, to speak of getting a brand new house, with up-to-date bath-room, and electric light, free of charge, sounds somewhat ridiculous, does it not?

#### EDITORIAL NOTES

But a very pleasing experience the writer has had recently, and one that can be verified, proves that it is not so, that, indeed, the above has been really accomplished.

In the little mining village of Thornely, in the County of Durham, a miniature Garden City has sprung into being during the past few months.

Judging from the appearance of the numerous flower patches so carefully tended by their respective owners, and the wonderful variety they display, together with the obvious pride the busy housewife takes in her window dressings, one would scarcely guess that these were the homes of working-class men, but such is the case.

In conversation with a number of them one learned that neither the Earl in his castle, nor the King in his palace could possibly be more content than these humble dwellers in their own wee cottages. "And all for nowt," they would say.

But how has it all come about? Well, in this way. The local colliery company, at an actual cost of £30,000, very generously offered to build, for each of its employees, a four-roomed dwelling, with a very liberal amount of land attached, on the following conditions: That the above sum be repaid by the workmen at the rate of 8/- per week. This amount, together with, approximately, 2/6 per week as rates is actually less than was previously being paid in local Council houses by way of rent.

Another interesting feature is the fact that the Colliery Company pay each man 5/- per week, in addition to wages. Thus, it will be seen that in fourteen years the homes become the freehold property of the occupiers, without having cost them so much as a halfpenny, as, in any case, they would have been living in houses bearing, at the least, a 10/- weekly rental. In addition to this I learned, too, that full advantage was being taken of this wonderful offer in other directions. They have their own Information Bureau which has taken the form of a wooden board, fastened to the gable end of one of the terraces.

It is only an improvised affair, true, and crude, perhaps, but none the less effective. Upon it notes of topical, and local interest are tacked each day by their own honorary secretary, who is, by the way, appointed annually. They have their own football team, and organise their own "outings." A fund is in being the whole year round, into which they can place their weekly coppers.

In the month of August of this year a very enjoyable day was spent by the sea, when 300 happy people, young and old alike, withdrew their wealth from the above fund.

The miner's life, like many another, is not an easy one, but he has learned to make the best of a bad job, with, as in the above case, surprising success. I am a working man with a fairly contented mind, and living in my own bit of property, but it hasn't been got so easily as those about which I have written.

Here is a bit of practical idealism, and a happy omen for to-morrow.

J. B. HENDERSON.

## TWO PLAYS

By THORNTON WILDER (Author of *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*).

[These two plays are selected from Mr. Thornton Wilder's new book, *The Angel That Troubled the Waters*.]

### CENTAURS

*[The usual chattering audience of our theatres is waiting for the curtains to part on a performance of Ibsen's "The Master Builder." Presently the lights are lowered to a coloured darkness, and the warm glow of the footlights begins again the ancient magic. The orchestra draws its bows soothingly to a gradual close and files out gropingly into the rabbit-hutch prepared for it, leaving perhaps a sentimental viola-player staring upward into the darkness. Suddenly the curtains are parted by an earnest young man, who stares into the shadowy audience and starts, with some difficulty, to address it.]*

SHELLEY: My name is Shelley. I . . . I am told that some of you may have heard of me, may even know my poems—or some of my poems. I cannot imagine what they may seem like to you who live in this world that . . . that is, I have just seen your streets for the first time—your machines, your buildings, and especially the machines with which you talk to one another. My poems must seem very strange in a world of such things. [Awkward pause.] Well, I wanted to say something about this play, but I don't know how to put it into words for you. You see, I feel that, in part, I wrote this play. [With sudden relief calling back through the curtains] Hilda! Will you help me a moment?

HILDA WANGEL'S VOICE: Yes, I'm coming.

SHELLEY [constrainedly, to the audience]: A friend of mine.

HILDA [appears in her mountaineering costume of the First Act, carrying an alpinestock. Vigorously, to the audience]: He promised to do this by himself, but he has gotten into difficulties. Have you told them that you wrote it?

SHELLEY: I tried to. It didn't sound reasonable.

HILDA: Well, you were able to explain it to me. Help me to persuade Papa to come out here.

[She disappears.]

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SHELLEY: Hendrick, for my sake.

HILDA's VOICE: There, did you hear that? For his sake, he said. Miss Fosli, will you kindly push forward the wicker settee for the last act? Thank you. [A wicker settee suddenly appears.] Now, Papa. [HILDA reappears leading the dramatist. IBSEN is smiling sternly through his spectacles and through his fringe of up-curling white whiskers.]

Now sit down and Shelley will begin again.

IBSEN: Hurry, young man. My beautiful play is ready to begin. The kingdom is on the table, the nurseries are empty, and the house is full of unconverted people.

HILDA [*touching his shoe with the tip of her alpinestock*]: Hush, Papa. Let him go about it in his own way. Have you told them about the poem you were about to write when you died?

SHELLEY: No. [*To the audience*] Ladies and Gentlemen, on the day I died—drowned in the Mediterranean—I was full of a poem to be called “The Death of a Centaur,” that I did not have time to put on paper.

HILDA: You forgot to say that it was a very good poem.

SHELLEY: I couldn't say that.

HILDA: You said it to me. [*Turning to the audience*] You should know that this young man had come to a time when everything he wrote was valuable. He was as sure to write great poems as a good apple tree is to give good apples.

SHELLEY: Perhaps it would have been one of the better ones. At all events, it was never written. . . .

IBSEN [*rising excitedly and stamping his feet as though they had snow on them*]: And I claim that I wrote it. The poem hung for a while above the Mediterranean, and then drifted up toward the Tyrol, and I caught it and wrote it down. And it is “The Master Builder.”

HILDA: Now you must sit down, Papa, and keep calm. We must reason this out calmly. In the first place, both are certainly about centaurs. What do you say, Shelley?

SHELLEY: Well, it is not a strange idea, or a new one, that the stuff

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of which masterpieces are made drifts about the world waiting to be clothed with words. It is a truth that Plato would have understood that the mere language, the words of a masterpiece, are the least of its offerings. Nay, in the world we have come into now, the languages of the planet have no value; but the impulse, the idea of "Comus" is a miracle, even in heaven. Let you remember this when you regret the work that has been lost through this war that has been laid upon your treasurable young men. The work they might have done is still with you, and will yet find its way into your lives and into your children's lives.

IBSEN: Enough, enough! You will be revealing all the mysteries soon. Enough has been said to prove that "The Death of the Centaur" and "The Master Builder" are the same poem. Get in with you, children. The play is ready to start. Solness sits with his head in his hands, and the harps are in the air.

[*He goes behind the curtains. SHELLEY lingers a moment; a shadow has fallen across his face.*]

HILDA [*laying her hand on his arm*]: What is the matter?

SHELLEY: That reminded me . . . of another poem . . . I did not write down.

\* \* \* \* \*

## THE ANGEL ON THE SHIP

[*The fore-deck of the "Nancy Bray," lying disabled in mid-ocean. The figurehead of the ship has been torn from its place and nailed to the forepost, facing the stern—back to back, as it were, with its former position. It is the half-length of an angel bearing wreaths; she is highly coloured and buxom, and has flowing yellow hair. On the deck lie three persons in the last stages of rags and exhaustion: MINNA, the captain's wife, the remnant of a stout, coarse woman; VAN, the under-cook, a little sharp youth; and a fat, old, sleepy member of the crew, JAMAICA SAM.*]

VAN [*driving the last nail into the figurehead*]: There she is, she's

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the new gawd of the Atlantic. It's only a she-gawd, but that's a good enough gawd for a sailor.

MINNA [*seated on the deck*]: Us'll call her Lily. That's a name like a God's.

SAM: Youm be quick. Youm say your prayers quick.

MINNA [*blubbering*]: Her can't hear us. Her's just the old figger-head we had thirty years.

VAN: Her's an angel. Her knows everything. [*He throws himself on his knees and lays his forehead on the boards. In a hoarse whisper*] That's the joss way. We all got to do it. [*The others do likewise.*]

SAM: Us'll pray in turns. Us must be quick. There ain't no more water to drink, and there ain't no more sails left to carry us on. Us'll have to be quick. Youm begin, Van. Youm a great lad with the words.

VAN [*with real fanaticism*]: Great gawd Lily, on the ship "Nancy Bray," all's lost with us if you don't bring us rain to drink. All the secret water I saved aside is drunk up, and we got to go over the side with the rest if you don't bring us rain to-day or to-morrow. Youm allus been the angel on the front of this yere ship "Nancy Bray," and you ain't goin' to leave us rot now. I finished my prayer, great gawd Lily. Amen.

MINNA: Great God Lily, I'm the captain's wife that's sailed behind you for twenty years. Many's the time, great God Lily, that I shined your face so you'd look spick and span and we sailing into London in the morning, or into heathen lands. You knows everything, and you knows what I did to my husband that I didn't let him have none of the secret water that me and Van saved up, and that when he died he knew it and cursed me and Van to hell. But youm forgiven everything, and send us some rain or by-and-by we'll die and there'll be no one here prayin' to you. This is the end of my prayin', great God Lily.

VAN [*whispers*]: Say Amen.

MINNA: Amen, great God Lily.

SAM: I ain't goin' to pray. I'm just a dog that's been on the sea since I was born. I don' know no land eddication.

MINNA: We all got to pray for some rain.

VAN: You got t'say your word too.

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SAM: God forgive me, great God Lily, I'm old Jamaica Sam that don't never go ashore. Amen. I'd be drownd, too, only for Van and the captain's wife, who gave me some of the secret water, so that if they died I could roll 'em over the side and not leave 'em on the clean deck. Amen. Youm known my whole life, great God Lily, and how I stole the Portagee's red bag, only it was almost empty, and . . . and that other thing. Send a lot of rain and a ship to save us. Amen.

VAN [*crawling up beneath the figure and throwing himself full length, hysterically*]: You've gone and forgiven me everything. Sure you have. I didn't kill the captain. The secret water was mine. Save us now, great Gawd Lily, and bring me back to my uncle in Amsterdam and make him leave me his three coal barges.

MINNA [*rocking herself*]: We'm lost. She'll save Sam, but I've done what the gods don't like. They'm after me. They've got me now. [*Suddenly staring off the deck*] Van! Van! Them's a ship coming to us. Van, look! [*She falls back crying.*]

VAN: Them's coming.

SAM [*trying to jump up and down*]: It's the "Maria Theresa Third," comin' right at us.

VAN [*his eye falls on the angel*]: What'll they say to the figger-head here?

SAM [*sententiously*]: But that's the great God Lily. Her's saved us. You ain't goin' to do anything to her?

VAN [*starting to beat the angel forward with his hammer*]: They'll call us heathen, bowin' down to wood and stone. Get the rope, Sam. We'll put her back.

MINNA [*frightened*]: But I can't never forget her and her great starey eyes. Her I've prayed to.

## THE NOVELS OF D. H. LAWRENCE: AN APPRECIATION

BY J. S. COLLIS

**G**REAT writers are justly regarded as mirrors into which we may look to see ourselves intensely reflected. If we dislike what we see therein we are obviously entitled to dislike ourselves. Therefore Art is a moral force. Sometimes a writer does not show what we are but what we might be. In proportion as he does both he is powerful as a moral force.

It might seem that once we allow ourselves to say that a writer reflects his age we land ourselves in difficulties. An amusing essay could be written in which the chief writers of the Victorian age could be shown to contradict each other hopelessly. But it would be superficial.

There are exceptions (Carpenter and Carlyle to a certain extent) but in the main the Victorians were all alike in this important aspect—namely that they concentrated their attention upon environment. They thought that by adjusting the outside world our problems could be solved. They paid little heed to the mysterious inner workings of the individual which cause the problems. As we are still paying for so great a simplification it is natural that we should have resolutely turned our attention to the individual and his psychology. For every good book on economics there appear two or three on psychology.

So turning to the novel of to-day we are not surprised to find in at least one series of works a concentrated attention upon the individual. We find that the difference between the novels of Mr. D. H. Lawrence and those preceding him is clear-cut. If we quickly sweep our minds over the work of Austen, Eliot, Bronte, Thackeray, Dickens, Trollope, Hardy, Bennett, Galsworthy, Forster, we see that they all deal with individuals in relation to something else. They deal with them in relation to society, to institutions, to conventions. These individuals are social beings before they are human beings. The author is not sufficiently interested in them to let them stand absolutely on their own merits. However fond he is of them he is just as fond of his picture of the social world, of his satire, his disillusion, his propaganda, his story. His presentation of human beings is not thorough enough to make their experiences or incidents sufficient to hold attention. The reader is held to the very end by a skilfully unfolding story held together by an intricate system of wires, such as eaves-dropping (Dickens' favourite trick), intercepted letters, coincidences, disguises,

unexpected wills, and so on, not forgetting the device of making a third party interrupt the lovers when embracing—(a thing which never happens in real life because lovers just see that it doesn't!)

Then H. G. Wells came and enormously broadened the novel. But he too was not primarily interested in his characters. He was primarily interested in ideas. He brought in the novel of ideas. The creative artist within him assumes a secondary rôle while the Questioner looks out upon modern civilisation asking: What is to be done? and pours out an orgy of ideas and ideals with the same high spirits as lesser men pour out wine. If he introduces an incident occasionally it is solely in order to give the reader a rest from the main business of ideas.

And now we have D. H. Lawrence who has brought in the novel of anti-ideas. He concentrates his attention upon the individual before anything else—before the ideas and ideals which rose from him, before the institutions he frames, the society he forms.

And not less are events subordinate to the individual. A reader of Lawrence knows that no event will be for the sake of another event—thus making an exciting story. He knows that when Gerald visits Gudrun in her family's house at night, that as he tiptoes along the passage he will *not* be caught, that there will be no heroics, nor an angry guilty scene. The attention is never excited that way: it is always the event itself that is important and thrilling. It is otherwise in the Victorian novels. Durbeville violates Tess: the event is passed over delicately and guiltily and the consequences that follow make the story.

In *Adam Bede* it is the leading up to and the leading away from the same event that interests the reader. It is not sex but the consequences of sex that are emphasised in the Victorian novels. In Lawrence it is not the consequences but the fact itself that is centralised. There is no indecent delicacy about his treatment of it. He deals with the internal feelings and intricate, complexities that go to make up that event, instead of just using it as the hinge for the story. You feel as you read that these things *are* and that the writer is only an announcer of the mighty process of the world.

He concentrates upon the internal things. He sees what others do not see and try not to be bothered with. His terrible eye penetrates right into his creations and with malign honesty he betrays their last secrets. The unsaid thoughts, the hidden flashes of hatred that pass

#### THE NOVELS OF D. H. LAWRENCE: AN APPRECIATION

between lovers, the invisible chords that join us, the vibrations like electricity that blast us, the secret telepathies that move us—these are the things to which he holds up the mirror. And we may add these are the things that count. They cause the ideas and ideals that we find on top. Get them right, come to terms with them and a new day dawns. But unfortunately the facing up to our inner experience is the one thing we always refuse to do.

We try to run life on a basis of superficiality while life runs on a basis of profundity. As long as we can conduct our lives on the surface “rubbing along”, keeping out of contact with our fellows, and placing etiquette, weather-talk, photography, child-appreciation, pseudo-humorousness, every shield we can think of, between ourselves and the terrible reality. And when time flings its revenge at us in the form of some hideous war we start blaming a politician or a Kaiser or a Treaty!

But Lawrence is determined to report what he sees. I will be honest, he has said to himself. That was a great idea, to be honest in reporting what he saw. That is the task he has undertaken for us, to put in what for so long has been left out, to say what for so long has been kept dark. At first we resent it. We do not quite see what he is attempting to do and we get far more pain than pleasure or profit.

These desperately self-conscious men and women with their terrific feelings and unconscious gravitations and sexual frustrations make us cry out: Shame on them! Shame on them! We long for a simple soul in the midst of all this. However this is not the age of simple souls. There is no doubt about it, simplicity is not easily found any more. We have got to a state of self-consciousness that approaches madness. We analyse our feelings in a manner, which if literature is any guide, we never did in the Victorian era. Even in our most emotional moments we do not analyse them while we make love as our hearts break we take notes; and though we may soften our woe we kill our joy. If Mr. Lawrence reports these things accurately and we don't like it, that is our fault not his.

But that is not to say that he could carry through such a task without displaying the vices of his virtues. At one period he seems to have plunged right down into the darkness, and to have wandered into strange and horrible regions where there was no glimmer of the sun. *The Rainbow* apparently was burnt by the common hangman.

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I do not understand why it caused so much concern but certainly the book is tedious beyond description—page after page of prosiness never ending in spite of the promise of its wonderful beginning. The following reflection of Ursula concerning some elderly gentleman suggests the general atmosphere of the book—“You are a lurking blood-sniffing creature with eyes peering out of the jungle darkness sniffing for your desires. That is what you *are*, though nobody would believe it, and you would be the very last to allow it.”

This may be true; but in *The Rainbow* the author seems to have considered that that is *all* man is. For my part I am not sorry that this book was so badly received. Otherwise he might have remained permanently in the shadows instead of emerging after an interval of five years into the splendid sequel (Ursula, Gudrun and family are carried over) of *Women in Love*. Even so he has always remained a lover of the darkness. He seems to be at home, like a cat in the night, in regions where criticism cannot follow nor morality judge him. His father as a miner spent his life in the bowels of the land, and his strange son seems to have inherited in the psychic sphere the power to dive below the surface of the earth.

He is a physiological mystic. He witnesses to the ecstasies of the body. He reveals the flesh as the mystery of mysteries. In his works cause and effect and all reasoning action are completely flouted. His men and women never act with any sort of mental consistency. They are body-conscious and body-consistent. To the hero of “Samson and Delilah” in *England my England* neither the bonds of the marriage vow nor the cords with which they tie him up and throw him into the street have any reality beside the invisible vows and the physiological bonds that make him again return to the house, and his wife leave open the door. It is to ultimate government by these bonds that his people succumb no matter what they say or mentally desire, no matter how grotesque in the circumstances seems the final subjection of their reason and the annihilation of their plans. How far this is a true finding, or rather how much Lawrence illegitimately adds, no one can say. All we know is that sometimes his short stories are ghastly and seemingly impossible, such as “You Touched Me” in *England My England* or “Daughters of the Vicar” in *The Prussian Officer*, while at the same time we must acknowledge that the great body of his work has an appeal for us and a power over us very difficult to explain away if

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we assume that he is putting something across. It is significant that he has an enormous following of women. Further, it is a definite fact that real Lawrence women do exist off paper. Most of us have met one.

But I would be wrong if I emphasised only the individualistic side of Lawrence and his physiological mysticism. His power lies even deeper than that. As the reader gets into his work he begins to feel that after all perhaps the individual is not the chief thing. He begins to feel that which lies behind the characters—the tremendous background. It is very difficult to give an account of the peculiar feeling one gets when his characters come together. It is not ideas coming together, it is not the exchange of opinions of several persons, nor even the conflict of two hearts. Rather, we are just shown living souls coming into contact, striking against each other, reacting from and reaching out to one another.

You seem to feel the universe at work while you read. There is the sense of an immense background behind these souls, an Unknown from which they have emerged, to which they shall return. Frequently one of the characters sinks into silence, becomes oblivious of the other's presence—and the reader feels aware of further powers in which he too is implicated, he knows that far more is concerned than just the particular persons in question, that the world is not what it seems, and that everywhere there is more at work than meets the eye. The hand of destiny is upon these men, nay upon the reader too: we are doomed: fate drives us on.

What great work it is! I remember how when I first took up *Twilight in Italy* it seemed to me only the old, old pretentious travel talk, precious, humiliating to the reader, making him feel a fool. It seemed to me that here was a man again "noticing" things just because he was abroad, pausing to talk about some old woman by the wayside whom if he had seen at home he wouldn't look at—the same old infuriating travel talk. But how wrong I was! I was soon to find that it was no mere traveller noticing things for publication, but a seer who could listen for the whisper of destiny and see further realities. I was deeply moved. And when I came to John of the Lago di Garda who was going to America though he knew not why, I was troubled in my spirit as one who should ask Who then is free? And as I read on I saw that it does not take this novelist a whole book to give a vision

of life: he can do it in a single picture. That Englishman he met at Lucerne who, without pleasure and without joy, had gone from this place to that place in his scheduled number of days "because he wanted to do it," would, under another author's hands, be a comic character. But Lawrence gives such a vision of all that was implied in that figure; that when he says, "My heart was wrung for my countryman, wrung till it bled," you cannot take it lightly.

Thus when he takes one person or one event it has a universal reference. It might be thought that his chapter in the "War in Kangroo" giving a personal account of what happened to himself, has an element of over-estimated self-importance. There is a kind of reader who might very well say, in a burst of moral indignation, "Good God man, what's all the fuss about! What's the good of parading with such solemnity your sufferings in the war like that! And what were your sufferings compared to others, you who lost nothing, you who never left England, you who only had to be twice medically examined and were not allowed to live in Cornwall after a time. You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

Such a person (and I'm sure I'm not inventing her) would be overlooking the fact that Lawrence could feel the atmosphere of hatred that spread over England at the time to an extent that few else could feel it, and therefore suffered in a way not known to the army of the insensitive; and further would be overlooking the fact that in the chapter referred to it is not Lawrence but mankind who is suffering. Coming back in the train from Cornwall Harriet was horrified at the expression on Lovat's face—like that of a Crucified Christ. And to the reader who knows how to read, that face is the face of the spirit of righteousness in the exact sense of the word, broken down, conquered, by the spirit of evil. It is not one sensitive man suffering but all sensitive men suffering, not one brave soul subdued, but all. The reader feels that it is not the writer but himself who is portrayed. Similarly when Lovat stands on the shore of the Pacific, it is not Lovat but Man standing on the beach of life. And when looking at the tremendous waves he feels a rising in his soul and the falling away of importunate thoughts, again it is not Lovat Frazer but we ourselves who are implicated; we too are standing there for whom questions likewise cease their siege and problems fade, then our psyches also freely flow and our sin is washed away.

## THREE POEMS

By R. GITTINGS

### I.—SONNET

**S**UCH pleasant gifts are to the body given—  
Clean winds, caressing water, and the warm sun,  
Free-hearted strife and rest when we have striven,  
And food by sturdy effort hardly won.  
The mind has learning and the large delight  
Of thought where little tongues defile not truth,  
Strength to master the body's evil might,  
In age remembrance; gallant dreams in youth.  
The soul—Beauty of nature or design,  
Love, the high beacon of the centuries,  
And Faith to see the single thread divine  
That runs through all these muddied tapestries.  
What may remain of life, what may be taken,  
Surely these last shall ever stay unshaken.

### II.—SONNET

Out of the hiving hum of argument  
Come honey truths and sweeter certainty,  
In cheerless earthen channels long were pent  
Those flower-lips that laugh most merrily;  
Birds that have beaten at the winter's breast  
Will fly the steadier in swallow weather,  
Nor seek for settled life within the nest  
To dream and die with sleek unruffled feather.  
So all the chances of experience  
Are better bargains, with the payment past,  
Than the safe bartering of finger'd pence  
Day upon day, from this hour to the last.  
A whole man builds his life from every brick  
And boulder that his travelling foot may kick.

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III.—STORM

No longer are the clouds that lean  
Upon the still wands of the wind  
Like an old slave's dishonour'd beard  
    So calm, so clear serene.  
They have been torn as sport inclin'd,  
    Storm-shaken, waste and weird.

So simple men of artless life,  
Happy and innocent of ill,  
    By sudden gusts of strife  
Are snatched from all security  
And blown with neither hope nor will  
    About an endless sky.

## DUSK

By STEFAN ZEROMSKI

(Translated from the Russian by H. C. STEVENS)

**B**ETWEEN the sturdy trunks of several ruddy firs, rising aloof along the edge of a clearing which stained the dingy green terraces of the hill with its numerous sombre stumps, pressed the sun, swimming in a coppery lustre, like a translucent dust-cloud hanging in a motionless bank above the distant scene. Its reflections still glittered on the fringes of the clouds, gilding and dyeing them scarlet, and penetrated between the folds of the grey masses to sparkle on the waters below.

Among the furrows of the stubble-land and the autumn-ploughed fields, in the marshy levels and the fresh woodland clearings, where lay streaks of water left from a recent tempest, the ruddy patches changed colour like shards of red-hot glass; over the grey, flattened clods fell a deceptive violet shadow, painful to the eyes; the sandy dunes, the yellow weed in the ditches, the bushes on the ridges took on extraneous, evanescent hues.

Through a deep hollow, surrounded on the east, north and south by a horse-shoe of forest-denuded hills, flowed a stream, overflowing into bays, swamps, lakes and arms, and rising in the same valley from subterranean springs. Skirting the water, on the peaty hide of the earth grew thickets of reeds, slender bulrushes, flags, and clumps of stocky osieres. The motionless, rust-coloured water now glimmered among the great leaves, the waterlilies, and the coarse waterweeds like shapeless pale-green stains.

A flock of teal flew up, circled around with outstretched necks, breaking the silence with the melodious, ringing whistle of their wings, describing smaller and smaller ellipses in the air until they dropped into the reeds, noisily cleaving the water with their breasts. The droning flight of the snipe, the muffled calling of the waterhens, died away; the ingenious whistling of the curlews ceased; disappeared even the dragon-fly and his azure brother, everlasting fluttering with their gauzy wings around the stems of the bulrushes. Only the indefatigable water-flies with their stilt legs, as fine as hairs yet furnished with colossal, fatty, satiated feet, still roved over the illumined surface of the depths—and two human beings continued to labour.

The marshes belonged to the farm. The former young master had well-nigh drowned himself in them, hunting with a spaniel after

ducks and snipe until he had cut down all the woods, left the fields lying fallow, and abruptly flying from his ancestral estate, had come to rest in Warsaw, where he was now selling soda-water from a street-stall.

When a new, wiser master made his appearance, he went stick in hand over all the fields, and frequently halted by the marshes, pulling reflectively at his nose.

He grabbled in the mud with his hands, dug holes, measured, and sniffed, until finally a strange idea occurred to him. He ordered the bailiff to hire day-labourers to dig up the peat, to carry the ooze in wheel-barrows to the fields, piling it up there in heaps, and to dig out a hole until a basin had been prepared for a pond; then the banks were to be reinforced, and a basin for another pond was to be dug lower down, until a dozen or more were ready; next, trenches were to be cut, sluices built and the ponds stocked with fish.

Valek Gibala, a landless labourer lodging in the neighbouring village, had immediately hired himself out for the cartage of the peat. Gibala had been in the service of the previous master as ostler, but he had not been kept on by the new owner. For to start with, the new master and the new bailiff had immediately reduced the allowances and wages, and secondly they looked for thievery everywhere. In the old master's time every ostler had deprived his pair of horses of half a gallon of oats, and had carried it off of an evening to the inn to exchange for tobacco and cigarette papers or a drop of whisky. As soon as the new bailiff arrived he detected this little habit, and as suspicion fell on Valek in particular he boxed his ears and dimisssed him.

From that time Valek and his wife had lodged in the village, for he was unable to obtain any other situation; the bailiff had given him such a testimonial that it was impossible for him to apply anywhere at all for work. They both made a little at harvest time by working here and there for peasants; but in winter and springtime they were consumed with a terrible, unimaginable hunger. The huge, bony peasant with his iron muscles went as thin as a rake, his face darkened, he grew weak and walked with a stoop. His wife, as a woman will, lived on her neighbours, gathered mushrooms, raspberries and strawberries, carried them to the house or to the Jews and made enough at least for a loaf of bread. But a peasant is not equal to threshing without food. When the bailiff announced the digging job in the marshes the

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eyes of both absolutely lit up. The bailiff himself promised thirty kopeks for every six cubic feet of earth dug out.

Valek had pressed his wife into the work only a few days before. She was loading the wheelbarrows, while he carried the mud into the fields along planks thrown across the firmer ground. They worked at a feverish pace. They had two large and deep wheelbarrows, and the second was already loaded before Valek returned with the empty one; he at once flung the draw-rope across his shoulder and pushed off up the rise. The iron wheel shrieked gratingly; the mud, thin, black, and trickling, and mingled with roots, feathers, and vegetable matter, fell on to the peasant's bare legs; as the barrow bounced from plank to plank the rope cut into his neck and shoulders, squeezing out a black streak of foul-smelling sweat on his shirt; their arms flagged at the elbows, their legs grew stiff and numb with puddling in the slime—but they could still clear twelve cubic feet in a day, and that meant a sight of money in the pocket.

They had been hoping that towards the end of the autumn they would be able to set aside thirty roubles, could pay their rent, buy a barrel of cabbage and five bushels of potatoes, a dress, boots, a couple of aprons for the woman, and linén for a shirt; and then would be able to eke out a miserable existence until the spring, making a little by threshing and weaving.

But then the bailiff had unexpectedly taken it into his head that thirty kopeks was too much to pay for six cubic feet, that not everybody would be tempted to dabble in mud from dawn till nightfall, that evidently they had been well starved, since they ran to obtain such work without thinking twice about it. "For twenty kopeks if you like," he said. "And if not. . . . "

At that season there was nothing to be earned from the peasants, and the farm with its threshers and machinery was dispensing with its own men—so they had no cause for haggling. After the bailiff's announcement Valek betook himself to the inn and got as drunk as a beast, out of spite. Next day he gave his wife a drubbing and took her with him to the work.

From that time on in the shorter autumn days they cleared the twelve cubic feet as before, not pausing in the labour from daybreak till nightfall.

And now from afar night was coming on; the distant pale-blue

forests were darkening and dissolving into the grey twilight; the glitter faded from the water, immeasurable shadows fell from the firs silhouetted against the sunset. Only here and there the stumps and stones still reddened on the summits of the hills and in the clearings. From these glimmering points tiny and fugitive rays were reflected, dropping into the abyssmal voids that are created between objects by an imperfect darkness; they vibrated in the voids, were broken, trembled for the twinkling of an eye and then went out—went out one after another. The trees and bushes lost their density, their convexity, their natural colours, and emerged from the grey expanse only as flattish shapes with freakish outlines and of a sombre black.

In the valley a dense mist was already settling, and a penetrating cold crept up. The twilight came on in invisible billows, slipping over the sides of the hills, drawing into itself the yellow hues of the stubble lands, the fallen trees, the mounds, and the rocks.

To meet the waves of the dusk, from the marshes arose other waves, whitish, translucent, hardly perceptible, crawling in streamers, winding in skeins around the vegetation, trembling and ruffling above the surface of the water. A cold breath of dampness kneaded them, sent them roving along the bottom of the valley, stretched them over the levels like a piece of coarse sacking.

“The mist is rising,” muttered Valek’s wife.

It was the moment of gloaming when all visible forms seem to be disintegrating into dust and nothingness, when a grey emptiness floods over the surface of the ground, and an unapprehended canker of sorrow peers into the eyes and constricts the heart. Valek’s wife was overcome with fear. Her hair bristled on her head and a shudder passed over her. The mists came on like living bodies, crawling towards her steadily, running up from behind, drawing back, lurking and then again pressing forward more impetuously in a compact rank. Finally they lay clammy hands upon her, soaking into her body to the very bones, clutching at the throat and fumbling at her breasts. Then she remembered her child. She had not seen her since noon; she was sleeping alone in the locked-up hut, in a linden cradle suspended from the cross-beam by birchen poles. For certain she was crying there, whimpering and sobbing. The mother heard that singular weeping, as mournful as the puling of kites in the wilderness. It sounded in her ears, seemed to be torturing just one spot in her brain, fretted at her

heart. All day she had not thought of her, for the hard labour dispelled all thought, almost annihilated her and confused her; but now the evening terror constrained her to collect herself and to fasten her thoughts on that little mite.

"Valek," she said timidly, when the man returned, dragging his wheel-barrow. "I'll run home and scrape the potatoes? . . ."

Gibala made no answer; he seemed not to have heard, for he picked up the handles of the full wheel-barrow and set off, cowering down like a sack of rye on a beam-scale. When he returned the woman beseeched him again:

"Valusha! Shall I run along?"

"Hey!" he muttered reluctantly.

She knew his anger, she knew his trick of seizing her beneath the ribs, gathering the flesh in his fist, shaking her once, twice, then squeezing her as though she were a stone among reeds. She knew that he might easily tear the rag from her head, wind her hair around his fist and drag the terrified woman a good step of the road, or snatch up the spade from the mud in his frenzy and split her head open without reflecting whether he killed her or not.

— But over her fear of punishment dominated an impatient anxiety, agitating her almost painfully. At moments the woman planned to take to flight; she had only to make her way on all fours into the ravine, to jump across the stream, and then diagonally through the fields, through the gardens. As she bent and filled the barrow, in her thought she was flying, leaping like a martin, feeling a real pain now, for it was painful going barefoot across the commons overgrown with trailing briars and brambles. Their sharp spurs not only pricked her legs but pierced her heart. She would reach the hut, unlock the bolt with the wooden key, the warmth and fustiness of the hut would beat in her face —she would rush to the cradle. Valek would kill her when he came home, he would torture her—but what of it? That would be after. . . .

But Valek quickly emerged once more from the mist, and she was overcome by the dread of his fists. Again she pleaded humbly, although she knew that this brute would not let her go.

"But maybe the girl is crying there. . . ."

He made no answer, but threw the rope off his shoulders, approached his wife, and with a jerk of his head indicated the stake up to which they had to dig that day. Then he seized the spade and began

to throw the mire into his own wheelbarrow shovelful after shovelful. He worked swiftly, furiously, a shovelful with every breath. When he had filled the barrow he dragged it off, running at a trot and saying as he went:

“You bring yours along too, lazybones!”

She understood this gracious concession to her love, this brutal bounty, this rough, harsh kind of caress, for if they both were to dig out the earth the work could be finished much sooner. Now she imitated his swift and precipitate movements, like a monkey; she threw up the mud four times as quickly—now no longer with her muscles, and not with the peasant’s prudent economy of effort, but with the strength of her nerves. There was a rattle in her throat, dazzling colours flickered beneath her eyelids, she had a nausea in her chest, and tears, bitter, heavy tears of senseless grief fell from her eyes into the cold and evil-smelling mire. With every thrust of her spade into the earth she glanced to see how far it was to the stake; when her load was ready she seized the barrow handles and ran off at full speed in imitation of her husband.

The mists climbed high, trailed to the reeds, and stood above the summits of the alders in an immobile wall. Through them one could distinguish the trees like patches of indefinite colour and extravagantly gigantic forms, and the miserable wretches running across the hollow, like enormous, monstrous apparitions.

Their heads sank to their chests, their arms executed their movements mechanically, their bodies cowered to the ground.

The wheels of the wheelbarrow rattled and groaned; waves like milk diluted with water undulated between the sombre downs.

In the depth of heaven the evening star was kindled: it glowed trembly and pressed its meagre little light through the gloom.

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Stefan Zeromski, the author of this story, was born in Russian Poland in 1864 and died in 1925. Educated at Warsaw University he turned to private teaching as a profession, travelling all through Poland in the course of his work. He began writing in 1890 with contributions to the Press, but he soon adopted the form of the novel, which remained his chief medium of expression. Zeromski’s *Harbingers of Spring*, published in 1925, aroused the whole Polish nation by its daring treatment of post-war Poland. Possessed of a fine literary appreciation, he was the first to introduce Conrad to Conrad’s kinsmen by birth. Conrad was himself a great admirer of Zeromski’s work, and there is a striking affinity between the literary styles of the two writers.

## A CRITIC IN THE GALLERY

By A. PAGET

**T**O the devil with consistency anyhow. Just because, for years past, we have surveyed the savagery of Strindberg, the incisiveness of Ibsen, the twittering of Tchehov, the piping of Pirandello, the serenity of Shakespeare and the sardonic sarcasm of Shaw, are we never to escape from them?

A pox on all these plays which enrich the imagination, widen the sympathies, deepen the spiritual and enlarge the boundaries of life—let's go and see something low-brow or middle-brow at the highest. After all long life should grant us some kind of tolerance. Homeward bound the proprietor of a vegetarian restaurant furtively makes a call on a butcher—and who shall blame him? To-morrow and the hefty purveyor of dead flesh shall guiltily slink off to an ascetic repast of marrowfats and lentils—a traitor to his sacred calling. The atheist pamphleteer—living in irreproachable domesticity at Clapham—shall pray earnestly to Heaven for the sales and success of his latest outburst of profanity and the earnest believer of orthodox gospel—secure in a well-paid pulpit—shall weary of his own immaculate purity and, indulging in a relieving paroxysm of Satanism, consign all his rivals to eternal fire, brimstone and damnation.

Good luck to them both.

The Olympian aloofness and ironic serenity of an Anatole France shall be ours if for this day alone. Did not this impeccable writer remark somewhere that the pre-eminence of one woman over another lay in the magnificence of her thighs? Very well then. The pre-eminence of one theatrical entertainment over another shall lie in the magnificence of its potency to make us forget that internal combustion engines, income tax, proliferating people, and such like scourges of modern life, actually and really exist.

Where to go though, that is the immediate question.

Down and out lies the old Music Hall with scarce a soul to do it reverence. To the dark-souled congregations of the modern mausoleums it is not even a memory. Cross the Channel and you are not much better off. The sacred lamp of burlesque with its alluring display of leg is gone for ever. Even at the *Folies Bergère* things are no longer what they were.

We shall apparently all end, as Sinclair Lewis somewhere remarks,

in being conceived without sin. What would Plato, Rabelais, Calvin and John Masefield think of us I wonder? In some such mood then we drifted into the Adelphi Theatre. Irrational hope. "Clowns in Clover," a revue, and who is responsible for it I don't know.

Time was when we were wont to see on a programme "Libretto by Farnil (or Gilbert), Music by Audran (or Sullivan). Two people seemed capable in those days of providing an evening's entertainment. Times have indeed changed, for the number of *chefs* employed in concocting one of these modern mixtures seems beyond all recording. Music by one, interpolated songs by another, lyrics by someone else, sketches by others, another for lighting and yet a further one who "devises" matters and even then we haven't finished. The modern method.

Now to attempt to criticise such a thundering success as this is more than a trifle fatuous—the thing has long justified itself. What it sets out to do, it does. If it failed to set me alight so much the more unfortunate for me and the better for everyone else, for, truth to tell, the whole thing affected me like some particularly virulent form of nightmare. Any detailed account of the concussion of events seems impossible. Rather would one emulate the methods of these ultra-modern painters who synthesize a multitude of diverse impressions and stagger you with a canvas that can only be described as a violent assault on the senses. The very pace at which the thing is taken stupefies me. Heaven be praised that we are not members of Mr. Jack Hulbert's company, for he can have no mercy for himself or for anyone else. It is very certain that none of these people can lengthen their days by stealing a few hours "from the night, my boys" or dissipate their energies over golf courses and midnight cabarets. What would a chorus lady of thirty years ago think of her unfortunate sisters of the present day, I wonder? One feels a trifle exhausted simply watching them and they are the chief impression one carries away.

Phantasmagoria (gorgeous word) sums up "Clowns in Clover" for me. A phantasmagoria in which colour, movement, sound, are all actively pegging away in an optic, aural, brain-shattering cacophony. Impressions slowly emerge and one wonders at many things. The whole thing lacks contrast. It is too uniformly bright. Something grim should be thrust into its bowels. A Grand Guignol, say, that would not end in an anti-climax and let one down in the last line. Also as the thing is so

much a variety entertainment on a string, I rather fancy the inclusion of a trapeze artist and a troupe of acrobats would help it a little.

And one would like to do something novel with this hefty feminine chorus. Beerbohm Tree (whose anecdote is now getting a trifle worn) once suggested a ballet of diseases—scarlet fever, typhus, Asiatic cholera and the more recondite complaints to which all flesh is heir to. Fascinating notion. A trifle morbid, perhaps, but it gives one something to think about. Music by Stravinsky, of course, or one of the moderns. And the whole revue needs to be leavened with some deep rib-shaking laughter. No one seemed able to supply that.

Mr. Jack Hulbert (whom I had never seen before) seemed at his best when clad in a well-cut suit of clothes. Get him going at anything a trifle eccentric and he falls away somewhat. The spoof conjurer, for example, out of which a lot might have been made, went comparatively flat. One found oneself thinking of Alfred Lester here. And in the excellent sketch of the fifteen years' married man confronted with his early love letters, he never quite got into the skin of the character.

Truth is he is a light (and not a character) comedian, and although he works like the very devil the comic spirit never does, nor I don't suppose ever will, take possession of him. Perspiration is very much present but inspiration a very long way off. Miss Cicely Courtneidge is also a magnificent trier. Her activity is amazing. What woman has done woman can do is undoubtedly her motto and she gets her teeth well into a variety of characters from a Parisian *diseuse* (top-hole) to a proletarian. True she has not much of a singing voice any more than has Miss Irene Russell but they both display that positive genius for concealing all vocal deficiencies, so marked a feature of the musical comedy stage, and so that's all right.

Remains then Miss Elsie Janis whom I had not seen since we were "making the world safe for democracy," financiers, and political fakirs generally. Much, of course, has left her but her valuable hoarseness (only slight) is as fascinating as ever. Whence comes the artistic value of huskiness? She gave us some very good imitations of popular performers and, like all mimics that one ever encounters, seemed to become more herself at each successive impersonation. Luckily they always warn us beforehand what to expect, so that's all right.

To sum up, then; a very innocent show indeed and what the newspapers of the day love to call "clean"; indeed it is doubtful whether a

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convocation of bishops, city fathers and social purity-mongers generally could find it otherwise than absolutely innocuous—and this to many of us is a defect. The thing has plenty of ginger but no salt. One recalls Mdlle. Delysia at the London Pavilion: "And will you promise to be good if I admit you to my (pause) friend-sheep?"

To which Mr. John Humphries responded in his blunt, stumbling fashion, "Well, I'll be as good as you want me to be," whereupon Delysia (hurriedly) "Oh, you must be better than that."

Chastened, we wend our way into the ancient Strand, and as we fitfully frolic towards Bermondsey, the words of an old ballad (trolled by the greatest wit of his time) rings in our ears like the hackneyed horns of Elf-land, faintly blowing,

"Stand me a cab fare, duckie  
Do now, there's a dear,  
Or buy me a hot potato  
For I'm feeling awfully queer.  
You're eyes look dreadfully wicked  
But kissing I cannot allow  
I might have done so a few months ago  
But I'm living with mother now."

Whence has fled the national spirit that inspired these jocund strains. It seems more remote than ancient Athens.

\* \* \* \* \*

The name of Oliver Goldsmith is so deeply embedded in English literature that one doubts whether he will ever be uprooted. Once become a classic and you are, apparently, fixed for all time.

Dipping his pen into the well of English undefiled this writer gave us "The Vicar of Wakefield"—a work which it is next to impossible to read—and an immortal comedy "She Stoops to Conquer," a play which I, personally, found extremely difficult to sit out. One comes to the conclusion that the mentality of a people changes. How Tony Lumpkin and the Hardcastle crowd appeared to an eighteenth century audience is not difficult to surmise; doubtless they were accepted as the fine fresh fruits of a master dramatist. At this time of day they appear like a collection of wax-works.

The story is *naïve* beyond belief. Two blades from London put up at a country house under the very simple impression it is an inn. The

#### A CRITIC IN THE GALLERY

complications that ensue provide our diversion. The daughter of the house (the usual, simpering, crinolined jade) simulates a barmaid and captures blade one. Charles his friend, blade two, is hooked by the eternal confidante. It takes five acts to transact this bit of futility. The acting, taken on the whole, was good to middling. No one was bad and no one approached the excellent except perhaps Mr. Hay Petrie who can always be depended on for a well thought out study. Nigel Playfair miscast himself as triumphantly as he usually does but got through quite creditably, and Scott Russell in a small part sang as well as ever. Scenery all up to the average Hammersmith standard and the whole thing dished up with the thin, narrow-gutted stuff which passed for music in that far-off, silly, simpering age.

On the whole a wasted evening.

\* \* \* \* \*

"The Return Journey" at the St. James's, by that greatest of all apostles of common sense, Mr. Arnold Bennett, interested me enormously.

Any variation on the Faust legend leads us up the garden whether it come by way of Marlowe, Goethe, Gounod, Berlioz, Stephen Phillips, Emil Jannings or Pepper's Ghost. The yarn is as evergreen as Cinderella and possibly as ancient. The great Mr. Bennett, however, has given it an up-to-date twist by introducing a scientific element. Instead of the sudden quick change from old age to youth, to which we have been long accustomed, we get a gland treatment which promises to punish the patient pretty severely as time goes on. Otherwise we have the old story with Faust, Mephisto, Margarite, Siebel and even a kind of Martha. True they have all suffered a sea-change into something pluto-cratic and up-to-date as regards dress and surroundings, but the main idea seems as intact as nature itself.

This main idea always puzzled me and it still does. Sitting in a Lyons Tea shop, after the performance, I crystallised my impressions into a few phrases and here they are. My muse laboured and thus was she delivered.

*It all-times seems a trifle strange  
The trouble that Mephisto took  
To gain that simple Fausty soul  
Whom common sense had all forsook,*

*Did now some tool of Satan come  
With such a compact (pay deferred)  
With half the pains that Mephis took  
Quite easily he'd bag a herd.*

A detailed analysis of the play would be tiresome inasmuch as before these lines reach print the play may have joined the great majority.

Gerald du Maurier did well as the frisky-minded octogenarian (a little like Robey minus the eyebrows) and Henry Daniell—pallid, sardonic, suave, kept up all evil traditions, but the surprise of the afternoon came from Miss Grace Wilson, a quite young woman whom I had never heard of before. She played Margarite. Starting away as a slightly gawky young flapper she worked out a character, by a series of ever so subtle gradations that many of us will remember for a long time to come. Much of her triumph was, no doubt, due to Mr. Bennett for giving her such excellent stuff to say, much of it due to her *vis-à-vis* who had so thoroughly coached her, but much, oh yes much, was due to her charming and impressionable self.

\* \* \* \* \*

Fortified by a gargantuan steak, liberally accompanied with the conventional vegetable trimmings, a heavy slab of rice pudding and a goblet of coffee—my standard diet for Grand Opera—I made my way to the gallery door of the “Old Vic.” The hands of the clock stood at a quarter past five and I was a trifle staggered to find nearly three hundred people were in front of me. At what ungodly hour of the day does the queue begin to form itself, I wonder?

The opera to be performed was “Aida” by one Verdi—a really grand, grand opera inasmuch as it possesses all the ingredients for this most preposterous yet most delightful of all the Arts—pomp, ceremony, drama, melody and opportunities for everybody. The number of times one has seen this work has now gone beyond all reckoning. Not a minute of it but what is familiar and yet does age fail to wither or repetition stale it.

There were faults innumerable but there were also excellencies, and chief of the latter stood the orchestra of, I think, twenty-two performers under the enthusiastic and flexible baton of Mr. Chas. Corri. There was a verve and an attack about this small body that was something even more than stimulating. The divine fire had descended on

them. The solo playing of oboe, bassoon, clarinet and flute was nothing short of impéccable. The trumpets made one slip only that could be noticed (a fraction of a second too late in picking up an accompaniment in the third act) but otherwise the brass was *sans* reproach. The one solitary cellist proved himself an artist and the pair of contra-bass tore away at the *sforzandos* until their fingers must have bled. Chorus, well drilled—almost independent of the conductor—and staging suggestive more than elaborate as is the modern way.

The principals fetched the story well out—always a feature in the Waterloo Road where folks like to know what the pother is all about—and if they were not up to Covent Garden standard in voice they frequently surpassed them in vigour and intensity.

A well spent evening.

\* \* \* \* \*

The Ibsen Centenary was celebrated at the "Old Vic" by the production of his early play "The Vikings."

Much can be forgiven a youth of twenty-three, which was the age of the "old man" when he perpetrated this elegant little trifle; long, long before he succumbed to the sub fusk fascination of provincial back-parlours. Odd to realise that Ibsen was once young. An equivalent to £7 in English money is said to have been the net financial result of this somewhat sombre brain-storm—a little fact which seems to point to the Norwegian people's acute sense of economic value. Written to-day it is doubtful whether it would fetch as much.

What can be said of this work but that it would make an ideal *libretto* for an heroic Music Drama, possessing, as it does, all that monumental stupidity that this class of work seems to demand. Wagner being unable any longer to undertake this kind of thing (having died at Venice in 1887) we should dearly like to see one of the moderns come to grips with it—Granville Bantock for choice or Sibelius. One wonders why Greig failed to have a shot at it, for truth to tell the whole affair gasps for music, and if any member of the audience is still wondering what was the matter with it he can now free his mind from all doubt.

But to our Vikings, who turn out to be a slightly more demonstrative set than we have met for some time. "Live dangerously" would appear to have been their motto only they flourished in an age before Nietzsche and his mottoes came into fashion. The average Viking, I should say,

scarcely found it necessary to bolster himself up with "Do it now," "A stab in time saves nine" or such like slogan—he just got on with the job instinctively. There is small doubt but that he conformed to the "Then current mode in Worshipping both Thor and Odin" and for his activities the raising of heroes and the slaying thereof. Such was his simple faith.

Ibsen's drama deals with a couple of particularly hefty young warriors named Gunnar and Sigurd, and needless to say they both possess that grossly exaggerated sense of the importance of blood-letting common to the whole Viking fraternity. Tread softly for they both love a female "Hiordis" by name—large browed, deep chested, potential mother of heroes. She—magnificent jade—will only bestow her mighty self on the one that performs the deed of greatest prowess. Sigurd therefore goes out and throttles a couple of bears but having more than a brotherly affection for his mate permits him to accept all the credit of this doubtful achievement. Gunnar, therefore, collars Hiordis and Sigurd contents himself with a nice-minded girl, "Dagny" by name, daughter of Ornulf, a positively super Viking.

All this happened before the rise of the curtain showing very clearly that Ibsen adopted the reach-back method pretty early in life. Ultimately the actual truth respecting the above little affair comes to the surface and this is where the malecho gets a look in. The crescendo is reached at the end of Act Four when Sigurd receives a well-placed arrow in his diaphragm from the bow of Hiordis. She—unhappy woman—then hurls herself over a convenient cliff actuated, no doubt, by the "united in death" idea; a couple of characters rush on with the "Who has done this unhappy deed" stuff; a gust of the Ride of the Valkyries floats on the evening breeze and the play closes.

Such is the story which, the intelligent reader will have noted, is entirely different from any Ibsen we have hitherto met being absolutely devoid of any moral or philosophical significance whatever. The characters are all pretty forthright, with the exception of Hiordis and here we get the first glimpse (I suppose) of Ibsen's subsequent big women.

Esme Church put up a tussle with her but the part requires a giantess—Sybil Thorndike, Ellen Terry and Miss Church blended into one—a somewhat large order. Scenery properly subdued, as is usual in Norway, Iceland, or wherever it was the action took place, and costumes very harmonious when we consider the action took place Anno Domini 933.

## IN PRAISE OF THE IMMODERATE

By LOUIS GOLDING

I HAD for a long time thought myself, in a vague sort of way, a Hellenist. But when I met Jimmy Bowles at a house-party in Gloucestershire, I speedily learned the temerity of thinking about anything in a vague sort of way. For Bowles is not merely a leader-writer upon no less Olympian a journal than *The Times*; he is a Fellow of All Soul's. Or I ought perhaps to phrase it that he is not merely a Fellow of so Olympian institution as All Soul's, he is a leader-writer on *The Times*. You can't be a Hellenist just like that, vaguely, in the void. It is as precise an intellectual condition as being a member of the thirty-second order is a condition of masonic merit or being on the committee of White's is a condition of social grace.

The particular heresy which provoked against me the thunders of Bowles's canonical wrath was my assertion that the mean could not be golden, that I would be served with no half-measures in my art. Jimmy's eyebrows beetled. His lips paled. But I would brook no warning. I persevered with my praise of the immoderate. The excellent and the intolerable, I cried aloud, these are the only things we can tolerate in art. And then it was that Bowles rose in his wrath. And so he solemnly, with book, bell and candle, pronounced exorcism upon me, and I was hurled out of the bright communion of Hellenism into a grey barbaric limbo, among Goths and Persians and Scotsmen and Esquimos.

Out of this same void I still lift my forlorn voice and wave my ineffectual hands. The mean, I still proclaim, cannot be golden. Let us have immoderation in all things. Upon the incorruptible world of Marcus Stone let no withered leaf fall! Let no neo-Cubist temper me his angularities with the sinister seductions of a curve! Let no tinkle of melody corrupt the abrupt cacophonies of Satie! There is, in preposterous art, a dizzy rapture which it shares with supreme art. Mediocre art is rice pudding.

Hence Swinburne wrote with such enthusiasm of the execrable poetry Frederick William delivered in kingly labour; hence the gentleman in the footnote to "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers" responsible for the exquisite lines:—

*O to pen a stanza  
For the Marquis of Braganza!  
O for a lay*

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*Loud as the serge  
That lashes Lapland's sounding shore.*

is a more eminent poet than the author of *Parisina* and the Baedekeresque Pilgrimage. Mayfair has her graces of scimitars in stone, of tall wicked ladies poised delicately like the blue willow-kerb; Chicago flaunts her bad manners in the eye of the moon. But who would elect for his purple revelries, the Bronx?

The excellent and the intolerable, I repeat, are the only things I can tolerate in Art. I recall with delirious delight a picture exhibited by the "Allied Artists" in London some years ago, in which a Boy Scout was presented, embalmed among lurid and portentous sun-flowers —the worst picture I have ever seen. When I return to Oxford, I have no time for the intermediate virtues of Exeter College, whilst I walk a tight-rope of ecstasy between Magdalen Tower and Mr. Ruskin's Balliol Chapel. What use have I for the courtly mediocrities of Van-dyck when I can rise to Heaven through the cleft clouds of El Greco or swoop to Hell with a Californian movie-poster? And there is a lady from Cincinnati, who recently sent me her poems; and there are the poems of Pindar. What need assails me then for the strophes of Sir William Watson?

I ask you. Bethink yourself a moment. How can there be any disputing of a thesis which establishes the Arctic and Antarctic Poles of Art as equal *foci* for starry adventure? I think it will most readily be conceded that in the art of acting the law works with most strength and speed. We may accept as the best acting that defiant flaming penetration of the actor into the veins and marrow of his author's conception, at the same time as he most splendidly expresses his own uniqueness. A mediocre player fits into his part as into a ready-made suit; for some anxious moments or minutes he achieves the interchange between John Bloggs and Sophocles, or, rather, between John Bloggs and Oedipus; but how soon a Bloggs reduced even from his own unexciting stature and texture protrudes through Oedipus as the straw stuffing through the joints of a doll! But supremely bad acting is a triumphant and relentless delineation of the innermost secrets housed by the thoroughly bad actor. He struts the stage, his red heart visibly pumping, the shanks of his skeleton dangle and clank.

Here, I think, the reason lies that makes New York theatrically

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the most exciting city in the world. Nowhere else do actors and plays so excellent and so infamous rub shoulders with each other so intimately. Paris achieves a certain Sorellesque technique, London a certain Etonian propriety, but they only rarely achieve the peaks or abysses of New York. It is not only in a metropolis that you may hope to attain either extremity. In Mantua last year I saw an Italian fit-up company act so transcendently that I grow pale with bliss and pain at the memory of it. This same year in Marrakech, which lies in Morocco under the tall Atlas mountains, I saw a company of such cretins perform a revue entitled "Un Chleuh! dans la Soupe," that I grow pale with bliss and pain at the memory of it. But the experience whither all this is leading was more beatific than Mantua or Marrakech, more astounding than Broadway. For upon one and the same evening, in one and the same theatre, the miracle of synthesis was accomplished. The extremes coincided. The fallacy of the Hellenist's golden mean was for me forever exploded.

This was the way in which it happened. My friend and I had several hours to spend in a certain provincial city before a midnight train bore us toward. From the very moment we set eyes upon the Tivoli Theatre, we knew that no other place in that city could so reward us for our patronage. Here there was no chance that the fitful evasions of the mediocre would insult us. The very title of the revue, pictured upon shrieking posters—"Topsy Trotter Turns Turtle"—was a pæan of imbecility. And that no detail of its marvel should escape us, we entered the Grand Box, so commanding with several senses a panorama of stage and draughty wings.

The chorus was expatiating on the appetites of married men for a weeny bit of tootsy-wootsy in the "pile" moonlight. Such mournful and such haggard ladies, such cornflake voices. "But this," we whispered to each other idiomatically, "is the stuff!" Upon the appearance of male flesh in the box the chant was temporarily suspended until the ladies had made valuations and comments. The silk-hatted leading gentleman, who had been reprimanding the totally inefficient limelight-man, gesticulated ferociously chorus-wards from the shadows. The singing was resumed, with sudden ascents into aerial static, with sudden descents into mediumistic ventriloquisms. The dresses bawled with every unintended discordance of colour, magenta rubbing shoulders with terra cotta, shrill green with kaffir pink.

After ending upon a variety of top-notes the chorus filed regretfully away, uncovering thus a perspective of marble halls like a stevedore's paradise. The comic man entered, his nose painted hilariously scarlet, a dreadfully funny little bowler hat perched on the back of his head. . . . But his eyes—woe's me for the sorrow of his eyes. He made animadversions upon his mother-in-law, and would have no truck with bloaters. He broke occasionally into an unintended falsetto, weary as the petulant calling of the plover, until we hid our faces and wept. The silk-hatted leading gentleman, pathetic backwash from d'Orsai, Brummell, d'Aurevilly, had an altercation with the comic gentleman, who attempted a somersault to make an effective exit, but found it just beyond his powers and ambled off miserably.

Hereupon, the swell, the masher, Fitzhenry was his name, told us what a boy he was all the way from Piccadilly to the Roo de la Pay, and how duchesses swooned when he came near them. His coat sagged like purses at the shoulders, there was a hole above the heel of his left shoe. But as day deepened into the long late glories of sunset (fumbling with orange slides) and sunset waned and the moon came queenly into the hushed silences (excruciating blue light concentrating on tombstone teeth), we learned that there was no disentwining his heart from the roses on Topsy's breast, (appearance of leading lady, suitably rose-tinctured, and languishing duet making the soul sick). When the great earth-quaking sunrise came clangng up beyond Cathay—the introduction of a pagoda and two pig-tale-coiffured girls had transported us thither—the mature charms of the leading lady were revealed. No make-up could abate the antiquity of her eyes nor the involuntary twitchings of her lips. And when she danced an incompetent little dance with Fitzhenry, we looked sadly away as from an intimacy of the toilet.

So this pageant of execrable art was unrolled upon this superb and dolorous evening. And I remember how casually I turned from the stage, crowded with its gibbering mannikins and looked over the stalls and the smoky pit, to the further corner of the theatre; and how suddenly my eyes were arrested and my soul stood still; how the discord ebbed from my ears; how my eyes were bathed with cool light; how the walls around me crumbled in a wind from faery: how I was brought before Beauty face to face.

I cannot explain whether it was illusion or vision; but as I knew

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Beauty when I first gazed upon the vast inverted lily of Etna from the citadel of Castrogiovanni, and Beauty in a tense earthless moment in a fugue of Bach, and Beauty upon the lips of a Bellini Madonna in the Brera at Milan—so in that vulgar and ridiculous theatre, so magically transformed, or, more truly, so pierced and penetrated, I knew Beauty then. Had Beauty been hiding all that while, beyond that veil of which Bergson speaks, “interposed between nature and ourselves, or rather between us and our own consciousness, a veil that is opaque for the generality of men, but thin, almost transparent, for the artist and the poet?” Had we set aside “those symbols of practical utility . . . which mask reality from us?” Was reality beauty therefore? And were not the extremes of art the obverse and reverse of the same coin?

I will not be metaphysical. The actual, the physical, fact was this only: that a mirror was placed on that further wall, in which, from our vantage, the whole stage was contained as a composition of a master in its intended and consummate frame. What strange man placed it here, if he knew its wizard virtue, if it enmeshes Beauty still in that banal theatre, I cannot say. But “Look!” I whispered to my friend. “Look!” and I seized his arm. He was silent, and turning towards him, I found him gazing too upon that apocalyptic mirror.

For all there was of vulgar upon that stage and of pathetic, having passed through transmutation, was rapt into the other of perfect Art, where day is windless, night without mist; an ether removed from the confines of known dimensions, where Beauty is unconditioned by time, so that it endures more briefly than foam, more stolidly than granite. Here, when the girls of the chorus danced, it was with the rhythmic swaying of Egyptian Votresses or grasses under clear still water. But their lips were subtle, like the archaic maidens with plaited hair who smile so delicately in the small museum upon the Acropolis. The hair of the chief lady was massed with the marching gloom of Caravaggio, her movements were slow and sombre, like a tide. The futile figure of the leading man became immaculate, as a flower is in the dustless Alpine air; his lines swept with elegance and power like the bow of Paganini or the brush of Tiepolo. The wretched scenery put off its wretchedness. Not Toledo stood more stolid to all the four winds. Not Marettimo in the sea north-westward from Sicily took the air more cleanly.

Upon that tawdry stage, distant from us by all the distance of the

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actual and false world, a buffoon had capered, red-nosed, froth on the stream of men. Here, in this mirror, he attained the terrifying dignity of the Comic Spirit, his mechanic face immobile like the mask of an actor in the theatre of Dionysus, facing now the impending tiers of Athens, now the laurelled brows of the God. It was the Comic Spirit which had inspired the enormous lungs of Aristophanes and given to the cheeks of Rabelais their rotund benignance. The sun was that clown's aureole, as it had been Fielding's and Meredith's. Was it not, indeed, sublimely comical that the blood-stream of Man should be a vaster torrent than the Milky Way and the sword hung in the scabbard of Orion should be a thing frailer than a penny trumpet?

## THE COUNTY ASYLUM

By A. L.

**I**N the brightness and burgeoning  
    Of the April day  
    Only the house on the hill  
        Looms still and grey.  
From the windows vacant and dark  
    No beckoning hand  
Waves a greeting to Spring from the stark  
    Grey house on the hill.

In the blue stillness  
    Of the April night  
    Only the house on the hill  
        Is ablaze with light.  
“Is it lit for revelry?”  
    Whisper the listening trees,  
“Or aflame with devilry  
    When all is still?”

Nay, nay! Nor devilry  
    Nor revels are here.  
Hot is the house on the hill  
    And fevered with fear  
Of the nameless terrors that lurk  
    Where shadows are,  
Or leap from the creeping mirk  
    When all is still.

Oh evening star!  
    Do thou in pity shed  
    Thy still cool light  
        On eyes a-stare in dread!  
Potent o'er age-old fears  
    Is thy far quietude  
Since glowed in Eve's first tears  
    Thy ray in the night!

## THE WIDOWER

By JOHN VAN DRUTEN (Author of "YOUNG WOODLEY")

**H**E was in his office when the telephone rang and he heard Mrs. Clayton's voice. From its even, set tone, he knew what she had to tell him.

"It's all over, Richard."

"When?"

"Quarter of an hour ago. Quite suddenly. There was no time to send for you."

"How was it?"

"Perfectly peaceful. Nothing . . . not a sign."

"All right. I'll be back soon."

His voice was steady enough and so were his hands as he put back the receiver. For a moment he stared at the wall in front of him with dull, blank eyes, trying to realise what it meant, this news that he had been awaiting for four months now. But it meant nothing, nothing. His eyes softened, became human again. He called his secretary.

"I've got to go, Miss Ellis. Will you sign the letters for me? I'll try to look in to-morrow."

In the taxi on the way home he lit a cigarette and tried again to think. He couldn't. Brenda was dead. Well, he had known for four months now that she was going to die, had lived with that knowledge, watched her growing weaker and paler, drifting slowly towards that last stage of coma which had ended now in death.

He tried to survey their married life; it seemed to elude him. Eight years, happy years. Were they happy? He hardly knew any longer. Seen like this, they seemed a succession of parties and concerts and holidays, of friends crowding their flat and Brenda playing hostess in a series of lovely gowns, of brief, snatched love scenes before a dying fire after the last guest had gone, interrupted by the clock chiming three and Brenda's "I think, my dear, that bed is indicated." Interrupted love scenes; there seemed never to have been quite enough time in their married life. Angry moments, too, with Brenda being cold and offhand, carelessly sarcastic, as though the occasion were not quite worth her bothering to be really cruel, as only she knew how to be.

Oh, but it wasn't fair remembering it like this. What of the other times, the happy times, moments of sweetness almost intolerable to recall? If only he could recall them! Only now, his brain refused.

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He could hardly picture Brenda even now, hardly re-assemble her features, gazing out through the taxi window at the midday shopping crowd in Oxford Street.

They reached the studio at last. As he fitted his key in the lock he wondered how he would be greeted, if there would be tears, scenes. But Mrs. Clayton, Brenda's stepmother, was calm, her face set impersonally as it had been these last weeks that she had been watching. She took him into the sitting-room, told him the few unimportant details, the arrangements she had made. Presently she left him, going back to the room he was not yet allowed to enter. He sat quite still on the divan, fingering the unopened morning paper. Again he tried to think and failed.

He turned his mind to practical things, the funeral plans, the doctor, the lawyers. Over the telephone he occupied himself with these for half an hour; everything was simple, smoothly-oiled, impersonal. Death was prepared for completely in the world. Formal sympathy, formal arrangements; he felt nothing; he wanted to feel and couldn't. His mind went back to that day, four months ago, when they had told him, when the knowledge that he must lose her had driven everything out of his life for . . . how long? A week, perhaps, and then the world had begun to move forward again as he had grown used to the notion. He thought, too, of that day three weeks ago when the last stage had begun, when he had realised that he could never speak to her again, that her frail, silent body was being carried slowly down that dark river of death.

That day he had wept, bitterly, recklessly, calling up all the pictures of her in health and beauty, sitting at her piano, walking with him on the Italian hills, coming into the studio before dinner, late and hurried and a little flushed, her eyes lively to greet him—a picture that now refused to come to his call.

He could not weep. Brenda was a name, only a name. He said it aloud, and it brought only the vision of her standing, slim, lovely but impersonal, a hostess in his flat, like an Academy picture.

Mrs. Clayton came quietly back. She stood at the door and looked at him, her face expressionless.

"You can go in when you want to, Richard. She looks lovely," she said, and turned away to her own room.

He stood still and waited. He was going to see her, for the last time,

lying ready for the coffin and the fire. He had never seen anyone dead; he felt afraid, suddenly, of what she might look like. Lovely, Mrs. Clayton had said. Lovely? He went slowly down the little hallway, stopped a moment with his hand on the door, then quietly opened it.

The room was terribly silent. He would not look at the bed. But, slowly, his eyes moved towards it. For a moment he thought she was gone, that there was no one there, and then he saw her, slighter, fraailer than he could have imagined, but lovely, lovelier than he had ever known her. His heart seemed to melt suddenly. She was beautiful, with her dark hair braided, her face white and her lips pale, like faintly coloured marble. There was a marvellous certainty and assurance in her face. Death seemed a lovely and a wonderful thing. He had never seen her look so still, so utterly tranquil, save when listening to music. Brenda, listening to Bach, had always seemed transformed, removed to another world where there were no doubts, but understanding only.

That was how she looked now, and he envied her. Death was fulfilment, certainty, completeness. He knew that now. And he knew too, that he loved her, as he had known he loved her in brief, blessed moments, that almost burst his heart now with the pain of their remembered sweetness. That evening before their marriage when he had sat gazing at her, not daring to speak, and had suddenly buried his head in her lap, weeping; that night after "Tristan" when they had driven out into the country, dark and still in the moonlight; that foggy afternoon when he had come back, late and tired and worried, from a business trip to the North, and found her asleep before the fire, waiting his return.

And now he began to weep. She was beyond him, but she had been his and he had loved her with a longing that he had forgotten in these last months of deadening misery. And she had loved him, too. He wanted to kiss her as she lay there, and dared not. He stood still, staring at her, hot tears pushing their way out, burning his lids. His teeth bit into his lips, which were trembling now. He made a movement with his hands towards her, and then turned and went out of the room, back to the divan, and lay there crying quietly, happily almost, happy that he could cry at last.

But the day had to be lived out. There was lunch to be endured, with Mrs. Clayton facing him, grey and silent, and the long afternoon, and how many other days? And, all the while, she lay there in that

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other room, waiting; but he would not go back to her. His moment of emotion had passed with his tears; he dared not recall it. All the afternoon he sat, turning over her papers, letters, music, photographs, curiously useless and impersonal now. Mrs. Clayton kept to her room until dinner, another silent meal. He had 'phoned Bill to tell him the news and had drawn comfort from his brief: "Oh God, I'm sorry. Do you want to see me?" answering, "Yes. Come round this evening." They sat and talked, idly and with long gaps, of little, unimportant things. Bill had said all there was to say, and little enough at that, four months ago, had been at hand ever since as a companion and a friend. He sat with his pipe, now, watching Dick quietly, seeing in him the schoolboy he had known, grown now into a dark, silent man. It was late when they spoke at last of Brenda.

"Do you remember that day down at Fay's place?" Dick asked, and then broke off, because he didn't want to share the memory, even with Bill.

"What am I going to do with this place?" he asked before he could reply. "I don't want to stay here now."

"You've made no plans?"

"Hardly. She only died this morning." This was brief and angry. He did not want to be reminded of the last four months when to think of the future seemed a treachery.

Bill's mouth tightened just a little, but he said nothing. He waited for Dick to go on, as he did, with suggestions of selling everything, living at a club or an hotel. Dick made them without thought of their significance, material plans only, refusing to face what they meant of loneliness, of a blank, meaningless future. It was close on two when Bill left. Dick stood at the door and murmured, "Thanks for coming," as he saw him out. It was only when he got to his improvised bed and lay, waiting for sleep, that he felt glad of Bill, wished he had been more responsive. Of Brenda he would not think at all.

The next two days were bleak and empty. He read through the announcement in *The Times*; Brenda, wife of Richard Gilchrist; wondered how much it meant to others who would read it; took a curious pleasure in its cold, formal phrasing. Letters and cards came by the post; he read them carefully, critically, testing the phrasing of their sympathy, wondering with a sort of malicious amusement who would remember and who would forget to write. He wished he could

show them to Brenda; she would have laughed over Dinah's scrawled two lines or Justin's five literary pages.

He went down to the office, did a morning's work, came back to the studio, and faced Mrs. Clayton in a ghastly discussion of what to do with Brenda's things.

"Take all her clothes. Burn them. Do what you like with them. I don't want anything . . . anything," he said. "Will you see to it?"

"Very well, Richard. But there's her jewellery. What about that?"

Her jewellery, the jade and amber he had given her, the long crystal ear-rings—what was he to do with them now?

"Throw them away."

"Oh, Richard. I can't do that."

"Why not?"

"I can't. You know that perfectly well."

"Then keep them . . . or give them away. Why should I want them now? I can't wear ear-rings, can I? Or do you imagine I am going to marry again, and will want them for her?"

"Richard . . . please!"

Yes, he shouldn't have said that, but he had done it to hurt himself, not her. And, after all, perhaps he would marry again; there were thirty, forty more years to be lived; were they to be dragged out alone? Was it betraying Brenda to think of it? He wondered what she would be like, if she would be jealous of Brenda, or Brenda of her; if she would mind wearing Brenda's jewellery; and he laughed suddenly. Mrs. Clayton looked at him steadily and went out of the room.

The third day brought the funeral. Flowers, and again he thought how Brenda would have been amused at the senders' cards. He sat with Mrs. Clayton in the car, driving to the Crematorium, staring out of the window, watching the raised hats with a sort of personal pride in the tribute. Only in the little chapel, listening to the service, did emotion seize him suddenly again. The clergyman's voice, intoning, did its best to rob the words of meaning, but their poetry gripped him with the tragedy of despair.

He began to weep again, not luxuriously now, but terribly, shaken by a sudden sense of the beauty that he did not believe in, of the after-life that he was so sure did not exist. Why break him up, tear his heart with a fable, when his own hopelessness seemed the most com-

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forting thing? His breathing was broken into little, smothered sobs; his fingers tightened on the rail before him.

He had a sudden dreadful vision of Brenda lying in the coffin, lovely as he had last seen her, an awful imagination of the flames waiting to consume her, all her beauty, her hair and her lips and her closed eyes burning to a little pile of ashes. The coffin began to glide slowly towards the furnace doors, and he made a sudden movement as though to stop it, crying out, "No . . . No!" and felt Bill's hand tightening on his arm, to hold him back . . .

It was over. The coffin was gone, the service ended. He turned away, master of himself again, but avoiding the little group which stood shamefacedly around in the chapel, afraid to approach him. They drove back to the studio. Mrs. Clayton was crying a little, for the first time, and he resented it now that he himself was calm again.

The day dragged itself along. In the afternoon Mrs. Clayton packed her suitcase to return to her home at Brighton. He thanked her diffidently for all that she had done and they shook hands in the doorway.

"We shall always be glad to see you, Richard, any time you like to come. I suppose you'll go away for a bit. It's been a dreadful strain for you. You've stood it wonderfully."

"She thinks I didn't care for Brenda," was Richard's thought, "that I've been callous and unfeeling." Then he remembered his outburst in the chapel, and shuddered.

He saw her into the taxi and came back to the empty room. The studio was unbearable now, full of memories and emptiness; the huge mirror over the fireplace seemed waiting to reflect Brenda coming into the doorway; he switched on the lamp by the piano and remembered with a sudden pain how its light would catch the glint in her hair as she played. He was tortured now with the sense of her in this room that they had planned together. He took his hat and went into the street.

It was early evening. As he walked out into the suburbs the soft, grey twilight deepened; lights came out in the little shops; the windows of the long rows of identical houses were all discreetly curtained. The streets were almost deserted; here and there a couple whispered; a boy passed him and whistled to a dog which scampered up and ahead. His heart was filled with a deep, bursting loneliness; he

could think of nothing. The future was blank, empty beyond thought; Brenda and the past were incredibly remote. He wanted companionship, he thought; he dared not be alone any longer. Yet he must be alone for the rest of his life. But there were friends . . . friends? Bill was busy that evening; Dinah, Justin, Fay . . . no, they were party friends, they could not help him now.

He turned, walking back towards the West End. He was hungry and, passing a little restaurant, went in and ordered some food. It was empty save for two couples, intimate and absorbed. He sat waiting for his meal, staring at the grey table-cloth, fingering the menu, tearing little bits off the corner. The waiter brought the soup, but it was hot, too hot to drink, burning his mouth. He pushed it from him, spilling it, losing his temper, swearing suddenly. He got up quickly, left a ten-shilling note on the table, and went out into the street again.

It was dark now; there were loafers idling and restless, hungry-looking crowds in the streets. He jostled against them angrily, turned off again into the quiet of Soho, dark, lonely, sinister, with loiterers in doorways. He wanted now to weep, but not alone, to weep in someone's arms, to yield up all his strength, to find some human comfort somewhere, someone to hold him, stroke his hair.

He walked on, tired to exhaustion, his lips twitching. He wondered vaguely if he were going to faint and who would find him. A woman was standing before the window of a shop, lighted and displaying cheap and tawdry evening dresses. She fell into step with him.

"Hullo, boy," she said, "You're looking lonely."

He stopped and stared at her for a moment. She was young and rather pretty.

"Why not come along with me?" she asked.

He continued to stare at her, though without seeing her. A wave of cheap perfume swept over him, drowning him in a sense of intimacy. He put his hand to his throat and nodded.

"Yes," he said, "let's get a taxi. I'm tired."

## DOWN THE NILE

By I. NEWMARK

**Y**OU often hear the expression "down the Nile" when walking through Hoxton. Nile Street is a well-known quarter—notorious in days of old, but to-day a busy market street full of Cockneys. It contains all the queer types and characters that are the product of London's slumdom. There are women wearing men's caps with a bearing more jaunty and aggressive than a mere male's. They invariably speak with hoarse voices as if the powers of their vocal chords had reached the limits of endurance.

You hear the choicest of Cockney accents, which to one, not accustomed to its flow, would require much elucidation of its import. The people living round Nile Street seem inseparable from the neighbourhood. They would look incongruous were they all removed and planted suddenly at Notting Hill or Surbiton. They have stamped their character on their surroundings, but the place itself has had a far greater effect on them.

It is a remarkable tribute to human nature to find so many patient, courageous people living in this soul-destroying atmosphere. Nile Street has a depressing appearance but its inhabitants are of a cheery, kindly sort. You cannot make them down-hearted with dirty bricks and mortar. True, one end of the street is taken up by big business premises, lending a rather dignified, formal air to the immediate vicinity. Closely abutting on them are the shops, and the tenements crowd between the public-house and the pork-butcher's, and all the other little shops present their motley appearance down both sides of the street.

These tiny stores are supposed to specialise in one branch of goods, but as sidelines they stock most other household wares. Thus the grocer sells pails and wash-basins as "extras" and the oilshop across the way has quite a big stock of cheese and tinned goods. The sweet shop sells soap and the florist sells artificial flowers. It has even been observed that women have been drinking tea in the public-house. In most shop-windows a placard "Relief Tickets Taken" is prominently displayed. The little general stores jostle each other and appear to make the choice of the would-be-purchaser a difficult one. Perhaps some of the regular customers of one store find it convenient to shop elsewhere for a while until the expected remittance arrives.

The uses of the small shop are many—it encourages friendly

relations between the shopkeeper and the buyer—it will oblige by selling minute quantities of certain necessaries, and also it does not insist in every case on immediate cash payment. The larger shops up the street, branches of the Big Providers, may sell just as cheaply, and even cheaper in some instances, but they cannot hope to obtain the affection and cordiality of the customer. The butchers must be the best liked or the best hated dealers in the Nile. They provide an overloaded counter of all sorts of dead animals and arrange the portion of carcases in the most tempting fashion. It's "Buy our lovely meat" and "all the best to-day" and "we've got the goods," making a bewildering but wholehearted appeal to the harassed housewife. There is one red, shock-haired youth who with cheerful but penetrating voice manages to attract the attention of passers-by. They look at the viands spread before them, give a closer scrutiny to the price marked on the ticket and falter hesitantly. They may be making a quick mental calculation of a certain "cut," but the young man with a reassuring smile leads them gently to the desired object, and closes a deal.

The shoppers are mostly women, and they hold tightly clutched in one hand the purse containing the family exchequer. They guard the sacred treasure with open-eyed vigilance, as if the fortunes of an Empire depended upon its safe keeping. How they will dole out the unwilling money to the greedy and avaricious shopkeeper! For all his bland favours and smirking courtesies he is the direct receiver of the meagre weekly allowance. However, he cannot be blamed entirely for the way of things. Also he is a neighbour, and one becomes familiar and tolerant with neighbours.

The fruit stall keepers do not appear in such an ill light as the grocers or the butchers. They have all their stock arranged in neat partitions on the barrows. The fruit is cheap enough and there is almost a complete uniformity in prices along the line of stalls. The house-keeper must be cheered by the sight of all this pleasant looking and inexpensive produce from orchards far and near. Money spent on fruit must be given with a better face than money spent on candles or soap. It is a touch with Nature to buy her gifts. The fruit barrows occupy a prominent enough position "down the Nile." Starting right from the top of the street as it joins the East Road with its clattering trams, they stretch till where there is a narrowing of the roadway. Overloaded stalls bearing all the season-

able fruit stand together with poor looking barrows selling off cheap lines. Some of the better appointed stands are supported by shining brass poles. These outshine their near rivals. During the busy dinner hour there is a constant succession of customers buying the fruit. Here are factory girls, attracted by cheap pears at twopence a pound. In turn they bashfully ask for a "penn'orth please." The girls stroll away, one hand protecting their hair from the wind, and the other containing the bag of pears. They giggle as they pass the boys at the corner of the street, and shrilly return flying compliments.

Nearly every street corner contains youths lounging against shop-windows, doorposts, walls—anything capable of support. Wearing caps and "chokers" they keep their hands thrust deeply into trousers pockets, bawling out at one another, or scrutinise the passing crowd. It is when a newspaper seller comes rushing along, and yelling out "twelve o'clock" or "Star" that they become animated and are fired with a new interest. They scan the news-sheet when it is bought, and discuss the latest news with much zest and vigorous comments. Then there is another relapse till the next edition of the paper appears, and no prophet has yet arrived who can tell which way the wind will blow.

Nile Street in days gone by, as the oldest inhabitant will tell you, also had its loungers, but they were more vicious than the modern ones. They made the Nile a place of notoriety, where thieves' dens abounded, and policemen hunted in couples. To-day things are not so bad, but the dirty atmosphere does not seem conducive to the growth of a mannerly, refined, class of individuals. The by-streets contain the most tumbledown and ramshackle houses that ever disgraced the living quarters of human beings. There are long lines of two-storey, poverty-stricken dwelling places. Some are relieved from utter drabness by little flower boxes or pots placed on the window-sill. In many of the windows of the houses appear dirty curtains, making the outside appearance look an unbroken area of gloom. The doors and window sills have lost their last coat of paint, and the bricks of the walls show the ravages of Time. There are many such streets leading out into the Nile. They bring their huddled overcrowded flock of humanity converging into its teeming thoroughfare. It is as if they were seeking avenues of escape, or a relief from the congestion of a stuffy, stifling existence.

The children seem the greatest problem round the Nile. You see

them by the score, playing on doorsteps and out on the pavements and open street. The streets appear full of them, blocking the ways of grown-ups and giving nightmares to conscientious drivers. They are mostly unwashed, with scraggy torn clothing and threadbare boots. But what they lack in apparel they make up for in vigour and boisterousness, and the boys seem always fighting each other. When they tire of this, they torment the girls, and run away with their toys, or bombard them with their peashooters. Sometimes a shrill mother gives a boy a whack on the ear and the air is full of howling and triumphant yells from the youngster's opponents. The babies are sprawled out on the pavements, or lie in the laps of mothers or young sisters. The latter sometimes wheel their charges away in precarious looking prams, and place the burden against a wall while they begin to play a game of "rounders."

During holiday times there are children everywhere. They are sent out of the house to play wherever they can find room. They use places like the doorway of a big factory or a little used alley way, or a flight of stairs leading to an office entrance. There the girls dress their dolls, or play "schools" with one another. Throughout the day there is a continuous yelling and hallooing from the noisier boys. They use their lungs lustily and pierce the air with their shrill clamour. It is no use denying that they do not make their presence felt.

Nile Street is full of noises, besides those of shrieking boys. There are the newspaper sellers who cry through the streets from early morning till dusk. It is a fuller, stronger, more metallic and throated utterance than the more acute tones of the youngsters. They keep up their monotonous thick falsetto, overwhelming all other noises in the neighbourhood. Then there is the cry of the hawkers disposing of their various wares. Just before dinner-time begins itinerant street musicians take up their stand outside the big factories. The solo cornet player gives vent to soulful, sentimental melodies, hoping to pierce the hearts of susceptible factory girls. Then on occasions the jazz-band takes up its position and fills the air with rattling, thumping, strident noises.

Another outstanding set of noises is the shrill piercing yells of irate mothers calling to their offspring. The notes are designed to pierce every nook and cranny in the Nile and must cost the performers much nervous strain. It is often that while one's notice is attracted

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by a certain din, one also cannot help being aware of one or more outstanding odours. Pride of place must be given to the butchers' shops, which for certain reasons show a partiality for disposing of strong smelling meat. That smell catches one by the throat, and woe betide the person who is not capable of stomaching these pungent odours. Then the fried-fish shop with its greasy smell being exhaled together with the hissing vapour. It seems to permeate the atmosphere for quite a distance, doubtless whetting the appetites of many a fish and chip lover.

The brewery is not far away, and from there comes wafted the rich, thickly smelling odour of malted hops. It does not overpower one, but acts as a gentle suggestion of far away pleasures yet to be tasted. The sweet factory, however, is never consistent with its odours. One day there may be a fine flavour of candy on the breeze. Another day the attractive marzipan may be sent abroad. Often too, there is a sickly, sugary smell, as if that day was the day for making inferior sweetmeats. Sometimes the odours are mingled, suggesting that the orders for assorted goods are being carried through.

Like its more famous namesake, the Nile bears through its busy thoroughfare all types and conditions of humanity. One class obviously predominates, that which receives the least reward for its services to Society. But Life goes on, and the poor manage to live and despite all reasons to the contrary, reproduce themselves in large numbers. Making ends meet is their standing problem, and were that problem gradually to disappear, it is probable that the character of Nile Street would fundamentally change.

The poverty stricken aspect of the dilapidated dwelling places, the jostling small general stores, the tatters of the children, would all vanish. Perhaps many items of interest that make up the character of the street would be submerged in the vortex of change. One cannot regret the passing of such spots of darkness in a great city, and not be moved by its degrading effect on the people living in its midst.

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Our contributor is a member of the Bermondsey Bookshop. His article we think, displays keen powers of observation and a lively sense of the humanities.

## “WHERE I DID BEGIN . . .”

By HARCOURT WILLIAMS

**T**HAT winter evening I alighted from the motor coach as twilight was falling on the old town of T—.

It was just before Christmas. The soft changing lights, the country smells, the air after the mirk of London, all tempted me to walk the three miles or so that divided me from my cottage.

As my even tread took me along the dim deserted road my mood of rush and hurry fell away from me. My life in London assumed its true perspective. It resembled a noisy gale of wind, and here was the lull that follows after; the aftermath that creates another world bringing peace and swift forgetfulness.

Two miles out a long hill descends towards the Roman marsh over which a sea-like mist was floating and above the stars. A Londoner sees no stars. How multitudinous they seemed that night. Brilliant, scintillating fire. I felt that I must cry with Leontes “Stars, Stars! And all eyes else dead coals!”

On descending the hill I entered the mist. Common things became distorted. Queer shapes seemed to flit across my path. Haystacks loomed up like giant buildings as I approached; monstrous trees fled fantastically as I passed. How very silent the country seems on a December night. Even my footsteps made no noise as my rubber soles struck the road. I might have been suspended in some void. Suddenly my steps were arrested. Someone had coughed feebly in the shadow of the hedge a little in front on my right.

“Who’s there?” I called, startled from my reverie.

No answer came. My cold fingers fumbled for a match. Not finding one I groped towards the spot from whence I judged the sound had come. My hands encountered a body which as I touched it emitted a groan. It proved to be a man, a tramp, as far as I could tell, for his clothes reeked of unwashed sweat. Although the man was approaching a state of collapse I managed to raise him to his feet and we proceeded together down the hill. Fortunately my cottage was not far away. I left him by the gate while I got the door open—for the building was uninhabited in my absence—and then helped him inside. There is something rather eerie about entering at night an empty cottage, whose beams are black with antiquity: As if there were a rush of past deeds—of memories, surprised by the abrupt noisy opening of the door.

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I soon had a blazing fire and close by made a rough bed of cushions which we keep for garden use in summertime. It was only when the man's face came into the full light of the lamp that I recognised him. It was Williker. His grandparents had been well-to-do farmers in the district in the days when farming was really profitable. His father had been less prosperous and most of the cottagers in the small hamlet were relations and of the same name, but they had little interest in their ne'er-do-well cousin, who had long forfeited their respect by his nomadic tendencies. Indeed that very "respect" made it impossible for them to begin to understand the strange wayward being that throbbed through life in a cage that only one key could have opened.

Before the war Williker had lived up on the hill in a rough hut, that had nothing in its favour as a human dwelling except a view of breath-taking beauty. He went to the war a bronzed well-set-up young man with fear hidden in his heart, for his nature was one that pothouse boys delight to terrify. He came back, still bronzed and well set up, but middle aged and with a smashed hand. Having no head for business he was easily persuaded to commute his pension. Probably in the fine new suit in which they had demobilised him he felt that the world was at his feet, and in triumph he bought a bicycle and a cornet. He could play the cornet quite well and loved "a music" as they call it here. Many a night distant strains of melody floated across the moonlit marsh from the lonely hut. But the money was soon gone and from that moment things began to go from bad to worse. His hand made him an indifferent labourer and folk soon forgetting the pumped-up sentimental obligations to Service men, employed younger and sounder hands. His clothes became more and more disreputable, and he suffered with his feet. He began not exactly to beg, but to cadge food, which exasperated the propriety of his relations, distant in two senses, and at last he vanished from the neighbourhood. Now here he was before my fire.

As soon as possible I got a hot drink down him and covered him with blankets for he was blue with cold, then I bribed a messenger with an "allowance" to ride in the necessary three miles to fetch a doctor.

One of Williker's feet was booted, the other bound with old rags. He looked at me with his soft sensitive eyes. His face always a little weak was rendered more sharp by hunger, but it was a noble face, almost Greek in its line. Maybe there had been Gipsy blood at some

time. That would account for much. I do not think that he recognised me. Presently he began to ramble in the speech, then it became articulate. I was sitting waiting for the doctor when I felt his eyes upon me.

"The Empress Eugene lived in a house at Chislehurst." His voice rang out clear and shrill. "That house should have comed to us by rights when her died. There was some dispute about de will—the parson said from de pulpit—said from de pulpit. . . ." His utterance faltered and stopped.

Suddenly it began again. "I met her onst, over at Appledore cross roads—by de schoolhouse there—driving in her chaise she were, with outriders an' all. I had to stand back in de dirty grip so as not to get run'd over. I saw her plain enough, but she never looked at me . . . a cater cousin of mine or some sort she were."

Soon after that the doctor arrived; an old man with a trick of smiling with clenched teeth. The result might almost be described as a grimace. He overhauled Williker with skilled expedition until he came to the wrapped foot. "We had better have a look at this." And he began to unwind the sodden dirty rags. It was an unsavoury business but he performed the operation as though handling the dressings of a slick hospital ward. At one point Williker winced.

"That's a fine pair of gaiters you've got there my friend," flashed the doctor as quick as thought.

"Yes," responded Williker, his eyes now shining. "There's a queer yarn about them. The Prince o' Wales gived 'em to a member o' parley-ment with special orders as how he was to pass 'em on to me when he had done with 'em. You can see they were made for a dook."

Now the fact was that *I* had given the old gaiters to Williker some two years ago and they were now very much the worse for wear. He seemed unconscious that I knew anything about the matter. The doctor flung one of his odd grins in my direction as he finished unwrapping the foot, then I heard his tongue click against the roof of his mouth. Williker was lying back on the cushions exhausted. "It's de foot and mouth disease, no bounds," he murmured. "I do believe I've caught it from them ailing sheep, working in they fields along o' them."

"Where does he hail from?" asked the doctor.

Williker answered the question himself. "I was born in the room above this 'ere."

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"Is that true?" queried the old man turning to me.

I nodded. "This cottage was divided into three in those days and Williker's parents occupied this end."

"His life is run his compass," muttered the doctor as he covered the naked foot with a blanket, then holding his hands towards me, "May I wash?" I took him to my bedroom.

"Well, what can we do?" I asked.

The methodical hands, no longer young but still sensitive, passed swiftly over each other as he answered. "Keep him warm and give him anything that he wants." And then after a pause he added, "It won't be long."

"Do you mean he's dying?"

"Yes. Is it very . . . ?"

I stopped him. "Oh no, not that. I'm very glad I found him. But such a thought had not entered my head. Poor chap."

"With that foot and his damaged hand what chance has he now?" The doctor did not wait for my reply, but laying aside the towel descended the dark twisting old stairs.

"Sorry I can't stay," he whispered over his shoulder, "A maternity case you understand. Can I send anyone?"

"Well if you would not mind telling Mrs. Ritchie at the Post Office . . ." I suggested. "I don't like leaving him to go myself."

"Quite, quite." He bent over Williker for an instant. "Comfortable, old chap? That's right. I expect the warmth will make you sleep. Good-night." And suddenly the clean hand gripped the ragged shoulder. As he passed me at the door he shot into my ear, "There'll be no pain—at least—" but the self-starter drowned the rest and the car was swallowed in the mist.

Shortly after Mrs. Ritchie looked in and her calm practical nature guessed what was to be done almost without telling. She made Williker some warm milk and persuaded him to sip a little, and she insisted on my eating, though I never felt less inclined. We talked in undertones by the shaded lamp while our patient dosed by the fire.

"Did you know him when he was young?" I asked.

"Yes, I did. As a young man he wasn't a bit like you've known him; quite respectable he were."

I knew my Ritchie well enough to understand what she meant by respectability. She was no lover of the Scribes and Pharisees.

"Quite one of the smart ones was Williker," she added.

"What made him take to this——" and as I spoke I changed 'nomadic' to 'wandering' "life?"

Ritchie looked at me a minute. "I really can't say." And then I knew that she could but would not.

The voice of Williker broke in on us. He was wandering again.

"Bertha will die an old bachelor and I be still a virgin . . . There be a gun called Bertha. . . . Bloody hell, how them things do shriek . . . they terrify me. Poor old 'Erb . . . his guts hanging on a blarsted bit of barbed wire. Christ how sick I be. Oh . . ." and then, when the fit of nausea had left him, he said with the plaintiveness of a sick child, "I'd liefer be thistle pecking down the marsh."

Seemingly Ritchie felt that her silence was no longer an obligation. "Bertha Cruttenden was the school marm here twenty years ago and Williker went courting she. He's muddlin' him and 'er proper."

Then Williker's voice began again, "I were too fond of larking with the fellars up at the public of an evening, so she said." The sick mind had gone back to the past. "She wanted me to go to church, but I wouldn't do that . . . 'cause of the will being read from the pulpit . . . and losing the property and that . . . there be royal blood somewhere . . . blood . . . blood. She gived me a brand new billycock hat to go to church in, she did. She was a dainty bit of a girl albeit she was smart enough to teach the young 'uns. We had lovely times in the big wood on Kench Hill when the blackthorn were in bloom."

Ritchie had tears in her eyes. "Oh, it were a pitiful business. He were *devoted* to that woman."

"And she to him?" I asked.

"Yes, but in a different way seemingly. Some folk want to bend love to 'em instead of taking it wholehearted like."

"Who kisses a joy as it flies," I murmured.

"Yes," responded Ritchie with a gleam. "That's it." And then a raucous laugh interrupted us.

"They got me fair tight that evening . . . no not tight, just merry-like. Taff wagered me that I wouldn't walk down the village with three hats on my head. So of course I did, you bet. First I put on Taff's soft hat, Trilby hats they called 'em then, on top of that I set old Ned's straw, and right on the tippy-top I balances the new billicock . . . and down the street I goes . . . with the chaps all shouting with

laughter and grabbing on to their breeches in case of accidents . . . and there she be . . . sitting at her open door as she sometimes did of a summer evening . . . oh my girl, my girl . . . it were only a bit of foolishness. You bain't going to wreck our lives for the sake of a mad prank? Don't 'ee do it, for God's love dont 'ee do it. . . ." Ritchie knelt and held Williker's hands, for the laughter had become a sobbing that shook the emaciated body and yet lacked the relief of tears. After the paroxysm had passed he dozed.

"Is she still alive?" I asked.

"Miss Cruttenden?" Oh yes. She lives in London."

"And she never forgave him?"

"No, never. And his life was ruined, and hers too, in a manner of speaking. She went on with the schooling until her rheumatics got too bad. She just withered and got old, and liked gossip and such like little things."

"May be," I suggested, "she would have liked to make friends again, but didn't know how to set about it. Often it's difficult to say the right word just at the moment that it should be said."

"Yes. It so soon be too late."

Ritchie got up to put her things on. "I must be getting down home now. Do you mind being left?"

I assured her that I did not, which I think was true, but as I held the lamp so that she could see the uneven path to the little white gate I rather wished that she was not going. I had never actually met death before—not so closely. I made up the fire and turned down the lamp. Williker was breathing heavily. Sitting down again I fell to contemplating the stalwart beams that spanned the room, as I had done before in many an idle moment. Somehow to-night those familiar beams took on a new significance. They had supported the bed in which Williker's mother had laboured in his birth and here he was lying beneath them breathing his last. Those beams were in position when Shakespeare went home to die at Stratford; they were there when Holbein drew the Dance of Death. If ever any place was fraught with atmosphere that could reveal a ghost this old timber building was one, and as the still night crept on to the wheezing accompaniment of my grandfather clock I felt that something must surely happen—that I should see something. What I expected I cannot say. What I desired I do not know, unless it was some kind of spiritual compensation for Williker's

broken empty life. Probably if the truth were known he and Bertha Cruttenden were not in the least suited to each other—perhaps the pitiful incident of the bowler hat was merely an excuse to break an attachment that had no foundation in their natures. And yet I knew that it was this denial of love that had wrought the havoc, cheating their lives of a deep significance. . . . My reflections were interrupted. There was a sound on the stairs. A creaking tread. The staircase was hidden from the room we were in by a door. The door was shut. I listened breathlessly. Williker stirred uneasily. Silence again reigned. With an effort I made myself go and open the door. I could see nothing. Then Williker spoke. "Would you like to see the Bandsman's Journal?"

He had often offered me this compilation of brass band news in former days and I had pretended to be enthralled by its contents. Now he had no paper in his hands, although he thought he had. "Shall I play?" I asked, and acting on the suggestion struck some chords on the piano. I could see his face in the flickering firelight. Under the influence of the music it became animated—illuminated rather. I had frequently noticed how he changed when talking of music. He became fired with understanding, inspiration. Silence fell again when I had finished. Then suddenly something in his eyes made me go to him. I held his shoulders tightly, and took his hand in mine. The convulsive movement subsided. Quite simply he asked, "Could you spare me a drop of hot water to wet my tea?" just as I had heard him say it a dozen times at our garden door, holding out a black old canakin with a great dollop of tea at the bottom.

He lay back in my arms and I closed his tired eyes.

The tension of nervous feeling, apprehension, even fear, gave way to peace. Beauty surrounded me like a warm tropical air. A gentle healing balm soothed my overwrought mind. I had been expecting a miracle—half desiring, half dreading some mystical apparition, and here before me all the time was an enactment of eternal interest and significance. One that heightens for us the true values of life and makes us weigh our petulant, froward moods, our self aggrandizement, in the scales of Eternity.

FROM THE NOTEBOOK OF AN  
UNSUCCESSFUL REALIST

By ANTHONY J. GUDAITIS

I HAVE to laugh grimly. I am crazy enough to call myself a realist. As if the relation of that name to myself as a writer means anything to anyone. I am totally unknown. I am not dictated by the popular desires or whims of other people, although I may write of them. I belong to no particular sect or school of writers that I am conscious of. I am brazen enough to label myself as one outside the pale—an outsider, a literary exile, that's what I think I am. But I genuinely like this idea of being unknown, of being a trifle independent, of being able to enjoy the complete freedom of the artist; to be answerable or responsible to no one; to be true to my own views and virtues and vices; and my problem is to find time to write and manage to earn a living at the same time. When the mood moves me I write, and that is frequently. Sometimes it is a poem, sometimes it is a story, and sometimes a jumble of words, unholy words, that I attempt to predict as the outgrowth of a new art. Once in a while I sell something.

A realist? Mentally I look myself over again in as dispassionate a manner as I can. I find myself living in two worlds, a world of imagination and a world of reality. I try to be a faithful, realistic interpreter of both of these worlds—blending or unblending them as I am tempted. It may be that I casually create a man or woman wholly from life. Another time I will only take a little from life and allow my imagination to fertilize the rest. What is the difference? Is one less true than the other? What is mere fancy could have been, what really is is often improbable and in passing becomes a dream.

The prostitute who walks the streets, offering pleasure to indiscriminate men, can feel that she is something tangible in the machine of existence that has a distinct relation to people and animals and things. I am much more to be pitied than the prostitute because I lack practicalness; I detest it. I am a supersensitive soul struggling now with dreams, now with realities. Many times I have only a vague connection with the world of reality and physical contacts. I seem to be sunken into a beautiful, horrible abyss that is unlike anything I could describe. I am a conglomeration which the wind carries here and there and will finally reduce to nothing.

I go to New York and Chicago in reality and visit Africa and Asia in my dreams. I converse with real men and with other men I have

## THE BERMONDSEY BOOK

never known. I tell them of my conflicts of passion, my longings and despairings. I have intercourse with a thousand women I have never met; and they are scared at the thought of bearing illegitimate children. I am a needle in a haystack. Someday I shall not be found.

I pretend that I am in love with all humanity, yet I never quite achieve my pretence. I street-walk all day long and all night. I stop in an Italian Quarter where a gale is going on. I loiter watching the movements of dancers and hear the crazy music and the non-ceasing gable of voices. What rich wine is poured down eager mouths, what wet kisses find loving lips. I am jealous of them. I do not love them.

I write in a drab room surrounded by many books. Once I used to collect books in a maniacal way: first editions, limited presses, old books, erotic books, books odd and rare. I have a pleasant supply of sensuous books to divert me. One night I dreamed that in twenty-four hours I had written a whole bibliotheca of books.

Thoughts and realities leave me as quickly as they come. Now and then I jot them down. Many more escape me entirely. I don't regard myself as a genius, but what a peculiar delight I receive in suffering! Men, much of my type, conceive of only a hell on earth and henceforth believe in no other hells.

The preacher, lisping out a carefully prepared sermon, eyes me curiously, appears to sympathize with me, but in what an alien aloof manner. He sees me an ignoramus and I see in him almost as much.

How much more satisfied I would be if I could perform something lastingly adequate to man's needs, if I could only contribute something useful and nourishing as sunshine and rain. I want to become more than a dabbler who wrestles between dreams and realities.

## II

It is Friday night in the town where I was born. The mass of people are hurrying from work much the same as they did when I was a boy. Even most of their faces seem unchanged. Where before were crude stone paths and dusty roads are now paved sidewalks and asphalt roadways. This and that fact that there are newer and more stores and lights are brighter are the only changes. The atmosphere of the town remains the same.

As I continue through the places of my old haunts I grow tired and

FROM THE NOTEBOOK OF AN UNSUCCESSFUL REALIST

weary. I don't understand that for I am still young and the sites where I spent younger, sunshiny days ought to give me an added zest. I become sad and a little dubious over certain precepts. Out in the outskirts of the town where the woods begin and a sturdy bridge crosses a little rivulet, I pause to think.

Frenzied, I drop my mask of calmness, giving my mind full reign to recall and ponder over past events. Forgotten things, buried episodes suddenly glare out, revive themselves articulately.

I am a young boy again. I am a dreamy-eyed lad whose parents came from Russia to New England to make money. New England brings up brawny, practical boys, and cultivates in most of them a love for nature. I was no exception. With the other boys I went to a large brick school where I obtained the fundamentals of education. Whenever I now see the word education I always associate it with a picture of this red brick building. There were days, however, when there was no school. Summer days, vacation days. More than a few of them I spent alone in the woods under a pine tree, softly settled among its nettles, conjuring fairy tales—it was Utopia to me.

In the town our house was near the cemetery. The lady who boarded with us ever since I could remember was a consumptive. Despite her approaching end, she fell voluptuously in love and tasted of sexual experience a number of times—before she died and was buried in the cemetery at the back of our house. On stormy winter nights I used to be scared that her ghost would be blown our way and enter the house for refuge. One night, sleeping with my father, I beheld a nude white figure parading about our bedroom. I rubbed my eyes, pinched myself, and ducked my head under the coverlet a few times to make sure I was not dreaming. No, I was not. The nude white figure was there and it was real. Exceedingly frightened, much too frightened to rouse my father, pretending sleep I fell asleep. On the morrow and many morrows after that, I believed it was God that had appeared to me.

What winters we experienced in New England! How cold it was. My father and mother worked in the factory. I had to prepare my own simple meals. I am vividly reminded of the first bit of money I made one season selling papers. It was not very easy work when the streets were slushy and slippery and cold. Up and down the streets I darted and charged, yelling the headlines of the latest murder and making

at least twenty cents a night. Winter nights, the paper-peddling being done, I used to sit near the stove, droning songs from an old book, to music of my own invention.

There was a teacher I had known sometime before whom I fell in love with. At times, when I had done my lessons unusually well, she would put her arm around me and caress my hair. Once in a while she would keep me after school alone, and then she would kiss me. I was thrilled. I wove countless romances around her, amorous situations of a nature too ludicrous to ever arise. When she bent down for anything, all the boys used to gape and stretch their necks to catch a glimpse of her pretty breasts. I gaped and stretched my neck, too, but I thought I was more privileged than the rest. I loved her and the rest did. She was my first love, I believe.

From my place at the bridge I retrace my footsteps to the town. I know I have tried to live over my extreme youth, trying to catch something of its wonder that I lost. How many wonderful things I have lost. I make more than twenty cents a day now than when I peddled papers. I am no longer enamoured of the fair schoolmistress of long ago. She is probably old by now. Even if she were young and still possessed her charm, even then I would be apt to refuse her if she offered herself to me.

### III

There are days when I cry for leisure and never get enough of it. When leisure comes, often I find I cannot write at all. On such days I hide the impulse to cry and laugh. On top of a hill I waste an afternoon. Far below, beside the brook, a bunch of rowdies with their girls are having a garrulous picnic. I am in a screened place and although they cannot very well see me I can see them plainly. They drink and sing bawdy songs.

I leave the beautiful hill that is lit by sunshine. I leave the tipsy revellers with something definite in my mind. Hours later I am alone with a woman in a darkened room. Women are easy to pick up. No, I do not mean that, for more often now women do the picking up. It is the men who are easy. I know a little more about love than I did before, and I am not repulsive towards femininity in general. The woman with me is of medium height. She is a little plump, with that plumpness that fascinates and incites. It is not necessary to give a further description of her.

## A LIBRARIAN'S POSERS

By ROBERT PARTRIDGE

“**O**N what side of his face did Cromwell have a wart?” was a question recently put to a librarian. After a brief search a portrait of Cromwell was produced and the true position of the wart located. The question was not in the least trivial, for it culminated in the discovery of a very valuable and unique death-mask of Cromwell, which was found in an old “curio” shop.

“What is the analysis of the River Jordan’s water?” was another puzzler. At first the librarian was perplexed and suggested that the best thing to do would be to send for a sample. To his surprise this had already been done, but the supply sent had been so small that a correct scientific analysis was not possible. For some time the librarian delved into the most obscure kind of books, and at last, in a musty, dilapidated Government Report, he found an authoritative, scientific analysis. A big order by a shipping firm, amounting to thousands of pounds, was the result.

Librarians are extremely helpful people. Further, they are equal to all emergencies.

Not long ago a youth entered a public library and said; “Please, Sir, have you a book on ‘How to manage Triplets.’ Our manager’s wife says she can handle twins, but triplets have got her beat completely.” The librarian, quite unperturbed, promptly produced a “Mother’s Manual”, which no doubt eased the poor woman’s anxiety.

“Have you a sky-blue book?” was the request of a flapper the other day. After a few tactful questions the confession was drawn from her that she wanted a novel with a light-blue cover to it in order to match her new frock.

“Please, sir, I’ve run, now may I read?” a little boy asked, appearing suddenly at a library counter, his face flushed and perspiring, his hair ruffled, and his collar askew. It took the librarian several seconds to realise that the youthful aspirant to learning had seen the publicity poster outside the building, bearing the slogan: “He who runs may read.”

“Is the stuck-up mister in?” demanded a burly borrower in a gruff voice. The assistant, foreseeing trouble, called the librarian. But both officials were much relieved when it transpired that all he wanted was Crockett’s “Stickit Minister.”

Many librarians have been asked for Dante’s “Infernal Comedy,” and not a few have been startled by such requests as “Kiss Auntie”

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(Antony Hope's "Quisante"); "The Ruby Yacht" (Omar's "Rubaiyat"); "The Essays of a Liar" ("Essays of Elia"); or the "Dunce's Hat" (Pope's "Dunciad").

A little boy who collected butterflies and moths was searching in a public library catalogue for a book dealing with his hobby. At length he boldly approached the learned librarian and asked for Dr. Bull's famous text-book "Advice to Young Mothers."

Far from being monotonous the librarian's life is filled with varied experiences. Bank-managers, dustmen, office-boys, policemen, butchers, postmen, artists, professors and costermongers, all flock to him for advice and information; like the London taxi-driver he has an answer for everyone. At all times he is a father-confessor, teacher, director of studies, crossword-puzzle expert, business and legal adviser, a true guide, philosopher and friend.

Throughout each day he is besieged by telephone calls, letters and postcards, all of them requiring information. Here is a small list of queries, taken almost at random:—

To what extent was advertising employed in Greece and Rome?

How much leprosy is there in India?

How is watercress best cultivated, and what are its food values?

What are economic conditions like in Tanganyika?

What is the date of the Trafalgar Square Riots?

Please give me some names of teachers of the Leschetizky piano-forte method.

Where is Brumanor mentioned in Flecker's poems?

Who are the manufacturers of Phit-Eesi boots?

Where was Ruskin's father buried?

Like Datas, the true librarian is a veritable living storehouse of facts. The questions asked him range over every aspect of life and time. At one moment he may be discussing microbes with a scientist, the next he is requested for the name of the last Derby winner, the price of coal in Finland, the atomic weight of helium, or the name of the author of "Eothen."

Like a flashing comet, the true librarian consumes himself in giving light to others; but he loves it. He would not change his job for a handful of sparkling diamonds.

[This lively contribution is by a young member of the Bermondsey Bookshop.]

## DEATH AND ROBINSON

By K. G. BUDD

**I**N the dark street of a town where the houses are as like one another as a row of printed "e's", lived a man who walked in the shadow of a fear.

The neighbours would have told you that there was nothing that was noticeably strange about James Robinson. In outward appearances he was as other men. He had a devoted wife with a partiality for local gossip, a steady, if not prosperous, position in a manufacturing firm, ordinary clothes, and ordinary manners. But since the only thing in this world that can be truly hidden is a troubled heart, Robinson concealed his fear and even his few associates had not a glimpse into the inner workings of his mind.

One night, when he was twelve years of age, this Robinson had sat up in his bed in the darkness with the perspiration growing cold on his forehead and terror in his heart. He had been seized with the idea that he was soon to die. He sat there staring into the shadows and his imagination worked so rapidly on the thought of his own decease that he could picture with vividness his mother weeping at his bedside, the small coffin, the dumbness of his schoolfellows when the teacher broke the news that poor Jim Robinson had passed away. Presently, because the perspiration was chill upon him and because also the cheerful voices of his parents downstairs were somewhat reassuring, he lay down and fell asleep; but from that night Death came at irregular intervals to peer into his mind.

The shadow did not trouble him during his later school years, but it fell across his path on many occasions during the Great War of 1914—18. Amid the crash and horror of bursting shells, the white faces of the men crouching near him and seeking desperately to be unafraid, he was entirely without fear. It was only in the lulls between the fighting that he had time to reflect on the awfulness of sudden extinction. He meditated on the degree of pain that was caused by a bullet that hit one in a vital spot, on the sensation of dying slowly in a foreign land and being conscious of the fact that life, with all its pleasing mixture of sorrow and joy, was being relentlessly taken away for ever. The sight of a dead body filled him, not with pity or grief or repentance, but with dark fear in face of the one fact of life that no philosophy could make acceptable.

His comrades never guessed for one moment his innermost fears.

He was light-hearted enough in all the common toil and endeavour, and being a sensitive man, he was fortunate to be spared the humiliation of being pitied by his fellows if they had seen into the dark caverns of his mind.

At the end of the war, having survived the conflict with no more injury than a slightly damaged arm, Robinson returned to the round of civilian life still subject to moments of intense preoccupation concerning the End. Sometimes in the stillness of the night hours he would be seized with a sudden panic, and the vision of his childhood, with himself as now a mature cōrpse mildly lamented by the curious neighbours, would return to him.

As the years passed on, his anxiety to know the manner and time of his passing increased, until each day became a leaf torn from that brief calendar of existence which always confronted him. He never mentioned to his wife the shadow that was in his heart. He knew that he would look a fool in her eyes, even if she did not regard him as suddenly mentally unbalanced, for he realised acutely the absurdity of his own fears.

Nevertheless, he did once speak of them to his associates in the office. Said he to a group of them in the lunch-interval one day, in an offhand manner:

"Have any of you ever wondered what your end will be? It's a very funny thing, don't you think, that none of us ever bother our heads in the least how long remains to us? We know we've got to come to a full-stop, but it doesn't trouble us very much."

The general laughter that greeted these jesting remarks revealed clearly to Robinson that he was not as other men, and the talk would have turned to sport or women at once if he had not taken another plunge.

"Yes, but it is rather strange, isn't it? What *do* the majority of people die of, I wonder?"

"Heart failure," laughed one.

"Shortage of breath," said another, and moved off.

Robinson was bitterly disappointed. The fact that he was alone in the shadow was not comforting, and neither was the thought that he shared his colleagues' laughter at the idea of immortality. He often joked with them at the old idea of Heaven and Hell, and though the belief that he would one day walk in line with his deceased

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ancestors would somewhat have softened the blow that was to come from the darkness, he knew, as we all do, that the doctrine of eternal life is only a pitiful relic of animism. The empty tomb was not empty to his inner mind, even if he asserted otherwise in his creed.

With this increasing fear there developed in Robinson a premature retrospectiveness. The joy of the moment was always dimmed for him by the sudden realisation that he might now be experiencing such delight for the last time, and he began to look back on the blissful hours of the past with the eagerness of an old man. He was not morbid in the sense that he loved darkness and not light, gloom and not joy. It was only that jealous Death had seen fit to single him out as one on whom the inescapable reality of extinction might be deeply impressed. In the manner of the poem, Death whispered to him to look his last on all things lovely every hour, and Robinson, for all his self-criticism, was helpless. A mind complex of Death had mastered him, and the shadow rarely left his heart.

"It's very strange," he said to himself for the hundredth time, as one afternoon in his holidays he walked down the main street of the town. "I wonder if all these busy women and clerks, and errand boys, ever think for one moment of their inevitable end. Imagine all these and a billion billion others like them running in the marble halls of Paradise!"

To-day the air was enchanted with sunlight and fragrance. Robinson almost felt the shadow lifted from his heart as he strode on through the town to the calling countryside. Near the old clock above the Grammar School the street ended, and one could strike off from the road, through fields, to the purple woods beyond.

Robinson looked up at the clock, set his watch to three-fifteen in agreement with it, and was soon in the fields he loved. So strong was the sunlight that he walked almost like a dazed man. The meadows were even more delightful than he knew they were. Many times had he tramped here before, but the sweet mingling of colours, the freshness, the light and silence, intoxicated him with an ecstasy of mind and spirit that was wholly new. He walked on and wondered that he had ever allowed his life to be darkened by the shadow. So entranced was he at the change in himself that he did not notice for some time that his environment had changed. With amazement he began to see that the blue-green hills of home were in a position that

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was strange, to note that the town and the sounds of it were effaced with a rapidity he had never known before. . . .

Dr. Carlton was coming out of a near-by shop when he rushed, with others, to the man who had fallen in a heap only a short distance from the old clock above the Grammar School.

"Suddenly fatal heart disease, I expect," he said to himself, as he bent over the body.

Above him the hands of the clock showed sixteen minutes past three.

## THE STONE AND THE ANT

By EDWARD C. WOOD

### THE STONE

**T**HERE are certain men who move about among their fellows like gods. In crowds they betray themselves by the thrusts of their chins, by the poise of their heads and by the serene, steady look of their eyes. Regardless of the joys and sorrows of friends and enemies, ignorant of the meaning of good woman's love and strong man's palship, they are only reduced to the level of human emotion by the piteous appeal of an animal's pain or the irresistible magnetism of a child's chatter. There is that kinship in them.

Otherwise they are sublime—in the world yet far above it—seeing it as it is—a small animated ship of the firmament, as unimportant, comparatively, as that firmament is to the rest of the universe. Not in so many words, nor in so many stages have they come to this viewpoint. If you taxed them upon the subject they would look at you in surprise and you would realise that they are as ignorant of their state of sublimity as you are of its cause.

Until you realise, by some chance remark, leading in a hitherto unsuspected direction, to the solution of the mystery, that they have been transported willy-nilly from the human state of triumph and disaster, in one transportation, by some great though perhaps insignificant happening, or series of happenings, to the sublime, almost divine state of attachment which is now their whole nature. It is a state of being, in which even they, hardy realise the fact. They are there, in the sublime, and it is as natural as our over-emotional human state is to us.

They have been caught by some great ideal. Some great truth that has been denied to the perception of others has been allowed to them. And, as a stone dropped in a pool will set the waters eddying, prettily, symmetrically, systematically and increasingly, so some small happening, as prosaic, as small in compass, sometimes as ugly as the stone itself, will, dropped by Chance into the pool of a man's life, set his thoughts, words, actions and beliefs in an outward, swirling, all-embracing spread. His soul flies outward, demanding space and there is no arresting its progress until Time asserts its interest and the waves disappear as completely as though they had never come.

Through it all the man is as guiltless as the pool. The simple

happening that sent the ripples through his life was flung like the stone, by a capricious, careless hand. The hand of Chance has lifted the he-man from his fellows.

Mark this man. Hear him quietly speaking, not troubling if his words are heard or not. See him walk into a room filled with folks, as if he is entering his own private den. Then mark him as a stray word reaching him from some conversation near at hand, he is transformed to a thing of fire. He is in his element: his soul is touched, and if you are studying him, you discover his secret.

Perhaps it is religion that has taken hold of him. Not the half-baked, dogmatising, window-dressing, established religion, nor the fanatical, bible-thumping, soul-converting preaching of the Bush-Baptist, but the deep, convinced, unalterable knowledge, born of a thousand signs, or the outcome of one God—revealed, overwhelming vision, that God is Love.

Thenceforward he is a man apart; a he-man. Nothing can hurt or sway him. He is awful, but he is sublime. Then his child dies and his faith is tested. Sometimes his very sublimity defeats its own object, for it has taken him so far above mundane affairs, that he could never have imagined possible the sorrow that now grips him. His fall is all the more tragic and absolute. His ripples have vanished as if they had never been.

Mark that man. He is a Physical-culturist. He exercises his muscles with apparatus and without. He has attained system; perfection. He walks as if on air and never knows a day's illness—cannot understand anyone being ill.

Rheumatism? Pshaw! Right living, elimination of acids from the body by suitable dieting and regular exercising, will soon do away with all that.

Anæmia, Weakness? Plenty of exercise, green-meat and fruit, fresh air and cheerfulness. No more Anæmia.

He inspires others with confidence, but he has little desire to do so. He is concerned about himself for the most part, although he doesn't know it. Then one day he falls in love. He, who was formerly scornful of all human triumphs and disasters.

At the mere raising of the eyebrows of his lady-love, he throws up his exercises and right living, turns night into day and plays havoc with his body and mind. Were he an ordinary, weak human, inured

#### THE STONE AND THE ANT

to such extremes of joy and sorrow, he would, using his common gumption, adapt his system to meet this new event.

But, having been until now, above and away from human pettiness, he is more than a mark for Cupid's arrows. He is undone; a he-man no longer. His muscles, of which he was once so proud, become weak and flaccid, his weight drops a stone or more. Instead of being a he-man, he is a woman's man. Not the dashing, mashing, smirking lady-killer of the dance-hall, but the humble, fetch-and-carry, wife-humiliated wretch who, never mind his body, dare not call his soul his own.

He has defeated his own object.

Perhaps you know the collector. His eyes are dim, he peers a little, but that is due, not to fear or humility, but to the ravages of dim light and small print upon his eyesight. Yes, he is weak, though not human. He stoops, for his muscles follow his eyes.

When he was very young, about Christopher Robin's size, he read Swiss Family Robinson. The stone dropped into his pool. Johann Wyss *could* draw characters and paint scenes. He wanted to meet those characters again and revisit those scenes. He still treasures the old thumbed copy of the book. Before he became tired, however, in his search for other books by the same author, he came upon the story of David Copperfield. From thence it was not a far cry to the Old Curiosity Shop, through Pickwick Papers and a host more, to Edwin Drood. He was caught, but too much the collector to worry over the secret of Edwin.

He swirled on to Scott; Ivanhoe, The Talisman and Kenilworth held just long enough for him to dash through the other Waverleys, until he crossed over to Borrow. Borrow did not please him; he did not trouble to read beyond Lavengro. Nevertheless, he bought the rest of Borrow's books, and here the waters that had begun to ripple when he first read Swiss Family Robinson, now disappeared abruptly and he became—a collector first and a bookman after.

Books he bought, sometimes because they made up a set, sometimes because they were of a size that fitted the odd corners of his bookshelves, sometimes because they were pretentiously bound, but books and again books. He collected them, regardless of any other consideration, until he possessed one large room full. He was not satisfied until he had procured a larger room for them. As this room was the largest

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in the house, and as rooms go, about the largest size to be had anywhere, and as, like all collectors, he liked to feel that his collection was one complete whole, and not a series of scattered parts, he refused to carry his library into another room, but now regarded it as complete.

But his passion for collecting was, naturally, still unsatisfied. He took to collecting coins, pictures, swords, furniture and finally antiques. He became a collector first, last and all the time. The ripples in his pool of life subsided. Now he hardly remembers the dropping of the stone, when he first read Swiss Family Robinson. Quite possibly he will die.

### THE ANT

Which brings us to the case of Wileman. His stone dropped into his pool, when the bottom dropped out of his world.

Before he became a he-man, he was a bank clerk, but, quaint incongruity, he was a sensitive man. That state of affairs cannot endure for long. Either the bank clerk or the sensitive man must go by the board. In his case, both went—

His immediate superior had give him an unusually severe talking-to, and had backed his words with a censoring from the directors. Being sensitive, as has been stated, and, not true to type, he took things to heart, instead of adopting the *laissez faire* attitude of the manager, and the vague awe-inspiring mental picture of the director rampant, played havoc with his nature, which became that of an abject fear-racked worm. A man in that state does not remain stationary. He either recovers and goes forward to the heights, or backwards and downwards to the depths. Wileman touched bottom—for a time.

His fear and worry he carried with him when he left the bank, and as the girl to whom he was engaged was full-blooded and vigorous, he was thrown over with much scorn, and the seal was set upon his downward rush.

About now he encountered the ants, and Chance flung one of his stones into Wileman's pool. Instead of emigrating, committing suicide or getting dead drunk, he left the abode of his late fiancée and wandered aimlessly into the afternoon. It was a dull day but somehow his wanderings took him countrywards.

He tramped and tramped with little idea of where he was going. He vaguely noticed that the mad career of suburban motor-buses ceased

## THE STONE AND THE ANT

to trouble him. But at long last he realised that he was tired and weak. He threw himself down on a bank by the roadside, near a gate which opened into a farm.

Tired though he was, his brain refused to rest. Actually he was on the verge of a brain-storm.

An ant crawled across his hand and he watched it as it scampered across to a hole in the hedge. Perhaps it gave a warning to its fellow-ants, for presently there issued from the hole a veritable stream of ants. They seemed as if they were being marshalled, for although they appeared to be hurtling hither and thither, he noticed that they never ventured beyond a certain distance from the hole. He saw this the more particularly as he was waiting for one to venture near enough to be crushed by his doubled fist.

He had read something, somewhere, about ants—their habits and communal lives, and had always had the impression that there was some kind of individuality existing among them. If there was, he could not perceive it. The marshalling was apparently done for safety only.

Each ant was like every other ant. If, to these little creatures life was a serious business, to him watching, the whole colony seemed a monotonous purposeless world. He began to think in comparisons. He tried to liken one of the ants to the cashier at the bank.

The cashier wore kid-gloves and a high collar. He was bald and rather skinny. He was very pompous as only a man with a house up-river and a sidesman's job on Sundays, can be.

But Wileman, having singled out an ant, couldn't get the little beggar to stand still and be scrutinised. Darting hither and thither it soon disappeared into the ruck of ants.

He tried another and compared it with the bank-manager. *He* was bald, but fat instead of skinny. *He* was very pompous, but whether it was his house or his Sunday occupation, is hard to state.

But at length Wileman came to the conclusion, that all the ants are alike, and that all men are alike, and that men are like ants. Three conclusions altogether.

He got up and made for the nearest big road, his thoughts now transferred from ants to man. To get a clear conception of the value of men, their opinions and influences on his own life, he realised that he must get above them and look down at them.

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Looking at the man on the seat in front of him, he thought of a stout, sleeping inoffensive ant. When he handed the conductor his fare, he said "Ant" under his breath, not offensively, but reflectively and explanatory.

The conductor said "Eh?" but Wileman was too changed a man to set about explaining. He was pursuing his new idea, and he followed it off the bus, to his lodgings, over the week-end, and on to the bank.

The cashier, the manager, the directors and Wileman's fellow clerks all became ants with very little to distinguish one from the other. True, the director who had been responsible for the fateful censoring was allowed individual treatment to this extent. Wileman bearded him in his den, gave him notice that he intended to retire, and when pressed for an explanation, looked the director over, murmured "Ant," and, speaking as nonchalantly and as unfeelingly as if the director was indeed an ant, he told him what he thought of banks in general without mentioning any bank in particular. The up-shot was, that he got a rise in salary, without caring much either way.

Nor did he remain in the bank long. When a man rides roughshod over the rights of others and is not over-scrupulous, the world is apt to step aside and allow him the right of way. That's how it was with Wileman. In twelve months he was a director himself, and in two years he was the power behind half-a-dozen boards and companies.

Socially he was looked up to, in spite of stray scandal as to his business methods. He could not avoid this, but to give him credit, he set no store by popularity. He gave the cold-shoulder to three match-making mammas, whose daughters were comparable to the *fiancée* of his bank-clerk days, as sunlight unto moonlight, as wine unto water.

His ripples spread and spread, showing no signs of vanishing. But one sunny afternoon he experienced a vague longing. The memory of that afternoon when he had encountered the ants was with him. There was a curious glint in his eyes as he left the bank. Even the bank-clerks noticed and wondered at it, as they nodded to him obsequiously.

It was a short walk to the Monument, just by London Bridge. He found that the top platform had been closed to the public for some time.

"The Public!" He handed a pound-note to the policeman who

#### THE STONE AND THE ANT

gave him this information, and then, vaulting the railings mounted the stairs. At the top, a queer feeling of power came to him. At that moment he experienced the sublime for the second time in his life. Any fool could look down in this way, but not with the same perspective as he.

It was early, so that the regular stream of home-going pedestrians was not yet at its thickest. Nevertheless, London Bridge and King William Street were alive with ants, and every one looked like every other one. But what amazed him most was their numbers. Swarms and swarms.

He leaned forward to view still further afield, towards Cheapside and St. Paul's, and a portion of the rail, weak with rust, gave way.

He went over without a cry. There was no one to mourn him and he might have been forgotten sooner than he was, but that his business affairs were not what they had seemed. In his forward, tramping rush through two years of life, he had neglected many details, and only one of his half-dozen companies still survives.

It is very fortunate that he left no one to mourn him.

## A MOSAIC

By DOROTHY ALSTON

SANTA MAGARITA. *Monday.*

I ARRIVED here a week ago, and I have not left my room. I am not ill, tired, perhaps, from the long journey and disinclined to make any effort, but, I think the chief thing that keeps me upstairs, is the thought of the first plunge into the sea of unmeaning and curious faces below, and the fear that once I establish, even a visual connection with them, that someone, out of pure kindness of heart, will speak to me before I know whether I want them to. I am not naturally misanthropic, and I am intensely interested in my fellow creatures: all my life, I have made little mosaics of the things I have seen and heard, funny, out of the way experiences that have happened to me and to others, but I have always dreaded the initial entry, the first, cold touch of unaccustomed fingers and, perhaps more than anything else, I have hated the effort I must make before any vital intercourse can take place.

I came abroad to rest after a long and tiresome illness. I brought with me a boxful of books, pen, paper, typewriter; I engaged a sitting-room with a balcony overlooking the sea, and I trusted, as do all Englishwomen when they come abroad, that the sun would shine. But, and this I do not deny; I had no intention that these two months should pass without adding, at least, one more mosaic to my collection.

I was not particular as to whether the episode should belong to me, or to someone else; often, as a disinterested spectator I had seen more than if I, myself had been involved, for one's view is apt to become distorted by personal participation; but, I was quite determined that something should happen and, since it was probably out of my own hands anyhow, I was content to leave to fate my own connection with it. Besides, I had a line of retreat.

No one, without an express invitation from me could invade my rooms; as far as I could tell, nobody knew anything about me, not even my name, and the liberty which my privacy and anonymity thus provided, made my excursion downstairs infinitely less hazardous and committing. Of course, I realised that in order to gain what I wanted, I could not evade the consciousness of, at least, one other person beside myself, and for this I was prepared, in fact, the perilous chance which this contingency provided, in a way, pushed me towards its fulfilment and so, though not avidly impatient, at the moment, for some such happening, I resolved to go down and—shall we say—look round.

My first glance round the dining room was not encouraging. Near my table was seated a group of three people, a man and two women of nationality unknown, that is to say, the veneer was strange—the foundation was evidently Semitic. The man was drab and oily; he had a pendulous nose, long, thin mouth and lustreless eyes. The women were copiously hennaed with resilient nails and scarlet lips; their cheeks were white and the powder hung greasily to their thick, porous skins. They were well dressed, but they looked as if they wore no stays. They all three ate voraciously, bending down to meet their food with greedy, expectant mouths. On the backs of their chairs, hung heavily embroidered Chinese shawls. I must say, I hoped my adventure was not connected with them.

On my right, were a fat and more comfortable pair—German, I surmised. He had a short, grey beard and twinkling eyes; she was rotund and tightly laced. They, too, enjoyed their dinner, but more decorously, more solemnly. I rather liked the look of them. Presently a tall and provocative woman came in. A lady? It was difficult to say. She was fair, with beautifully brushed hair, exquisitely made-up face, good jewels and simple clothes. I couldn't quite place her. She nodded to one or two men, who were sitting by themselves, spoke a few words to another woman, and then sat down, by herself, at a table by the window. I wondered how long she would be alone. As my eyes followed her across the room, two people came to the table next to me. I did not notice them at first, but after a time, the man's compelling stare attracted my attention. I guessed them to be husband and wife. She was meticulously dressed in blue, her hair was red—of that fuzzy texture that stands by itself—she had small, blue eyes with white lashes, and a thin, tight mouth. She wore a small string of pearls round her neck, and a turquoise ring on her little finger. She looked possessive, suspicious, managing and slightly cross. I hated her at first sight. I don't think she noticed me, in any case, she never glanced in my direction. He was tall and thin; youngish, about thirty, with rather a charming face. I suppose I stared at them longer than I should have, but they interested me, and I wondered where they came from. I found out later, by asking the hall porter, that they were Dutch, and that their name was Van de Voorde. He kept staring at me all through the meal, surreptitiously, when his wife wasn't looking. I finished my dinner before they did, and went straight to my room.

*Saturday.*

I've been down to dinner every night since Monday. Mr. Van de Voorde becoming interesting, and his wife looks crosser than ever. I can see that he's miserable, unhappy and completely wife-driven. One night they changed their table and sat behind a pillar, where I could not see them and where only she could see me; nobody sat at their table, so there was no real reason why they should have moved, but the next day they were back again in their old place. Her hair is redder and fussier than ever.

An unfortunate thing happened to-night, and I am sure that she thinks that I did it on purpose. As I got up, after having finished my dinner, to go to my room, my necklace broke, and the beads rolled under their table. I murmured a confused apology and stooped to pick them up. Of course, the only thing he could do, was to help me, and in the confusion, I felt his hand touch mine. It was icily cold, and I saw that it was trembling. It was extremely awkward though, under the circumstances, rather funny, and I pictured her furious face as she watched us grovelling at her feet. Naturally, I pretended not to notice and got up at once. I should like to hear what she said to him, after I had gone.

*Sunday.*

To-night, some friends of mine came to dinner, and we stayed down in the drawing room afterwards to play Bridge. The Van de Voordes were sitting just outside on the terrace. It was a beautiful evening, with a full moon, and when it came to my turn to cut out of the rubber, for we were five, I went out, presumably to have a look at the sea. I stood where she could not see me, and watched them both out of the corner of my eye. Presently, she went in and he got up. As he did so, I walked to the balustrade, which runs along the edge of the terrace, and waited to see what would happen. I knew, quite well, that he would notice what I was doing, and I wanted to give him the opportunity to speak to me, if he wished. I have never seen a more lovely night, and I thought perhaps under the influence of the moon, he might make an advance of some sort, especially as his wife had disappeared. I must say, I am rather ashamed of the way I behaved, but I had the feeling that, somehow the end would justify the means, and besides, I disliked the look of Mrs. Van de Voorde. What a name!

#### A MOSAIC

Well, I stood on the terrace and looked at the sea. Very soon, I heard steps behind me; they stopped, and I glanced carelessly over my shoulder. We were quite alone, and I knew that, as usual, he was staring at me. I waited a moment, nothing happened, then I held out my hand. I felt him seize it and kiss it, then, before I could say anything, he dashed back into the hotel. I'm afraid I laughed, but the whole thing was so absurd. I waited a few minutes longer, but, as he did not reappear, I went back and joined my friends. He was nowhere to be seen.

I wonder who frightens him the most; I or his wife? We are so ridiculously cautious. What is the sense of dangling round his wife like a beaten dog and then, in a burst of desperate energy and courage, kissing my hand and flying back into the hotel, before he has seen what effect it had on me? I must, obviously, have invited him to do so for some reason. What does he expect me to do next? Say good morning, when I meet him in the hall? I shan't. All the same, I am glad now that there is something tangible between us, something that she doesn't know, and wouldn't like if she did. But the question is, how much does she know. She must be blind if she hasn't seen the way he looks at me and yet—Oh, I don't care—poor little man—but, my God, what a fool.

*Tuesday.*

Van de Voorde is alone; his wife is either ill or away. His latest idea is to wait in the hall until I get in the lift, then race upstairs, meet me on my landing and stand and look at me until I get to my room. Last night, I caught him walking up and down outside my door; he gave me a long look as I came out, but never said a word. Is he dumb? I have decided to come down, to-night, for the ball the hotel is giving for the Mi-Careme. I talked about it to the head-waiter and asked him at what time it began. I spoke rather loudly, on purpose, and I think he heard. I shall be masked. Will he know me? I wonder how it will end.

*2 a.m.*

Has it ended? I don't know. But I will try and write down what happened.

When I went to my room, to-night, to dress, I found a bunch of

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white camellias on my dressing-table. There was no note to tell me who had sent them, and my maid know nothing about it; she said, she had found them when she came to put out my things. I thought, at first, that they might have been a present from the Hotel, and I sent her to ask the chambermaid, but she knew nothing about them either. Then I realised that they must have come from him, probably as a means to identify my domino. I left my room rather late, and when I turned the corner of the passage, I saw a masked figure waiting at the lift; it was he, of course, but he made no sign, just followed me downstairs and into the ball room.

There, he came up to me and, without saying a word, put his arm round my waist and began to dance. I was too startled and amused to resist and we danced until the music stopped; then, he took my hand and led me across the terrace and down to the little summer house which stood by the tennis courts. We went in, and he shut the door. It was quite dark except for the moon which shone through the window, and I wondered what he would do next. Funnily enough, I wasn't in the least surprised, only intensely interested and, perhaps, a little moved. He pulled a chair forward and I sat down. Then, he stood still for a moment, pulled off his mask and, before I could prevent him, fell on his knees and buried his face in my lap. We must have stayed like that for some time, then he got up and, very slowly, drew me towards him. He didn't speak, or kiss me, but just waited.

The whole thing would have seemed completely unreal, except for the fact of our undeniable and astonishing proximity. I was enveloped in a scarlet domino, on which gleamed a huge patch of white camellias, and my face was grotesquely hidden by a black mask, whose lace edging almost hid my mouth. He was unmasked and the hood of his domino had fallen back from his head, while onto his face, had come that peculiar, puzzled look with which men of his kind approach an unaccustomed situation. We must have made a funny picture in the light of the moon.

Then, suddenly, in a flash, my mind reconstructed the whole story. I saw his first consciousness of me, and his effort to hide his secret from his wife; his agitation when our hands had met, inadvertently, under the table; his futile and pathetic attempt, that night on the terrace, to speak to me or, anyhow, to claim my attention; his resolve to make some decisive move while his wife wasn't there; his joy and

A MOSAIC

dread when he heard I was going to the ball and, finally, the snapping of his self-control when, at last, we were alone and he could show me what he felt.

It was all written on his face. I pulled off my mask, for I wanted him to see me as clearly as possible and to realise that his pathetic temerity had gained its reward—besides—I disliked his wife, and I felt that there were many scores that I could help to wipe out. I didn't want him to think, that what I had done, I had done out of pity; he attracted me, and I meant he should know it. I wasn't ashamed of it. He waited patiently and a little anxiously, but when my face became revealed to his gaze and his eyes caught mine, he suddenly caught me to him and kissed me. I shut my eyes and lay in his arms.

There was a sofa in the corner and, presently, we sat down. He put his arms round me and rested his head on my shoulder. Through the little window I could see the lights of the hotel, and the door out of which we had come. Two shadows crossed it and were lost in the darkness of the garden. I felt his hands steal to my shoulder and crush the camellias he had given me; I pulled out one and he put it to his lips. Then all at once, I heard a noise and looked up; the door had opened a man was peering in; over his shoulder, I caught sight of a shock of red hair and a small pearl necklace. It shut again quickly. Had he heard? Had he seen? I don't know—anyhow he gave no sign, only lifted his face to mine, and I kissed him.

Five minutes later I was back in my room.

*Wednesday evening.*

To-night she was alone. She greeted me with a brilliant smile.  
Poor little Van de Voorde.

## CURB-STONE FINANCIERS

By ALF HEWITT

“**Y**US, guvner, they’re the right chat, an’ the cheapest in the road!” The voice was silent for a few minutes and then it rasped again. “Try, ’arf a poun’ o’ them apples, guvner.” By this time the speaker had one dirty paw on the sleeve of my coat and the other gnarled mass of earthy nails and knuckles was caressing a good sized apple.

It was a Wednesday morning and for want of something better to do, I decided to stroll along the Tower Bridge Road market and watch the noble society of gutter merchants exercise their art.

My first introduction into this exclusive circle was with the already mentioned fruiterer. Between much spitting upon the pavement and opening and shutting of one eye, he expounded the art of buying right, so as to sell right, “An’ bless yer, no I don’t do this for a living, Gawd bless yer, no, I sells ‘em too cheap for that,” and by the look of his clothes, especially the rear of his trousers which were of rather large dimensions, I could see that he could not afford to shop in Bond Street, and also his confessed poverty showed that the hectic colour of his nose was not the result of indigestion.

I left our friend after enriching him by threepence and very soon found myself in the thick of the market. The noise was deafening. Voices of all notes and brogues were yelling as if the owners’ very existence depended on the loudness of the yell.

“Fine, ripe, termarters!”

“Fresh ‘addicks!”

“Nice beet root, lidy!”

“Bootlaces, M’am!”

“Eels, all alive-o,” and a thousand other calls all mixed like a “Dutch melody.” The roadside was packed tightly with stalls, whilst among the crowded shoppers on the pavement, were other costers, whose stocks were either on portable trays or in their hands. One lady of Hebrew extraction would not let me pass her until I had bought a present for the “missus.” I explained I had no “missus.”

“Vel der young lady.”

“I have no young lady,” I said.

“Vel, wear ‘em for armlets then!”

I blushed, but such persistency beat me and after making certain that none of my acquaintances were watching, I parted with sixpence.

## CURB-STONE FINANCIERS

I jostled with the poorly-clad crowd until I came to that part of the market where fish is displayed in prominence. Three stalls of this odorous substance were standing together. Many women of the "no hat and shawl" type were sorting out and digging their nails in the various species, while under one stall lay a cat (no doubt overcome by the fumes). The noise in this part of the market was like the smell, overwhelming. The gutter was greasy, the costers were greasy and the money which changed hands was greasy. The aroma from the fish not only attracted customers but multitudes of flies, which had taken possession. About six inches from my ear, a high pitched voice had started to shout "Beet roots, beet roots, they're lo'ly they're lo'ly!" I turned my head and saw a rather plump lady of about forty summers waving a juicy beet root perilously near to my face.

"Try one, they're good!" I fled.

The next thing which claimed my attention was a second-hand clothes stall. Here the air was clearer and voices a little quieter. The voice of the sales lady could easily be heard. "Now this gown, me lidies, belonged to a titled person, and was made in Paris."

I was greatly impressed by this dramatic exclamation, and turning my eyes from the over-dressed owner of the stall to the garment in question, I could not help thinking that the "titled lady" who had once owned the garment must have been dead at least fifty years, and I was somewhat puzzled when a gown with such a pedigree was sold for two shillings. Stockings which had been renovated many times by some patient hand, were sold for anything from a penny to threepence a pair. Everything on this stall was sold by auction and I could have bought myself a pair of trousers from a deceased lord's wardrobe for the price of a new handkerchief.

One article held up by the auctioneer caused quite a stir. It resembled a small handleless basket with numerous artificial flowers intertwined on the outside of it. It was held aloft for a minute that all might gaze and wonder on such workmanship, before the particulars were given, and then they came. "Now, this 'ere 'at, lidies, is the latest fashion an' worth a poun', it's new, and the flowers are real silk." This startling statement was left to soak in, on the hearers, and its effect was good. In an instant the hat (for such it was) was with the crowd and being handed round for those who wished to try it on. After five attempts it found a resting place, and the buyer walked away with the

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hat stuck on the back of her head well satisfied in getting such value for ninepence.

I now began to move on and after passing an ice-cream barrow, a barrel organ, and a man selling racing tips, I came to a second-hand furniture stall. What bargains!

A pair of pictures advertising a certain brand of whisky, for one shilling the pair, must have drawn my attention, for I was gazing at these when the owner of the stall approached me and diverted my attention to himself.

"Wot yer looking fer, guvner? They're cheap, sort 'em out. This 'ere sideboard's cheap, guvner. Six bob!"

Whilst he was talking to me, a pompous lady arrived, took a pinch of snuff, and told a howling urchin who was holding her skirt to "shut yer fice, fer gawd's sake," and then began to pound and shake a dilapidated armchair which, as she told the owner, had "taken 'er fancy."

After much haranguing over the price and much walking away and coming back, the chair changed hands for two shillings. The condition of the goods on this stall did not belie the owner's cry, "Second-hand furniture," for the goods were and thoroughly looked it.

The next stall had a varied display of well-polished boots and shoes in the last stages of senile decay. The owner, a stout Hebrew with a bushy moustache and wearing odd boots, seemed well content to sit on a box at the side of his barrow gazing philosophically at the feet of the passers by.

The rest of the road was occupied by an assortment of second-hand clothes stalls and fruit stalls. The people had thinned out, the noise was less and very few people were buying. So it was when I came to the last person, a policeman standing near the curb and smiling to a well powdered young lady who was tripping across the Tower Bridge Road.

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[This "little bit of life" is the work of a member of the Bermondsey Bookshop who has contributed articles to previous numbers of the BERMONDSEY Book.]

IN A DANCE HALL  
By NORMAN RIDLEY

THE band has stopped. A sudden murmurous roar  
Rises in crescendo from the floor,  
Where men and women, muscularly tired,  
Separate and wait to be inspired  
By further toxic draughts of syncopation.  
I am aware of chameleonic sights  
Coloured by fitful, coruscating lights;  
Of black-stalked men in shirts of spotless linen;  
Of female boys and fat, perspiring women—  
Products of spontaneous creation!

There is a pause of rapt, expectant zeal  
While from the dais a diuretic squeal  
Preludes a weird rhapsodic composition—  
The signal for the conjugal position. . . .  
Hermaphroditic girls their silken knees  
Contort in anti-calisthenic style,  
While sooted niggers nasally beguile  
Unheeding ears with escapades of love.  
The pianist accompanies above  
With digital gymnastics on the keys.

## THE LAST WISDOM

By B. G. BREW

**H**E was the last of his clan. For as long as there had been leaves on the trees and ferns in the rocks his family had lived in the forest and called it their own. It belonged to them as much as they to it and neither had ever contemplated life without the other. Time was when they had been members of the great tribes of the Shee, but, lacking the wisdom of the Lordly Ones, they had come to dwell alone, here in the forest amid the companionship of the green leaves.

Century after century had passed thus and, while the world grew old with the years, life in the forest remained unchanged save by the Shadow of Shadows and the toll of Death. For Death took his toll even here and one by one they had been forced to follow him from the sunlight to the unknown bournes of hope and despair. And in the woodland there were now no descendants to carry on the laughter of the cap and bells and bear the memory of the years. He only remained of all the happy band that once had been, and about his wizen little figure there clung the rags of a great tradition.

Regardless of the march of time, he lived from day to day, knowing the seasons by the changing garment of the forest and the passage of the years by the ringmarks on a felled trunk. No foot of man had ever desecrated the sanctity of his palace, nor human voice broken his peace. He lived alone, yet none went more richly befriended. The birds that filled the air with song were dearer to him than brothers, the flowers in their fragrance were sweeter to him than sisters; the field mice and the squirrels, the conies and the butterflies. All shared with him their joys and sorrows. There was no mating of which he did not approve, no fledgling hatched that did not receive his benediction.

From elm to ash, and ash to oak the green-capped little monster would flit the merry hours away, his bells tinkling as he sped. Their sound would waken the primrose from its bed of moss and their echoes would stir the sleepy doormouse to fresh life. Wherever he went the magic of the bells went too, throwing laughter to the breeze and shedding sunshine on the grass. Berries and roots were his daily food and his bed a heap of pine cones under the stars.

One day, in his wanderings, he came to the edge of the woodland. With careless frolic to the music of the bells, he had stepped suddenly from the leafy shade to find himself upon a broad highway. To right and left of him the road lay bare and white, stretching as far as the eye

could see. He stopped, amazed; such a sight was indeed new. Where and to what did this gleaming ribbon lead? So there were other worlds beyond that of the forest, and, perhaps, creatures too as wise or wiser than the jackdaw!

At that moment a shadow darkened the way and into view there came the figure of a man, tall and thin, with grey hair and flowing beard. Over his shoulder was a tattered cloak and in his hand he carried a staff. His face was weather-beaten and wrinkled, but his eyes were of the blue that belongs to eternal youth. When he had come abreast of the thicket where the little dwarf crouched, he paused, and, sitting down on a heap of stones, took from his wallet some bread and cheese. As he ate, two black eyes watched him anxiously, first with a fright, then with a growing curiosity. At last from the tangled hiding-place the dwarf emerged. Creeping to the stranger's side, he touched him on the arm. The bells tinkled warningly upon his cap and the man looked round.

"Why! What have we here?" He cried in a voice that was full and musical. "Here's a curiosity to whet the most jaded appetite! And what brings you here, my little fellow? I thought the last of your sort were dead and buried these many years."

Saying which he set the trembling little monster upon his knee and regarded him with interest. From his lofty perch the dwarf looked back and, seeing that no harm befell him, he presently took courage and began to tell his new friend of the forest whence he had come and the wonders that he found there. He whispered to him how the bluebells in springtime got their blue, of the place where the butterflies kept their wings and where to reach the "rainbow's end" in April showers. All this and more he told him and when he had finished the Stranger replied:

"Little Fool, I like you. I come from a world where the people are dull and tired. They have forgotten the mysteries of which you speak and are wise only in their own conceits. They call me the Weaver of Eternity. Through my fingers their days run out like the quicksands on the shore and fall as foam upon the ocean wave. Yet I love this wayward folk and long to bring them happiness again, such happiness as they knew when they were children and have since forgotten. Will you come with me and share my task? You shall have gold and fine raiment, sweet food to eat and pleasures without end. Such luxury as

the forest can never give shall be yours in the Towns where the days are short and the nights are long."

The little dwarf's eyes sparkled and he lent forward more eagerly. He saw as in a dream fair ladies, bright-eyed and tender, the courtiers' silken coats, the glint of jewels shining in the gloom, light and colour in profusion, and himself, the centre of the throng, winning with his woodland lore the first place at the feast. What a hero he would be! Far better this than the green days in the forest and his bed of pine cones at sunset.

"There is only one thing that I have to ask of you," the Stranger added, "It is so simple a request that it is hardly worth the making and will disturb your peace no more than the shadow of a bird's wing. All I ask is that you no longer keep your cap and bells, but throw them with doublet and hose into yonder ditch. In their stead I will give you garments that shall drape you as a king. The sound of your bells would irritate my people so that they would grow melancholy rather than glad."

"Certainly," the dwarf cried when he saw the satin coat and feathered hat the Stranger held out to him. Jumping out of his threadbare doublet and hose he threw them with cap and bells into the ditch. As they fell the bells clanked sadly before they sank, gurgling into the mud.

"You have done well"; said the Stranger. "The clothes I give you will suit you far better than those you have thrown away, and the bells were a silly piece of tomfoolery. But we must depart for the hour grows late and we have far to go."

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That night in a tavern in the fashionable quarter of a city some leagues distant from the forest the Weaver of Eternity and the little dwarf gave their first performance. The low-raftered room, the long trestled tables and rough forms on which the audience knelt or sat, the sand-dusted floor and smoke-laden atmosphere filled the elfin sprite with wonder, almost with awe. This people whom he gazed upon from the safe shelter of the chimney corner with their never-ceasing chatter, their gay clothes and their tired, tired eyes were as new to him as the rippling stream was old. Were the men so thirsty that they lifted ever

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and anon the tankard to their lips, or the women so vain that they toyed with the roses in their hair and looked so shyly down? He looked and listened and the puzzled frown upon his brow grew deeper.

Suddenly above the hubbub the voice of the Stranger rose in a song that swept as a breath of silence through the room bearing the quiet of hidden things to all who listened, weary-eyed. Very sweet was the air he sang, deep and gentle as the wind amid the tall grass or the sighing of the pine trees on a summer's day. The little dwarf's eyes filled with tears and a empty longing for he knew not what filled his heart and made it heavy. Then the music changed; fire was in the singer's blood; into the words that he now sang there swept the lilting intoxication of new life chasing Despondency down the mossy ways; Love and Adventure ruled the skies and Death was but an old man's tale, unheeded. The eyes of the listeners kindled; desire lit their hearts anew; old, forgotten passions swelled within their breasts and memories of far-off things seemed but as yesterday.

Like wine too was the music to the little dwarf making his head swim and his limbs tingle with strange excitement for he knew not what. Far behind him lay the old days now; the Present was a flaming jewel beckoning him ever onward. He would show these people what a dwarf could do; poor, little deformed monster though he was, he would make those rafters ring and ring again. No matter what the morrow, for to-night he would be Prince of Jesters.

Scarce aware of what he did, as the last notes died away, the elf tripped out upon the open space before the audience, his whole body contorted in a weird grimace, the feathered plume upon his head nodding as he ran. Peal upon peal of laughter rent the air breaking the charm the singer's voice had wrought like thunderclaps in a summer calm. Here, there and everywhere he darted in a dance of wildest glee, or so it seemed to those who watched him leaping and twisting, bounding and skipping while the room rocked with mirth. Nothing could tire him, none could stop him. Indeed, here was a wonder—the most hideous little gargoyle that had ever been seen, the sight of whose puckered little face could chase dull care away till morning!

At last it was over. He stood still in their midst, bewildered, his breath coming and going in short gasps. He looked from one to the other of the sea of faces that rose before him, then with a quaint little bow and a flourish of the hand, he was gone. A burst of applause broke

from the audience; it swelled to a roar as they called his name and louder still as there came no response.

"Let him dance to-morrow night!" The ladies cried, and the men shouted "Encore! At last the Weaver has given us something new; let's see him again."

But the little dwarf did not appear. When they went to look for him he was nowhere to be found. The Weaver had left the hostel too, but to his disappearances, so rapid and so unexpected, they had grown accustomed. In vain they searched the main streets and the alleys, the houses and even the steeple tower—hollo how they might, their plaything had eluded them.

\* \* \* \* \*

Out into the night, dazed and amazed, he rushed, away from the laughing throng, from the shouts of applause and the clapping of hands. Another moment and it had seemed as if the very walls would fall upon him and stifle him. His silk coat was wet with the perspiration of his terror, the lace at his throat choked him and his feathered hat weighed as heavy as lead. Only to escape, be free once more to wander at will and call the little bit of him that was his soul his own! Where was the forest now, his doublet and hose and the ever-merry bells? He must find the high-roads and go back to them. The Stranger had lied; he was very, very miserable.

Running blindly, he knew not whither, he came upon the gates of the City and beyond them the road gleamed white and straight. Like a shadow of the night, he crept unnoticed past the fortressed walls to take the path that led him, as by instinct, to the well-remembered haunts. Until the dawn he trudged, nor stopped for bite or sup upon the way. As the first pale streaks of light lit the eastern sky the dark lines of the forest loomed upon his left and with a weary sigh he sank upon the grass by the roadside to wait half-waking, half-sleeping, till the sun had risen red behind the trees.

As the warm rays shone down in silver shafts upon the sleeping earth, the little dwarf rose, feeling strangely old and sad, and made his way to where, in the heart of the forest, the gloom was deepest and the peace was whitest. In days gone by he had sat here, listening to the secrets the wind told the leaves, or blowing the hours away in down from a dande-

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lion stem. Now the place seemed empty and deserted. His voice rang hollow in the stillness and the echoes returned to mock him. Where the flowers had raised their heads to greet his approach, they drooped and died; the birds had all flown away; the very trees regarded him askance.

From place to place he wandered. Everywhere it was the same; his friends of yesterday knew him no more. They turned in cold distrust from this intruder of their privacy; what did he do here, this courtier in satin coat and haughty plumes? For them, they had no time for such as he. They mourned a Fool's gay laughter and the music of the bells in his cap as he gambled down the pathway and left them one May morn. . . .

Slowly the dwarf retraced his steps. Gone were the green days of the forest, gone forever, and the future held no gleam of hope.

He stood once more upon the fringe of the trees and looked to right and left down the highroad. In the far distance he discerned, coming towards him, the figure of a man, tall and thin, with flowing beard and staff in hand. The Stranger approached as he had done before, but this time the dwarf watched him come with an ache of longing in his heart and a great weariness before his eyes.

Now, the blue eyes of the Weaver were looking into his, the hand of the Weaver was on his shoulder, and the voice of the Weaver said gently, insistently:

"Best come with me, Little Fool, to the Towns where the days are short and the nights are long. Needs must we tread the high road when the forest paths are closed."

## THE BOOKSHELF

TEN YEARS AGO. By R. H. MOTTRAM. (Chatto and Windus).

This collection of sketches is published as a pendant to "The Spanish Farm Trilogy," a book, or rather collection of books, which finally established Mr. Mottram (after Mr. C. E. Montague) as the foremost English novelist of the war.

The sketches in this volume have appeared in various periodicals and one must be frank and say that they reveal signs of strain in the writing, and in hardly any of them is there any touch of "The Spanish Farm."

One feels that the sketches were written for occasions, but written without any particular zest. Take the first in the book; "Never Again." Mr. Mottram recalls personal memories of the war common to all soldiers and urges us, because of those memories, to say that war must not happen again, because if it does "we may need a memorial for civilisation itself." Now we all know this perfectly well; it is merely a text for a sermon which leaves us (because we are collectively impotent in all things affecting our peace) exactly where we were before.

In spite of all our Armistice Day protestations, all our pious hopes expressed in writing and in speech, another war is as certain as to-morrow's sunrise. Instead of preaching from the text of the last war our job is to prevent any possibility of the next one. How much and how little we can do to stop it remains to be seen.

I am not blaming Mr. Mottram for perpetuating poignant memories in this book of war sketches, but only suggesting that it is doubtful if books about the war written from the point of view of these sketches, are of any particular value. They are published in book form for Armistice Day and they will be read, as I have read them with sympathy and appreciation, but they reveal Mr. Mottram as a preacher (which is the last thing he is or ought to be) and not as a constructive writer.

War memories are not in themselves sufficient. In a few more years, even if there be no other war, they will have become softened and blurred; some of them almost forgotten. Even Armistice Day may on one November 11th be a Saints' Day in the Church Calendar for the generation and the generations now committed to and destined for materialism and forgetfulness. For it is the brutal truth to say that no matter how deep may be the memories evoked by Armistice Day—its celebration will be of no avail save that in due time it brings a collective call which imposes itself upon all the powers of governments to make war impossible.

The first and the greatest difficulty preventing the formation of such a will for universal peace, is this; that no matter who experiences or who writes about war, there is no inherited memory of its horrors. What the sufferers experienced in the war can never be adequately realised by those who were not in it. And if you tell a child about it there will be no understanding; and the generation now succeeding the "sacrificed one," of which Mr. Mottram is a member, cannot understand the horrors of the war because it does not understand them. There is no real transmission in these things from those who know to those

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who do not know. The history of blood and tears which is war is the history of all time. But in 1914 we had no inherited memory which made us realise the horrors to which we so merrily marched away with songs upon our lips and courage and fear in our hearts.

Mr. Mottram reminds us that it is ten years since the Armistice. It might as well be ten thousand.

### ACTION. By C. E. MONTAGUE. (Chatto and Windus).

The author of this book did not live to see it published, and it may be the last volume of his work we shall ever read. By his death we lost a great journalist who kept his work free from the stains that now almost everywhere disfigure the daily and weekly press, and an author who raised the essay and the short story to the highest level in contemporary work.

Mr. Montague was perhaps at his best in the short story. He did not use this medium in any conventional sense. Plots, as such, are hardly to be found in any of his tales. One of the greatest of all his stories, "Honours Easy," in "Fiery Particles," is no more than an essay in irony—yet it is in every respect a story.

Of his works "A Hind Let Loose" and "Rough Justice," much the same may be said—they are not the novels we are accustomed to—but how satisfying they are for all who love good writing—style coloured and made alive with thought.

An austere beauty lies over all Mr. Montague's work—a beauty which sets it apart from the work of almost all his contemporaries. In all his work the style is the man, and those who know anything of modern literature know how few authors there are of whom this may be said in the sense of high praise.

In this book of short stories Mr. Montague is not consistently at his best; there is a marked variation in quality. One expects so much from the author that the least drop in his high standard reveals itself at once. For example the story, "A Cock and Bull Story" (perhaps because it is about the war) lacks Mr. Montague's sure grip of his subject, and gives the impression of something remembered which he finds himself suddenly called upon to mould into a story. Here is a tale that did not impel itself to be written, and because of the author's particular style, it does not hold the reader. "Judith," on the other hand, which is one of the best stories in the book, shows Mr. Montague writing straight from the heart to the heart. We can all understand this exquisite short story and those of us who knew more about the war than was good for us will understand it much too poignantly. "Wodjabet," too, is a tale giving us the author at his best.

But one of the most moving stories in this volume is "Didn't Take Care of Himself," which does not deal with the war. On the depiction of the chief character in this story Mr. Montague has lavished all his knowledge of humanity and of the curious ways of men's hearts. The man in the story is just one of those queer people who are utterly unselfish—one whom Mr.

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Montague loved. For he was of those whose impulse was to be to a friend what a bright fire is, something which puts you at your ease and may help you to be at your best and to shine, but vaunteth not itself and seeketh not its own. And Mr. Montague himself was of this rare kind who are the real salt of the earth.

WINTER WORDS. By THOMAS HARDY (Macmillan).

This volume of poems would, we are told have undergone further revision, had the author lived to issue it on his birthday.

The poems may safely be said to be the last from one whose reputation as a poet is now so vigorously assailed. The reputation can take care of itself whatever the modern school of criticism may say, but it has to be admitted that the poems here collected do not add to it. There is throughout these poems the familiar, knotty style, the awkward gait of the words (so dearly beloved in the earlier work) but less of the profound philosophy.

Yet here and there the real lyric note of which Hardy was a master even in old age, comes clear and true, as in "Proud Songsters."

There are brand new birds of twelve-months growing,  
Which a year ago, or less than twain,  
No finches were, nor nightingales, nor thrushes,  
But only particles of grain,  
And earth, and air, and rain.

But little can be said in praise of the long poem "Aristodemus the Messinian" in which occur such lines as;

Nay, white tippings above the Delphic tripod  
Mangle never their message! And they lip such.

There are many more poems in the book showing an awkward style at its worst. But where there is, as always in the best of Hardy's poetry, economy of words on a dramatic theme. We find a fine poem like "Her Second Husband Hears Her Story." This poem, one of the best in the book, opens marvellously with;

Still, Dear, it is incredible to me that here, alone,  
You should have sewed him up until he died,  
And in this very bed. I do not see  
How you could do it, seeing what might betide.

It must be said of this volume as a whole that the short poems are the best. There are one or two pungent epigrams, as the author would have called them. Of these the best are "Not Known" and "Christmas 1924."

The first is clearly an answer to those who have misjudged his work.

They know a phasm they name as me,  
In whom I should not find  
A single self-held quality  
Of body or mind.

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The other goes to the heart of all our madness:

“Peace upon earth!” was said. We sing it,  
And pay a million priests to bring it.  
After two thousand years of mass  
We’ve got as far as poison-gas.

“Winter Words” will, I fear, add little to a great poet’s reputation, but it cannot detract from it. The old fire and the same touch are to be found somewhere in even the least successful of the poems; and there are a few as perfect as a great poet could make them. We take our leave of the poet in this volume and our stand on this; that in due time Thomas Hardy will be assigned one of the highest places among the poets, a place perhaps even higher than that already given to him among the novelists.

THE EARLY LIFE OF THOMAS HARDY (1840—1891). By FLORENCE EMILY HARDY (Macmillan).

In this interesting biography of Thomas Hardy the author has, rightly or wrongly, adopted a form which makes any adverse criticism difficult. The form is that of diaries and documents, conversations etc. The main result is a very definite dullness, but against this must be placed the advantage of many vivid and interesting personal expressions on things by Thomas Hardy which help one to understand him better. Whether these are enough in a biography of so famous a man is doubtful and may make many wish that the book had taken another shape.

What, for example, would Mr. A. E. Housman have made of the life? Unquestionably he could have given us an immortal picture of a lonely soul, a great questioning mind, and brought to life to those to whom Thomas Hardy was but a vague name, a personality among the most interesting in our literature. He would have given us the background which this work lacks. The life within and outside the life. Without these things no biography of Thomas Hardy can be said to be satisfactory.

But this is merely a personal view, hardly valid perhaps when it is made clear that Thomas Hardy had no great desire to have his life written.

I think one reason for this (as this book shows) lay in the fact that he knew his life had been strangely uneventful. His life was one long mental adventure. It is true that he lived and worked in London for a few years—but this made no impression upon him save a desire to escape to the country and the formation of the opinion that it was “a city of four million lost souls.”

The boyhood here described is what we would have expected—ordinary and uneventful—revealing no marked signs of high talent. There are, however, many signs of a mind growing to something far beyond the ordinary when Thomas Hardy’s early days of training as an architect are described. He was setting down many thoughts about life and could attain early to the truth of this;

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"The poetry of a scene varies with the minds of the perceivers. Indeed, it does not lie in the scene at all."

How much of Thomas Hardy's own poetry finds explanation in this statement! He had begun to write poetry in London but not for publication. A breakdown in health took him back to Dorchester. His mind was liberated at once. He sat down and began "The Poor Man and The Lady." He wanted money, and prose fiction seemed his only way to obtain it. There were thoughts in his mind about fame for he says, "It is the man who bases his actions upon what the world is thinking, no matter what it may be saying, who rises to the top." But at this time Hardy was very ignorant of the commercial ways of the world however shrewd he ought have been, and certainly was, in his comments on men and things. He allowed the publisher to have the copyright of "Under the Greenwood Tree" for £30! Remembering this, he must have smiled ironically at the prices paid for scraps of his writings just before his death.

Then came recognition and the long years almost uneventful save for the work done. Marriage, taking up of residence at Maxgate. At Maxgate "The Woodlanders" (that most perfect story) took shape and was completed. "Tess" and the others now so familiar followed. "The Dynast's," too, was in Hardy's mind in the early days at Maxgate. In this house, which in the end became almost a shrine, Hardy lived quietly and wrote persistently. Little or nothing, if one is to judge by this biography, happened to disturb the quiet order of his life.

In 1890, when he was 49 years of age, he had settled down to an existence undisturbed by the events of a busy world—an existence which remained very much the same until his death.

In the second volume which is to come we may hear more about Thomas Hardy, but it will be less interesting in many ways for it will deal with a life fixed in its routine and disturbed only by admirers and the consequences of an established and growing reputation.

One closes this first volume with the feeling that all that could be told (within the limits prescribed by the form of the book) has been told of a life remarkably quiet and uneventful—no sort of life at all judged by our hectic standards of living. Yet the book is disappointing. Thomas Hardy does not emerge as a quiet man. One carries away no picture of him, for throughout the book there are no points of contact between the subject and the reader. The accuracy of detail is remarkable; but in the biography of one of our greatest writers one looks for the inspiration, the revealing insight, by which alone a great memorial of such a man can be fashioned out of words.

## DIALOGUES AND MONOLOGUES. By HUMBERT WOLFE (Victor Gollancz).

In this volume of literary criticism Mr. Humbert Wolfe is assured of his place as an essayist. In clear, and often very beautiful prose, he discourses

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with ease upon such varied subjects as George Moore, "The Craft of Verse," The Difficulties of the Poet and Modernism in Verse, and is reminiscent under the title of Drum.

The essay on George Moore is the first of its kind ever written. George Moore hardly emerges at all and one does not want him to emerge. The less we know (in a personal sense) of great artists the better. But the explanation of his style (which is the man) is provided with the utmost skill.

"George Moore's opinions don't matter and what does matter is the way in which they were expressed."

This is shrewd criticism and may well be accepted on the final judgment of the work of an artist who is not a thinker. George Moore will always be read for his style (almost perfect). But style alone is not enough for it changes and his character and the human story remain. Apart from "Esther Waters," where, in all the work of George Moore, is there a human being (in a creative sense)? Posterity will place him, as Mr. Wolfe very willingly suggests Porter has been placed, as "prose lying in state."

In the dialogue on "The Craft of Verse" one finds many startling opinions quietly expressed. There is a curious deliberation in the entry caused, I think, by too close an examination of the intangible. How can one lay hands upon the magic of Shelley or Keats? Great poetry is above criticism and when, subjected to detailed analysis may well become meaningless. It sings its own way into the heart and finds a home there for ever. No criticism or analysis can disturb its resting place. There is no craft of verse—for the very word "craft" assumes a form of labour which no poet of the first order ever endured.

"The Difficulties of the Poet" is an admirable essay written from the heart and raising questions still unanswered even in that strange, intellectual world which has come to be called Bloomsbury. There should be no difficulties (save monetary ones) for the true poet. He sings because he must and the best always sang for their suppers. Many of the modern poets have only to pipe to be feasted, for the new patrons of the "arts" (mainly women) no longer keep canaries.

There is a very clever dialogue entitled "Modernism in Verse" in which Mr. Wolfe scores heavily over one Bypass (aptly named). Bypass believes that "the Modernist poet will make an honest woman of Euterpe." Mr. Wolfe, knowing better, declares, "You cannot bind Euterpe to any wedlock. She is not for any single man, because, though she is the same for ever, for every true lover she is new and fresh and incredible." And all poets fail.

This stimulating and provocative book ends with an essay of reminiscence called "Drum" a delightful piece of work. Quarrels apart—"Dialogues and Monologues" is one of the best books of modern literary criticism I have read this year.

THE SILVER CIRCUS. By A. E. COPPARD (Jonathan Cape).

This new collection of short stories adds further to Mr. Coppard's

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high reputation. Although the stories in this book are by no means of equal merit, each bears the unmistakable marks of the author's originality of idea and treatment and his inimitable style. Mr. Coppard may be said to be the greatest of modern short story writers whose style is the distinguishing mark. If his stories were printed without his name it would not be difficult to say who wrote them. Other writers of short stories may intrigue us with their clever plots but no one can hold us so powerfully by the short use of words as Mr. Coppard. This is not to say that there are no plots in his short stories; there are, but they are not invented to make the story. The story unfolds itself out of the characters and their circumstances. There is no need to invent anything; the tales seem to tell themselves as all the best tales do.

Here is Mr. Coppard's great gift—the power to take the slightest incident out of life and allow it to fashion itself into a story which very often in his skilful hands is a microcosm of the whole of life. As I have said the stories in "The Silver Circus" are by no means equal in interest: "The Silver Circus," for example, is the least successful.

But how perfect is the story "Darby Dallow Tells His Tale." A very simple story but told with rare sentiment and wonderful economy of words. If one demands that a short story should be short, then "Darby Dallow Tells His Tale" fulfils the condition to the utmost and may without exaggeration be described as a little masterpiece.

I am naturally biassed in favour of "Fine Feathers" and "The Presser," because both appeared originally in the BERMONDSEY BOOK. Of these two short stories, "Fine Feathers" is by far the better, perhaps because it is more familiar in humanity. What a vivid and acute sense Mr. Coppard has for the little incidents so important in the lives of little people. In so many of his tales the very small in itself becomes quite enormous. The incidents in the life of each one of us are reminders of the truth of this.

And how well (turning to the other stories in the book) Mr. Coppard understands women. Few if any writers can equal Mr. Coppard in the delicacy with which he deals with themes, often very strongly sexual. Yet nothing unpleasant emerges as it does in the work of writers who have not Mr. Coppard's sensibility and style.

Altogether, then, the best book of short stories of the year.

MEMOIRS OF A FOX-HUNTING MAN. By SIEGFRIED SASOON  
(Faber & Gwyer).

The first edition of this book may provide some kind of consolation to those who do not believe in reviews of books for it was published anonymously. Yet the critics praised it with one accord as though it might have been written by an unknown author. Which shows that critical judgment, even in the popular press, is still alive to good work without a name. We are getting on.

It happens, however, to be a fact about this book that the name of the

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author was well-known to reviewers almost as soon as it was published! But whether one knew that this book was written by Siegfried Sassoon or Timothy Tinks, would not disturb one's judgment of it; that it is very good indeed.

To call it, as one hurried writer has called it, the best book of the year, is to talk nonsense. Like all memoirs, it is partly fiction and it is certain no author could remember, as clearly as Mr. Sassoon does, the details of childish habits. For hunting is like war in this; that we only remember the big things—not the small.

Mr. Sassoon's war experiences were unfortunate. He took a game (like fox-hunting) too seriously and he was not, if one may judge by the last two chapters in this book, a "a good mixer" in the proper Army sense.

But the early chapters in this book are excellent and the style is impeccable.

As I read about early days and onwards, with talk of an aunt, a private income (never much in jeopardy) and of men and horses I begin to understand why the author can write as simply and sincerely as he does in this book.

He was an orphan. He was brought up by a most understanding aunt, whose portrait remains one of the most beautiful I have encountered in modern literature.

In the description of Aunt Evelyn I find all the satisfaction I require from this delightful book. There is for all of us a woman somewhere, and for a certainty for Mr. Sassoon, Aunt Evelyn.

In the background there is a solicitor (like a father might have been) a fool about payments, but in the foreground is the aunt who understands, and a boy and a man, as clean and straight as a blade.

One quarrels with parts of this book as I have quarrelled with Mr. Sassoon's war poetry because I saw war as a joyous game and he did not; but no one can read this book without realising its sincerity and the simplicity of the writing.

Mr. Sassoon was a thoughtful rider to hounds and a thoughtful soldier. In this book he has given us the truth, as he sees it, about two phases of life almost akin in the spirit of killing.

Personally I prefer war to fox-hunting and the best soldiers in the world, killed on foot without "chasing." The exploits of "Tally Ho" were, (save on one occasion) useless in the Great War. Mr. Sassoon's realisation of this fact is made clear in this book; at least I think it is though I may have misread the memoirs. If he could only stand outside life for a space what a book he could write, for he has all the fairy gifts.

F. H.

JEHOVAH'S DAY. By MARY BORDEN (Heinemann).

"Jehovah's Day" is the seventh book that Mary Borden has written, and (perhaps because seven is a magic number) this is certainly her most remarkable, though perhaps not her best book.

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One wonders what idea she had when she started writing. Had she, one summer's night looked at the immensity of the starry sky and thought how minute a creature is man compared to the infinity of time. Man, a speck, to whom one day of Jehovah's time is a hundred million years; that should have been the theme of the book but it is not.

True, all through 491 pages is the contrast of the futile struggles of mankind compared to the vastness of time, but there she has failed. Her people are not the little atoms of matter she intended them to be, they are, in varying degrees, intensely alive, so alive in fact that they gradually dominate time instead of being dominated by it.

Peregrine Wood, Professor and Savant, wrapped in a world of abstruse mathematics; and Ann, his wife, with her gift of second sight, are people of the author's imagination; their feet are of clay, but it is not quite earthly clay.

Hilary, their airman son, is a dragon-fly, darting, swooping, far above the earth in which he has no interest. The description of him as a type is perfect. "He was alert and perfectly still. He seemed to her to be balanced like the needle of a compass, but he seemed too like a weapon charged with explosive, like a loaded rifle."

Patrick O'Hagen, lover and beloved of Ann, and Peregrine's friend is the fourth important character. A man out of sympathy with the machine-made world in which he lives, interested only in living creatures, his life is a struggle for simplicity in an artificial world.

The cleverest characters are the lesser ones. Carrie Whitaker, a Society woman, but in reality a captive fish in an aquarium, who assumes that because she can see nothing beyond her tank that there *is* nothing beyond. Rose Kimberley, who believes she too is in the aquarium and a leader of a multitude of small fish when in reality she is an animal, wild and untamed, to whom the freedom of the prairie makes a constant appeal.

The humorous and tragic story of these people ends in a crisis, out of all proportion to their importance in Jehovah's Day.

One is left with a feeling of bewilderment, as though one has been watching a brilliant story unfold itself at the cinema, but which is hopelessly mixed with another and quite different type of film, equally, if not more, brilliant.

D. W.

## BOOKS RECOMMENDED.

- JOSEPH AND HIS BRETHREN: by *H. W. Freeman* (Chatto & Windus).  
POINT COUNTER POINT: by *Aldous Huxley* (Chatto & Windus).  
THE OLD AND THE YOUNG: by *Luigi Pirandello* (Chatto & Windus).  
ELIZABETH AND ESSEX: by *Lytton Strachey* (Chatto & Windus).

BOOKS RECOMMENDED

- LIONS AND LAMBS: by *Low* and *Lynx* (Jonathan Cape).  
THE ENORMOUS ROOM: by *E. E. Cummings* (Jonathan Cape).  
A CONVERSATION WITH AN ANGEL: by *Hilaire Belloc* (Jonathan Cape).  
BEST SHORT STORIES OF 1928: Edited by *Edward J. O'Brien* (Jonathan Cape).  
THE PATHWAY: by *Henry Williamson* (Jonathan Cape).  
THE COLLECTED POEMS OF W. H. DAVIES, 1928 (Jonathan Cape).  
MY BROTHER JONATHAN: by *Francis Brett Young* (Heinemann).  
MIDSUMMER NIGHT: by *John Masefield* (Heinemann).  
EGG PANDERVIL: by *Gerald Bullett* (Heinemann).  
A MODERN PLUTARCH: by *John Cournos* (Thornton Butterworth).  
THE LOVERS OF THE MARKET PLACE: by *Richard Dehan* (Thornton Butterworth).  
MOTHER AND SON: by *Romain Rolland* (Thornton Butterworth).  
ORLANDO: by *Virginia Woolf* (Hogarth Press).  
THE STRUCTURE OF THE NOVEL: by *Edwin Muir* (Hogarth Press).  
PHASES OF ENGLISH POETRY: by *Herbert Read* (Hogarth Press).  
LYRICAL POETRY from BLAKE TO HARDY: by *H. J. C. Grierson* (Hogarth Press).  
VOLPONE: by *Ben Jonson*. Adapted by *Stefan Zweig* (George Allen & Unwin).  
MYSTIC LYRICS FROM THE INDIAN MIDDLE AGES: by *R. T. Gribble*.  
THE GENIUS: by *Theodor Dreiser* (Constable).  
THE COMPLETE POETICAL WORKS OF GEORGE MEREDITH: (Constable).  
WORLDS WITHIN WORLDS: by *Stella Benson* (Macmillan).  
THE SILVER THORN: by *Hugh Walpole* (Macmillan).  
POOR WOMEN: by *Norah Hoult* (Scholartis).  
THE STORY OF THE SPECTATOR, 1828-1928: by *William Beach Thomas* (Methuen).  
THE UNSPOILED: by *M. E. Frances Parker* (Fowler Wright).  
BONNET AND SHAWL: by *Philip Guedalla* (Hodder & Stoughton).  
MADAME BOVARY: by *Gustave Flaubert* (The Bodley Head).  
AN ANTHOLOGY OF "NINETIES" VERSE: by *A. J. A. Symons* (Elkin Mathews & Marrot).  
WINTER SONATA: by *Dorothy Edwards* (Wishart).  
UNDERTONES OF WAR: by *Edmund Blunden* (Cobden Sanderson).  
FRANZ SCHUBERT: by *Newman Flower* (Cassell).

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CHRISTOPHER'S DAY: by *Martin Armstrong* (Gollancz).

THE GYPSY: by *W. B. Trites* (Gollancz).

SELECTED ESSAYS AND ADDRESSES: by *Lord Haldane* (John Murray).

THE BUCK IN THE SNOW: by *Edna St. Vincent Millay* (Harper).

MEET THESE PEOPLE: by *Reginald Arkell* (Herbert Jenkins).

LAST CHANGES, LAST CHANCES: by *H. W. Nevinson* (Nisbet).

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PUBLISHERS PLEASE NOTE

Space for reviews of books is naturally limited, but every endeavour will be made to notice the best books published during the quarter.

The list of Books Recommended, which is now a feature of the BERMONDSEY Book, will be considerably extended. Mention in this list does not preclude a subsequent review.

All books for review should be addressed to: The Editor, The Bermondsey Book, 171 Bermondsey Street, S.E.1.

## LETTERS FROM ABROAD.

DEAR BERMONDSEY BOOK,

ROME, November

**W**E are still talking of the exceptionally hot dry summer we have had; even 6,000 feet up in the Dolomites where we spent August, people had to wear the thinnest of clothes, so you can imagine what those suffered who had to remain in the towns on the plains. We came down from our heights in time for the great music festival at Siena, but about this you will have read in all the English papers. Siena was a marvellous background for the festival, delighting all who saw it, whether for the first time or for the hundredth. An extra Palio was run for the occasion and as the beautiful mediæval clothes were newly and especially woven for this year, the scene was more than ever magnificent. The wide Piazza, during the race, looked as if a picture from the museum had come to life.

The unusual heat made a gap in many activities not political ones though, as Mussolini never rests from work, or rather, takes his rest by living like an ascetic, eating very little, drinking no wine, and going early to bed. A most useful innovation, due to his tireless thought for the country, is the way in which the problem of the roads is to be treated. An entire army of workmen has been formed ready to start work on the anniversary of the creation of Fascism on miles and miles of roads that are to be re-made, a much needed reform, as all who have bumped up and down some of the dust-covered ways will agree.

It often seems to me that here the pulse of life, owing to the climate and to the fact that, though Rome is the capital, there are other centres of art, literature and business as well, is inclined to move from a winter to a summer centre, Rome, Naples, Florence, and even Milan to a certain extent, have their quiet time when Venice, a town that sleeps through the winter, wakes with the first breath of summer to a vivid life. The force of life does not drag one, as in England, always one way—to London—but throws one like a ball on the waters of a many coloured fountain, here and there, uncertain where the brightest colour and the strongest jet of water will hold one.

This summer and autumn Venice has been more than ever gay with festivals; the most successful of these was the one, where all the different costumes of the various regions of Italy—north and south—were represented, worn by pretty women of each place. Every encouragement is given to keep these decorative garments from falling into disuse, and through prizes that are offered and, let us hope, also, because of a natural desire to look pretty, there is a revival in wearing the dresses that had given place to the universal short skirt and *cloche* hat. The Venetian women are learning to be once more proud of their black shawls, and in the Dolomites so charming is the dress of the peasants, that most of the girl visitors buy a gay flower-patterned frock with coloured aprons and handkerchief.

Venice faced her autumn solemnly and grandly with a great ceremony in honour of the fourth centenary of the birth of Paolo Veronese. Ugo Ojetti gave an oration in honour of the great painter in the Ducal Palace in the presence of the Crown Prince. Those invited to the ceremony were also asked to visit Villa Giacomelli-Maser, near Treviso where, though few people know

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of it, some of Veronese's best frescoes decorate the walls of that dignified villa built by Palladio. All who make a study of house decoration must see the new rooms at the *Museo Correr* where beautiful 18th century Venetian furniture and pictures have been lately placed. The municipality of Venice taking into consideration the number of festivals and ceremonies that attract people to the town, has decided to open an office for the direction of all these events. Salvini, grandson of the famous actor, and a well-known *régisseur*, is to be the head of it.

Genoa is, at the moment, doing more for art than any other city in Italy. All the magnificent palaces and churches are being restored and lovely old villas at Nervi and Pegli have been bought by the town to provide the public with gardens. Villa Durazzo-Pallavicini is still kept as it was when it was built in 1830 and is a rare example of the romantic taste in gardening. It has a wood of high camellia trees, incredibly lovely when in bloom. This, and the other villas are under the direction of Prof. Orlando Grossi who has a great knowledge of Genoa, ancient and modern, and who recently told me most interesting details about the old town. One of these was that the artisans' quarter, built in the 15th century, was arranged so that during the day the sun shines in turn on every part of each building, showing that in the past builders knew of the disinfectant qualities of sunlight.

At Milan, the great war monument is to be unveiled in November. It has been designed by a group of Milanese architects, Ponti, Lancia, Buzzi, Cabiatì, and Alpago Novello, under the direction of Prof. Muzio. The sculptors decorating the temple are Wildt, Andreotti, Saponaro, Griselli and Maraini. The monument is of an octagonal form with niches and a cupola.

Vasari's house at Arezzo has been restored. In it have been placed all the Vasari papers originally in the Rasponi archives in Florence but which had at a later time belonged to a German professor. This is an important acquisition for Italy and these documents are now appearing as a magazine called *Il Vasari*, edited by Alessandro Del Vita. Prof. Del Vita who is superintendent of the Museum at Arezzo, is also a specialist in pottery and has started a factory where the famous ancient Roman cups of Arezzo, are reproduced. They are as thin as blown glass and are decorated with delicate reliefs.

Of books there is not much to tell you, but you must read Elio Zorzi's delightful, *Osterie Veneziane* (Venetian Inns) published by Zanichelli of Bologna. It is a learned book on Venice, wine and food; it is very amusing and full of illustrations. Emilio Cecchi and Roberto Longhi have started a new magazine on art called *Pinacoteca*. The first number came out in August and has, amongst other interesting articles, one on Rubens in his Italian period. Ugo Ojetti's book on *Tintoretto, Canova, and Fattori*, is ready and will, I hope, be translated into English. I have at times written to you of Italo Svevo whose books much liked by Valery, Joyce, Lesbaud, and other foreigners, were but little noticed by Italians. Svevo died suddenly a few weeks ago since when many articles have appeared on his work.

One cannot be everywhere, but I wish I could have got to Perugia to hear

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a few of the interesting lectures given at the University for foreign students. Prof. E. Bodrero gave one on the English poets in Italy before Sitwell days when English poets knew more of Italians. Marinetti explained Futurist lyrics, and Gherardo Dottori spoke of Futurist painting. You may not agree with me, but I think Dottori is a fine painter and not only when judged by Futurist standards.

Operas and concerts begin late in the season. Toscanini is to conduct at the Scala a whole concert devoted to Schubert and Défauw, the Belgian conductor, works of modern Italian and other composers. At the Milanese theatres there are to be many new plays. Corradini's *Charlotte Corday* will be given at the Olympia and as usual, many foreign plays (translated) will be acted. At The Turin Theatre, Sem Benelli's company are to give Peer Gynt, plays by Shakespeare and Shaw, and a new play by Sem Benelli, *Orfeo*. The Pitoeff company are coming, again, to Italy with two of Shaw's plays and, one by Tolstoi as well as *La Double Inconstante* by Marivaux, and *Le Medecin Volant* by Molierè. For the first time the company of the Kamerny Theatre of Moscow is coming to Italy with a repertory not yet decided upon. Bragaglia will, of course, in Rome go on with the splendid work of his Independant Theatre.

And talking of the theatre I must tell you that the great Japanese actor Sadanji Ichikowa, has been received by Mussolini. As he has acted the part of Mussolini in a play about him in Tokio the meeting must have been interesting to them both. He said after his visit "The atmosphere of greatness and simplicity that I had tried to put into my impersonation of Mussolini I found in reality when I faced the man."

Florence, for the moment, is also a sleeping beauty but, in the winter, the town will wake to many exciting novelties. Very good concerts are to be given (subscribed for for three years) at the Politeama Fiorentina, conducted by Gui; and the various companies touring Italy will find their way to Florentine theatres.

I do not know what news to give you of Naples where, archæologically speaking, it is still dig and wait, wait and hope. Lots more solid ground must be moved before Herculaneum can give us, once more, something really exciting.

And my last piece of news takes me back to Milan where Gio Ponti, the young architect, has been chosen as director of the International Decorative Arts Exhibition which is to be opened early next year, at Monza. He is one of the most brilliant examples of Italian versatility for, besides being an architect, he designs delightful motives for porcelain and furniture, frescoes walls in tempura, and is also editor of *Domus*, the best Italian paper on architecture and house decoration. I hope England will take an important part in this exhibiton as under the new direction it is certain to be as successful as it will be original and vital.

BONAVENTURA.

THE BERMONDSEY BOOK

DEAR BERMONDSEY Book,

BERLIN, November.

**B**ERLIN IM LICHT! This was the fashion for the best part of a week in October, and from dusk till nearly dawn the city (in parts) was ablaze with light, some of the illuminations being of quite an original character. There was a competition, with attractive prizes, for the best-lighted and decorated shop-windows, with the result that huge crowds were drawn towards the principal shopping-centres, usually deserted at this time of night. On the third evening an enormous procession, organized by the leading firms and consisting of 60 to 70 cars, not to mention a troupe of performing elephants from the Scala and a caravan from the circus Krone (both performing here just now) moved slowly through the crowded streets, from one end of the town to the other. Wertheim, the big store on the Leipziger Platz, set two loud speakers going, and to the astonishment of the onlookers a couple started dancing in the street! This courageous pair found followers and soon the whole Platz was a swaying mass of delighted jazzers and fox-trotters, reminding one of Cologne at the height of Carnival. Such a thing has never happened in this staid northern city before.

Just previous to this, another popular attraction was the *eiserne Gustav's* return from Paris. This elderly cabdriver (the last of his kind in Wannsee—a lake suburb of Berlin) with his "Droschke" and faithful steed "Grasmus," was 22 weeks on his journey and was given a regular triumphal reception—the day of his arrival being his 60th birthday. The streets were lined with sightseers. "Grasmus" and his master smothered in flowers (the cab filled with more material comforts) were entertained to lunch by the publishing firm of Ullstein, where no less a personality than Henny Porten waited on the old gentleman! The deeds of an endowment for old and invalid cabdrivers was presented to him and will help a class of typical Berlin citizens slowly but surely disappearing from the metropolis.

"Graf Zeppelin's" visit was a source of great interest and while flying over the city Dr. Eckener's address to the inhabitants was broadcasted, so that one had the unique experience (if in possession of a loud speaker) of seeing the huge airship and hearing the pilot's voice at one and the same moment (an age of wonders!).

Various exhibitions have come and gone. The International Aviatik or "Ila," as it was popularly called, attracted an enormous number of visitors. The 5th Funk-Ausstellung, devoted entirely to broadcasting and kindred subjects, always has a good public.

The "Internationale Büro-Ausstellung", showing the most modern fittings and accessories for administrative bodies and offices was instructive, the noiseless typewriter being hailed with much delight. An effort to simplify the housing problem was made by a company of builders and architects showing a model settlement in a "suburb-Zehlendorf," small houses of the simplest material and supplied with every labour-saving device possible; the ideal nome for unmarried people or for small families, otherwise penned up in huge tenement-barracks with very little air and less light. But though comparatively

cheap, they are still too dear nowadays for the class for which they are intended.

Because our nerves are not harassed enough these days, the "Grand Guignol" has paid us its first visit—their speciality of hair-raising horrors seemed to be unknown here and on some evenings the audience simply fled from their seats or protested loudly, so that the actors could scarcely continue. Their humorous *repertoire* being so delightful, they were begged to make more copious use of this part of their art, or at least give less harrowing pieces; they made a compromise but these latter are scarcely less ghastly, though they were cleverly played.

As a welcome contrast, Barrie's "Was jede Frau weiss" ("What every woman knows") has been taken into the *repertoire* of the Staats Theatre and much appreciated. Here General-Intendant Jessner has produced a revival of Goethe's "Egmont" and is arranging a Studio, in which, on Sundays, matinée problem-plays of unknown authors are to be given. The talented poet and dramatist "Klabund," whose early death was much lamented here (and whose Chinese play "Der Kreidekreis" is to be produced in London under the title "The Chalk Circle" in the late autumn) had a posthumous première at the "Tribüne," a kind of commemoration. The play "X.Y.Z." of three persons is highly amusing and successful with an unexpected ending and is a great success.

Another of the younger school, Hasenclever, has a tragicomedy at the Kammerspiele, "Ehen werden in Himmel geschlossen" ("Marriages are made in Heaven") which is very original, and, in parts, delicious. I fear, however, it would shock some English audiences, "der liebe Gott" in person appearing on the stage, but as he is made up exactly, in garb and head, as Gerhart Hauptmann, much amusement is caused in the theatre when he enters from a game of golf on the meadows of Heaven, where two scenes of the play are laid. He takes coffee with St. Magdalen, to whom St. Peter (played by Romanowky, made up as the late Emperor Franz Joseph, with a delightful Vienna accent and a golden key sticking out of his coat pocket) is paying a visit. She begs that three suicides (just arrived) may be given another chance on the earth. This granted, they are sent back, where, of course, they do away with themselves again. Given another chance and their lives being laid in humbler places, they muddle up their existences in exactly the same way. "Der liebe Gott," played by Werner Krauss, is a very lovable figure. He stands helpless at the end; human beings are not to be saved, they just go headlong to their own destruction.

Shaw's "Misalliance," here entitled "Eltern und Kinder" ("Parents and Children"), is having a splendid run at the Komödie. The brilliant dialogue shows no trace of age. In honour of Tolstoi's centenary, two theatres are giving "Der lebende Leichnam" ("The living corpse"), each excellent in its way. Dreiser's "Ton in des Töpfer's Hand" ("Clay in the potter's hand") is clever and well acted, but extremely unpleasant in its subject; Verneuil's "Herr Lamberthier" (although a French play, it has had its first appearance here at the Lessing theatre) has two parts only; played by Albert Bassermann

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(one of the best of modern German actors) and Lucie Mannheim. It is a revelation, and grips from beginning to end. A much-talked of revival of "Romeo and Juliet" (because of the two young and extremely charming people playing the chief parts, Elizabeth Bergner and Franz Lederer) has not come up to expectations. Georg Kaiser's "Okobertag" is interesting and Heinrich Mann, up to now a serious writer, has tried his hand at a jazz comedy "Bibi, Jugend 1928" ("Bibi, the youth of 1928") which, with *chansons* and couplets by Rudolph Nelson, is being played at the new "Theatre in Palmenhaus." Raquel Meller has had a great success at the Scala and the long-expected "Die drei Groschenoper" (literally "three farthing's opera" an adaptation of "The Beggar's Opera") by Brecht and Weill is given somewhat in the style of the "Piscatorbühne" (Alas! now defunct from want of means). The treatment is more original, only the *finale* resembles somewhat Gay's parody and this moves one to laughter. It is a breaking-away from the stereotyped operetta and the strongest effects are secured with the simplest means.

This same composer, Weill, has had two operas produced in the Städtische Oper "Der Protagonist" and "Der Zar lässt sich Photographieren" (the book in both cases by Kaiser) but neither very successful. In the latter-named, a very grotesque effect is obtained; a chorus of 40 white-bearded, top-hatted old gentlemen sit in a row in the orchestra, from which place they sing (but one swallow does not make a summer). A new reading of Verdi's "Don Carlos" was given at the same house and in the Staatsoper, Richard Strauss's "Aegyptische Helena," made a very pompous *début* in Berlin, in the composer's presence. An old work, Cimarosa's "Heimliche Ehe" ("The Secret Marriage") proved too feeble for present day audiences.

We are in great danger of losing Furtwängler, for he has received the most tempting offers from the Vienna Opera house, and although strenuous efforts are being made to keep him here, it seems as if our only success will be the winter Subscription Concerts in the Philharmonic. America has loomed large during the last few years, but that only meant a month or so, and the Vienna crisis (he had a tremendous ovation after conducting "Rheingold") is more acute. The tide of concerts is flowing thick and fast, all the well-known artists have come (or are coming), most of them commemorating Schubert in some form or other. The first Symphony evening in the Opera house brought Bach's monumental work, "Die Kunst der Fuge," for the first time to Berlin. Originally held to be a theoretical counterpoint work partly for the piano, it was left to a highly-gifted young musician (he was eighteen when he started on his discoveries) to show that it was a work of the deepest musical feeling, by assigning the different unnamed parts of the score to distinct instruments and thus prepared it for practical performance. The rendering, under Kleiber, was superb. It is divine music, and the young genius, Wolfgang Gräser, responsible for this resurrection, died a few months previous to the Berlin production, by his own hand, at the age of twenty-two and was unable to enjoy the fruit of his labours. Several performances in the provinces had brought him some antagonists as well as praise (nothing unusual in such

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cases). His task was stupendous and perilous and he seems to have taken this to heart.

Professor Max Slevogt's 60th birthday is being celebrated by three exhibitions of his work; paintings, drawings and illustrations. Renoir is again to be seen at Flechtheim. His exhibits are more numerous than last year. The pastels and drawings from private collections are of particular interest and are not usually available for public inspection. Gauguin, too, is attracting much attention at Thannhauser's. A young German, of whom more will be heard, Xaver Fuhr, showed some work of great promise at the Gallery Nierendorf.

The well-known actress, Tilla Durieux, has written a novel, *Eine Tür fällt ins Schloss* ("A door falls too!") which, to those in the know, is descriptive of many stirring events in her own life. She and the book have been rather adversely criticised.

The Goethe Prize has been awarded this year to one of the most interesting men of the present age (Albert Schweitzer) best known for his wonderful biography of Johann Sebastian Bach. In addition to this he is theologian and preacher, doctor of medicine and founder and actual builder of a hospital in Lambarene in Central Africa, which after going to pieces during the war, was rebuilt and carried on with renewed strength. He is engaged on an enormous work, of which two volumes are at present finished; *Verfall und Wiedergeburt der Kultur* (Decline and Regeneration of Culture) and *Kultur und Ethik* (Culture and Ethics), both written entirely in equatorial Africa!

"Der Verband deutscher Erzähler" has organised this autumn "Matinées of Youth," in which the works of the younger authors are given prominence. Gertrud Epstein, a writer of originality and talent, and recipient of a coveted literary prize introduced by George Engel, was the first woman to be honoured, and her "Erzählung" (short story) "Hibo," was read with feeling by an actor of note, Theodor Loos.

DILETTANTE.

DEAR BERMONDSEY BOOK,

PARIS, November.

OCTOBER is the period which marks in Paris life the end of holidays and the renewal of winter activities.

"La Rentrée" admirably expresses this particular moment which really forms a fifth season in the year. It has no fixed date, but convention has decreed that the later it starts, the more *chic* it will be. It is the curtain behind which our curiosity anticipates all festivities, novelties and actualities. In truth, the year in the "Ville Lumière" starts with "La Rentrée" and not the first of January and until the breaking-up in the summer feverish intensity reigns supreme.

A crop of exhibitions usually spring up at this time, though at present they seem spaced at greater intervals than last year. The Motor Show was an

unsurpassed success. Motor-mad crowds, unable to gain access, and traffic tied up around the Salon were the usual characteristics. While two hundred cars were housed inside the large hall, no less than two thousand were outside, and whatever has resulted from this gigantic show it has at least proved the vitality of French industry and the possibility of obtaining comfortable and handsome cars for next to nothing. Woe betide the traffic of Paris if 100,000 new vehicles are put into circulation (as it is predicted) in the already too congested streets.

The great topic now is of the next Colonial Exhibition to take place in 1929. A big movement with regard to Fair Exhibitions is steadily acquiring vast importance throughout all the Provinces. These fairs offer unlimited attractions and bring a number of visitors from town to town, besides which they have a decided commercial utility. They show the latest models in decorative, household and industrial arts. If entertainments come to be added to these programmes who knows whether they will not bring a revival of the "Theatre Ambulant" which existed three centuries ago and was so famous in the time of Molierè.

The *début* of Jean-Jean Lavalliere, son of Eve Lavalliere, was awaited with much curiosity on the stage. The name of Eve Lavalliere is, perhaps, little known in England, but she was not long since Paris' cherished idol, the essence of the true Parisienne. She suddenly disappeared from the stage at the height of her success to vow herself to religion in a small mountain village in the Vosges.

I always remember one of Eve Lavalliere's last appearances. It was in London at His Majesty's Theatre, at the beginning of the War. A charity matinée had been organised in favour of the French Red Cross and a number of leading artists had come over from Paris to give their support. A few names come to my mind, de Feraudy, de Max, Albert Lambert, Marguerite Carré, but among them Eve Lavalliere. After first-rate scenes of all kinds, acts from operas, and various sketches, she appeared, her lithe, white figure all grace and soft, ineffable charm, standing out against the background of heavy curtains a few yards from the footlights. I have never forgotten the little poem she recited with unequalled simplicity and pathos, "*c'était un enfant de Sept ans*," nor the thunderous applause which followed her appearance. Jean-Jean Lavalliere has inherited her large sentimental eyes. As a *gamin de Paris* in the Palace Revue he had aroused all sympathies and shown promise of real talent. A strange destiny has been his. Till to-day he had shared his mother's seclusion and only suddenly allowed himself to be drawn by the call of his vocation.

Of Maurice Rostand's *Napoleon Fourth* the less said the better. The son of the noted author of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, in spite of his sincerity as a poet it is beneath him to violate history. His new poetical work, *Morbidezza* of another kind also grates on one's sense of proportion.

After many adventures and changes the Company of Young Authors has arrived at the Studio of the Champs-Elysées with *Prout* by Leon Regis, a pseudo-Pirandellian play, diverting in its way, tending to prove that in life,

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man is at the same time actor and spectator. The production is ultra-original, but the action is laborious and fails to please completely.

The ultra-romantic play *La Reine Fiammette* by Catulle Mendès, has been added to the repertoire of the *Comédie Française*. It amuses us to note that in 1895 it was unanimously refused and only comes into favour at a time when the romantic epoch is almost a dream.

A new version of *Hamlet* does credit to Mr. Gaston Baty. Recently, under the title of *Masks* Mr. Baty turned his attention to the dramatic art of Shakespeare. After various explanations of the legends attached to the stage in the Elizabethan period and on the personality of Shakespeare he produced the two versions of the tragic story of *Hamlet Prince of Denmark* and even the third. The first he has presented at the Avenue Theatre in M. Theodore Lascari's translation.

Pitoeff and company are giving *The Communion of the Saints* by Madeleine Berubet, which is so horrifying in its morals that it becomes ludicrous. As refreshing as ever is Sacha Guitry's novelty, *Mariette*. It has no other aim than to beguile and it does so to the full. It is a charming episode of Louis Napoleon's life put to pleasant music by Oscar Strauss. Yvonne Printemps as Mariette is as ever, bewitching.

The first performance of the Orchestra Symphonique de Paris had an auspicious opening under the direction of M. Ansermet, M. Fourestier and Alfred Cortot who is the moving spirit of this new organisation. On this occasion, he played the Brandenburg concerto and conducted it from the piano. Among the list of guest conductors of this orchestra are Mengelberg, Bruno Walter and Stravinsky, and among the singers Muratore, Lotte Lehman, Elizabeth Schumann and the usual number of "stars." The appearance of Frieda Hempel in her recital at the Opera was more a fashionable than an artistic event. The house was full of Americans. Her rather cold virtuosity recalls somewhat the art of Heifetz.

In a flying visit I had occasion to witness the second of the two yearly pilgrimages at Saintes-Maries-les-Mers. No fairy story is more charming than the legend of Les-Saintes, named after the three heroines, St. Maries in Provence, Marie-Magdlena, Marie Jacobé, and Marie Salome. Twenty centuries ago, with Lazarus, St. Maximum and Sarah, they landed on this sandy corner of the southern coast, all following their vocation in different parts of the country. The hill which sheltered Marie-Magdlena (St. Baume) is to-day a famous resort for visitors. All were buried in Christian ground except Sarah, and in honour of her, entire tribes of gipsy folk, of the true caravan type, mostly wealthy and covered with jewels, meet at "Saintes" every year to fête their patroness. The sight is unforgettable and the ceremonies most fascinating. I can only urge lovers of tradition to attend these extraordinary festivities.

To cinema patrons, a last, little word. Jackie Coogan is among us, doing musical turns with his father. London is to see him soon, I believe. This grown-up youth has not lost the charm of the tiny lad, and, what is rare, when cinema idols are seen in the flesh, there is no disillusion.

JULIETTE AUTRAN.

DEAR BERMONDSEY BOOK,

NEW YORK, November.

**V**ERY few things surprise a New Yorker; his ears have become hardened to the squeaking of taxi-cab brakes, the piercing staccato of riveting machines, the never ceasing rumbling of the Elevated, to an almost infinite number of noises. He walks hastily through the streets, jostles his neighbour, is jostled in return by other pedestrians, and dashes by a spiral route between automobiles when he crosses the road, without so much as blinking an eye. Nevertheless every day he is greeted by new phenomena which, although eliciting no surprise from him, arouse his curiosity and finally his wallet. Now it is the Vitaphone, or Movietone, or, in simpler terms, Speaking Pictures.

The first presentation of the Vitaphone was regarded with interest for several minutes, then with perplexity, and lastly with amusement. For on the screen was shown a singer, dressed elaborately, who opened and closed his mouth, dilated his eyes, made vain gestures—but where did the voice come from? not from his mouth, it seemed, but from some corner at the foot of the screen. And sometimes the actor opened his mouth, but not until he almost closed it again did his voice burst forth as though by means of ventriloquism.

Beginning with individual performers and short sentimental vaudeville acts, the Vitaphone extended its scope to the regular moving pictures, and incidentally succeeded in achieving synchronization of voice and gesture. "The tremendous future success of the moving picture business is assured" and practically every picture firm began to erect large voice production edifices, screen actors took to voice training and to the gargling of raw eggs, and as usual the public once more has become the recipient of mediocrity, sentimentality, and Noise.

To-day great signs on Broadway brightly twinkle with bold announcements of "Don't fail to see *The Terror*"; you'll regret missing "*The Revenge of Red-headed Molly*," a blood-curdling production. Listen to the voices of your favourite "stars," and numerous other optimistic allurements.

After one hears his favourite "star's" voice—there is no more favourite "star." "Why, she talks through her nose!" "Oh, I thought he had a deep, masculine voice, and just hear him: he talks like my brother's wife."

Passionate but silent love scenes, having lent themselves to the audience's imagination, were, somehow, successful; but passionate love scenes accompanied with honeyed lullabys of "I'll love you till I draw my last breath," "How dare my father come between us—we'll elope, my sweetheart," "Oh, you brute, unhand me!" and so on, strangely fail to produce pleasant emotions in young hearts and memories in hearts petrified by age. Tragedy turns to humour when the virtue of the heroine is at stake, and the villain announces with a triumphant leer, "At last, my dear, I've got you in my power."

It is true that moving pictures accompanied only by orchestral music *via* the sound machine, from which, at a most tender moment on the screen

#### LETTERS FROM ABROAD

issues forth a heart-rending song, succeed in drawing out a greater abundance of tears than would otherwise have been the case. Suppressed turbulence leaks out of the New York mind, and New Yorkers return to their homes at midnight with refreshed bodies and tender ears, both of which will contract on the next morning when a symphony of riveting machines, honking horns, groaning vehicles burst forth with a fiercer violence because of a night's rest.

Movietone orchestral music, on the other hand, is still mastered by numerous forms of squeaks, static, and jarring sounds; but, fortunately, the New York ear is accustomed to such noise and from habit scarcely hears it. One wonders what will become of the large orchestras still performing in many of the New York gold-lined, moving picture theatres.

The Movietone has its good uses, as exemplified by the picture "The Patriot" in which the voices of running Russians increased the mass effect, and the singing of the old Russian national anthem by numerous people, heightening the glory of a new order, succeeded in gaining the participation of the audience to a great extent, an accomplishment rarely achieved in the theatre in this country.

With the general acceptance of the Movietone, and the manner in which it is being employed, the moving picture industry again reveals its interest solely in net profits. Every device is brought into play whereby the screen will exploit every hidden nook of its audience's puerile emotions; and the most sterile and stereotyped plots continue to be produced, childish patriotism and ideals are played up to, and in the next "fade-in" the dose of lewdness is increased, while in the neighbouring theatre a censor closes the show because an actor on the legitimate stage utters several profane words.

The possibilities of the screen fill one with hope: what opportunities to produce marvellous effects of photography! What vast and limitless means by which to accomplish what the stage is necessarily powerless to do: scenic effects, character portrayal to the point of symbolism, the interplay of masses, structures, crowds, depiction of our machine age and its possibilities, interpretation of American life, its *tempo*, its preoccupation with the acquirement of wealth to the point of fatuity, and so on indefinitely. The Movietone could find its proper place in the aforementioned. But instead we find the moving picture industry descending to the twelve-year-old intelligence of its general public, appealing to its infantile emotions, as do the so-called American literary magazines.

Despair is out of place here. The moving picture industry failing to take advantages of æsthetic possibilities, ignoring its opportunity to become one of the arts, twisting and distorting its interpretation of life, submitting itself to any atrocity for the sake of earning more dollars, is, in its entirety, a grand example of American ideals, and New York ideals in particular. What it has failed to portray on its screen, the industry as a whole has succeeded in exemplifying.

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