
Windfalls
Alfred George Gardiner

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WINDFALLS ***

WINDFALLS

By Alfred George Gardiner

(Alpha of the Plough)

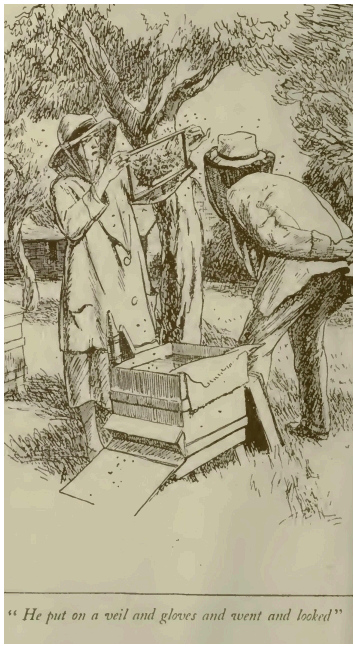
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1920

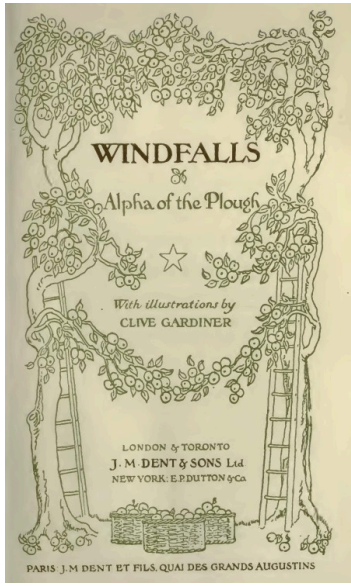


Original



" He put on a veil and gloves and went and looked "

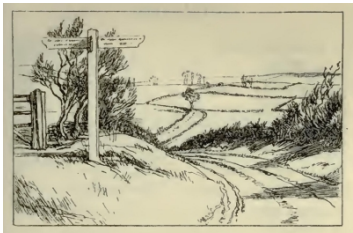
Original



Original

TO GWEN AND PHYLLIS

I think this book belongs to you because, if it can be said to be about anything in particular—which it cannot—it is, in spite of its delusive title, about bees, and as I cannot dedicate it to them, I offer it to those who love them most.



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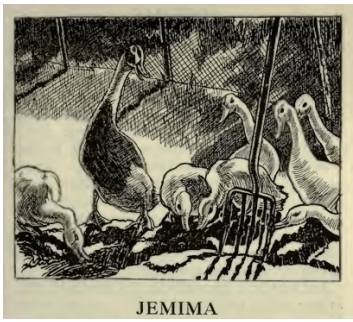


Original

PREFACE

In offering a third basket of windfalls from a modest orchard, it is hoped that the fruit will not be

found to have deteriorated. If that is the case, I shall hold myself free to take another look under the trees at my leisure. But I fancy the three baskets will complete the garnering. The old orchard from which the fruit has been so largely gathered is passing from me, and the new orchard to which I go has not yet matured. Perhaps in the course of years it will furnish material for a collection of autumn leaves.



JEMIMA

Original

JEMIMA

I took a garden fork just now and went out to dig up the artichokes. When Jemima saw me crossing the orchard with a fork he called a committee meeting, or rather a general assembly, and after some joyous discussion it was decided *nem. con.* that the thing was worth looking into. Forthwith, the whole family of Indian runners lined up in single file, and led by Jemima followed faithfully in my track towards the artichoke bed, with a gabble of merry noises. Jemima was first into the breach. He always is...

But before I proceed it is necessary to explain. You will have observed that I have twice referred to Jemima in the masculine gender. Doubtless, you said, “How careless of the printer. Once might be forgiven; but twice——” Dear madam' (or sir), the printer is on this occasion blameless. It seems incredible, but it's so. The truth is that Jemima was the victim of an accident at the christening ceremony. He was one of a brood who, as they came like little balls of yellow fluff out of the shell, received names of appropriate ambiguity—all except Jemima. There were Lob and Lop, Two Spot and Waddles, Puddle-duck and Why?, Greedy and Baby, and so on. Every name as safe as the bank, equal to all contingencies—except Jemima. What reckless impulse led us to call him Jemima I forget. But regardless of his name, he grew up into a handsome drake—a proud and gaudy fellow, who doesn't care twopence what you call him so long as you call him to the Diet of Worms.

And here he is, surrounded by his household, who, as they gabble, gobble, and crowd in on me so that I have to scare them off in order to drive in the fork. Jemima keeps his eye on the fork as a good batsman

keeps his eye on the ball. The flash of a fork appeals to him like the sound of a trumpet to the warhorse. He will lead his battalion through fire and water in pursuit of it. He knows that a fork has some mystical connection with worms, and doubtless regards it as a beneficent deity. The others are content to grub in the new-turned soil, but he, with his larger reasoning power, knows that the fork produces the worms and that the way to get the fattest worms is to hang on to the fork. From the way he watches it I rather fancy he thinks the worms come out of the fork. Look at him now. He cocks his unwinking eye up at the retreating fork, expecting to see large, squirming worms dropping from it, and Greedy nips in under his nose and gobbles a waggling beauty. My excellent friend, I say, addressing Jemima, you know both too much and too little. If you had known a little more you would have had that worm; if you had known a little less you would have had that worm. Let me commend to you the words of the poet:

> A little learning is a dangerous thing:
> Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring.

I've known many people like you, who miss the worm because they know too much but don't know enough. Now Greedy——

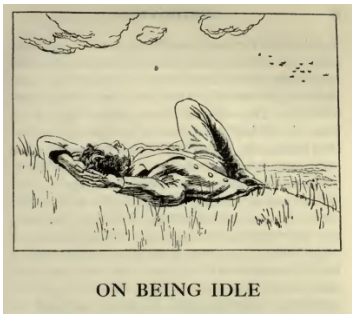
But clear off all of you. What ho! there.... The scales!... Here is a bumper root.... Jemima realises that something unusual has happened, assembles the family, and discusses the mystery with great animation. It is this interest in affairs that makes the Indian runners such agreeable companions. You can never be lonely with a family of Indian runners about. Unlike the poor solitary hens who go

grubbing about the orchard without an idea in their silly heads, these creatures live in a perpetual gossip. The world is full of such a number of things that they hardly ever leave off talking, and though they all talk together they are so amiable about it that it makes you feel cheerful to hear them.... But here are the scales.... Five pound three ounces.... Now what do you say to that, Jemima? Let us turn to and see if we can beat it.

The idea is taken up with acclamation, and as I resume digging I am enveloped once more by the mob of ducks, Jemima still running dreadful risks in his attachment to the fork. He is a nuisance, but it would be ungracious to complain, for his days are numbered. You don't know it, I said, but you are feasting to-day in order that others may feast tomorrow. You devour the worm, and a larger and more cunning animal will devour you. He cocks up his head and fixes me with that beady eye that gleams with such artless yet searching intelligence.... You are right, Jemima. That, as you observe, is only half the tale. You eat the worm, and the large, cunning animal eats you, but—yes, Jemima, the crude fact has to be faced that the worm takes up the tale again where Man the Mighty leaves off:

His heart is builded
For pride, for potency, infinity,
All heights, all deeps, and all immensities,
Arrased with purple like the house of kings,
To stall the grey-rat, and the carrion-worm
Statelily lodge...

I accept your reminder, Jemima. I remember with humility that I, like you, am only a link in the chain of the Great Mother of Mysteries, who creates to devour and devours to create. I thank you, Jemima. And driving in the fork and turning up the soil I seized a large fat worm. I present you with this, Jemima, I said, as a mark of my esteem...



Original

ON BEING IDLE

I have long laboured under a dark suspicion that I

am an idle person. It is an entirely private suspicion. If I chance to mention it in conversation, I do not expect to be believed. I announce that I am idle, in fact, to prevent the idea spreading that I am idle. The art of defence is attack. I defend myself by attacking myself, and claim a verdict of not guilty by the candour of my confession of guilt. I disarm you by laying down my arms. “Ah, ah,” I expect you to say. “Ah, ah, you an idle person. Well, that is good.” And if you do not say it I at least give myself the pleasure of believing that you think it.

This is not, I imagine, an uncommon artifice. Most of us say things about ourselves that we should not like to hear other people say about us. We say them in order that they may not be believed. In the same way some people find satisfaction in foretelling the probability of their early decease. They like to have the assurance that that event is as remote as it is undesirable. They enjoy the luxury of anticipating the sorrow it will inflict on others. We all like to feel we shall be missed. We all like to share the pathos of our own obsequies. I remember a nice old gentleman whose favourite topic was “When I am gone.” One day he was telling his young grandson, as the child sat on his knee, what would happen when he was gone, and the young grandson looked up cheerfully and said, “When you are gone, grandfather, shall I be at the funeral?” It was a devastating question, and it was observed that afterwards the old gentleman never discussed his latter end with his formidable grandchild. He made it too painfully literal.

And if, after an assurance from me of my congenital idleness, you were to express regret at so unfortunate an affliction I should feel as sad as the old gentleman. I should feel that you were lacking in tact, and I daresay I should take care not to lay

myself open again to such *gaucherie*. But in these articles I am happily free from this niggling self-deception. I can speak the plain truth about "Alpha of the Plough" without asking for any consideration for his feelings. I do not care how he suffers. And I say with confidence that he is an idle person. I was never more satisfied of the fact than at this moment. For hours he has been engaged in the agreeable task of dodging his duty to *The Star*.

It began quite early this morning—for you cannot help being about quite early now that the clock has been put forward—or is it back?—for summer-time. He first went up on to the hill behind the cottage, and there at the edge of the beech woods he lay down on the turf, resolved to write an article *en plein air*, as Corot used to paint his pictures—an article that would simply carry the intoxication of this May morning into Fleet Street, and set that stuffy thoroughfare carolling with larks, and make it green with the green and dappled wonder of the beech woods. But first of all he had to saturate himself with the sunshine. You cannot give out sunshine until you have taken it in. That, said he, is plain to the meanest understanding. So he took it in. He just lay on his back and looked at the clouds sailing serenely in the blue. They were well worth looking at—large, fat, lazy, clouds that drifted along silently and dreamily, like vast bales of wool being wafted from one star to another. He looked at them "long and long" as Walt Whitman used to say. How that loafer of genius, he said, would have loved to lie and look at those woolly clouds.

And before he had thoroughly examined the clouds he became absorbed in another task. There were the sounds to be considered. You could not have a picture of this May morning without the sounds. So

he began enumerating the sounds that came up from the valley and the plain on the wings of the west wind. He had no idea what a lot of sounds one could hear if one gave one's mind to the task seriously. There was the thin whisper of the breeze in the grass on which he lay, the breathings of the woodland behind, the dry flutter of dead leaves from a dwarf beech near by, the boom of a bumble-bee that came blustering past, the song of the meadow pipit rising from the fields below, the shout of the cuckoo sailing up the valley, the clatter of magpies on the hillside, the “spink-spink” of the chaffinch, the whirr of a tractor in a distant field, the crowing of a far-off cock, the bark of a sheep dog, the ring of a hammer reverberating from a remote clearing in the beech woods, the voices of children who were gathering violets and bluebells in the wooded hollow on the other side of the hill. All these and many other things he heard, still lying on his back and looking at the heavenly bales of wool. Their dreaminess affected him; their billowy softness invited to slumber....

When he awoke he decided that it was too late to start an article then. Moreover, the best time to write an article was the afternoon, and the best place was the orchard, sitting under a cherry tree, with the blossoms falling at your feet like summer snow, and the bees about you preaching the stern lesson of labour. Yes, he would go to the bees. He would catch something of their fervour, their devotion to duty. They did not lie about on their backs in the sunshine looking at woolly clouds. To them, life was real, life was earnest. They were always “up and doing.” It was true that there were the drones, impostors who make ten times the buzz of the workers, and would have you believe they do all the work because they make most of the noise. But the example of these

lazy fellows he would ignore. Under the cherry tree he would labour like the honey bee.

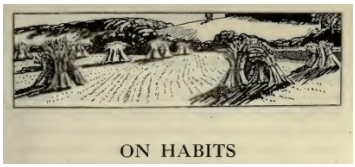
But it happened that as he sat under the cherry tree the expert came out to look at the hives. She was quite capable of looking at the hives alone, but it seemed a civil thing to lend a hand at looking. So he put on a veil and gloves and went and looked. It is astonishing how time flies when you are looking in bee-hives. There are so many things to do and see. You always like to find the queen, for example, to make sure that she is there, and to find one bee in thousands, takes time. It took more time than usual this afternoon, for there had been a tragedy in one of the hives. It was a nucleus hive, made up of brood frames from other hives, and provided with a queen of our best breed. But no queen was visible. The frames were turned over industriously without reward. At last, on the floor of the hive, below the frames, her corpse was found. This deepened the mystery. Had the workers, for some obscure reason, rejected her sovereignty and killed her, or had a rival to the throne appeared and given her her quietus? The search was renewed, and at last the new queen was run to earth in the act of being fed by a couple of her subjects. She had been hatched from a queen cell that had escaped notice when the brood frames were put in and, according to the merciless law of the hive, had slain her senior. All this took time, and before he had finished, the cheerful clatter of tea things in the orchard announced another interruption of his task.

And to cut a long story short, the article he set out to write in praise of the May morning was not written at all. But perhaps this article about how it was not written will serve instead. It has at least one virtue. It exhales a moral as the rose exhales a

perfume.



Original



Original

ON HABITS

I sat down to write an article this morning, but found I could make no progress. There was grit in

the machine somewhere, and the wheels refused to revolve. I was writing with a pen—a new fountain pen that someone had been good enough to send me, in commemoration of an anniversary, my interest in which is now very slight, but of which one or two well-meaning friends are still in the habit of reminding me. It was an excellent pen, broad and free in its paces, and capable of a most satisfying flourish. It was a pen, you would have said, that could have written an article about anything. You had only to fill it with ink and give it its head, and it would gallop away to its journey's end without a pause. That is how I felt about it when I sat down. But instead of galloping, the thing was as obstinate as a mule. I could get no more speed out of it than Stevenson could get out of his donkey in the Cevennes. I tried coaxing and I tried the bastinado, equally without effect on my Modestine.

Then it occurred to me that I was in conflict with a habit. It is my practice to do my writing with a pencil. Days, even weeks, pass without my using a pen for anything more than signing my name. On the other hand there are not many hours of the day when I am without a pencil between thumb and finger. It has become a part of my organism as it were, a mere extension of my hand. There, at the top of my second finger, is a little bump, raised in its service, a monument erected by the friction of a whole forest of pencils that I have worn to the stump. A pencil is to me what his sword was to D'Artagnan, or his umbrella was to the Duke of Cambridge, or his cheroot was to Grant, or whittling a stick was to Jackson or—in short, what any habit is to anybody. Put a pencil in my hand, seat me before a blank writing pad in an empty room, and I am, as they say of the children, as good as gold. I tick on as

tranquilly as an eight-day clock. I may be dismissed from the mind, ignored, forgotten. But the magic wand must be a pencil. Here was I sitting with a pen in my hand, and the whole complex of habit was disturbed. I was in an atmosphere of strangeness. The pen kept intruding between me and my thoughts. It was unfamiliar to the touch. It seemed to write a foreign language in which nothing pleased me.

This tyranny of little habits which is familiar to all of us is nowhere better described than in the story which Sir Walter Scott told to Rogers of his school days. “There was,” he said, “a boy in my class at school who stood always at the top, nor could I with all my effort, supplant him. Day came after day and still he kept his place, do what I would; till at length I observed that, when a question was asked him, he always fumbled with his fingers at a particular button in the lower part of his waistcoat. To remove it, therefore, became expedient in my eye, and in an evil moment it was removed with a knife. Great was my anxiety to know the success of my measure, and it succeeded too well. When the boy was again questioned his fingers sought again for the button, but it was not to be found. In his distress he looked down for it—it was to be seen no more than to be felt. He stood confounded, and I took possession of his place; nor did he ever recover it, or ever, I believe, suspect who was the author of his wrong. Often in after-life has the sight of him smote me as I passed by him, and often have I resolved to make him some reparation; but it ended in good resolutions. Though I never renewed my acquaintance with him, I often saw him, for he filled some inferior office in one of the courts of law at Edinburgh. Poor fellow! I believe he is dead, he took

early to drinking."

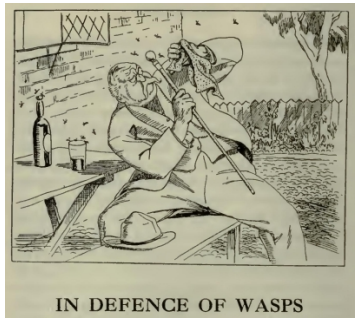
It was rather a shabby trick of young Scott's, and all one can say in regard to its unhappy consequences is that a boy so delicately balanced and so permanently undermined by a trifle would in any case have come. to grief in this rough world. There is no harm in cultivating habits, so long as they are not injurious habits. Indeed, most of us are little more than bundles of habits neatly done up in coat and trousers. Take away our habits and the residuum would hardly be worth bothering about. We could not get on without them. They simplify the mechanism of life. They enable us to do a multitude of things automatically which, if we had to give fresh and original thought to them each time, would make existence an impossible confusion. The more we can regularise our commonplace activities by habit, the smoother our path and the more leisure we command. To take a simple case. I belong to a club, large but not so large as to necessitate attendants in the cloakroom. You hang up your own hat and coat and take them down when you want them. For a long time it was my practice to hang them anywhere where there was a vacant hook and to take no note of the place. When I sought them I found it absurdly difficult to find them in the midst of so many similar hats and coats. Memory did not help me, for memory refused to burden itself with such trumpery things, and so daily after lunch I might be seen wandering forlornly and vacuously between the rows and rows of clothes in search of my own garments murmuring, "Where *did* I put my hat?" Then one day a brilliant inspiration seized me. I would always hang my coat and hat on a certain peg, or if that were occupied, on the vacant peg nearest to it. It needed a few days to form the habit, but once formed it worked like a

charm. I can find my hat and coat without thinking about finding them. I go to them as unerringly as a bird to its nest, or an arrow to its mark. It is one of the unequivocal triumphs of my life.

But habits should be a stick that we use, not a crutch to lean on. We ought to make them for our convenience or enjoyment and occasionally break them to assert our independence. We ought to be able to employ them, without being discomposed when we cannot employ them. I once saw Mr Balfour so discomposed, like Scott's school rival, by a trivial breach of habit. Dressed, I think, in the uniform of an Elder Brother of Trinity House he was proposing a toast at a dinner at the Mansion House. It is his custom in speaking to hold the lapels of his coat. It is the most comfortable habit in speaking, unless you want to fling your arms about in a rhetorical fashion. It keeps your hands out of mischief and the body in repose. But the uniform Mr Balfour was wearing had no lapels, and when the hands went up in search of them they wandered about pathetically like a couple of children who had lost their parents on Blackpool sands. They fingered the buttons in nervous distraction, clung to each other in a visible access of grief, broke asunder and resumed the search for the lost lapels, travelled behind his back, fumbled with the glasses on the table, sought again for the lapels, did everything but take refuge in the pockets of the trousers. It was a characteristic omission. Mr Balfour is too practised a speaker to come to disaster as the boy in Scott's story did; but his discomfiture was apparent. He struggled manfully through his speech, but all the time it was obvious that he was at a loss what to do with his hands, having no lapels on which to hang them.

I happily had a remedy for my disquietude. I put

up my pen, took out a pencil, and, launched once more into the comfortable rut of habit, ticked away peacefully like the eight-day clock. And this is the (I hope) pardonable result.



IN DEFENCE OF WASPS

Original

IN DEFENCE OF WASPS

It is time, I think, that some one said a good word for the wasp. He is no saint, but he is being abused beyond his deserts. He has been unusually prolific this summer, and agitated correspondents have been

busy writing to the newspapers to explain how you may fight him and how by holding your breath you may miraculously prevent him stinging you. Now the point about the wasp is that he doesn't want to sting you. He is, in spite of his military uniform and his formidable weapon, not a bad fellow, and if you leave him alone he will leave you alone. He is a nuisance of course. He likes jam and honey; but then I am bound to confess that I like jam and honey too, and I daresay those correspondents who denounce him so bitterly like jam and honey. We shouldn't like to be sent to the scaffold because we like jam and honey. But let him have a reasonable helping from the pot or the plate, and he is as civil as anybody. He has his moral delinquencies no doubt. He is an habitual drunkard. He reels away, in a ludicrously helpless condition from a debauch of honey and he shares man's weakness for beer. In the language of America, he is a “wet.” He cannot resist beer, and having rather a weak head for liquor he gets most disgracefully tight and staggers about quite unable to fly and doubtless declaring that he won't go home till morning. I suspect that his favourite author is Mr Belloc—not because he writes so wisely about the war, nor so waspishly about Puritans, but because he writes so boisterously about beer.

This weakness for beer is one of the causes of his undoing. An empty beer bottle will attract him in hosts, and once inside he never gets out. He is indeed the easiest creature to deal with that flies on wings. He is excessively stupid and unsuspicious. A fly will trust nobody and nothing, and has a vision that takes in the whole circumference of things; but a wasp will walk into any trap, like the country bumpkin that he is, and will never have the sense to walk out the way he went in. And on your plate he simply waits for

you to squeeze his thorax. You can descend on him as leisurely as you like. He seems to have no sight for anything above him, and no sense of looking upward.

His intelligence, in spite of the mathematical genius with which he fashions his cells, is contemptible, and Fabre, who kept a colony under glass, tells us that he cannot associate entrance and exit. If his familiar exit is cut off, it does not occur to him that he can go out by the way he always comes in. A very stupid fellow.

If you compare his morals with those of the honey bee, of course, he cuts a poor figure. The bee never goes on the spree. It avoids beer like poison, and keeps decorously outside the house. It doesn't waste its time in riotous living, but goes on ceaselessly working day and night during its six brief weeks of life, laying up honey for the winter and for future generations to enjoy. But the rascally fellow in the yellow stripes just lives for the hour. No thought of the morrow for him, thank you. Let us eat, drink, and be merry, he says, for to-morrow——. He runs through his little fortune of life at top speed, has a roaring time in August, and has vanished from the scene by late September, leaving only the queen behind in some snug retreat to raise a new family of 20,000 or so next summer.

But I repeat that he is inoffensive if you let him alone. Of course, if you hit him he will hit back, and if you attack his nest he will defend it. But he will not go for you unprovoked as a bee sometimes will. Yet he could afford this luxury of unprovoked warfare much better than the bee, for, unlike the bee, he does not die when he stings. I feel competent to speak of the relative dispositions of wasps and bees, for I've been living in the midst of them. There

are fifteen hives in the orchard, with an estimated population of a quarter of a million bees and tens of thousands of wasps about the cottage. I find that I am never deliberately attacked by a wasp, but when a bee begins circling around me I flee for shelter. There's nothing else to do. For, unlike the wasp, the bee's hatred is personal. It dislikes you as an individual for some obscure reason, and is always ready to die for the satisfaction of its anger. And it dies very profusely. The expert, who has been taking sections from the hives, showed me her hat just now. It had nineteen stings in it, planted in as neatly as thorns in a bicycle tyre.

It is not only in his liking for beer that the wasp resembles man. Like him, too, he is an omnivorous eater. If you don't pick your pears in the nick of time he will devastate them nearly as completely as the starling devastates the cherry tree. He loves butcher's meat, raw or cooked, and I like to see the workman-like way in which he saws off his little joint, usually fat, and sails away with it for home. But his real virtue, and this is why I say a good word for him, is that he is a clean fellow, and is the enemy of that unclean creature the fly, especially of that supreme abomination, the blow fly. His method in dealing with it is very cunning. I saw him at work on the table at lunch the other day. He got the blow fly down, but did not kill it. With his mandibles he sawed off one of the creature's wings to prevent the possibility of escape, and then with a huge effort lifted it bodily and sailed heavily away. And I confess he carried my enthusiastic approval with him. There goes a whole generation of flies, said I, nipped in the bud.

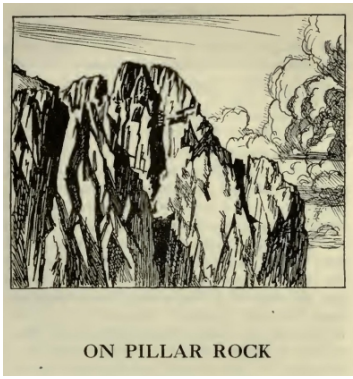
And let this be said for him also: he has bowels of compassion. He will help a fellow in distress.

Fabre records that he once observed a number of wasps taking food to one that was unable to fly owing to an injury to its wings. This was continued for days, and the attendant wasps were frequently seen to stroke gently the injured wings.

There is, of course, a contra account, especially in the minds of those who keep bees and have seen a host of wasps raiding a weak stock and carrying the hive by storm. I am far from wishing to represent the wasp as an unmitigated blessing. He is not that, and when I see a queen wasp sunning herself in the early spring days I consider it my business to kill her. I am sure that there will be enough without that one. But in preserving the equilibrium of nature the wasp has its uses, and if we wish ill to flies we ought to have a reasonable measure of tolerance for their enemy.



Original



ON PILLAR ROCK

Original

ON PILLAR ROCK

Those, we are told, who have heard the East a-calling “never heed naught else.” Perhaps it is so; but they can never have heard the call of Lakeland at New Year. They can never have scrambled up the screes of the Great Gable on winter days to try a fall with the Arrow Head and the Needle, the Chimney and Kern Knotts Crack; never have seen the mighty Pillar Rock beckoning them from the top of Black Sail Pass, nor the inn lights far down in the valley

calling them back from the mountains when night has fallen; never have sat round the inn fire and talked of the jolly perils of the day, or played chess with the landlord—and been beaten—or gone to bed with the refrain of the climbers' chorus still challenging the roar of the wind outside—

> Come, let us tie the rope, the rope, the rope,
> Come, let us link it round, round, round.
> And he that will not climb to-day
> Why—leave him on the ground, the ground, the ground.

If you have done these things you will not make much of the call of the temple bells and the palm trees and the spicy garlic smells—least of all at New Year. You will hear instead the call of the Pillar Rock and the chorus from the lonely inn. You will don your oldest clothes and wind the rope around you—singing meanwhile “the rope, the rope,”—and take the night train, and at nine or so next morning you will step out at that gateway of the enchanted land—Keswick. Keswick! Wastdale!... Let us pause on the music of those words.... There are men to whom they open the magic casements at a breath.

And at Keswick you call on George Abraham. It would be absurd to go to Keswick without calling on George Abraham. You might as well go to Wastdale Head without calling on the Pillar Rock. And George tells you that of course he will be over at Wastdale on New Year's Eve and will climb the Pillar Rock or Scafell Pinnacle with you on New Year's Day.

The trap is at the door, you mount, you wave

adieus, and are soon jolting down the road that runs by Derwentwater, where every object is an old friend, whom absence only makes more dear. Here is the Bowder Stone and there across the Lake is Causey Pike, peeping over the brow of Cat Bells. (Ah! the summer days on Causey Pike, scrambling and picking wimberries and waking the echoes of Grisedale.)

And there before us are the dark Jaws of Borrowdale and, beyond, the billowy summits of Great Gable and Scafell. And all around are the rocky sentinels of the valley. You know everyone and hail him by his name. Perhaps you jump down at Lodore and scramble up to the Falls. Then on to Rosthwaite and lunch.

And here the last rags of the lower world are shed. Fleet Street is a myth and London a frenzied dream. You are at the portals of the sanctuary and the great peace of the mountains is yours. You sling your rucksack on your back and your rope over your shoulder and set out on the three hours' tramp over Styhead Pass to Wastdale.

It is dark when you reach the inn yard for the way down is long and these December days are short. And on the threshold you are welcomed by the landlord and landlady—heirs of Auld Will Ritson—and in the flagged entrance you see coils of rope and rucksacks and a noble array of climbers' boots—boots that make the heart sing to look upon, boots that have struck music out of many a rocky breast, boots whose missing nails has each a story of its own. You put your own among them, don your slippers, and plunge among your old companions of the rocks with jolly greeting and pass words. What a mingled gathering it is—a master from a school in the West, a jolly lawyer from Lancashire, a young

clergyman, a barrister from the Temple, a manufacturer from Nottingham, and so on. But the disguises they wear to the world are cast aside, and the eternal boy that refuses to grow up is revealed in all of them.

Who shall tell of the days and nights that follow?—of the songs that are sung, and the “traverses” that are made round the billiard room and the barn, of the talk of handholds and footholds on this and that famous climb, of the letting in of the New Year, of the early breakfasts and the departures for the mountains, of the nights when, tired and rich with new memories, you all foregather again—save only, perhaps, the jolly lawyer and his fellows who have lost their way back from Scafell, and for whom you are about to send out a search party when they turn up out of the darkness with new material for fireside tales.

Let us take one picture from many. It is New Year's Day—clear and bright, patches of snow on the mountains and a touch of frost in the air. In the hall there is a mob of gay adventurers, tying up ropes, putting on putties, filling rucksacks with provisions, hunting for boots (the boots are all alike, but you recognise them by your missing nails). We separate at the threshold—this group for the Great Gable, that for Scafell, ours, which includes George Abraham, for the Pillar Rock. It is a two and a half hour's tramp thither by Black Sail Pass, and as daylight is short there is no time to waste. We follow the water course up the valley, splash through marshes, faintly veneered with ice, cross the stream where the boulders give a decent foothold, and mount the steep ascent of Black Sail. From the top of the Pass we look down lonely Ennerdale, where, springing from the flank of the Pillar mountain, is the great Rock we

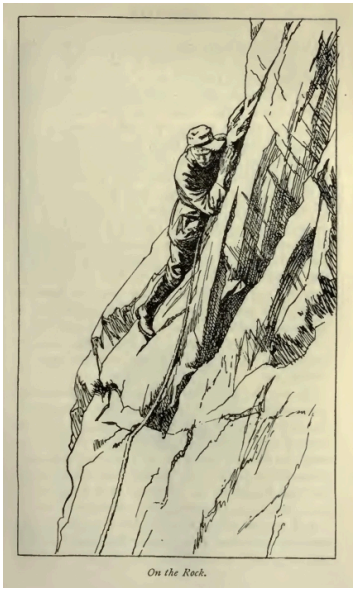
have come to challenge. It stands like a tower, gloomy, impregnable, sheer, 600 feet from its northern base to its summit, split on the south side by Jordan Gap that divides the High Man or main rock from Pisgah, the lesser rock.

We have been overtaken by another party of three from the inn—one in a white jersey which, for reasons that will appear, I shall always remember. Together we follow the High Level Traverse, the track that leads round the flank of the mountain to the top of Walker's Gully, the grim descent to the valley, loved by the climber for the perils to which it invites him. Here wre lunch and here we separate. We, unambitious (having three passengers in our party of five), are climbing the East face by the Notch and Slab route; the others are ascending by the New West route, one of the more difficult climbs. Our start is here; theirs is from the other side of Jordan Gap. It is not of our climb that I wish to speak, but of theirs. In the old literature of the Rock you will find the Slab and Notch route treated as a difficult feat; but to-day it is held in little esteem.

With five on the rope, however, our progress is slow, and it is two o'clock when we emerge from the chimney, perspiring and triumphant, and stand, first of the year, on the summit of the Pillar Rock, where the wind blows thin and shrill and from whence you look out over half the peaks of Lakeland. We take a second lunch, inscribe our names in the book that lies under the cairn, and then look down the precipice on the West face for signs of our late companions. The sound of their voices comes up from below, but the drop is too sheer to catch a glimpse of their forms. “They're going to be late,” says George Abraham—the discoverer of the New West—and then he indicates the closing stages of the

climb and the slab where on another New Year's Day occurred the most thrilling escape from death in the records of the Pillar rock—two men falling, and held on the rope and finally rescued by the third. Of those three, two, Lewis Meryon and the Rev. W. F. Wright, perished the next year on the Grand Paradis. We dismiss the unhappy memory and turn cheerfully to descend by Slingsby's Crack and the Old West route which ends on the slope of the mountain near to the starting point of the New West route.

The day is fading fast, and the moon that is rising in the East sheds no light on this face of the great tower. The voices now are quite distinct, coming to us from the left. We can almost hear the directions and distinguish the speakers. “Can't understand why those lads are cutting it so fine,” says George Abraham, and he hastens our pace down cracks and grooves and over ledges until we reach the screes and safety. And now we look up the great cliff and in the gathering dusk one thing is visible—a figure in a white jersey, with arms extended at full stretch. There it hangs minute by minute as if nailed to the rocks.



On the Rock.

Original

The party, then, are only just making the traverse from the chimney to the right, the most difficult manoeuvre of the climb—a manoeuvre in which one, he in the white jersey, has to remain stationary while his fellows pass him. “This is bad,” says George Abraham and he prepares for a possible emergency. “Are you in difficulties? Shall we wait?” he cries. “Yes, wait.” The words rebound from the cliff in the still air like stones. We wait and watch. We can see nothing but the white jersey, still moveless; but every motion of the other climbers and every word they speak echoes down the precipice, as if from a sounding board. You hear the iron-shod feet of the climbers feeling about for footholds on the ringing wall of rock. Once there is a horrible clatter as if both feet are dangling over the abyss and scraping convulsively for a hold. I fancy one or two of us feel

a little uncomfortable as we look at each other in silent comment. And all the time the figure in white, now growing dim, is impaled on the face of the darkness, and the voices come down to us in brief, staccato phrases. Above the rock, the moon is sailing into the clear winter sky and the stars are coming out.

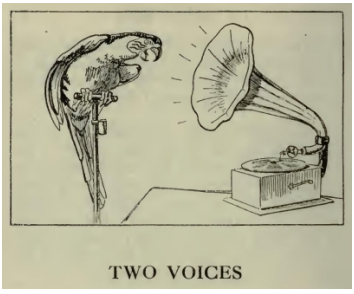
At last the figure in white is seen to move and soon a cheery “All right” drops down from above. The difficult operation is over, the scattered rocks are reached and nothing remains but the final slabs, which in the absence of ice offer no great difficulty. Their descent by the easy Jordan route will be quick. We turn to go with the comment that it is perhaps more sensational to watch a climb than to do one.

And then we plunge over the debris behind Pisgah, climb up the Great Doup, where the snow lies crisp and deep, until we reach the friendly fence that has guided many a wanderer in the darkness down to the top of Black Sail Pass. From thence the way is familiar, and two hours later we have rejoined the merry party round the board at the inn.

In a few days it is all over. This one is back in the Temple, that one to his office, a third to his pulpit, another to his mill, and all seem prosaic and ordinary. But they will carry with them a secret music. Say only the word “Wastdale” to them and you shall awake its echoes; then you shall see their faces light up with the emotion of incommunicable things. They are no longer men of the world; they are spirits of the mountains.



Original



TWO VOICES

Original

TWO VOICES

Yes," said the man with the big voice, "I've seen it coming for years. Years."

“Have you?” said the man with the timid voice. He had taken his seat on the top of the bus beside the big voice and had spoken of the tube strike that had suddenly paralysed the traffic of London.

“Yes, years,” said big voice, crowding as much modesty into the admission as possible. “I'm a long-sighted man. I see things a long way off. Suppose I'm a bit psychic. That's what I'm told. A bit psychic.”

“Ah,” said timid voice, doubtful, I thought, as to the meaning of the word, but firm in admiring acceptance of whatever it meant.

“Yes, I saw it coming for years. Lloyd George—that's the man that up to it before the war with his talk about the dukes and property and things. I said then, 'You see if this don't make trouble.' Why, his speeches got out to Russia and started them there. And now's it's come back. I always said it would. I said we should pay for it.”

“Did you, though?” observed timid voice—not questioningly, but as an assurance that he was listening attentively.

“Yes, the same with the war. I see it coming for years—years, I did. And if they'd taken my advice it' ud have been over in no time. In the first week I said: 'What we've got to do is to build 1000 aeroplanes and train 10,000 pilots and make 2000 torpedo craft.' That's what I said. But was it done?”

“Of course not,” said timid voice.

“I saw it all with my long sight. It's a way I have. I don't know why, but there it is. I'm not much at the platform business—tub-thumping, I call it—but for seeing things far off—well, I'm a bit psychic, you know.”

“Ah,” said timid voice, mournfully, “it's a pity some of those talking fellows are not psychic, too.”

He'd got the word firmly now.

“Them psychic!” said big voice, with scorn. “We know what they are. You see that Miss Asquith is marrying a Roumanian prince. Mark my word, he'll turn out to be a German, that's what he'll turn out to be. It's German money all round. Same with these strikes. There's German money behind them.”

“Shouldn't wonder at all,” said timid voice.

“I know,” said big voice. “I've a way of seeing things. The same in the Boer War. I saw that coming for years.”

“Did you, indeed?” said timid voice.

“Yes. I wrote it down, and showed it to some of my friends. There it was in black and white. They said it was wonderful how it all turned out—two years, I said, 250 millions of money, and 20,000 casualties. That's what I said, and that's what it was. I said the Boers would win, and I claim they did win, seeing old Campbell Bannerman gave them all they asked for.”

“You were about right,” assented timid voice.

“And now look at Lloyd George. Why, Wilson is twisting him round his finger—that's what he's doing. Just twisting him round his finger. Wants a League of Nations, says Wilson, and then he starts building a fleet as big as ours.”

“Never did like that man,” said timid voice.

“It's him that has let the Germans escape. That's what the armistice means. They've escaped—and just when we'd got them down.”

“It's a shame,” said timid voice.

“This war ought to have gone on longer,” continued big voice. “My opinion is that the world wanted thinning out. People are too crowded. That's

what they are—they're too crowded."

"I agree there," said timid voice. "We wanted thinning."

"I consider we haven't been thinned out half enough yet. It ought to have gone on, and it would have gone on but for Wilson. I should like to know his little game. 'Keep your eye on Wilson,' says *John Bull*, and that's what I say. Seems to me he's one of the artful sort. I saw a case down at Portsmouth. Secretary of a building society—regular chapel-goer, teetotaller, and all that. One day the building society went smash, and Mr Chapel-goer had got off with the lot."

"I don't like those goody-goody people," said timid voice.

"No," said big voice. "William Shakespeare hit it oh. Wonderful what that man knew. 'All the world's a stage, and all the men and women players,' he said. Strordinary how he knew things."

"Wonderful," said timid voice.

"There's never been a man since who knew half what William Shakespeare knew—not one-half."

"No doubt about it," said timid voice.

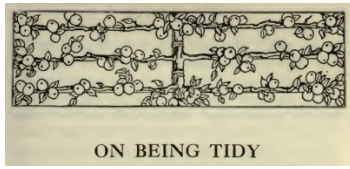
"I consider that William Shakespeare was the most psychic man that ever lived. I don't suppose there was ever such a long-sighted man before *or* since. He could see through anything. He'd have seen through Wilson and he'd have seen this war didn't stop before the job was done. It's a pity we haven't a William Shakespeare now. Lloyd George and Asquith are not in it with him. They're simply duds beside William Shakespeare. Couldn't hold a candle to him."

"Seems to me," said timid voice, "that there's nobody, as you might say, worth anything to-day."

“Nobody,” said big voice. “We've gone right off. There used to be men. Old Dizzy, he was a man. So was Joseph Chamberlain. He was right about Tariff Reform. I saw it years before he did. Free Trade I said was all right years ago, when we were manufacturing for the world. But it's out of date. I saw it was out of date long before Joseph Chamberlain. It's the result of being long-sighted. I said to my father, 'If we stick to Free Trade this country is done.' That's what I said, and it's true. We *are* done. Look at these strikes. We stick to things too long. I believe in looking ahead. When I was in America before the war they wouldn't believe I came from England. Wouldn't believe it. 'But the English are so slow,' they said, 'and you—why you want to be getting on in front of us.' That's my way. I look ahead and don't stand still.”

“It's the best way too,” said timid voice. “We want more of it. We're too slow.”

And so on. When I came to the end of my journey I rose so that the light of a lamp shone on the speakers as I passed. They were both well-dressed, ordinary-looking men. If I had passed them in the street I should have said they were intelligent men of the well-to-do business class. I have set down their conversation, which I could not help overhearing, and which was carried on by the big voice in a tone meant for publication, as exactly as I can recall it. There was a good deal more of it, all of the same character. You will laugh at it, or weep over it, according to your humour.



Original

ON BEING TIDY

Any careful observer of my habits would know that I am on the eve of an adventure—a holiday, or a bankruptcy, or a fire, or a voluntary liquidation (whatever that may be), or an elopement, or a duel, or a conspiracy, or—in short, of something out of the normal, something romantic or dangerous, pleasurable or painful, interrupting the calm current of my affairs. Being the end of July, he would probably say: That fellow is on the brink of the holiday fever. He has all the symptoms of the epidemic. Observe his negligent, abstracted manner. Notice his slackness about business—how he just comes and looks in and goes out as though he were a visitor paying a call, or a person who had been left a fortune and didn't care twopence what happened.

Observe his clothes, how they are burgeoning into unaccustomed gaiety, even levity. Is not his hat set on at just a shade of a sporting angle? Does not his stick twirl with a hint of irresponsible emotions? Is there not the glint of far horizons in his eye? Did you not hear him humming as he came up the stairs? Yes, assuredly the fellow is going for a holiday.

Your suspicions would be confirmed when you found me ransacking my private room and clearing up my desk. The news that I am clearing up my desk has been an annual sensation for years. I remember a colleague of mine once coming in and finding me engaged in that spectacular feat. His face fell with apprehension. His voice faltered. “I hope you are not leaving us,” he said. He, poor fellow, could not think of anything else that could account for so unusual an operation.

For I am one of those people who treat their desks with respect. We do not believe in worrying them about their contents. We do not bully them into disclosing their secrets. We stuff the drawers full of papers and documents, and leave them to mellow and ripen. And when the drawers are full we pile up other papers and documents on either side of us; and the higher the pile gets the more comfortable and cosy we feel. We would not disturb them for worlds. Why should we set our sleeping dogs barking at us when they are willing to go on sleeping if we leave them alone? And consider the show they make. No one coming to see us can fail to be impressed by such piles of documents. They realise how busy we are. They understand that we have no time for idle talk. They see that we have all these papers to dispose of —otherwise, why are they there? They get their business done and go away quickly, and spread the news of what tremendous fellows we are for work.

I am told by one who worked with him, that old Lord Strathcona knew the trick quite well, and used it unblushingly. When a visitor was announced he tumbled his papers about in imposing confusion and was discovered breasting the mighty ocean of his labours, his chin resolutely out of the water. But he was a supreme artist in this form of amiable imposture. On one occasion he was entertained at a great public dinner in a provincial city. In the midst of the proceedings a portly flunkey was observed carrying a huge envelope, with seals and trappings, on a salver. For whom was this momentous document intended? Ah, he has paused behind the grand old man with the wonderful snowy head. It is for him. The company looks on in respectful silence. Even here this astonishing old man cannot escape the cares of office. As he takes the envelope his neighbour at the table looks at the address. It was in Strathcona's own hand-writing!

But we of the rank and file are not dishevelled by artifice, like this great man. It is a natural gift. And do not suppose that our disorder makes us unhappy. We like it. We follow our vocation, as Falstaff says. Some people are born tidy and some are born untidy. We were bom untidy, and if good people, taking pity on us, try to make us tidy we get lost. It was so with George Crabbe. He lived in magnificent disorder, papers and books and letters all over the floor, piled on every chair, surging up to the ceiling. Once, in his absence, his niece tidied up for him. When he came back he found himself like a stranger in a strange land. He did not know his way about in this desolation of tidiness, and he promptly restored the familiar disorder, so that he could find things. It sounds absurd, of course, but we people with a genius for untidiness must always seem absurd to the

tidy people. They cannot understand that there is a method in our muddle, an order in our disorder, secret paths through the wilderness known only to our feet, that, in short, we are rather like cats whose perceptions become more acute the darker it gets. It is not true that we never find things. We often find things.

And consider the joy of finding things you don't hope to find. You, sir, sitting at your spotless desk, with your ordered and labelled shelves about you, and your files and your letter-racks, and your card indexes and your cross references, and your this, that, and the other—what do you know of the delights of which I speak? You do not come suddenly and ecstatically upon the thing you seek. You do not know the shock of delighted discovery. You do not shout “Eureka,” and summon your family around you to rejoice in the miracle that has happened. No star swims into your ken out of the void. You cannot be said to find things at all, for you never lose them, and things must be lost before they can be truly found. The father of the Prodigal had to lose his son before he could experience the joy that has become an immortal legend of the world. It is we who lose things, not you, sir, who never find them, who know the Feast of the Fatted Calf.

This is not a plea for untidiness. I am no hot gospeller of disorder. I only seek to make the best, of a bad job, and to show that we untidy fellows are not without a case, have our romantic compensations, moments of giddy exaltation unknown to those who are endowed with the pedestrian and profitable virtue of tidiness. That is all. I would have the pedestrian virtue if I could. In other days, before I had given up hope of reforming myself, and when I used to make good resolutions as piously as my

neighbours, I had many a spasm of tidiness. I looked with envy on my friend Higginson, who was a miracle of order, could put his hand on anything he wanted in the dark, kept his documents and his files and records like regiments of soldiers obedient to call, knew what he had written on 4th March 1894, and what he had said on 10th January 1901, and had a desk that simply perspired with tidiness. And in a spirit of emulation I bought a roll-top desk. I believed that tidiness was a purchasable commodity. You went to a furniture dealer and bought a large roll-top desk, and when it came home the genius of order came home with it. The bigger the desk, the more intricate its devices, the larger was the measure of order bestowed on you. My desk was of the first magnitude. It had an inconceivable wealth of drawers and pigeon-holes. It was a desk of many mansions. And I labelled them all, and gave them all separate jobs to perform.

And then I sat back and looked the future boldly in the face. Now, said I, the victory is won. Chaos and old night are banished. Order reigns in Warsaw. I have but to open a drawer and every secret I seek will leap magically to light. My articles will write themselves, for every reference will come to my call, obedient as Ariel to the bidding of Prospero.

"Approach, my Ariel; come,"

I shall say, and from some remote fastness the obedient spirit will appear with—

> "All hail, great master; grave sir, hail! I come
>
> To answer thy best pleasure; be 't to fly,

To swim, to dive into the sea, to ride
On the curl'd clouds."

I shall know where Aunt Jane's letters are, and where my bills are, and my cuttings about this, that, and the other, and my diaries and notebooks, and the time-table and the street guide. I shall never be short of a match or a spare pair of spectacles, or a pencil, or—in short, life will henceforth be an easy amble to old age. For a week it worked like a charm. Then the demon of disorder took possession of the beast. It devoured everything and yielded up nothing. Into its soundless deeps my merchandise sank to oblivion. And I seemed to sink with it. It was not a desk, but a tomb. One day I got a man to take it away to a second-hand shop.

Since then I have given up being tidy. I have realised that the quality of order is not purchasable at furniture shops, is not a quality of external things, but an indwelling spirit, a frame of mind, a habit that perhaps may be acquired but cannot be bought.

I have a smaller desk with fewer drawers, all of them nicely choked up with the litter of the past. Once a year I have a gaol delivery of the incarcerated. The ghosts come out into the daylight, and I face them unflinching and unafraid. They file past, pointing minatory fingers at me as they go into the waste-paper basket. They file past now. But I do not care a dump; for to-morrow I shall seek fresh woods and pastures new. To-morrow the ghosts of that old untidy desk will have no terrors for my emancipated spirit.



Original



AN EPISODE

Original

AN EPISODE

We were talking of the distinction between madness and sanity when one of the company said that we were all potential madmen, just as every

gambler was a potential suicide, or just as every hero was a potential coward.

“I mean,” he said, “that the difference between the sane and the insane is not that the sane man never has mad thoughts. He has, but he recognises them as mad, and keeps his hand on the rein of action. He thinks them, and dismisses them. It is so with the saint and the sinner. The saint is not exempt from evil thoughts, but he knows they are evil, is master of himself, and puts them away.

“I speak with experience,” he went on, “for the potential madman in me once nearly got the upper hand. I won, but it was a near thing, and if I had gone down in that struggle I should have been branded for all time as a criminal lunatic, and very properly put away in some place of safety. Yet I suppose no one ever suspected me of lunacy.”

“Tell us about it,” we said in chorus.

“It was one evening in New York,” he said. “I had had a very exhausting time, and was no doubt mentally tired. I had taken tea with two friends at the Belmont Hotel, and as we found we were all disengaged that evening we agreed to spend it together at the Hippodrome, where a revue, winding up with a great spectacle that had thrilled New York, was being presented. When we went to the box office we found that we could not get three seats together, so we separated, my friends going to the floor of the house and I to the dress circle.

“If you are familiar with the place you will know its enormous dimensions and the vastness of the stage. When I took my seat next but one to one of the gangways the house was crowded and the performance had begun. It was trivial and ordinary enough, but it kept me amused, and between the acts

I went out to see the New Yorkers taking 'soft' drinks in the promenades. I did not join them in that mild indulgence, nor did I speak to anyone.

“After the interval before the concluding spectacle I did not return to my seat until the curtain was up. The transformation hit me like a blow. The huge stage had been converted into a lake, and behind the lake through filmy draperies there was the suggestion of a world in flames. I passed to my seat and sat down. I turned from the blinding glow of the conflagration in front and cast my eye over the sea of faces that filled the great theatre from floor to ceiling. 'Heavens! if there were a fire in this place,' I thought. At that thought the word 'Fire' blazed in my brain like a furnace. 'What if some madman cried Fire?' flashed through my mind, and then '*What if I cried Fire?*'

“At that hideous suggestion, the demon word that suffused my brain leapt like a shrieking maniac within me and screamed and fought for utterance. I felt it boiling in my throat, I felt it on my tongue. I felt myself to be two persons engaged in a deadly grapple—a sane person struggling to keep his feet against the mad rush of an insane monster. I clenched my teeth. So long as I kept my teeth tight—tight—tight the raging madman would fling himself at the bars in vain. But could I keep up the struggle till he fell exhausted? I gripped the arms of my seat. I felt beads of perspiration breaking out on my right brow. How singular that in moments of strain the moisture always broke out at that spot. I could notice these things with a curious sense of detachment as if there were a third person within me watching the frenzied conflict. And still that titanic impulse lay on my tongue and hammered madly at my clenched teeth. Should I go out? That would look odd, and be

an ignominious surrender. I must fight this folly down honestly and not run away from it. If I had a book I would try to read. If I had a friend beside me I would talk. But both these expedients were denied me. Should I turn to my unknown neighbour and break the spell with an inconsequent remark or a request for his programme? I looked at him out of the tail of my eye. He was a youngish man, in evening dress, and sitting alone as I was. But his eyes were fixed intently on the stage. He was obviously gripped by the spectacle. Had I spoken to him earlier in the evening the course would have been simple; but to break the ice in the midst of this tense silence was impossible. Moreover, I had a programme on my knees and what was there to say?...

"I turned my eyes from the stage. What was going on there I could not tell. It was a blinding blur of Fire that seemed to infuriate the monster within me. I looked round at the house. I looked up at the ceiling and marked its gilded ornaments. I turned and gazed intensely at the occupants of the boxes, trying to turn the current of my mind into speculations about their dress, their faces, their characters. But the tyrant was too strong to be overthrown by such conscious effort. I looked up at the gallery; I looked down at the pit; I tried to busy my thoughts with calculations about the numbers present, the amount of money in the house, the cost of running the establishment—anything. In vain. I leaned back in my seat, my teeth still clenched, my hands still gripping the arms of the chair. How still the house was! How enthralled it seemed!... I was conscious that people about me were noticing my restless inattention. If they knew the truth.... If they could see the raging torment that was battering at my teeth.... Would it never go? How long would this

wild impulse burn on my tongue? Was there no distraction that would

> Cleanse the stuffed bosom of this perilous stuff
>
> That feeds upon the brain.

"I recalled the reply—

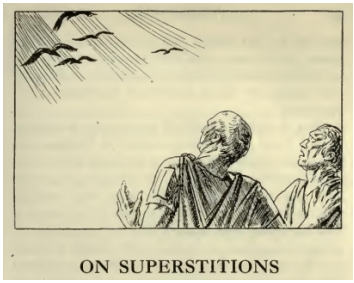
> Therein the patient must minister to himself.

"How fantastic it seemed. Here was that cool observer within me quoting poetry over my own delirium without being able to allay it. What a mystery was the brain that could become the theatre of such wild drama. I turned my glance to the orchestra. Ah, what was that they were playing?... Yes, it was a passage from Dvorak's American Symphony. How familiar it was! My mind incontinently leapt to a remote scene, I saw a well-lit room and children round the hearth and a figure at the piano....

"It was as though the madman within me had fallen stone dead. I looked at the stage coolly, and observed that someone was diving into the lake from a trapeze that seemed a hundred feet high. The glare was still behind, but I knew it for a sham glare. What a fool I had been.... But what a hideous time I had had.... And what a close shave.... I took out my handkerchief and drew it across my forehead."



Original



Original

ON SUPERSTITIONS

It was inevitable that the fact that a murder has taken place at a house with the number 13 in a street, the letters of whose name number 13, would not pass unnoticed. If we took the last hundred murders that have been committed, I suppose we should find that as many have taken place at No. 6 or No. 7, or any other number you choose, as at No. 13—that the law of averages is as inexorable here as elsewhere. But this consideration does not prevent the world remarking on the fact when No. 13 has its turn. Not that the world believes there is anything in the superstition. It is quite sure it is a mere childish folly, of course. Few of us would refuse to take a house because its number was 13, or decline an

invitation to dinner because there were to be 13 at table. But most of us would be just a shade happier if that desirable residence were numbered 11, and not any the less pleased with the dinner if one of the guests contracted a chill that kept him away. We would not confess this little weakness to each other. We might even refuse to admit it to ourselves, but it is there.

That it exists is evident from many irrefutable signs. There are numerous streets in London, and I daresay in other towns too, in which there is no house numbered 13, and I am told that it is very rare that a bed in a hospital bears that number. The superstition, threadbare though it has worn, is still sufficiently real to enter into the calculations of a discreet landlord in regard to the letting qualities of his house, and into the calculations of a hospital as to the curative properties of a bed. In the latter case general agreement would support the concession to the superstition, idle though that superstition is. Physical recovery is a matter of the mind as well as of the body, and the slightest shadow on the mind may, in a condition of low vitality, retard and even defeat recovery. Florence Nightingale's almost passionate advocacy of flowers in the sick bedroom was based on the necessity of the creation of a certain state of mind in the patient. There are few more curious revelations in that moving record by M. Duhamel of medical experiences during the war, than the case of the man who died of a pimple on his nose. He had been hideously mutilated in battle and was brought into hospital a sheer wreck; but he was slowly patched up and seemed to have been saved when a pimple appeared on his nose. It was nothing in itself, but it was enough to produce a mental state that checked the flickering return of life. It assumed

a fantastic importance in the mind of the patient who, having survived the heavy blows of fate, died of something less than a pin prick. It is not difficult to understand that so fragile a hold of life might yield to the sudden discovery that you were lying in No. 13 bed.

I am not sure that I could go into the witness-box and swear that I am wholly immune to these idle superstitions myself. It is true that of all the buses in London, that numbered 13 chances to be the one that I constantly use, and I do not remember, until now, ever to have associated the superstition with it. And certainly I have never had anything but the most civil treatment from it. It is as well behaved a bus, and as free from unpleasant associations as any on the road. I would not change its number if I had the power to do so. But there are other circumstances of which I should find it less easy to clear myself of suspicion under cross examination. I never see a ladder against a house side without feeling that it is advisable to walk round it rather than under it. I say to myself that this is not homage to a foolish superstition, but a duty to my family. One must think of one's family. The fellow at the top of the ladder may drop anything. He may even drop himself. He may have had too much to drink. He may be a victim of epileptic fits, and epileptic fits, as everyone knows, come on at the most unseasonable times and places. It is a mere measure of ordinary safety to walk round the ladder. No man is justified in inviting danger in order to flaunt his superiority to an idle fancy. Moreover, probably that fancy has its roots in the common-sense fact that a man on a ladder does occasionally drop things. No doubt many of our superstitions have these commonplace and sensible origins. I imagine, for example, that the Jewish

objection to pork as unclean on religious grounds is only due to the fact that in Eastern climates it is unclean on physical grounds.

All the same, I suspect that when I walk round the ladder I am rather glad that I have such respectable and unassailable reasons for doing so. Even if—conscious of this suspicion and ashamed to admit it to myself—I walk under the ladder I am not quite sure that I have not done so as a kind of negative concession to the superstition. I have challenged it rather than been unconscious of it. There is only one way of dodging the absurd dilemma, and that is to walk through the ladder. This is not easy. In the same way I am sensible of a certain satisfaction when I see the new moon in the open rather than through glass, and over my right shoulder rather than my left. I would not for any consideration arrange these things consciously; but if they happen so I fancy I am better pleased than if they do not. And on these occasions I have even caught my hand—which chanced to be in my pocket at the time—turning over money, a little surreptitiously I thought, but still undeniably turning it. Hands have habits of their own and one can't always be watching them.

But these shadowy reminiscences of antique credulity which we discover in ourselves play no part in the lives of any of us. They belong to a creed outworn. Superstition was disinherited when science revealed the laws of the universe and put man in his place. It was no discredit to be superstitious when all the functions of nature were unexplored, and man seemed the plaything of beneficent or sinister forces that he could neither control nor understand, but which held him in the hollow of their hand. He related everything that happened in nature to his own inexplicable existence, saw his fate in the

clouds, his happiness or misery announced in the flight of birds, and referred every phenomenon of life to the soothsayers and oracles. You may read in Thucydides of battles being postponed (and lost) because some omen that had no more relation to the event than the falling of a leaf was against it. When Pompey was afraid that the Romans would elect Cato as prætor he shouted to the Assembly that he heard thunder, and got the whole election postponed, for the Romans would never transact business after it had thundered. Alexander surrounded himself with fortune tellers and took counsel with them as a modern ruler takes counsel with his Ministers. Even so great a man as Cæsar and so modern and enlightened a man as Cicero left their fate to augurs and omens. Sometimes the omens were right and sometimes they were wrong, but whether right or wrong they were equally meaningless. Cicero lost his life by trusting to the wisdom of crows. When he was in flight from Antony and Cæsar Augustus he put to sea and might have escaped. But some crows chanced to circle round his vessel, and he took the circumstance to be unfavourable to his action, returned to shore and was murdered. Even the farmer of ancient Greece consulted the omens and the oracles where the farmer to-day is only careful of his manures.

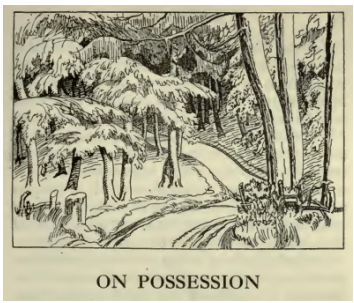
I should have liked to have seen Cæsar and I should have liked to have heard Cicero, but on the balance I think we who inherit this later day and who can jest at the shadows that were so real to them have the better end of time. It is pleasant to be about when the light is abroad. We do not know much more of the Power that

Turns the handle of this idle show

than our forefathers did, but at least we have escaped the grotesque shadows that enveloped them. We do not look for divine guidance in the entrails of animals or the flight of crows, and the House of Commons does not adjourn at a clap of thunder.



Original



Original

ON POSSESSION

I met a lady the other day who had travelled much and seen much, and who talked with great vivacity about her experiences. But I noticed one peculiarity about her. If I happened to say that I too had been, let us say, to Tangier, her interest in Tangier immediately faded away and she switched the conversation on to, let us say, Cairo, where I had not been, and where therefore she was quite happy. And her enthusiasm about the Honble. Ulick de Tompkins vanished when she found that I had had the honour of meeting that eminent personage. And so with books and curiosities, places and things—she was only interested in them so long as they were her exclusive property. She had the itch of possession, and when she ceased to possess she ceased to enjoy. If she could not have Tangier all to herself she did not want it at all.

And the chief trouble in this perplexing world is that there are so many people afflicted like her with the mania of owning things that really do not need to be owned in order to be enjoyed. Their experiences must be exclusive or they have no pleasure in them. I have heard of a man who countermanded an order for an etching when he found that someone else in the same town had bought a copy. It was not the beauty of the etching that appealed to him: it was the petty and childish notion that he was getting something that no one else had got, and when he found that someone else had got it its value ceased to exist.

The truth, of course, is that such a man could never possess anything in the only sense that

matters. For possession is a spiritual and not a material thing. I do not own—to take an example—that wonderful picture by Ghirlandajo of the bottle-nosed old man looking at his grandchild. I have not even a good print of it. But if it hung in my own room I could not have more pleasure out of it than I have experienced for years. It is among the imponderable treasures stored away in the galleries of the mind with memorable sunsets I have seen and noble books I have read, and beautiful actions or faces that I remember. I can enjoy it whenever I like and recall all the tenderness and humanity that the painter saw in the face of that plain old Italian gentleman with the bottle nose as he stood gazing down at the face of his grandson long centuries ago. The pleasure is not diminished by the fact that all may share this spiritual ownership, any more than my pleasure in the sunshine, or the shade of a fine beech, or the smell of a hedge of sweetbrier, or the song of the lark in the meadow is diminished by the thought that it is common to all.

From my window I look on the slope of a fine hill crowned with beech woods. On the other side of the hill there are sylvan hollows of solitude which cannot have changed their appearance since the ancient Britons hunted in these woods two thousand years ago. In the legal sense a certain noble lord is the owner. He lives far off and I doubt whether he has seen these woods once in ten years. But I and the children of the little hamlet know every glade and hollow of these hills and have them for a perpetual playground. We do not own a square foot of them, but we could not have a richer enjoyment of them if we owned every leaf on every tree. For the pleasure of things is not in their possession but in their use.

It was the exclusive spirit of my lady friend that

Juvenal satirised long ago in those lines in which he poured ridicule on the people who scurried through the Alps, not in order to enjoy them, but in order to say that they had done something that other people had not done. Even so great a man as Wordsworth was not free from this disease of exclusive possession. De Quincey tells that, standing with him one day looking at the mountains, he (De Quincey) expressed his admiration of the scene, whereupon Wordsworth turned his back on him. He would not permit anyone else to praise *his* mountains. He was the high priest of nature, and had something of the priestly arrogance. He was the medium of revelation, and anyone who worshipped the mountains in his presence, except through him, was guilty of an impertinence both to him and to nature.

In the ideal world of Plato there was no such thing as exclusive possession. Even wives and children were to be held in common, and Bernard Shaw to-day regards the exclusiveness of the home as the enemy of the free human spirit. I cannot attain to these giddy heights of communism. On this point I am with Aristotle. He assailed Plato's doctrine and pointed out that the State is not a mere individual, but a body composed of dissimilar parts whose unity is to be drawn “ex dissimilium hominum consensu.” I am as sensitive as anyone about my title to my personal possessions. I dislike having my umbrella stolen or my pocket picked, and if I found a burglar on my premises I am sure I shouldn't be able to imitate the romantic example of the good bishop in “Les Misérables.” When I found the other day that some young fruit trees I had left in my orchard for planting had been removed in the night I was sensible of a very commonplace anger. If I had known who my Jean Valjean was I shouldn't have

asked him to come and take some more trees. I should have invited him to return what he had removed or submit to consequences that follow in such circumstances.

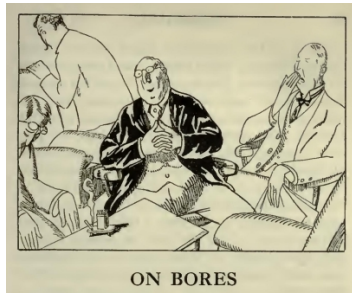
I cannot conceive a society in which private property will not be a necessary condition of life. I may be wrong. The war has poured human society into the melting pot, and he would be a daring person who ventured to forecast the shape in which it will emerge a generation or two hence. Ideas are in the saddle, and tendencies beyond our control and the range of our speculation are at work shaping our future. If mankind finds that it can live more conveniently and more happily without private property it will do so. In spite of the Decalogue private property is only a human arrangement, and no reasonable observer of the operation of the arrangement will pretend that it executes justice unfailingly in the affairs of men. But because the idea of private property has been permitted to override with its selfishness the common good of humanity, it does not follow that there are not limits within which that idea can function for the general convenience and advantage. The remedy is not in abolishing it altogether, but in subordinating it to the idea of equal justice and community of purpose. It will, reasonably understood, deny me the right to call the coal measures, which were laid with the foundations of the earth, my private property or to lay waste a countryside for deer forests, but it will still leave me a legitimate and sufficient sphere of ownership. And the more true the equation of private and public rights is, the more secure shall I be in those possessions which the common sense and common interest of men ratify as reasonable and desirable. It is the grotesque and iniquitous wrongs

associated with a predatory conception of private property which to some minds make the idea of private property itself inconsistent with a just and tolerable social system. When the idea of private property is restricted to limits which command the sanction of the general thought and experience of society, it will be in no danger of attack. I shall be able to leave my fruit trees out in the orchard without any apprehensions as to their safety.

But while I neither desire nor expect to see the abolition of private ownership, I see nothing but evil in the hunger to possess exclusively things, the common use of which does not diminish the fund of enjoyment. I do not care how many people see Tangier: my personal memory of the experience will remain in its integrity. The itch to own things for the mere pride of possession is the disease of petty, vulgar minds. “I do not know how it is,” said a very rich man in my hearing, “but when I am in London I want to be in the country and when I am in the country I want to be in London.” He was not wanting to escape from London or the country, but from himself. He had sold himself to his great possessions and was bankrupt. In the words of a great preacher “his hands were full but his soul was empty, and an empty soul makes an empty world.” There was wisdom as well as wit in that saying of the Yoloffs that “he who was born first has the greatest number of old clothes.” It is not a bad rule for the pilgrimage of this world to travel light and leave the luggage to those who take a pride in its abundance.



Original



Original

ON BORES

I was talking in the smoking-room of a club with a

man of somewhat blunt manner when Blossom came up, clapped him on the shoulder, and began:

“Well, I think America is bound to——” “Now, do you mind giving us two minutes?” broke in the other, with harsh emphasis. Blossom, unabashed and unperturbed, moved off to try his opening on another group. Poor Blossom! I had almost said “Dear Blossom.” For he is really an excellent fellow. The only thing that is the matter with Blossom is that he is a bore. He has every virtue except the virtue of being desirable company. You feel that you could love Blossom if he would only keep away. If you heard of his death you would be genuinely grieved and would send a wreath to his grave and a nice letter of condolence to his wife and numerous children.

But it is only absence that makes the heart grow fond of Blossom. When he appears all your affection for him withers. You hope that he will not see you. You shrink to your smallest dimensions. You talk with an air of intense privacy. You keep your face averted. You wonder whether the back of your head is easily distinguishable among so many heads. All in vain. He approacheth with the remorselessness of fate. He putteth his hand upon your shoulder. He remarketh with the air of one that bringeth new new's and good news—“Well, I think that America is bound to——” And then he taketh a chair and thou lookest at the clock and wonderest how soon thou canst decently remember another engagement.

Blossom is the bore courageous. He descends on the choicest company without fear or parley. Out, sword, and at 'em, is his motto. He advances with a firm voice and a confident air, as of one who knows he is welcome everywhere and has only to choose his company. He will have nothing but the best, and as

he enters the room you may see his eye roving from table to table, not in search of the glad eye of recognition, but of the most select companionship, and having marked down his prey he goes forward boldly to the attack. Salutes the circle with easy familiarity, draw's up his chair with assured and masterful authority, and plunges into the stream of talk with the heavy impact of a walrus or hippopotamus taking a bath. The company around him melts away, but he is not dismayed. Left alone with a circle of empty chairs, he riseth like a giant refreshed, casteth his eye abroad, noteth another group that whetteth his appetite for good fellowship, moveth towards it with bold and resolute front. You may see him put to flight as many as three circles inside an hour, and retire at the end, not because he is beaten, but because there is nothing left worth crossing swords with. “A very good club to-night,” he says to Mrs B. as he puts on his slippers.

Not so Trip. He is the bore circumspect. He proceeds by sap and mine where Blossom charges the battlements sword in hand. He enters timidly as one who hopes that he will be unobserved. He goes to the table and examines the newspapers, takes one and seats himself alone. But not so much alone that he is entirely out of the range of those fellows in the corner who keep up such a cut-and-thrust of wit. Perchance one of them may catch his eye and open the circle to him. He readeth his paper sedulously, but his glance passeth incontinently outside the margin or over the top of the page to the coveted group. No responsive eye meets his. He moveth just a thought nearer along the sofa by the wall. Now he is well within hearing. Now he is almost of the company itself. But still unseen—noticeably unseen. He puts down his paper, not ostentatiously but

furtively. He listens openly to the conversation, as one who has been enmeshed in it unconsciously, accidentally, almost unwillingly, for was he not absorbed in his paper until this conversation disturbed him? And now it would be almost uncivil not to listen. He waits for a convenient opening and then gently insinuates a remark like one venturing on untried ice. And the ice breaks and the circle melts. For Trip, too, is a bore.

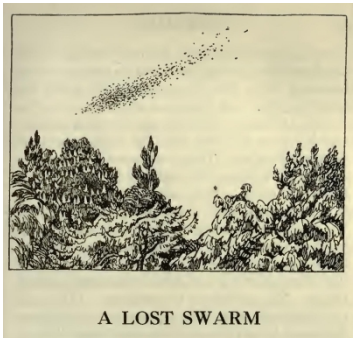
I remember in those wonderful submarine pictures of the brothers Williamson, which we saw in London some time ago, a strange fish at whose approach all the other fish turned tail. It was not, I think, that they feared him, nor that he was less presentable in appearance than any other fish, but simply that there was something about him that made them remember things. I forget what his name was, or whether he even had a name. But his calling was obvious. He was the Club Bore. He was the fish who sent the other fish about their business. I thought of Blossom as I saw that lonely creature whisking through the water in search of some friendly ear into which he could remark—"Well, I think that America is bound to——" or words to that effect. I thought how superior an animal is man. He doth not hastily flee from the bore as these fish did. He hath bowels of compassion. He tempereth the wind to the shorn lamb. He looketh at the clock, he beareth his agony a space, he seemeth even to welcome Blossom, he stealeth away with delicate solicitude for his feelings.

It is a hard fate to be sociable and yet not to have the gift of sociability. It is a small quality that is lacking. Good company insists on one sauce. It must have humour. Anything else may be lacking, but this is the salt that gives savour to all the rest. And the humour must not be that counterfeit currency which

consists in the retailing of borrowed stories. “Of all bores whom man in his folly hesitates to hang, and Heaven in its mysterious wisdom suffers to propagate its species,” says De Quincey, “the most insufferable is the teller of good stories.” It is an over hard saying, subject to exceptions; but it contains the essential truth, for the humour of good company must be an authentic emanation of personality and not a borrowed tale. It is no discredit to be a bore. Very great men have been bores! I fancy that Macaulay, with all his transcendent gifts, was a bore. My head aches even at the thought of an evening spent in the midst of the terrific torrent of facts and certainties that poured from that brilliant and amiable man. I find myself in agreement for once with Melbourne who wished that he was “as cocksure of one thing as Macaulay was of everything.” There is pretty clear evidence that Wordsworth was a bore and that Coleridge was a bore, and I am sure Bob Southey must have been an intolerable bore. And Neckar's daughter was fortunate to escape Gibbon for he was assuredly a prince of bores. He took pains to leave posterity in no doubt on the point. He wrote his “Autobiography” which, as a wit observed, showed that “he did not know the difference between himself and the Roman Empire. He has related his 'progressions from London to Bariton and from Bariton to London' in the same monotonous, majestic periods that he recorded the fall of states and empires.” Yes, an indubitable bore. Yet these were all admirable men and even great men. Let not therefore the Blossoms and the Trips be discomfited. It may be that it is not they who are not fit company for us, but we who are not fit company for them.



Original



Original

A LOST SWARM

We were busy with the impossible hen when the alarm came. The impossible hen is sitting on a dozen eggs in the shed, and, like the boy on the burning deck, obstinately refuses to leave the post of duty. A sense of duty is an excellent thing, but even a sense of duty can be carried to excess, and this hen's sense of duty is simply a disease. She is so fiercely attached to her task that she cannot think of eating, and resents any attempt to make her eat as a personal affront or a malignant plot against her impending family. Lest she should die at her post, a victim to a misguided hunger strike, we were engaged in the delicate process of substituting a more reasonable hen, and it was at this moment that a shout from the orchard announced that No. 5 was swarming.

It was unexpected news, for only the day before a new nucleus hive had been built up from the brood frames of No. 5 and all the queen cells visible had been removed. But there was no doubt about the swarm. Around the hive the air was thick with the whirring mass and filled with the thrilling strum of innumerable wings. There is no sound in nature more exciting and more stimulating. At one moment the hive is normal. You pass it without a suspicion of the great adventure that is being hatched within. The next, the whole colony roars out like a cataract, envelops the hive in a cloud of living dust until the queen has emerged and gives direction to the masses that slowly cohere around her as she settles on some branch. The excitement is contagious. It is a call to adventure with the unknown, an adventure sharpened by the threat of loss and tense with the instancy of action. They have the start. It is your wit

against their impulse, your strategy against their momentum. The cloud thins and expands as it moves away from the hive and you are puzzled to know whither the main stream is moving in these ever widening folds of motion. The first indeterminate signs of direction to-day were towards the beech woods behind the cottage, but with the aid of a syringe we put up a barrage of water in that direction, and headed them off towards a row of chestnuts and limes at the end of the paddock beyond the orchard. A swift encircling move, armed with syringe and pail, brought them again under the improvised rainstorm. They concluded that it was not such a fine day as they had thought after all, and that they had better take shelter at once, and to our entire content the mass settled in a great blob on a conveniently low bough of a chestnut tree. Then, by the aid of a ladder and patient coaxing, the blob was safely transferred to a skep, and carried off triumphantly to the orchard.



Settled in a great Blob.

Original

And now, but for the war, all would have been well. For, but for the war, there would have been a comfortable home in which the adventurers could have taken up their new quarters. But hives are as hard to come by in these days as petrol or matches, or butter or cheese, or most of the other common things of life. We had ransacked England for hives and the neighbourhood for wood with which to make hives; but neither could be had, though promises were plenty, and here was the beginning of the swarms of May, each of them worth a load of hay according to the adage, and never a hive to welcome them with. Perhaps to-morrow something would arrive, if not from Gloucester, then from Surrey. If only the creatures would make themselves at home in the skep for a day or two....

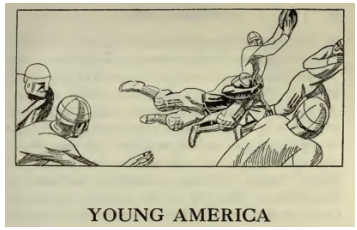
But no. For two hours or so all seemed well. Then perhaps they found the skep too hot, perhaps they detected the odour of previous tenants, perhaps—but who can read the thoughts of these inscrutable creatures? Suddenly the skep was enveloped in a cyclone of bees, and again the orchard sang with the exciting song of the wings. For a moment the cloud seemed to hover over an apple tree near by, and once more the syringe was at work insisting, in spite of the sunshine, that it was a dreadfully wet day on which to be about, and that a dry skep, even though pervaded by the smell of other bees, had points worth considering. In vain. This time they had made up their minds. It may be that news had come to them, from one of the couriers sent out to prospect for fresh quarters, of a suitable home elsewhere, perhaps a deserted hive, perhaps a snug hollow in some porch or in the bole of an ancient tree. Whatever the goal, the decision was final. One moment the cloud was about us; the air was filled with the high-pitched roar of thirty thousand pair of wings. The next moment the cloud had gone—gone sailing high over the trees in the paddock and out across the valley. We burst through the paddock fence into the cornfield beyond; but we might as well have chased the wind. Our first load of hay had taken wings and gone beyond recovery. For an hour or two there circled round the deserted skep a few hundred odd bees who had apparently been out when the second decision to migrate was taken, and found themselves homeless and queenless. I saw some of them try to enter other hives, but they were promptly ejected as foreigners by the sentries who keep the porch and admit none who do not carry the authentic odour of the hive. Perhaps the forlorn creatures got back to No. 5, and the young colony

left in possession of that tenement.

We have lost the first skirmish in the campaign, but we are full of hope, for timber has arrived at last, and from the carpenter's bench under the pear tree there comes the sound of saw, hammer, and plane, and before nightfall there will be a hive in hand for the morrow. And it never rains but it pours—here is a telegram telling us of three hives on the way. Now for a counter-offensive of artificial swarms. We will harvest our loads of hay before they take wing.



Original



YOUNG AMERICA

Original

YOUNG AMERICA

If you want to understand America," said my host, "come and see her young barbarians at play. To-morrow Harvard meets Princeton at Princeton. It will be a great game. Come and see it."

He was a Harvard man himself, and spoke with the light of assured victory in his eyes. This was the first match since the war, but consider the record of the two Universities in the past. Harvard was as much ahead of Princeton on the football field as Oxford was ahead of Cambridge on the river. And I went to share his anticipated triumph. It was like a Derby Day at the Pennsylvania terminus at New York. From the great hall of that magnificent edifice a mighty throng of fur-coated men and women, wearing the favours of the rival colleges—yellow for Princeton and red for Harvard—passed through the gateways to the platform, filling train after train, that dipped under the Hudson and, coming out into the sunlight on the other side of the river, thundered away with its jolly load of revellers over the brown New Jersey country, through historic Trenton and on by woodland and farm to the far-off towers of Princeton.

And there, under the noble trees, and in the quads

and the colleges, such a mob of men and women, young and old and middle-aged, such “how-d'ye-do's” and greetings, such meetings and recollections of old times and ancient matches, such hurryings and scurryings to see familiar haunts, class-room, library, chapel, refectories, everything treasured in the memory. Then off to the Stadium. There it rises like some terrific memorial of antiquity—seen from without a mighty circular wall of masonry, sixty or seventy feet high; seen from within a great oval, or rather horseshoe, of humanity, rising tier above tier from the level of the playground to the top of the giddy wall. Forty thousand spectators—on this side of the horseshoe, the reds; on the other side, with the sunlight full upon them, the yellows.

Down between the rival hosts, and almost encircled, by them, the empty playground, with its elaborate whitewash markings—-for this American game is much more complicated than English Rugger —its goal-posts and its elaborate scoring boards that with their ten-foot letters keep up a minute record of the game.

The air hums with the buzz of forty thousand tongues. Through the buzz there crashes the sound of approaching music, martial music, challenging music, and the band of the Princeton men, with the undergrads marching like soldiers to the battlefield, emerges round the Princeton end of the horseshoe, and takes its place on the bottom rank of the Princeton host opposite. Terrific cheers from the enemy.

Another crash of music, and from our end of the horseshoe comes the Harvard band, with its tail of undergrads, to face the enemy across the greensward. Terrific cheers from ourselves.

The fateful hour is imminent. It is time to unleash the dogs of war. Three flannelled figures leap out in front of the Princeton host. They shout through megaphones to the enemy. They rush up and down the line, they wave their arms furiously in time, they leap into the air. And with that leap there bursts from twenty thousand throats a barbaric chorus of cheers roared in unison and in perfect time, shot through with strange, demoniacal yells, and culminating in a gigantic bass growl, like that of a tiger, twenty thousand tigers leaping on their prey—the growl rising to a terrific snarl that rends the heavens.

The glove is thrown down. We take it up. We send back yell for yell, roar for roar. Three cheerleaders leap out on the greensward in front of us, and to their screams of command and to the wild gyrations of their limbs we stand up and shout the battle-cry of Harvard. What it is like I cannot hear, for I am lost in its roar. Then the band opposite leads off with the battle-song of Princeton, and, thrown out by twenty thousand lusty pairs of lungs, it hits us like a Niagara of sound. But, unafraid, we rise like one man and, led by our band and kept in time by our cheer-leaders, gesticulating before us on the greensward like mad dervishes, we shout back the song of "Har-vard! Har-vard!"

And now, from underneath the Stadium, on either side there bound into the field two fearsome groups of gladiators, this clothed in crimson, that in the yellow and black stripes of the tiger, both padded and helmeted so that they resemble some strange primeval animal of gigantic muscular development and horrific visage. At their entrance the megaphones opposite are heard again, and the enemy host rises and repeats its wonderful cheer and

tiger growl. We rise and heave the challenge back. And now the teams are in position, the front lines, with the ball between, crouching on the ground for the spring. In the silence that has suddenly fallen on the scene, one hears short, sharp cries of numbers. “Five!” “Eleven!” “Three!” “Six!” “Ten!” like the rattle of musketry. Then—crash! The front lines have leapt on each other. There is a frenzied swirl of arms and legs and bodies. The swirl clears and men are seen lying about all over the line as though a shell had burst in their midst, while away to the right a man with the ball is brought down with a crash to the ground by another, who leaps at him like a projectile that completes its trajectory at his ankles.

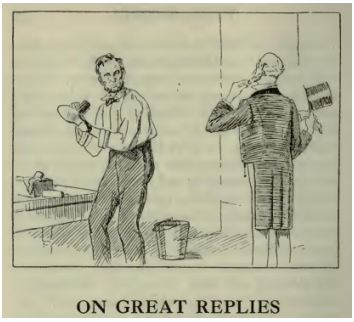
I will not pretend to describe what happened during the next ninety thrilling minutes—which, with intervals and stoppages for the attentions of the doctors, panned out to some two hours—how the battle surged to and fro, how the sides strained and strained until the tension of their muscles made your own muscles ache in sympathy, how Harvard scored a try and our cheer-leaders leapt out and led us in a psalm of victory, how Princeton drew level—a cyclone from the other side!—and forged ahead—another cyclone—how man after man went down like an ox, was examined by the doctors and led away or carried away; how another brave in crimson or yellow leapt into the breach; how at last hardly a man of the original teams was left on the field; how at every convenient interval the Princeton host rose and roared at us and how we jumped up and roared at them; how Harvard scored again just on time; how the match ended in a draw and so deprived us of the great carnival of victory that is the crowning frenzy of these classic encounters—all this is recorded in columns and pages of the American newspapers and

lives in my mind as a jolly whirlwind, a tempestuous "rag" in which young and old, gravity and gaiety, frantic fun and frantic fury, were amazingly confounded.

"And what did you think of it?" asked my host as we rattled back to New York in the darkness that night. "I think it has helped me to understand America," I replied. And I meant it, even though I could not have explained to him, or even to myself all that I meant.



Original



ON GREAT REPLIES

Original

ON GREAT REPLIES

At a dinner table the other night, the talk turned upon a certain politician whose cynical traffic in principles and loyalties has eclipsed even the record of Wedderbum or John Churchhil. There was one defender, an amiable and rather portentous gentleman who did not so much talk as lecture, and whose habit of looking up abstractedly and fixedly at some invisible altitude gave him the impression of communing with the Almighty. He was profuse in his admissions and apologies, but he wound up triumphantly with the remark:

"But, after all, you must admit that he is a person of genius."

"So was Madame de Pompadour," said a voice from the other side of the table.

It was a devastating retort, swift, unexpected, final. Like all good replies it had many facets. It lit up the character of the politician with a comparison of rare wit and truth. He was the courtesan of democracy who, like the courtesan of the King, trafficked sacred things for ambition and power, and brought ruin in his train. It ran through the dull, solemn man on the other side of the table like a rapier. There was no reply. There was nothing to reply to. You cannot reply to a flash of lightning. It revealed the speaker himself. Here was a swift,

searching intelligence, equipped with a weapon of tempered steel that went with deadly certainty to the heart of truth. Above all, it flashed on the whole landscape of discussion a fresh and clarify ing light that gave it larger significance and range.

It is the character of all great replies to have this various glamour and finality. They are not of the stuff of argument. They have the absoluteness of revelation. They illuminate both subject and personality. There are men we know intimately simply by some lightning phrase that has leapt from their lips at the challenge of fundamental things. I do not know much about the military genius or the deeds of Augureau, but I know the man by that terrible reply he made to Napoleon about the celebration at Notre Dame which revealed the imperial ambitions of the First Consul. Bonaparte asked Augureau what he thought of the ceremony. “Oh, it was very fine,” replied the general; “there was nothing wanting, *except the million of men who have perished in pulling down what you are setting up*.”

And in the same way Luther lives immortally in that shattering reply to the Cardinal legate at Augsburg. The Cardinal had been sent from Rome to make him recant by hook or by crook. Remonstrances, threats, entreaties, bribes were tried. Hopes of high distinction and reward were held out to him if he would only be reasonable. To the amazement of the proud Italian, a poor peasant's son —a miserable friar of a country town—was prepared to defy the power and resist the prayers of the Sovereign of Christendom.

“What!” said the Cardinal at last to him, “do you think the Pope cares for the opinion of a German boor? The Pope's little finger is stronger than all Germany. Do you expect your princes to take up

arms to defend *you—you*, a wretched worm like you? I tell you, no! And where will you be then—where will you be then?"

"Then, as now," replied Luther. "Then, as now, in the hands of Almighty God."

Not less magnificent was the reply of Thomas Paine to the bishop. The venom and malice of the ignorant and intolerant have, for more than a century, poisoned the name and reputation of that great man—one of the profoundest political thinkers and one of the most saintly men this country has produced, the friend and secretary of Washington, the brilliant author of the papers on "The Crisis," that kept the flame of the rebellion high in the darkest hour, the first Foreign Secretary of the United States, the man to whom Lafayette handed the key of the Bastille for presentation to Washington. The true character of this great Englishman flashes out in his immortal reply. The bishop had discoursed "On the goodness of God in making both rich and poor." And Paine answered, "God did not make rich and poor. God made male and female and gave the earth for their inheritance."

It is not often that a great reply is enveloped with humour. Lincoln had this rare gift, perhaps, beyond all other men. One does not know whether to admire most the fun or the searching truth of the reply recorded by Lord Lyons, who had called on the President and found him blacking his boots. He expressed a not unnatural surprise at the occupation, and remarked that people in England did not black their own boots. "Indeed," said the President. "Then whose boots do they black?" There was the same mingling of humour and wisdom in his reply to the lady who anxiously inquired whether he thought the

Lord was on their side. “I do not know, madam,” he said, “but I hope that we are on the Lord's side.”

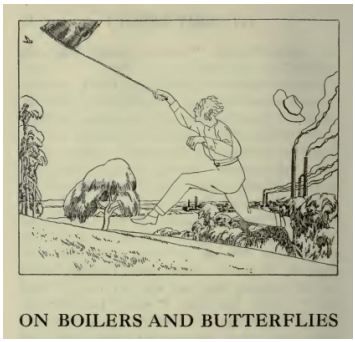
And with what homely humour he clothed that magnanimous reply to Raymond when the famous editor, like so many other supporters, urged him to dismiss Chase, his Secretary of the Treasury, who had been consistently disloyal to him and was now his open rival for the Presidency, and was using his department to further his ambitions. “Raymond,” he said, “you were brought up on a farm, weren't you? Then you know what a 'chin fly' is. My brother and I were once ploughing on a Kentucky farm, I driving the horse and he holding the plough. The horse was lazy; but once he rushed across the field so that I, with my long legs, could scarcely keep pace with him. On reaching the end of the furrow, I found an enormous chin fly fastened upon him and I knocked him off. My brother asked me what I did that for. I told him I didn't want the old horse bitten in that way. 'Why,' said my brother, 'that's all that made him go!' Now, if Mr Chase has got a presidential 'chin-fly' biting him, I'm not going to knock it off, if it will only make his department *go!*” If one were asked to name the most famous answer in history, one might, not unreasonably, give the palm to a woman—a poor woman, too, who has been dust for three thousand years, whose very name is unknown; but who spoke six words that gave her immortality. They have been recalled on thousands of occasions and in all lands, but never more memorably than by John Bright when he was speaking of the hesitation with which he accepted cabinet office: “I should have preferred much,” he said, “to have remained in the common rank of citizenship in which heretofore I have lived. There is a passage in the Old Testament that has often struck me as being one of great beauty. Many

of you will recollect that the prophet, in journeying to and fro, was very hospitably entertained by a Shunamite woman. In return, he wished to make her some amends, and he called her to him and asked her what there was he should do for her. 'Shall I speak for thee to the King?' he said, 'or to the captain of the host.' Now, it has always appeared to me that the Shunamite woman returned a great answer. She replied, in declining the prophet's offer, 'I dwell among mine own people.'"

It is the quality of a great reply that it does not so much answer the point as obliterate it. It is the thunder of Sinai breaking in on the babble of vulgar minds. The current of thought is changed, as if by magic, from mean things to sublime things, from the gross to the spiritual, from the trivial to the enduring. Clever replies, witty replies, are another matter. Anybody can make them with a sharp tongue and a quick mind. But great replies are not dependent on wit or cleverness. If they were Cicero would have made many, whereas he never made one. His repartees are perfect of their kind, but they belong to the debating club and the law court. They raise a laugh and score a point, but they are summer lightnings. The great reply does not come from witty minds, but from rare and profound souls. The brilliant adventurer, Napoleon, could no more have made that reply of Augereau than a rabbit could play Bach. He could not have made it because with all his genius he was as soulless a man as ever played a great part on the world's stage.



Original



Original

ON BOILERS AND BUTTERFLIES

I went recently to an industrial town in the North

on some business, and while there had occasion to meet a man who manufactured boilers and engines and machinery of all sorts. He talked to me about boilers and engines and machinery of all sorts, and I did my best to appear interested and understanding. But I was neither one nor the other. I was only bored. Boilers and engines, I know, are important things. Compared with a boiler, the finest lyric that was ever written is only a perfume on the gale. There is a practical downrightness about a boiler that makes “Drink to me only with thine eyes,” or “O mistress mine, where are you roaming?” or even “Twelfth Night” itself, a mere idle frivolity. All you can say in favour of “Twelfth Night,” from the strictly business point of view, is that it doesn't wear out, and the boiler does. Thank heaven for that.

But though boilers and engines are undoubtedly important things, I can never feel any enthusiasm about them. I know I ought to. I know I ought to be grateful to them for all the privileges they confer on me. How, for example, could I have gone to that distant town without the help of a boiler? How—and this was still more important—how could I hope to get away from that distant town without the help of a boiler? But gratitude will not keep pace with obligation, and the fact remains that great as my debt is to machinery, I dislike personal contact with it as much as I dislike the east wind. It gives the same feeling of arid discomfort, of mental depression, of spiritual bleakness. It has no bowels of compassion. It is power divorced from feeling and is the symbol of brute force in a world that lives or perishes by its emotional values. In Dante's “Inferno” each sinner had a hell peculiarly adapted to give him the maximum of misery. He would have reserved a machine-room for me, and there I should have

wandered forlornly for ever and ever among wheels and pulleys and piston-rods and boilers, vainly trying amidst the thud and din of machinery and the nauseous reek of oily “waste” to catch those perfumes on the gale, those frivolous rhythms to which I had devoted so much of that life' which should be “real and earnest” and occupied with serious things like boilers. And so it came about that as my friend talked I spiritually wilted away.

I did not seem to be listening to a man. I seemed to be listening to a learned and articulate boiler.

Then something happened. I do not recall what it was; but it led from boilers to butterflies. The transition seems a little violent and inexplicable. The only connection I can see is that there is a “b” in boilers and a “b” in butterflies. But, whatever the cause, the effect was miraculous. The articulate boiler became suddenly a flaming spirit. The light of passion shone in his eyes. He no longer looked at me as if I were a fellow-boiler; but as if I were his long-lost and dearly-loved brother. Was I interested in butterflies? Then away with boilers! Come, I must see his butterflies. And off we went as fast as petrol could whisk us to his house in the suburbs, and there in a great room, surrounded with hundreds of cases and drawers, I saw butterflies from the ends of the earth, butterflies from the forests of Brazil and butterflies from the plains of India, and butterflies from the veldt of South Africa and butterflies from the bush of Australia, all arranged in the foliage natural to their habitat to show how their scheme of coloration conformed to their setting. Some of them had their wings folded back and were indistinguishable from the leaves among which they lay. And as my friend, with growing excitement, revealed his treasure, he talked of his adventures in

the pursuit of them, and of the law of natural selection and all its bearing upon the mystery of life, its survivals and its failures. This hobby of his was, in short, the key of his world. The boiler house was the prison where he did time. At the magic word “butterflies” the prison door opened, and out he sailed on the wings of passion in pursuit of the things of the mind.

There are some people who speak slightingly of hobbies as if they were something childish and frivolous. But a man without a hobby is like a ship without a rudder. Life is such a tumultuous and confused affair that most of us get lost in the tangle and brushwood and get to the end of the journey without ever having found a path and a sense of direction. But a hobby hits the path at once. It may be ever so trivial a thing, but it supplies what the mind needs, a disinterested enthusiasm outside the mere routine of work and play. You cannot tell where it will lead. You may begin with stamps, and find you are thinking in continents. You may collect coins, and find that the history of man is written on them. You may begin with bees, and end with the science of life. Ruskin began with pictures and found they led to economics and everything else. For as every road was said to lead to Rome, so every hobby leads out into the universe, and supplies us with a compass for the adventure. It saves us from the humiliation of being merely smatterers. We cannot help being smatterers in general, for the world is too full of things to permit us to be anything else, but one field of intensive culture will give even our smattering a respectable foundation.

It will do more. It will save our smattering from folly. No man who knows even one subject well, will ever be quite such a fool as he might be when he

comes to subjects he does not know. He will know he does not know them and that is the beginning of wisdom. He will have a scale of measurement which will enable him to take soundings in strange waters. He will have, above all, an attachment to life which will make him at home in the world. Most of us need some such anchorage. We are plunged into this bewildering whirlpool of consciousness to be the sport of circumstance. We have in us the genius of speculation, but the further our speculations penetrate the profounder becomes the mystery that baffles us. We are caught in the toils of affections that crumble to dust, indoctrinated with creeds that wither like grass, beaten about by storms that shatter our stoutest battlements like spray blown upon the wind. In the end, we suspect that we are little more than dreams within a dream—or as Carlyle puts it, "exhalations that are and then are not." And we share the poet's sense of exile—

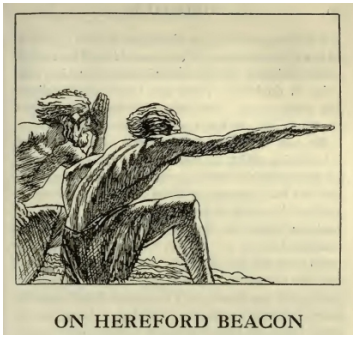
> In this house with starry dome,
> Floored with gem-like lakes and seas,
> Shall I never be at home?
> Never wholly at my ease?

From this spiritual loneliness there are various ways of escape, from stoicism to hedonism, but one of the most rational and kindly is the hobby. It brings us back from the perplexing conundrum of life to things that we can see and grasp and live with cheerfully and companionably and without fear of bereavement or disillusion. We cultivate our garden and find in it a modest answer to our questions. We see the seasons come and go like old friends whose visits may be fleeting, but are always renewed. Or

we make friends in books, and live in easy comradeship with Horace or Pepys or Johnson in some static past that is untouched by the sense of the mortality of things. Or we find in music or art a garden of the mind, self-contained and self-sufficing, in which the anarchy of intractible circumstance is subdued to an inner harmony that calms the spirit and endows it with more sovereign vision. The old gentleman in “Romany Rye,” you will remember, found his deliverance in studying Chinese. His bereavement had left him without God and without hope in the world, without any refuge except the pitiful contemplation of the things that reminded him of his sorrow. One day he sat gazing vacantly before him, when his eye fell upon some strange marks on a teapot, and he thought he heard a voice say, “The marks! the marks! cling to the marks! or ——-” And from this beginning—but the story is too fruity, too rich with the vintage of Borrow to be mutilated. Take the book down, turn to the episode, and thank me for sending you again into the enchanted Borrovian realm that is so unlike anything else to be found in books. It is enough for the purpose here to recall this perfect example of the healing power of the hobby. It gives us an intelligible little world of our own where we can be at ease, and from whose warmth and friendliness we can look out on the vast conundrum without expecting an answer or being much troubled because we do not get one. It was a hobby that poor Pascal needed to allay that horror of the universe which he expressed in the desolating phrase, “Le silence étemel de ces espaces infinis m'effraie.” For on the wings of the butterfly one can not only outrange the boiler, but can adventure into the infinite in the spirit of happy and confident adventure.



Original



Original

ON HEREFORD BEACON

Jenny Lind sleeps in Malvern Priory Church; but Wynd's Point where she died is four miles away up on the hills, in the middle of that noble range of the Malverns that marches north and south from Worcester beacon to Gloucester beacon.

It lies just where the white ribbon of road that has wound its way up from Malvern reaches the slopes of Hereford beacon, and begins its descent into the fat pastures and deep woodlands of the Herefordshire country.

Across the dip in the road Hereford beacon, the central point of the range, rises in gracious treeless curves, its summit ringed with the deep trenches from whence, perhaps on some such cloudless day as this, the Britons scanned the wide plain for the approach of the Roman legions. Caractacus himself is credited with fortifying these natural ramparts; but the point is doubtful. There are those who attribute the work to——. But let the cabman who brought me up to Wynd's Point tell his own story.

He was a delightful fellow, full of geniality and information which he conveyed in that rich accent of Worcestershire that has the strength of the north without its harshness and the melody of the south without its slackness. He had also that delicious haziness about the history of the district which is characteristic of the native. As we walked up the steep road side by side by the horse's head he pointed out the Cotswolds, Gloucester Cathedral, Worcester Cathedral, the Severn and the other features of the ever widening landscape. Turning a bend in the road, Hereford beacon came in view.

“That's where Cromwell wur killed, sir.”

He spoke with the calm matter-of-factness of a

guide-book.

“Killed?” said I, a little stunned.

“Yes, sir, he wur killed hereabouts. He fought th' battle o' Worcester from about here you know, sir.”

“But he came from the north to Worcester, and this is south. And he wasn't killed at all. He died in his bed.”

The cabman yielded the point without resentment.

“Well, sir, happen he wur only captured. I've heard folks say he wur captured in a cave on Hereford beacon. The cave's there now. I've never sin it, but it's there. I used to live o'er in Radnorshire and heard tell as he wur captured in a cave on Hereford beacon.”

He was resolute on the point of capture. The killing was a detail; but the capture was vital. To surrender that would be to surrender the whole Cromwellian legend. There is a point at which the Higher Criticism must be fought unflinchingly if faith is not to crumble utterly away.

“He wur a desperate mischieful man wur Cromwell,” he went on. “He blowed away Little Malvern Church down yonder.”

He pointed down into the woody hollow below where an ancient tower was visible amid the rich foliage. Little Malvern Priory! Here was historic ground indeed, and I thought of John Inglesant and of the vision of Piers Plowman as he lay by the little rivulet in the Malverns.

“Left the tower standing he did, sir,” pursued the historian. “Now, why should th' old varmint a' left th' tower standing, sir?”

And the consideration of this problem of Cromwellian psychology brought us to Wynd's Point.

The day before our arrival there had been a visitor to the house, an old gentleman who had wandered in the grounds and sat and mused in the little arbour that Jenny Lind built, and whence she used to look out on the beacon and across the plain to the Cotswolds. He had gently declined to go inside the house. There are some memories too sacred to disturb. It was the long widowed husband of the Swedish saint and singer.

It is all as she made it and left it. There hangs about it the sense of a vanished hand, of a gracious spirit. The porch, with its deep, sloping roof, and its pillars of untrimmed silver birch, suggesting a mountain chalet, "the golden cage," of the singer fronting the drawing-room bowered in ivy, the many gables, the quaint furniture, and the quainter pictures of saints, that hang upon the walls—all speak with mute eloquence of the peasant girl whose voice thrilled two hemispheres, whose life was an anthem, and whose magic still lingers in the sweet simplicity of her name.

"Why did you leave the stage?" asked a friend of Jenny Lind, wondering, like all the world, why the incomparable actress and singer should surrender, almost in her youth, the intoxicating triumphs of opera for the sober rôle of a concert singer, singing not for herself, but for charity.

Jenny Lind sat with her Lutheran Bible on her knee.

"Because," she said, touching the Bible, "it left me so little time for this, and" (looking at the sunset) "none for that."

There is the secret of Jenny Lind's love for Wynd's Point, where the cuckoo—his voice failing slightly in these hot June days—wakes you in the rosy dawn

and continues with unwearied iteration until the shadows lengthen across the lawn, and the Black Mountains stand out darkly against the sunset, and the lights of Gloucester shine dimly in the deepening gloom of the vast plain.

Jenny Lind was a child of Nature to the end, and Wynd's Point is Nature unadorned. It stands on a woody rock that drops almost sheer to the road, with mossy ways that wind through the larches the furze and the broom to the top, where the wind blows fresh from the sea, and you come out on the path of spongy turf that invites you on and on over the green summits that march in stately Indian file to the shapely peak of Worcester beacon.

Whether you go north to Worcester beacon or south over Hereford beacon to Gloucester beacon, there is no finer walk in England than along these ten miles of breezy highlands, with fifteen English counties unrolled at your feet, the swifts wheeling around your path and that sense of exhilaration that comes from the spacious solitude of high places. It is a cheerful solitude, too, for if you tire of your own thoughts and of the twin shout of the cuckoo you may fling yourself down on the turf and look out over half of busy England from where, beyond 'the Lickey Hills, Birmingham stains the horizon with its fuliginous activities to where southward the shining pathway of the Bristol Channel carries the imagination away with Sebastian Cabot to the Spanish main. Here you may see our rough island story traced in characters of city, hill, and plain. These grass-grown trenches, where to-day the young lambs are grazing, take us back to the dawn of things and the beginnings of that ancient tragedy of the Celtic race. Yonder, enveloped in a thin veil of smoke, is Tewkesbury, and to see Tewkesbury is to

think of the Wars of the Roses, of “false, fleeting, perjured Clarence that stabbed me on the field at Tewkesbury,” and of Ancient Pistol, whose “wits were thick as Tewkesbury mustard.” There is the battlefield of Mortimer's Cross, and far away Edgehill carries the mind forward to the beginning of that great struggle for a free England which finished yonder at Worcester, where the clash of arms was heard for the last time in our land and where Cromwell sheathed his terrible sword for ever.

The sun has left the eastern slopes and night is already beginning to cast its shadows over Little Malvern and the golf links beyond, and the wide plain where trails of white smoke show the pathway of trains racing here through the tunnel to Hereford, there to Gloucester, and yonder to Oxford and London. The labourer is leaving the fields and the cattle are coming up from the pastures. The landscape fades into mystery and gloom. Now is the moment to turn westward, where

> Vanquished eve, as night prevails,
> Bleeds upon the road to Wales.

All the landscape is bathed with the splendour of the setting sun, and in the mellow radiance the Welsh mountains stand out like the far battlements of fairyland. Eastnor Castle gleams like a palace of alabaster, and in the woods of the castle that clothe these western slopes a pheasant rends the golden silence with the startled noise and flurry of its flight.

The magic passes. The cloud palaces of the west turn from gold to grey; the fairy battlements are captured by the invading night, the wind turns suddenly chill, the moon is up over the Cotswolds. It

is time to go....

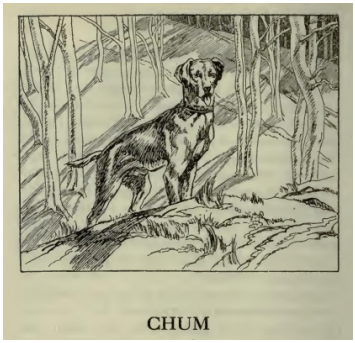
Down in the garden at Wynd's Point a rabbit scurries across the lawn and a late cuckoo returning from the hills sends a last shout through the twilight. The songs of the day are done. I stand under the great sycamore by the porch where through the hot hours the chorus of myriads of insects has sounded like the ceaseless note of a cello drawn by an unfaltering bow. The chorus has ceased. The birds have vanished, all save a pied wagtail, loveliest of a lovely tribe, that flirts its graceful tail by the rowan tree. From the midst of the foliage come those intimate murmurs of the birds, half chatter, half song, that close the day. Even these grow few and faint until the silence is unbroken.

> And the birds and the beasts and the insects are drowned,
>
> In an ocean of dreams without a sound.

Overhead the sky is strewn with stars. Night and silence have triumphed.



Original



CHUM

Original

CHUM

When I turned the key in the door and entered the cottage, I missed a familiar sound. It was the “thump, thump, thump,” of a tail on the floor at the foot of the stairs. I turned on the light. Yes, the place was vacant. Chum had gone, and he would not return. I knew that the veterinary must have called, pronounced his case hopeless, and taken him away, and that I should hear no more his “welcome home!” at midnight. No matter what the labours of the day had been or how profound his sleep, he never failed

to give me a cheer with the stump of his tail and to blink his eyes sleepily as I gave him “Good dog” and a pat on the head. Then with a huge sigh of content he would lapse back into slumber, satisfied that the last duty of the day was done, and that all was well with the world for the night. Now he has lapsed into sleep altogether.

I think that instead of going into the beech woods this morning I will pay my old friend a little tribute at parting. It will ease my mind, and in any case I should find the woods lonely to-day, for it was there that I enjoyed his companionship most. And it was there, I think, that he enjoyed my companionship most also. He was a little particular with whom he went, and I fancy he preferred me to anybody. Children he declined to go with, unless they were accompanied by a responsible grown-up person. It was not that he did not love children. When little Peggy returned after a longish absence his transports of joy knew no bounds. He would leap round and round in wild circles culminating in an embrace that sent her to the floor. For he was a big fellow, and was rather like Scott's schoolmaster who, when he knocked young Scott down, apologised, and explained that “he didn't know his own strength.”

But when he went into the woods Chum liked an equal to go with, and I was the man for his money. He knew my favourite paths through the woodlands, and flashed hither and thither to his familiar haunts, his reddish-brown coat gleaming through the trees like an oriflamme of Pan, and his head down to the ground like a hound on the trail. For there was more than a hint of the hound in his varied composition. What he was precisely no one ever could tell me. Even the veterinary gave him up. His fine liquid brown eyes and eloquent eyebrows were pure

Airedale, but he had a nobler head than any Airedale I have known. There was a strain of the Irish terrier in him, too, but the glory of his smooth ruddy coat was all his own. And all his own, too, were his honest, simple heart and his genius for friendship.

There was no cunning about the fellow, and I fancy that in dogdom he was reckoned something of a fool. You could always tell when he had been sleeping in the armchair that was forbidden to him by the look of grotesque criminality that he wore. For he had an acute sense of sin, and he was too ingenuous for concealment. He was as sentimental as a schoolgirl, and could put as much emotion into the play of his wonderful eyebrows as any actor that ever walked the stage. In temperament, he was something of a pacifist. He would strike, but only under compulsion, and when he passed the Great Dane down in the valley he was a spectacle of abject surrender and slinking humbleness. His self-pity under pain was ludicrous, and he exploited it as openly as a beggar exploits his sores. You had but to speak sympathetically to him, to show any concern about his affliction, whatever it might chance to be, and he would limp off to the forbidden armchair with the confidence of a convalescent entitled to any good thing that was going. And there he would lie curled up and watchful, his eyes blinking with mingled joy at the unaccustomed luxury and pity for the misfortune that was the source of that joy. He had the qualities of a rather impressionable child. Scold him and he sank into an unspeakable abyss of misery; pat him or only change the tone of your voice and all the world was young and full of singing birds again.

He was, I fear, a snob. He had not that haughty aloofness from his kind, that suggestion of being

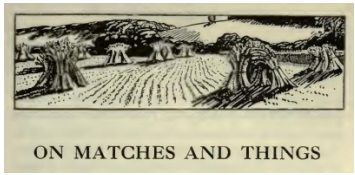
someone in particular which afflicts the Chow. For him a dog was a dog whatever his pedigree, his coat, his breed, or his colour. But in his relations to the human family he revealed more than a little of the spirit of the flunkey. “A man's a man, for a' that,” was not his creed. He discriminated between the people who came to the front door and the people who came to the side door. To the former he was systematically civil; to the latter he was frankly hostile. “The poor in a loomp is bad,” was his fixed principle, and any one carrying a basket, wearing an apron, clothed in a uniform was *ipso facto* suspect. He held, in short, to the servile philosophy of clothes as firmly as any waiter at the Ritz or any footman in Mayfair. Familiarity never altered his convictions. No amount of correction affected his stubborn dislike of postmen. They offended him in many ways. They wore uniforms; they came, nevertheless, to the front door; they knocked with a challenging violence that revolted his sense of propriety. In the end, the burden of their insults was too much for him. He took a sample out of a postman's pair of trousers. Perhaps that incident was not unconnected with his passing.

One day he limped into the garden, dragging his hindlegs painfully. Whether he had been run over by a motor-car or had fallen back in leaping a stile—he could take a gate with the grace of a swallow—or had had a crack across the back with a pole we never knew. Perhaps the latter, for he had enemies, and I am bound to say deserved to have them, for he was a disobedient fellow, and would go where he was not wanted. But whatever the cause he just wilted away at the hindquarters, and all the veterinary's art was in vain. The magic word that called him to the revels in his native woods—for he had come to us as a pup

from a cottage in the heart of the woodland country —no longer made him tense as a drawn bow. He saw the cows in the paddock without indignation, and left his bone unregarded. He made one or two efforts to follow me up the hill to the woods, but at the corner of the lane turned back, crept into the house, and lay under the table as if desiring only to forget and to be forgotten. Now he is gone, and I am astonished to find how large a place he filled in the circle of my friendships. If the Indian's dream of the happy hunting ground is true, I fancy I shall find Chum there waiting to scour the woods with me as of old.



Original



Original

ON MATCHES AND THINGS

I had an agreeable assurance this afternoon that the war is over. I went-into a tea-shop and sat down. There were several young waitresses by the counter engaged in animated conversation. They eyed me with that cold aloofness which is the ritual of the order, and which, I take it, is intended to convey to you the fact that they are princesses in disguise who only serve in shops for a pastime. When I had taken out my watch twice with an appearance of ostentatious urgency, one of the princesses came towards me, took my order (looking meanwhile out of the window to remind me that she was not really aware of me, but only happened to be there by chance), and moved languorously away. When she returned she brought tea—and sugar. In that moment her disdain was transfigured. I saw in her a ministering angel who under the disguise of indifference went about scattering benedictions among her customers and assuring them that the spring had come back to the earth.

It was not only the princess who was transfigured. The whole future became suddenly irradiated. The winter of discontent (and saccharine) had passed magically away, and all the poor remnant of my life would be sweetened thrice a day by honest sugar.

Not until that astonishing sugar basin swam into my ken had I realised how I loathed the chemical

abomination that I had borrowed from my friends through long years of abstinence. I am ordinarily a one-lump person, but in my exultation I put in two lumps and then I seized the spoon and stirred and stirred in an ecstasy of satisfaction. No longer did the spoon seem a sardonic reminiscence of happier days, a mere survival of an antique and forgotten custom, like the buttons on the back of your coat. It resumed its authority in the ordinance of the tea-table. To stir your tea is no mean part of a noble ceremony. It keeps tune with your thoughts if you are alone, and it keeps time with your tongue if you are talking. It helps out the argument, fills up the gaps, provides the animated commentary on your discourse. There are people I shall always remember in the attitude of standing, cup in hand, and stirring, stirring, stirring as the current of talk flowed on. Such a one was that fine old tea-drinker, Prince Kropotkin—rest his gentle soul if he indeed be among the slain.... With what universal benevolence his patriarchal face used to gleam as he stood stirring and talking, talking and stirring, with the hurry of his teeming thoughts.

It is not one's taste for sugar or loathing of saccharine that accounts for the pleasure that incident in the tea-shop gave. It is that in these little things we feel the return of the warm current to the frozen veins of life. It is like the sensation you have when, after days in the icy solitudes of the glaciers, you begin to descend to the \alleys and come with a shock of delight upon the first blades of grass and later upon the grazing cattle on the mountain side, and the singing birds and all the pleasant intimacies of the familiar life. They seem more precious than you had ever conceived them to be. You go about in these days knitting up your severed friendships with things. You slip into the National Gallery just to see

what old favourites have come up from the darkness of the cellars. You walk along the Embankment rejoicing in the great moon that shines again from the Clock Tower. Every clock that chimes gives you a pleasant emotion, and the boom of Big Ben sounds like the salutation of an old friend who had been given up as lost. And matches.... There was a time when I thought nothing of a match. I would strike a match as thoughtlessly as I would breathe. And for the same reason, that matches were as plentiful as air. I would strike a match and let the wind puff it out; another and let it burn out before using it, simply because I was too busy talking or listening or thinking or doing nothing. I would try to light a pipe in a gale of wind on a mountain top, crouching behind a boulder, getting inside my hat, lying on the ground under my coat, and wasting matches by the dozen. I would get rid of a box of matches a day, and not care a dump. The world was simply choked with matches, and it was almost a duty to go on striking them to make room for the rest. You could get a dozen boxes for a penny or twopence, and in the kitchen you could see great bags of matches with boxes bursting out at the top, and simply asking to be taken. If by some accident you found yourself without a box in your pocket you asked the stranger for a light as confidently as you would ask him for the time o' day. You were asking for something that cost him nothing except a commonplace civility.

And now... I have this very day been into half-a-dozen shops in Fleet Street and the Strand and have asked for matches and been turned empty away. The shopmen have long ceased to say, “No; we haven't any.” They simply move their heads from side to side without a word, slowly, smilelessly, wearily, sardonically, as though they have got into the habit

and just go on in their sleep. “Oh, you funny people,” they seem to say, dreamily. “Will you never learn sense? Will nothing ever teach you that there aren't any matches; haven't been any matches for years and years; never will be any matches any more? Please go away and let the other fools follow on.” And you go away, feeling much as though you had been caught trying to pass a bad half-crown.

No longer can you say in the old, easy, careless way, “Can you oblige me with a light, sir?” You are reduced to the cunning of a bird of prey or a pick-pocket. You sit in the smoking carriage, eyeing the man opposite, wondering why he is not smoking, wondering whether he is the sort of fellow who is likely to have a match, pretending to read, but waiting to pounce if there is the least movement of his hand to his pocket, preparing to have “After you, sir,” on your lips at the exact moment when he has lit his cigarette and is screwing up his mouth to blow out the precious flame. Perhaps you are lucky. Perhaps you are not. Perhaps the fellow is only waiting to pounce too. And thus you sit, each waiting for what the other hasn't got, symbols of eternal hope in a matchless world.

I have come to reckon my friends by the measure of confidence with which I can ask them for a light. If the request leaps easily to the lips I know that their friendship is of the sterling stuff. There is that excellent fellow Higginson, for example. He works in a room near mine, and I have had more lights from him in these days than from any other man on earth. I never hesitate to ask Higginson for a match. I do it quite boldly, fearlessly, shamelessly. And he does it to me—but not so often, not nearly so often. And his instinct is so delicate. If—having borrowed a little too recklessly from him of late—I go into his room

and begin talking of the situation in Holland, or the new taxes, or the Peace Conference, or things like that—is he deceived? Not at all. He knows that what I want is not conversation, but a match. And if he has one left it is mine. I have even seen him pretend to relight his pipe because he knew I wanted to light mine. That is the sort of man Higginson is. I cannot speak too highly of Higginson.

But the years of famine are over. Soon we shall be able to go into the tobacconist's shop and call for a box of matches with the old air of authority and, having got them, strike them prodigally as in the days before the great darkness. Even the return of the newspaper placards is welcome for the assurance it brings that we can think once more about Lords and the Oval.

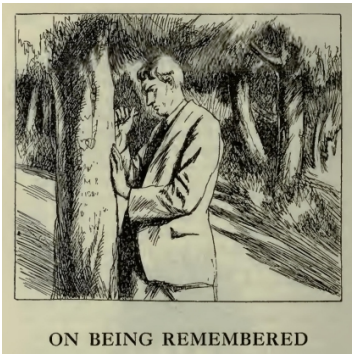
And there are more intimate reminders that the spring is returning, Your young kinsman from Canada or Australia looks in to tell you he is sailing home tomorrow, and your friends turn up to see you in tweeds instead of khaki. In the dining-room at the club you come across waiters who are strange and yet not strange, bronzed fellows who have been on historic battlefields and now ask you whether you will have “thick or clear,” with the pleasant air of renewing an old acquaintance. Your galley proof is brought down to you by a giant in shirt sleeves whom you look at with a shadowy feeling of remembrance. And then you discover he is that pale, thin youth who used to bring the proofs to you years ago, and who in the interval has been fighting in many lands near and far, in France and Macedonia, Egypt and Palestine, and now comes back wearing the burnished livery of desert suns. Down on the golf links you meet a stoutish fellow who turns out to be the old professional released from Germany after

long months of imprisonment, who tells you he was one “of the lucky ones; nothing to complain of, sir; I worked on a farm and lived with the farmer's family, and had the same as they had. No, sir, nothing to complain of. I was one of the lucky ones.”

Perhaps the pleasure of these renewals of the old associations of men and things is shadowed by the memory of those who were not lucky, those who will never come back to the familiar ways and never hear the sound of Big Ben again. We must not forget them and what we owe them as we enter the new life that they have won for us. But to-day, under the stimulus of the princess's sugar basin, I am inclined to dwell on the credit side of things and rejoice in the burgeoning of spring. We have left the deathly solitudes of the glaciers behind, and though the moraine is rough and toilsome the valleys lie cool beneath us, and we can hear the pleasant tinkle of the cow-bells calling us back to the old pastures.



Original



Original

ON BEING REMEMBERED

As I lay on the hill-top this morning at the edge of the beech woods watching the harvesters in the fields, and the sunlight and shadows chasing each other across the valley, it seemed that the centuries were looking down with me. For the hill-top is scored with memories, as an old school book is scored with the names of generations of scholars. Near by are the earthworks of the ancient Britons, and on the face of the hill is a great white horse carved in the chalk centuries ago. Those white

marks, that look like sheep feeding on the green hillside, are reminders of the great war. How long ago it seems since the recruits from the valley used to come up here to learn the art of trench-digging, leaving these memorials behind them before they marched away to whatever fate awaited them! All over the hill-top are the ashes of old fires lit by merry parties on happy holidays. One scorched and blackened area, more spacious than the rest, marks the spot where the beacon fire was lit to celebrate the signing of Peace. And on the boles of the beech trees are initials carved deep in the bark—some linked like those of lovers, some freshly cut, some old and covered with lichen.

What is this instinct that makes us carve our names on tree trunks, and school desks with such elaborate care? It is no modern vulgarity. It is as ancient as human records. In the excavations at Pergamos the school desks of two thousand years ago have been found scored with the names of the schoolboys of those far-off days. No doubt the act itself delighted them. There was never a boy who did not find pleasure in cutting wood or scrawling on a wall, no matter what was cut or what was scrawled. And the joy does not wholly pass with youth. Stonewall Jackson found pleasure in whittling a stick at any time, and I never see a nice white ceiling above me as I lie in bed, without sharing Mr Chesterton's hankering for a charcoal with which to cover it with prancing fancies. But at the back of it all, the explanation of those initials on the boles of the beeches is a desire for some sort of immortality—terrestrial if not celestial. Even the least of us would like to be remembered, and so we carve our names on tree trunks and tombstones to remind later generations that we too once passed this way.

If it is a weakness, it is a weakness that we share with the great. One of the chief pleasures of greatness is the assurance that fame will trumpet its name down the centuries. Cæsar wrote his Commentaries to take care that posterity did not forget him, and Horace's "Exegi monumentum ære perennius" is one of many confident assertions that he knew he would be among the immortals. "I have raised a monument," he says, "more enduring than brass and loftier than the pyramids of kings; a monument which shall not be destroyed by the consuming rain nor by the rage of the north wind, nor by the countless years and the flight of ages." The same magnificent confidence appears in Shakespeare's proud declaration—

> Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
> Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme,

and Wordsworth could predict that he would never die because he had written a song of a sparrow—

> And in this bush one sparrow built her nest
> Of which I sang one song that will not die.

Keats, it is true, lamented that his name was "writ in water," but behind the lament we see the lurking hope that it was destined for immortality.

Burns, in a letter to his wife, expresses the same comfortable confidence. "I'll be more respected," he said, "a hundred years after I am dead than I am at present;" and even John Knox had his eye on an

earthly as well as a heavenly immortality. So, too, had Erasmus. “Theologians there will always be in abundance,” he said; “the like of me comes but once in centuries.”

Lesser men than these have gone to their graves with the conviction that their names would never pass from the earth. Landor had a most imperious conceit on the subject. “What I write,” he said, “is not written on slate and no finger, not of Time itself who dips it in the cloud of years can efface it.” And again, “I shall dine late, but the dining-room will be well-lighted, the guests few and select.” A proud fellow, if ever there was one. Even that very small but very clever person, Le Brun-Pindare, cherished his dream of immortality. “I do not die,” he said grandly; “*I quit the time*.” And beside this we may put Victor Hugo's rather truculent, “It is time my name ceased to fill the world.”

But no one stated so frankly, not only that he expected immortality, but that he laboured for immortality, as Cicero did. “Do you suppose,” he said, “to boast a little of myself after the manner of old men, that I should have undergone such great toils by day and night, at home, and in service, had I thought to limit my glory to the same bounds as my life? Would it not have been far better to pass an easy and quiet life without toil or struggle? But I know not how my soul, stretching upwards, has ever looked forward to posterity as if, when it had departed from life, then at last it would begin to live.” The context, it is true, suggests that a celestial immortality were in his thought as well as a terrestrial; but earthly glory was never far from his mind.

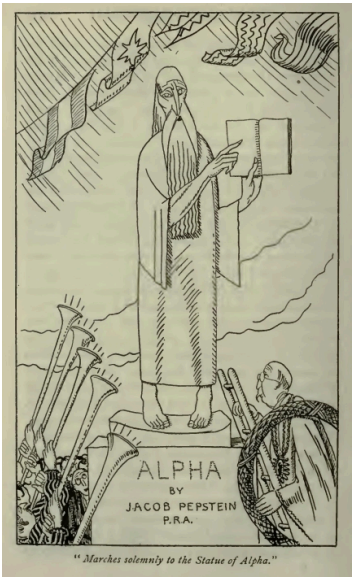
Nor was it ever forgotten by Boswell. His confession on the subject is one of the most exquisite

pieces of self-revelation to be found in books. I must give myself the luxury of transcribing its inimitable terms. In the preface to his “Account of Corsica” he says:—

*For my part I should be proud to be known as an author; I have an ardent ambition for literary fame; for of all possessions I should imagine literary fame to be the most valuable. A man who has been able to furnish a book which has been approved by the world has established himself as a respectable character in distant society, without any danger of having the character lessened by the observation of his weaknesses. (*Oh, you rogue!*) To preserve a uniform dignity among those who see us every day is hardly possible; and to aim at it must put us under the fetters of a perpetual restraint. The author of an approved book may allow his natural disposition an easy play (”*You were drunk last night, you dog*“), and yet indulge the pride of superior genius when he considers that by those who know him only as an author he never ceases to be respected. Such an author in his hours of gloom and discontent may have the consolation to think that his writings are at that very time giving pleasure to numbers, and such an author may cherish the hope of being remembered after death, which has been a great object of the noblest minds in all ages.*

We may smile at Boswell's vanity, but most of us share his ambition. Most of us would enjoy the prospect of being remembered, in spite of Gray's depressing reminder about the futility of flattering the “dull cold ear of death.” In my more expansive moments, when things look rosy and immortality seems cheap, I find myself entertaining on behalf of “Alpha of the Plough” an agreeable fancy something like this. In the year two thousand—or it may be three thousand—yes, let us do the thing handsomely

and not stint the centuries—in the year three thousand and ever so many, at the close of the great war between the Chinese and the Patagonians, that war which is to end war and to make the world safe for democracy—at the close of this war a young Patagonian officer who has been swished that morning from the British Isles across the Atlantic to the Patagonian capital—swished, I need hardly remark, being the expression used to describe the method of flight which consists in being discharged in a rocket out of the earth's atmosphere and made to complete a parabola on any part of the earth's surface that may be desired—bursts in on his family with a trophy which has been recovered by him in the course of some daring investigations of the famous subterranean passages of the ancient British capital—those passages which have so long perplexed, bewildered, intrigued, and occupied the Patagonian savants, some of whom hold that they were a system of sewers, and some that they were the roadways of a people who had become so afflicted with photophobia that they had to build their cities underground. The trophy is a book by one “Alpha of the Plough.” It creates an enormous sensation. It is put under a glass case in the Patagonian Hall of the Immortals. It is translated into every Patagonian dialect. It is read in schools. It is referred to in pulpits. It is discussed in learned societies. Its author, dimly descried across the ages, becomes the patron saint of a cult.



"Marches solemnly to the Statue of Alpha."

Original

An annual dinner is held to his memory, at which some immense Patagonian celebrity delivers a panegyric in his honour. At the close the whole assembly rises, forms a procession and, led by the Patagonian Patriarch, marches solemnly to the statue of Alpha—a gentleman with a flowing beard and a dome-like brow—that overlooks the market-place, and places wreaths of his favourite flower at the base, amid the ringing of bells and a salvo of artillery.

There is, of course, another and much more probable fate awaiting you, my dear Alpha. It is to make a last appearance on some penny barrow in the New Cut and pass thence into oblivion. That is the fate reserved for most, even of those authors whose names sound so loud in the world to-day. And yet it is probably true, as Boswell said, that the man who

writes has the best chance of remembrance. Apart from Pitt and Fox, who among the statesmen of a century ago are recalled even by name? But Wordsworth and Coleridge, Byron and Hazlitt, Shelley and Keats and Lamb, even second-raters like Leigh Hunt and Godwin, have secure niches in the temple of memory. And for one person who recalls the' brilliant military feats of Montrose there are a thousand who remember him by half a stanza of the poem in which he poured out his creed—

He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small.
That dares not put it to the touch
To win or lose it all.

Mæcenas was a great man in his day, but it was not his friendship with Octavius Cæsar that gave him immortality, but the fact that he befriended a young fellow named Horace, who wrote verses and linked the name of his benefactor with his own for ever. And the case of Pytheas of Ægina is full of suggestion to those who have money to spare and would like to be remembered. Pytheas being a victor in the Isthmian games went to Pindar and asked him how much he would charge to write an ode in his praise. Pindar demanded one talent, about £200 of our money. “Why, for so much money,” said Pytheas, “I can erect a statue of bronze in the temple.”

“Very likely.” On second thoughts he returned and paid for the poem. And now, as Emerson remarks in recalling the story, not only all the statues of bronze in the temples of Ægina are destroyed, but the temples themselves and the very walls of the city are utterly gone whilst the ode of Pindar in praise of

Pytheas remains entire. There are few surer paths to immortality than making friends with the poets, as the case of the Earl of Southampton proves. He will live as long as the sonnets of Shakespeare live simply in virtue of the mystery that envelops their dedication. But one must choose one's poet carefully. I do not advise you to go and give Mr ———— £200 and a commission to send your name echoing down the corridors of time.

Pindars and Shakespeares are few, and Mr ———— (you will fill in the blank according to your own aversion) is not one of them. It would be safer to spend the money in getting your name attached to a rose, or an overcoat, or a pair of boots, for these things, too, can confer a modest immortality. They have done so for many. A certain Maréchal Neil is wafted down to posterity in the perfume of a rose, which is as enviable a form of immortality as one could conceive. A certain Mr Mackintosh is talked about by everybody whenever there is a shower of rain, and even Blucher is remembered more by his boots than by his battles. It would not be very extravagant to imagine a time when Gladstone will be thought of only as some remote tradesman who invented a bag, just as Archimedes is remembered only as a person who made an ingenious screw.

But, after all, the desire for immortality is not one that will keep the healthy mind awake at night. It is reserved for very few of us, perhaps one in a million, and they not always the worthiest. The lichen of forgetfulness steals over the memory of the just and the unjust alike, and we shall sleep as peacefully and heedlessly if we are forgotten as if the world babbles about us for ever.



Original



Original

ON DINING

There are people who can hoard a secret as misers hoard gold. They can hoard it not for the sake of the secret, but for the love of secrecy, for the satisfaction of feeling that they have got something

locked up that they could spend if they chose without being any the poorer and that other people would enjoy knowing. Their pleasure is in not spending what they can afford to spend. It is a pleasure akin to the economy of the Scotsman, which, according to a distinguished member of that race, finds its perfect expression in taking the tube when you can afford a cab. But the gift of secrecy is rare. Most of us enjoy secrets for the sake of telling them. We spend our secrets as Lamb's spendthrift spent his money—while they are fresh. The joy of creating an emotion in other people is too much for us. We like to surprise them, or shock them, or please them as the case may be, and we give away the secret with which we have been entrusted with a liberal hand and a solemn request "to say nothing about it." We relish the luxury of telling the secret, and leave the painful duty of keeping it to the other fellow. We let the horse out and then solemnly demand that the stable door shall be shut so that it shan't escape, I have done it myself—often. I have no doubt that I shall do it again. But not to-day. I have a secret to reveal, but I shall not reveal it. I shall not reveal it for entirely selfish reasons, which will appear later. You may conceive me going about choking with mystery. The fact is that I have made a discovery. Long years have I spent in the search for the perfect restaurant, where one can dine wisely and well, where the food is good, the service plain, the atmosphere restful, and the prices moderate—in short, the happy mean between the giddy heights of the Ritz or the Carlton, and the uncompromising cheapness of Lockhart's. In those extremes I find no satisfaction.

It is not merely the dearness of the Ritz that I reject. I dislike its ostentatious and elaborate luxury.

It is not that I am indifferent to a good table. Mrs Poyser was thankful to say that there weren't many families that enjoyed their “vittles” more than her's did, and I can claim the same modest talent for myself. I am not ashamed to say that I count good eating as one of the chief joys of this transitory life. I could join very heartily in Peacock's chorus:

> “How can a man, in his life of a span,
> Do anything better than dine.”

Give me a satisfactory' dinner, and the perplexities of things unravel themselves magically, the clouds break, and a benign calm overspreads the landscape. I would not go so far as the eminent professor, who insisted that eating was the greatest of all the pleasures in life. That, I think, is exalting the stomach unduly. And I can conceive few things more revolting than the Roman practice of prolonging a meal by taking emetics. But, on the other hand, there is no need to apologise for enjoying a good dinner. Quite virtuous people have enjoyed good dinners. I see no necessary antagonism between a healthy stomach and a holy mind. There was a saintly man once in this city—a famous man, too—who was afflicted with so hearty an appetite that, before going out to dinner, he had a square meal to take the edge off his hunger, and to enable him to start even with the other guests. And it is on record that when the ascetic converts of the Oxford movement went to lunch with Cardinal Wiseman in Lent they were shocked at the number of fish courses that hearty trencherman and eminent Christian went through in a season of fasting, “I fear,” said one of them, “that there is a lobster salad side to the Cardinal.” I

confess, without shame, to a lobster salad side too. A hot day and a lobster salad—what happier conjunction can we look for in a plaguey world?

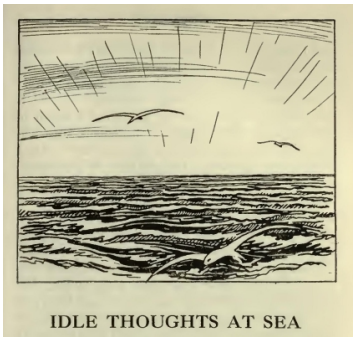
But, in making this confession, I am neither *gourmand* nor *gourmet*. Extravagant dinners bore me, and offend what I may call my economic conscience; I have little sense of the higher poetry of the kitchen, and the great language of the *menu* does not stir my pulse. I do not ask for lyrics at the table. I want good, honest prose. I think that Hazlitt would have found me no unfit comrade on a journey. He had no passion for talk when afoot, but he admitted that there was one subject which it was pleasant to discuss on a journey, and that was what one should have for supper at the inn. It is a fertile topic that grows in grace as the shadows lengthen and the limbs wax weary. And Hazlitt had the right spirit. His mind dwelt upon plain dishes—eggs and a rasher, a rabbit smothered in onions, or an excellent veal cutlet. He even spoke approvingly of Sancho's choice of a cow-heel. I do not go all the way with him in his preferences. I should argue with him fiercely against his rabbit and onions. I should put the case for steak and onions with conviction, and I hope with convincing eloquence. But the root of the matter was in him. He loved plain food plainly served, and I am proud to follow his banner. And it is because I have found my heart's desire at the Mermaid, that I go about burdened with an agreeable secret. I feel when I enter its portals a certain sober harmony and repose of things. I stroke the noble cat that waits me, seated on the banister, and rises, purring with dignity, under my caress. I say “Good evening” to the landlord who greets me with a fine eighteenth-century bow, at once cordial and restrained, and waves me to a seat with a grave

motion of his hand. No frowsy waiter in greasy swallow-tail descends on me; but a neat-handed Phyllis, not too old nor yet too young, in sober black dress and white cuffs, attends my wants, with just that mixture of civility and aloofness that establishes the perfect relationship—obliging, but not familiar, quietly responsive to a sign, but not talkative. The napery makes you feel clean to look at it, and the cutlery shines like a mirror, and cuts like a Seville blade. And then, with a nicely balanced dish of hors d'ouvres, or, in due season, a half-a-dozen oysters, the modest four-course table d'hôte begins, and when at the end you light your cigarette over your cup of coffee, you feel that you have not only dined, but that you have been in an atmosphere of plain refinement, touched with the subtle note of a personality.

And the bill? Sir, you would be surprised at its modesty. But I shall not tell you. Nor shall I tell you where you will find the Mermaid. It may be in Soho or off the Strand, or in the neighbourhood of Lincoln's Inn, or it may not be in any of these places. I shall not tell you because I sometimes fancy it is only a dream, and that if I tell it I shall shatter the illusion, and that one night I shall go into the Mermaid and find its old English note of kindly welcome and decorous moderation gone, and that in its place there will be a noisy, bustling, popular restaurant with a band, from which I shall flee. When it is “discovered” it will be lost, as the Rev. Mr Spalding would say. And so I shall keep its secret. I only purr it to the cat who arches her back and purrs understanding in response. It is the bond of freemasonry between us.



Original



Original

IDLE THOUGHTS AT SEA

I was leaning over the rails of the upper deck idly watching the Chinese whom, to the number of over

3000, we had picked up at Havre and were to disgorge at Halifax, when the bugle sounded for lunch. A mistake, I thought, looking at my watch. It said 12.15, and the luncheon hour was one. Then I remembered. I had not corrected my watch that morning by the ship's clock. In our pursuit of yesterday across the Atlantic we had put on another three-quarters of an hour. Already on this journey we had outdistanced to-day by two and a half hours. By the time we reached Halifax we should have gained perhaps six hours. In thought I followed the Chinamen thundering across Canada to Vancouver, and thence onward across the Pacific on the last stage of their voyage. And I realised that by the time they reached home they would have caught yesterday up.

But would it be yesterday after all? Would it not be to-morrow? And at this point I began to get anxious about To-day. I had spent fifty odd years in comfortable reliance upon To-day. It had seemed the most secure thing in life. It was always changing, it was true; but it was always the same. It was always To-day. I felt that I could no more get out of it than I could get out of my skin. And here we were leaving it behind as insensibly and naturally as the trees bud in spring. In front of us, beyond that hard rim of the horizon, yesterday was in flight, but we were overtaking it bit by bit. We had only to keep plugging away by sea and land, and we should soon see its flying skirts in the twilight across the plains. But having caught it up we should discover that it was neither yesterday nor to-day, but to-morrow. Or rather it would be a confusion of all three.

In short, this great institution of To-day that had seemed so fixed and absolute a property of ours was a mere phantom—a parochial illusion of this giddy

little orb that whizzed round so industriously on its own axis, and as it whizzed cut up the universal day into dress lengths of light and dark. And these dress lengths, which were so elusive that they were never quite the same in any two places at once, were named and numbered and tied up into bundles of months and years, and packed away on the shelves of history as the whirring orb unrolled another length of light and dark to be duly docketed and packed away with the rest. And meanwhile, outside this little local affair of alternate strips of light and dark—what? Just one universal blaze of sunshine, going on for ever and ever, without dawn or sunset, twilight or dark—not many days, but just one day and that always midday.

At this stage I became anxious not only about Today, but about Time itself. That, too, was becoming a fiction of this unquiet little speck of dust on which I and those merry Chinese below were whizzing round. A few hours hence, when our strip of daylight merged into a strip of dark, I should see neighbouring specks of dust sparkling in the indigo sky—specks whose strip of daylight was many times the length of ours, and whose year would outlast scores of ours. Indeed, did not the astronomers tell us that Neptune's year is equal to 155 of our years? Think of it—our Psalmist's span of life would not stretch half round a single solar year of Neptune. You might be born on New Year's Day and live to a green old age according to our reckoning, and still never see the glory of midsummer, much less the tints of autumn. What could our ideas of Time have in common with those of the dwellers on Neptune—if, that is, there be any dwellers on Neptune.

And beyond Neptune, far out in the infinite fields of space, were hosts of other specks of dust which

did not measure their time by this regal orb above me at all, but cut their strips of light and dark, and numbered their days and their years, their centuries and their aeons by the illumination of alien lamps that ruled the illimitable realms of other systems as the sun ruled ours. Time, in short, had ceased to have any fixed meaning before we left the Solar system, but out in the unthinkable void beyond it had no meaning at all. There was not Time: there was only duration. Time had followed To-day into the realm of fable.

As I reached this depressing conclusion—not a novel or original one, but always a rather cheerless one—a sort of orphaned feeling stole over me. I seemed like a poor bereaved atom of consciousness, cast adrift from Time and the comfortable earth, and wandering about forlornly in eternity and infinity. But the Chinese enabled me to keep fairly jolly in the contemplation of this cosmic loneliness. They were having a gay time on the deck below after being kept down under hatches during yesterday's storm. One of them was shaving the round grinning faces of his comrades at an incredible speed. Another, with a basket of oranges before him, was crying something that sounded like “Al-lay! Al-lay!” counting the money in his hand meanwhile again and again, not because he doubted whether it was all there, but because he liked the feel and the look of it. A sprightly young rascal, dressed as they all were in a grotesque mixture of garments, French and English and German, picked up on the battlefields of France, where they had been working for three years, stole up behind the orange-seller (throwing a joyful wink at me as he did so) snatched an orange and bolted. There followed a roaring scrimmage on deck, in the midst of which the orange-seller's coppers were sent

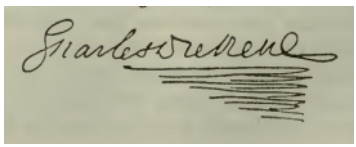
flying along the boards, occasioning enormous hilarity and scuffling, and from which the author of the mischief emerged riotously happy and, lighting a cigarette, flung himself down with an air of radiant good humour, in which he enveloped me with a glance of his bold and merry eye.

The little comedy entertained me while my mind still played with the illusions of Time. I recalled occasions when I had seemed to pass, not intellectually as I had now, but emotionally out of Time. The experiences were always associated with great physical weariness and the sense of the endlessness of the journey. There was that day in the Dauphiné coming down from the mountains to Bourg-d'Oison. And that other experience in the Lake District. How well I recalled it! I stood with a companion in the doorway of the hotel at Patterdale looking at the rain. We had come to the end of our days in the mountains, and now we were going back to Keswick, climbing Helvellyn on the way. But Helvellyn was robed in clouds, and the rain was of that determined kind that admits of no hope. And so, after a long wait, we decided that Helvellyn "would not go," as the climber would say, and, putting on our mackintoshes and shouldering our rucksacks, we set out for Keswick by the lower slopes of the mountains—by the track that skirts Great Dodd and descends by the moorlands into the Vale of St John.

All day the rain came down with pauseless malice, and the clouds hung low over the mountains. We ploughed on past Ullswater, heard Airey Force booming through the universal patter of the rain and, out on the moor, tramped along with that line sense of exhilaration that comes from the struggle with forbidding circumstance. Baddeley declares this walk to be without interest, but on that sombre day

we found the spacious loneliness of the moors curiously stimulating and challenging. In the late afternoon we descended the steep fell side by the quarries into the Vale of St John and set out for the final tramp of five miles along the road. What with battling with the wind and rain, and the weight of the dripping mackintosh and the sodden rucksack, I had by this time walked myself into that passive mental state which is like a waking dream, in which your voice sounds hollow and remote in your ears, and your thoughts seem to play irresponsibly on the surface of your slumbering consciousness.

Now, if you know that road in the Vale of St John, you will remember that it is what Mr Chesterton calls "a rolling road, a reeling road." It is like a road made by a man in drink. First it seems as though it is going down the Vale of Thirlmere, then it turns back and sets out for Penrith, then it remembers Thirlmere again and starts afresh for that goal, only to give it up and make another dash for Penrith. And so on, and all the time it is not wanting to go either to Thirlmere or to Penrith, but is sidling crabwise to Keswick. In short, it is a road which is like the whip-flourish that Dickens used to put at the end of his signature, thus:



Original

Now, as we turned the first loop and faced round to Penrith, I saw through the rain a noble view of

Saddleback. The broad summit of that fine mountain was lost in the clouds. Only the mighty buttresses that sustain the southern face were visible. They looked like the outstretched fingers of some titanic hand coming down through the clouds and clutching the earth as though they would drag it to the skies. The image fell in with the spirit of that grey, wild day, and I pointed the similitude out to my companion as we paced along the muddy road.

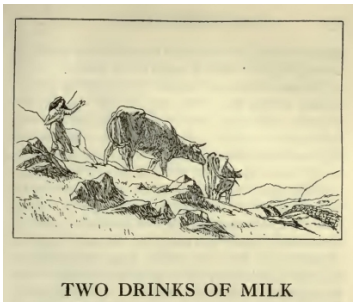
Presently the road turned in one of its plunges towards Thirlmere, and we went on walking in silence until we swung round at the next loop. As we did so I saw the fingers of a mighty hand descending from the clouds and clutching the earth. Where had I seen that vision before? Somewhere, far off, far hence, I had come suddenly upon just such a scene, the same mist of rain, the same great mountain bulk lost in the clouds, the same gigantic fingers gripping the earth. When? Where? It might have been years ago. It might have been the projection of years to come. It might have been in another state of existence.... Ah no, of course, it was this evening, a quarter of an hour ago, on this very road. But the impression remained of something outside the confines of time. I had passed into a static state in which the arbitrary symbols had vanished, and Time was only like a faint shadow cast upon the timeless deeps. I had walked through the shadow into the deeps.

But my excursion into Eternity, I remembered, did not prevent me, when I reached the hotel at Keswick, consulting the railway guide very earnestly in order to discover the time of the trains for London next day. And the recollection of that prosaic end to my spiritual wanderings brought my thoughts back to the Chinamen. One of them, sitting just below me,

was happily engaged in devouring a large loaf of French bread, one of those long rolls that I had seen being despatched to them on deck from the shore at Havre, skilfully balanced on a basket that was passed along a rope connecting the ship and the landing-stage. The gusto of the man as he devoured the bread, and the crisp, appetising look of the brown crust reminded me of something.... Yes, of course. The bugle had gone for lunch long ago. They would be half through the meal' by this time. I turned hastily away and went below, and as I went I put my watch back three-quarters of an hour. After all, one might as well accept the fiction of the hours and be in the fashion. It would save trouble.



Original



TWO DRINKS OF MILK

Original

TWO DRINKS OF MILK

The cabin lay a hundred yards from the hot, dusty road, midway between Sneam and Derrynane, looking across the noble fiord of Kenmare River and out to the open Atlantic.

A bare-footed girl with hair black as midnight was driving two cows down the rocks.

We put our bicycles in the shade and ascended the rough rocky path to the cabin door. The bare-footed girl had marked our coming and received us.

Milk? Yes. Would we come in?

We entered. The transition from the glare of the sun to the cool shade of the cabin was delicious. A middle-aged woman, probably the mother of the girl, brushed the seats of two chairs for us with her apron, and having done that drove the chickens which were grubbing on the earthen floor out into the open. The ashes of a turf fire lay on the floor and on a bench by the ingle sat the third member of the family.

She was a venerable woman, probably the grandmother of the girl; but her eye was bright, her faculties unblunted, and her smile as instant and untroubled as a child's. She paused in her knitting to

make room for me on the bench by her side, and while the girl went out for the milk she played the hostess.

If you have travelled in Kerry you don't need to be told of the charm of the Kerry peasantry. They have the fascination of their own wonderful country, with its wild rocky coast encircling the emerald glories of Killamey. They are at once tragic and childlike. In their eyes is the look of an ancient sorrow; but their speech is fresh and joyous as a spring morning. They have none of our Saxon reserve and aloofness, and to know them is to forgive that saying of the greatest of the sons of Kerry, O'Connell, who remarked that an Englishman had all the qualities of a poker except its occasional warmth. The Kerry peasant is always warm with the sunshine of comradeship. He is a child of nature, gifted with wonderful facility of speech and with a simple joy in giving pleasure to others. It is impossible to be lonely in Kerry, for every peasant you meet is a gentleman anxious to do you a service, delighted if you will stop to talk, privileged if you will only allow him to be your guide. It is like being back in the childhood of the world, among elemental things and an ancient, unhasting people.

The old lady in the cabin by the Derrynane road seemed to me a duchess in disguise. That is, she had just that gracious repose of manner that a duchess ought to have. She knew no bigger world than the village of Sneam, five miles away. Her life had been passed in this little cabin and among these barren rocks. But the sunshine was in her heart and she had caught something of the majesty of the great ocean that gleamed out there through the cabin door. Across that sunlit water generations of exiles had gone to far lands. Some few had returned and some

had been for ever silent. As I sat and listened I seemed to hear in those gentle accents all the tale of a stricken people and of a deserted land. There was no word of complaint—only a cheerful acceptance of the decrees of Fate. There is the secret of the fascination of the Kérry temperament—the happy sunlight playing across the sorrow of things.

The girl returned with a huge, rough earthen bowl of milk, filled almost to the brim, and a couple of mugs.

We drank and then rose to leave, asking as we did so what there was to pay.

“Sure, there's nothing to pay,” said the old lady with just a touch of pride in her sweet voice. “There's not a cabin in Kerry where you'll not be welcome to a drink of milk.”

The words sang in the mind all the rest of that summer day, as we bathed in the cool waters that, lapped the foot of the cliffs near Derrynane, and as we toiled up the stiff gradient of Coomma Kistie Pass. And they added a benediction to the grave night when, seated in front of Teague M'Carty's hotel —Teague, the famous fisherman and more famous flymaker, whose rooms are filled with silver cups, the trophies of great exploits among the salmon and trout, and whose hat and coat are stuck thick with many-coloured flies—we saw the moon rise over the bay at Waterville and heard the wash of the waves upon the shore.

When cycling from Aberfeldy to Killin you will be well advised to take the northern shore of Loch Tay, where the road is more level and much better made than that on the southern side. (I speak of the days before the coming of the motor which has probably changed all this.)

In our ignorance of the fact we had taken the southern road. It was a day of brilliant sunshine and inimitable thirst. Midway along the lake we dismounted and sought the hospitality of a cottage—neat and well-built, a front garden gay with flowers, and all about it the sense of plenty and cleanliness. A knock at the door was followed by the bark of a dog. Then came the measured tramp of heavy boots along the flagged interior. The door opened, and a stalwart man in shooting jacket and leggings, with a gun under his arm and a dog at his heels, stood before us. He looked at us with cold firmness to hear our business. We felt that we had made a mistake. We had disturbed someone who had graver affairs than thirsty travelers to attend to.

Milk? Yes. He turned on his heel and stalked with great strides back to the kitchen. We stood silent at the door. Somehow, the day seemed suddenly less friendly.

In a few minutes the wife appeared with a tray bearing a jug and two glasses—a capable, neatly-dressed woman, silent and severe of feature. While we poured out the milk and drank it, she stood on the doorstep, looking away across the lake to where the noble form of Schiehallion dominates the beautiful Rannoch country. We felt that time was money and talk foolishness, and drank our milk with a sort of guilty haste.

“What have we to pay, please?”

“Sixpence.”

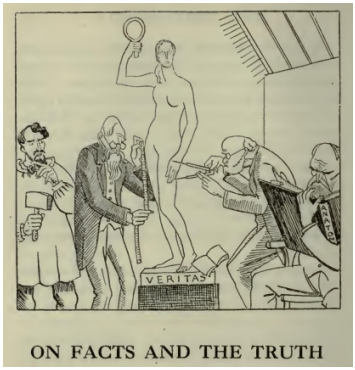
And the debt discharged, the lady turned and closed the door.

It was a nice, well-kept house, clean and comfortable; but it lacked something that made the poor cabin on the Derrynane road a fragrant

memory.



Original



Original

ON FACTS AND THE TRUTH

It was my fortune the other evening to be at dinner with a large company of doctors. While we were assembling I fell into conversation with an eminent physician, and, our talk turning upon food, he remarked that we English seasoned our dishes far too freely. We scattered salt and pepper and vinegar over our food so recklessly that we destroyed the delicacy of our taste, and did ourselves all sorts of mischief. He was especially unfriendly to the use of salt. He would not admit even that it improved the savour of things. It destroyed our sense of their natural flavour, and substituted a coarser appeal to the palate. From the hygienic point of view, the habit was all wrong. All the salts necessary to us are contained in the foods we eat, and the use of salt independently is entirely harmful.

"Take the egg, for example," he said. "It contains in it all the elements necessary for the growth of a chicken—salt among the rest. That is sufficient proof that it is a complete, self-contained article of food. Yet when we come to eat it we drench it with salt, vulgarise its delicate flavour, and change its natural dietetic character." And he concluded, as we went down to dinner, by commending the superior example of the Japanese in this matter. "They," he said laughingly, "only take salt when they want to die."

At the dinner table I found myself beside another member of the Faculty, and by way of breaking the conversational ice I asked (as I liberally applied salt to my soup) whether he agreed with those of his profession who held that salt was unnecessary and

even harmful. He replied with great energy in the negative. He would not admit that the foods we eat contain the salt required by the human body. “Not even the egg?” I asked. “No, not even the egg. We cook the egg as we cook most of our foods, and even if the foods contain the requisite salt in their raw state they tend to lose their character cooked.” He admitted that that was an argument for eating things *au naturel* more than is the practice. But he was firm in his conviction that the separate use of salt is essential. “And as for flavour, think of a walnut, eaten raw, with or without salt. What comparison is there?”

“But,” said I (artfully exploiting my newly acquired information about the Japanese), “are there not races who do not use salt?” “My dear sir,” said he, “the most conclusive evidence about the hygienic quality of salt is supplied by the case of the Indians. Salt is notoriously one of the prime essentials of life to them. When the supply, from one cause or another, is seriously diminished, the fact is reflected with absolute exactness in the mortality returns. If they don't get a sufficiency of salt to eat with their food they die.”

After this exciting beginning I should have liked to spend the evening in examining all the doctors separately on the subject of salt. No doubt I should have found all shades of differing opinion among them. On the face of it, there is no possibility of reconciling the two views I have quoted, especially the illustrations from the Japanese and the Indians. Yet I daresay they could be reconciled easily enough if we knew all the facts. For example, while the Indians live almost exclusively upon rice, the Japanese are probably the greatest fish consuming community in the world, and anyone who has dined

with them knows how largely they eat their fish in the raw state. This difference of habit, I imagine, would go far to explain what seems superficially inexplicable and incredible.

But I refer to the incident here only to show what a very elusive thing the truth is. One would suppose that if there were one subject about which there would be no room for controversy or disagreement it would be a commonplace thing like the use of salt.

Yet here were two distinguished doctors, taken at random—men whose whole life had been devoted to the study of the body and its requirements—whose views on the subject were in violent antagonism. They approached their subject from contrary angles and with contrary sets of facts, and the truth they were in search of took a wholly different form for each.

It is with facts as with figures. You can make them prove anything by judicious manipulation.

A strenuous person was declaiming in the train the other day about our air service. He was very confident that we were “simply out of it—that was all, simply out of it.” And he was full of facts on the subject. **I don't like people who brim over with facts—who lead facts about, as Holmes says, like a bull-dog to leap at our throat. There are few people so unreliable as the man whose head bulges with facts.** His conclusions are generally wrong. He has so many facts that he cannot sort them out and add up the total. He belongs to what the Abbé Sieyès called “loose, unstitched minds.”

Perhaps I am prejudiced, for I confess that I am not conspicuous for facts. I sympathise with poor Mrs Shandy. She could never remember whether the earth went round the sun or the sun round the earth.

Her husband had told her again and again, but she always forgot. I am not so bad as that, but I find that facts are elusive things. I put a fact away in the chambers of my mind, and when I go for it I discover, not infrequently, that it has got some moss or fungus on it, or something chipped off, and I can never trust it until I have verified my references.

But to return to the gentleman in the train. The point about him was that, so far as I could judge, his facts were all sound. He could tell you how many English machines had failed to return on each day of the week, and how many German machines had been destroyed or forced to descend. And judging from his figures he was quite right. “We were out of it—simply out of it.” Yet the truth is that while his facts were right, his deduction was wrong. It was wrong because he had taken account of some facts, but had left other equally important facts out of consideration. For example, through all this time the German airmen had been on the defensive and ours had been on the attack. The Englishmen had taken great risks for a great object. They had gone miles over the enemy's lines—as much as fifty miles over—and had come back with priceless information. They had paid for the high risks, of course, but the whole truth is that, so far from being beaten, they were at this time the most victorious element of our Army.

I mention this little incident to show that facts and the truth are not always the same thing. Truth is a many-sided affair, and is often composed of numerous facts that, taken separately, seem even to contradict each other. Take the handkerchief incident in “Othello.” Poor Desdemona could not produce the handkerchief. That was the fact that the Moor saw. Desdemona believed she had lost the handkerchief. Othello believed she had given it

away, for had not Iago said he had seen Cassio wipe his beard with it? Neither knew it had been stolen. Hence the catastrophe.

But we need not go to the dramatists for examples. You can find them in real life anywhere, any day. Let me give a case from Fleet Street. A free-lance reporter, down on his luck, was once asked by a newspaper to report a banquet. He went, was seen by a waiter to put a silver-handled knife into his pocket, was stopped as he was going out, examined and the knife discovered—also, in his waistcoat pocket, a number of pawntickets for silver goods. Could anyone, on such facts, doubt that he was a thief? Yet he was perfectly innocent, and in the subsequent hearing his innocence was proved. Being hard up, he had parted with his dress clothes, and had hired a suit at a pawnbroker's. The waist of the trousers was too small, and after an excellent dinner he felt uncomfortable. He took up a knife to cut some stitches behind. As he was doing so he saw a steely-eyed waiter looking in his direction; being a timid person he furtively put the knife in his pocket. The speeches came on, and when he had got his “take” he left to transcribe it, having forgotten all about the knife. The rest followed as stated. The pawntickets, which seemed so strong a collateral evidence of guilt, were of course not his at all. They belonged to the owner of the suit.

You remember that Browning in “The Ring and the Book,” tells the story of the murder of Pompilia from twelve different points of view before he feels that he has told you the truth about it. And who has not been annoyed by the contradictions of Ruskin?

Yet with patience you find that these apparent contradictions are only different aspects of one truth. “Mostly,” he says, “matters of any consequence are

three-sided or four-sided or polygonal.... For myself, I am never satisfied that I have handled a subject properly till I have contradicted myself three times." I fancy it is this discovery of the falsity of isolated facts that makes us more reasonable and less cocksure as we get older We get to suspect that there are other facts that belong to the truth we are in search of. Tennyson says that "a lie that is only half a truth is ever the blackest of lies"; but he is wrong. It is the fact that is only half the truth (or a quarter) which is the most dangerous lie—for a fact seems so absolute, so incontrovertible. Indeed, the real art of lying is in the use of facts, their arrangement and concealment. It was never better stated than by a famous business man in an action for libel which I have referred to in another connection. He was being examined about the visit of Government experts to his works, and the instructions he gave to his manager. And this, as I remember it, was the dialogue between counsel and witness:

"Did you tell him to tell them the facts?"

"Yes."

"The whole facts?"

"No."

"What facts?"

"*Selected facts*."

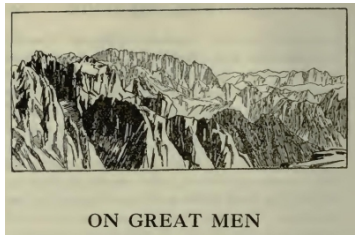
It was a daring reply, but he knew his jury, and he knew that in the midst of the Boer War they would not give a verdict against anybody bearing his name.

If in such a matter as the use of salt, which ought to be reducible to a scientific formula it is so hard to come at the plain truth of things, we cannot wonder that it dodges us so completely in the jungle of politics and speculation. I have heard a skilful politician make a speech in which there was not one

misstatement of fact, but the whole of which was a colossal untruth. And if in the affairs of the world it is so easy to make the facts lie, how can we hope to attain the truth in the realm that lies outside fact altogether. The truth of one generation is denounced as the heresy of another. Justification by “works” is displaced by justification by faith, and that in turn is superseded by justification by “service” which is “works” in new terms. Which is truth and which error? Or is that the real alternative? May they not be different facets of one truth. The prism breaks up the sunlight into many different colours and facts are only the broken lights of truth. In this perplexing world we must be prepared to find the same truth demonstrated in the fact that Japanese die because they take salt, and the fact that Indians die because they don't take it.



Original



Original

ON GREAT MEN

I was reading just now, apropos of a new work on Burke, the estimate of him expressed by Macaulay who declared him to be "the greatest man since Milton." I paused over the verdict, and the subject led me naturally enough to ask myself who were the great Englishmen in history—for the sake of argument, the six greatest. I found the question so exciting that I had reached the end of my journey (I was in a bus at the time) almost before I had reached the end of my list. I began by laying down my premises or principles. I would not restrict the choice to men of action. The only grievance I have against Plutarch is that he followed that course. His incomparable "Lives," would be still more satisfying, a still more priceless treasury of the ancient world, if, among his crowd of statesmen and warriors, we could make friends with Socrates and Virgil, Archimedes and Epictetus, with the men whose work survived them as well as with the men whose work is a memory. And I rejected the blood-and-thunder view of greatness. I would not have in my list a mere homicidal genius. My great man may have been a great killer of his kind, but he must have some better

claim to inclusion than the fact that he had a pre-eminent gift for slaughter. On the other hand, I would not exclude a man simply because I adjudged him to be a bad man. Henry Fielding, indeed, held that all great men were bad men. “Greatness,” he said, “consists in bringing all manner of mischief upon mankind, and goodness in removing it from them.” And it was to satirise the traditional view of greatness that he wrote that terrific satire “The Life of Jonathan Wild the Great,” probably having in mind the Marlboroughs and Fredericks of his day. But while rejecting the traditional view, we cannot keep out the bad man because he was a bad man. I regard Bismarck as a bad man, but it would be absurd to deny that he was a great man. He towers over the nineteenth century like a baleful ogre, a sort of Bluebeard, terrible, sinister, cracking his heartless, ruthless jests, heaving with his volcanic wrath, cunning as a serpent, merciless as a tiger, but great beyond challenge, gigantic, barbaric, a sort of mastodon of the primeval world, born as a terrific afterthought of nature.

Nor is power alone a sufficient title to greatness. It must be power governed by purpose, by a philosophy, good or bad, of human life, not by mere spasms of emotion or an itch for adventure. I am sure Pericles was a great man, but I deny the ascription to Alcibiades. I am sure about Cæsar, but I am doubtful about Alexander, loud though his name sounds down twenty centuries. Greatness may be moral or a-moral, but it must have design. It must spring from deliberate thought and not from mere accident, emotion or effrontery, however magnificent. It is measured by its influence on the current of the world, on its extension of the kingdom of the mind, on its contribution to the riches of living. Applying

tests like these, who are our six greatest Englishmen? For our first choice there would be a unanimous vote. Shakespeare is the greatest thing we have done. He is our challenger in the fists of the world, and there is none to cross swords with him. Like Sirius, he has a magnitude of his own. Take him away from our heavens, conceive him never to have been born, and the imaginative wealth of fife shrinks to a lower plane, and we are left, in Iago's phrase, “poor indeed.” There is nothing English for which we would exchange him. “Indian Empire or no Indian Empire,” we say with Carlyle, “we cannot do without our Shakespeare.”

For the second place, the choice is less obvious, but I think it goes indisputably to him who had

> “... a voice whose sound was like the sea.”

Milton plays the moon to Shakespeare's sun. He breathed his mighty harmonies into the soul of England like a god. He gave us the note of the sublime, and his influence is like a natural element, all pervasive, intangible, indestructible. With him stands his “chief of men”—the “great bad man” of Burke—the one man of action in our annals capable of measuring his stature with Bismarck for crude power, but overshadowing Bismarck in the realm of the spirit—the man at whose name the cheek of Mazarin turned pale, who ushered in the modern world by sounding the death-knell of despotic monarchism, who founded the naval supremacy of these islands and who (in spite of his own ruthlessness at Drogheda) first made the power of England the instrument of moral law in Europe.

But there my difficulties begin. I mentally survey

my candidates as the bus lumbers along. There comes Chaucer bringing the May morning eternally with him, and Swift with his mighty passion tearing his soul to tatters, and Ruskin filling the empyrean with his resounding eloquence, and Burke, the prose Milton, to whose deep well all statesmanship goes with its pail, and Johnson rolling out of Bolt Court in his brown wig, and Newton plumbing the ultimate secrets of this amazing universe, and deep-browed Darwin unravelling the mystery of life, and Wordsworth giving "to weary feet the gift of rest," and Dickens bringing with him a world of creative splendour only less wonderful than that of Shakespeare. But I put these and a host of others aside. For my fourth choice I take King Alfred. Strip him of all the legends and improbabilities that cluster round his name, and he is still one of the grand figures of the Middle Ages, a heroic, enlightened man, reaching out of the darkness towards the light, the first great Englishman in our annals. Behind him comes Bacon. At first I am not quite sure whether it is Francis or Roger, but it turns out to be Roger—there by virtue of precedence in time, of the encyclopaedic range of his adventurous spirit and the black murk of superstition through which he ploughed his lonely way to truth.

I am tempted, as the bus turns my corner, to finish my list with a woman, Florence Nightingale, chosen, not as the romantic "lady of the lamp," but as the fierce warrior against ignorance and stupidity, the adventurer into a new field, with the passion of a martyr controlled by a will of iron, a terrific autocrat of beneficence, the most powerful and creative woman this nation has produced.. But I reject her, not because she is unworthy, but because she must head a companion fist of great Englishwomen. I

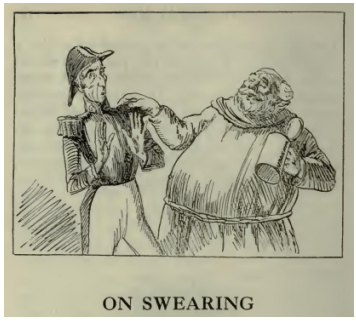
hurriedly summon up two candidates from among our English saints—Sir Thomas More and John Wesley. In spite of the intolerance (incredible to modern ears) that could jest so diabolically at the martyrdom of the "heretic," Sir Thomas Fittar, More holds his place as the most fragrant flower of English culture, but if greatness be measured by achievement and enduring influence he must yield place to the astonishing revivalist of the eighteenth century who left a deeper mark upon the spiritual life of England than any man in our history.

There is my list—Shakespeare, Milton, Cromwell, King Alfred, Roger Bacon, John Wesley—and anybody can make out another who cares and a better who can. And now that it is made I find that, quite unintentionally, it is all English in the most limited sense. There is not a Scotsman, an Irishman, or a Welshman in it. That will gall the kibe of Mr Bernard Shaw. And I rejoice to find another thing.

There is no politician and no professional soldier in the half-dozen. It contains two poets, two men of action, one scientist and one preacher. If the representative arts have no place, it is not because greatness cannot be associated with them. Bach and Michael Angelo cannot be left out of any list of the world's great men. But, matchless in literature, we are poor in art, though in any rival list I should be prepared to see the great name of Turner.



Original



Original

ON SWEARING

A young officer in the flying service was describing to me the other day some of his recent experiences in France. They were both amusing and sensational, though told with that happy freedom from vanity and self-consciousness which is so pleasant a feature of the British soldier of all ranks. The more he has done and seen the less disposed he seems to regard himself as a hero. It is a common enough phenomenon. Bragging is a sham currency. It is the base coin with which the fraudulent pay their way. F. C. Selous was the greatest big game hunter of modern times, but when he talked about his adventures he gave the impression of a man who had only been out in the back garden killing slugs. And Peary, who found the North Pole, writes as modestly as if he had only found a new walk in Epping Forest. It is Dr Cook, who didn't find the North Pole and didn't climb Mount M'Kinley, who does the boasting. And the man who talks most about patriotism is usually the man who has least of that commodity, just as the man who talks most about his honesty is rarely to be trusted with your silver spoons. A man who really loves his country would no more brag about it than he would brag about loving his mother.

But it was not the modesty of the young officer that leads me to write of him. It was his facility in swearing. He was extraordinarily good-humoured, but he swore all the time with a fluency and variety that seemed inexhaustible. There was no anger in it and no venom in it. It was just a weed that had overgrown his talk as that pestilent clinging convolvulus overgrows my garden. “Hell” was his favourite expletive, and he garnished every sentence with it in an absent-minded way as you might scatter

pepper unthinkingly over your pudding. He used it as a verb, and he used it as an adjective, and he used it as an adverb, and he used it as a noun. He stuck it in anyhow and everywhere, and it was quite clear that he didn't know that he was sticking it in at all.

And in this reckless profusion he had robbed swearing of the only secular quality it possesses—the quality of emphasis. It is speech breaking bounds. It is emotion earned beyond the restraints of the dictionary and the proprieties of the normal habit. It is like a discord in music that in shattering the harmony intensifies the effect. Music which is all discord is noise, and speech which is all emphasis is deadly dull.

It is like the underlining of a letter. The more it is underlined the emptier it seems, and the less you think of the writer. It is merely a habit, and emphasis should be a departure from habit. “When I have said 'Malaga,'” says Plancus, in the “Vicomte de Bragelonne,” “I am no longer a man.” He had the true genius for swearing. He reserved his imprecations for the grand occasions of passion. I can see his nostrils swell and his eyes flash fire as he cries, “Malaga.” It is a good swear word. It has the advantage of meaning nothing, and that is precisely what a swear word should mean. It should be sound and fury, signifying nothing. It should be incoherent, irrational, a little crazy like the passion that evokes it.

If “Malaga” has one defect it is that it is not monosyllabic. It was that defect which ruined Bob Acres' new fashion in swearing. “'Damns' have had their day,” he said, and when he swore he used the “oath referential.” “Odds hilts and blades,” he said, or “Odds slanders and lies,” or “Odds bottles and glasses.” But when he sat down to write his challenge

to Ensign Beverley he found the old fashion too much for him. “Do, Sir Lucius, let me begin with a damme,” he said. He had to give up artificial swearing when he was really in a passion, and take to something which had a wicked sound in it. For I fear that, after all, it is the idea of being a little wicked that is one of the attractions of swearing. It is a symptom of the perversity of men that it should be so. For in its origin always swearing is a form of sacrament. When Socrates spoke “By the Gods,” he spoke, not blasphemously, but with the deepest reverence he could command. But the oaths of to-day are not the expression of piety, but of violent passion, and the people who indulge in a certain familiar expletive would not find half so much satisfaction in it if they felt that, so far from being wicked, it was a declaration of faith—“By our Lady.” That is the way our ancestors used to swear, and we have corrupted it into something which is bankrupt of both faith and meaning.

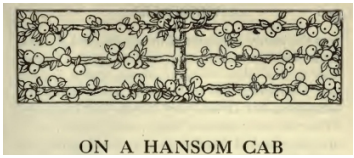
The revival of swearing is a natural product of the war. Violence of life breeds violence of speech, and according to Shakespeare it is the prerogative of the soldier to be “full of strange oaths.” In this respect Wellington was true to his vocation. Not that he used “strange oaths.” He stuck to the beaten path of imprecation, but he was most industrious in it. There are few of the flowers of his conversation that have come down to us which are not garnished with “damns” or “By Gods.” Hear him on the morrow of Waterloo when he is describing the battle to gossip Creevey—“It has been a damned serious business. Blücher and I have lost 30,000 men. It has been a damned nice thing—the nearest run thing you ever saw in your life.” Or when some foolish Court flunkey appeals to him to support his claim to ride in

the carriage with the young Queen on some public occasion—“Her Majesty can make you ride on the box or inside the carriage or run behind like a damned tinker's dog.” But in this he followed not only the practice of soldiers in all times, but the fashionable habit of his own time. Indeed, he seems to have regarded himself as above reproach, and could even be shocked at the language of the Prince Regent.

“By God! you never saw such a figure in your life as he is,” he remarks, speaking of that foul-mouthed wastrel. “Then he speaks and swears so like old Falstaff, that damn me if I was not ashamed to walk into the room with him.” This is a little unfair to Falstaff, who had many vices, but whose recorded speech is singularly free from bad language. It suggests also that Wellington, like my young aviator, was unconscious of his own comminatory speech. He had caught the infection of the camps and swore as naturally and thoughtlessly as he breathed. It was so with that other famous soldier Sherman, whose sayings were a blaze of blasphemy, as when, speaking of Grant, he said, “I'll tell you where he beats me, and where he beats the world. He don't care a damn for what the enemy does out of his sight, but it scares me like Hell.” Two centuries ago, according to Uncle Toby, our men “swore terribly in Flanders,” and they are swearing terribly there again, to-day. Perhaps this is the last time that the Flanders mud, which has been watered for centuries by English blood, will ensanguine the speech of English lips. I fancy that pleasant young airman will talk a good deal less about “Hell” when he escapes from it to a cleaner world.



Original



Original

ON A HANSOM CAB

I saw a surprising spectacle in Regent Street last evening. It was a hansom cab. Not a derelict hansom cab such as you may still occasionally see, with an obsolete horse in the shafts and an obsolete driver on the box, crawling along like a haggard dream, or a forlorn spectre that has escaped from a cemetery and

has given up hope of ever finding its way back—no, but a lively, spic-and-span hansom cab, with a horse trotting in the shafts and tossing its head as though it were full of beans and importance, and a slap-up driver on the box, looking as happy as a sandboy as he flicked and flourished his whip, and, still more astonishing, a real passenger, a lady, inside the vehicle.

I felt like taking my hat off to the lady and giving a cheer to the driver, for the apparition was curiously pleasing. It had something of the poignancy of a forgotten odour or taste that summons up whole vistas of the past—sweetbriar or mignonette or the austere flavour of the quince. In that trotting nag and the swaying figure on the box there flashed upon me the old London that used to amble along on four legs, the London before the Deluge, the London before the coming of King Petrol, when the hansom was the jaunty aristocrat of the streets, and the two-horse bus was the chariot of democracy. London was a slow place then, of course, and a journey say, from Dollis Hill to Dülwich, was a formidable adventure, but it was very human and humorous. When you took your seat behind, or still better, beside the rosy-cheeked bus-driver, you settled down to a really good time. The world was in no hurry and the bus-driver was excellent company. He would tell you about the sins of that "orf horse," the idiosyncrasies of passengers, the artifices of the police, the mysteries of the stable. He would shout some abstruse joke to a passing driver, and with a hard wink include you in the revelry. The conductor would stroll up to him and continue a conversation that had begun early in the morning and seemed to go on intermittently all day—a conversation of that jolly sort in which, as Washington Irving says, the

jokes are rather small and the laughter abundant.

In those happy days, of course, women knew their place. It was inside the bus. The outside was consecrated to that superior animal, Man. It was an act of courage, almost of impropriety, for a woman to ride on the top alone. Anything might happen to her in those giddy moral altitudes. And even the lady I saw in the hansom last night would not have been quite above suspicion of being no better than she ought to be. The hansom was a rather roguish, rakish contraption that was hardly the thing for a lady to be seen in without a stout escort. It suggested romance, mysteries, elopements, late suppers, and all sorts of wickednesses. A staid, respectable "growler" was much more fitting for so delicate an exotic as Woman. If she began riding in hansoms alone anything might happen. She might want to go to public dinners next—think of it!—she might be wanting to ride a bicycle—horrors!—she might discover a shameless taste for cigarettes, or demand a living wage, or University degrees, or a vote, just for all the world as though she was the equal of Man, the Magnificent....

As I watched this straggler from the past bowling so gaily and challengingly through the realm that he had lost, my mind went back to the coming of King Petrol, whose advent heralded a new age. How clumsy, and impossible he seemed then! He was a very Polyphemus of fable, mighty, but blind and blundering. He floundered along the streets, reeling from right to left like a drunken giant, encountering the kerb-stone, skimming the lamp-post. He was in a perpetual state of boorish revolt, standing obstinately and mulishly in the middle of the street or across the street amidst the derision and rejoicing of those whose empire he threatened, and who saw in these

pranks the assurance of his ultimate failure. Memory went back to the old One a.m. from the Law Courts, and to one night that sums up for me the spirit of those days of the great transition....

It was a jocose beast that, with snortings and trumpetings, used to start from the vicinity of the Law Courts at One a.m. The fellow knew his power. He knew that he was the last thing on wheels to skid along the Edgeware Road. He knew that he had journalists aboard, worthless men who wrote him down in the newspapers, unmoral men who wrote articles

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(from Our Peking Correspondent)

in Fleet Street, and then went home to bed with a quiet conscience; chauffeurs from other routes returning home, who when the car was “full up” hung on by teeth and toe-nails to the rails, or hilariously crowded in with the driver; barmaids and potboys loudly jocular, cabmen—yes, cabmen, upon my honour, cabmen in motor buses! You might see them in the One a.m. from the Law Courts any morning, red faced and genial as only cabmen can be, flinging fine old jokes at each other from end to end of the car, passing the snuff-box, making innocent merriment out of the tipsy gentleman with the tall hat who has said he wants to get out at Baker Street, and who, lurching in his sleep from right to left, is being swept on through Maida Vale to far Cricklewood. What winks are exchanged, what jokes cracked, what lighthearted raillery! And when the top hat, under the impetus of a bigger lurch than usual, rolls to the floor—oh, then the car resounds

with Homeric laughter, and the tipsy gentleman opens his dull eyes and looks vacantly around. But these revels soon are ended.

An ominous grunt breaks in upon the hilarity inside the car:

> First a shiver, and then a thrill,
> Then something decidedly like a spill—
> O. W. Holmes,
> *The Deacon's Masterpiece* (DW)

and we are left sitting motionless in the middle of Edgware Road, with the clock over the shuttered shop opposite pointing to quarter to two.

It is the spirit of Jest inside the breast of the motor bus asserting himself. He disapproves of the passengers having all the fun. Is he not a humorist too? May he not be merry in the dawn of this May morning?

We take our fate like Englishmen, bravely, even merrily.

The cabmen laugh recklessly. This is their moment. This is worth living for. Their enemy is revealed in his true colours, a base betrayer of the innocent wayfarer; their profession is justified. What though it is two or three miles to Cricklewood, what though it is two in the morning! Who cares?

Only the gentleman with the big bag in the corner.

"'Ow am I to git 'ome to Cricklewood?" he asks the conductor with tears in his voice.

The conductor gives it up. He goes round to help the driver. They busy themselves in the bowels of the machinery, they turn handles, they work pumps,

they probe here and thump there.

They come out perspiring but merry. It's all in the day's work. They have the cheerful philosophy of people who meddle with things that move—cab drivers, bus-drivers, engine-drivers.

If, when looking well won't move thee.
Looking ill prevail?

So they take a breather, light cigarettes, crack jokes. Then to it again.

Meanwhile all the hansoms in nocturnal London seem to swoop down on us, like sharks upon the dead whale. Up they rattle from this side and that, and every cabman flings a jibe as he passes.

“Look 'ere,” says one, pulling up. “Why don't yer take the genelmen where they want to go? That's what I asks yer. Why—don't—yer—take—the—genelmen—where—they—want—to go? It's only your kid. Yer don't want to go. That's what it is. Yer don't want to go.”

For the cabman is like “the wise thrush who sings his song twice over.”

“'Ere take ole Jumbo to the 'orspital!” cries another.

“We can't 'elp larfin', yer know,” says a third feelingly.

“Well, you keep on larfin',” says the chauffeur looking up from the inside of One a.m. “It suits your style o' beauty.”

A mellow voice breaks out:

We won't go home till morning,

Till daylight does appear.

And the refrain is taken up by half a dozen cabmen in comic chorus. Those who can't sing, whistle, and those who can neither sing nor whistle, croak.

We sit inside patiently. We even joke too. All but the man with the big bag. He sits eyeing the bag as if it were his life-long enemy.

He appeals again to the conductor, who laughs.

The tipsy man with the tall hat staggers outside. He comes back, puts his head in the doorway, beams upon the passengers, and says:

“It's due out at eight-thirty in the mor-r-ning.”

We think better of the tipsy gentleman in the tall hat. His speech is that of the politest people on earth. His good humour goes to the heart. He is like Dick Steele—“when he was sober he was delightful; when he was drunk he was irresistible.”

“She won't go any more to-night,” says the conductor.

So we fold our tents like the Arabs and as silently steal away. All but the man with the big bag. We leave him still, struggling with a problem that looks insoluble.

Two of us jump into a hansom that still prowls around, the last of the shoal of sharks.

“Drive up West End Lane.”

“Right, sir.”

Presently the lid opens. We look up. Cabby's face, wreathed in smiles, beams down on us.

“I see what was coming all the way from Baker Street,” he savs. “I see the petrol was on fire.”

“Ah!”

“Yus,” he says. “Thought I should pick you up about 'ere.”

“Ah!”

“No good, motors,” he goes on, cheerfully. “My opinion is they'll go out as fast as they come in. Why, I hear lots o' the aristocracy are giving 'em up and goin' back to 'orses.”

“Hope they'll get better horses than this,” for we are crawling painfully up the tortuous reaches of West End Lane.

“Well, genelmen, it ain't because 'e's overworked. 'E ain't earned more than three bob to-night. That's jest what' e's earned. Three bob. It's the cold weather, you know. That's what it is. It's the cold weather as makes 'im duck his 'ead. Else 'e's a good 'orse. And 'e does go after all, even if 'e only goes slow. And that's what you can't say of that there motor-bus.”

We had no reply to this thrust, and the lid dropped down with a sound of quiet triumph.

And so home. And my dreams that night were filled with visions of a huge Monster, reeking with strange odours, issuing hoarse-sounds of malicious laughter and standing for ever and ever in the middle of Edgware Road with the clock opposite pointing to a quarter to two, a rueful face in the corner staring fixedly at a big bag and a tipsy gentleman in a tall hat finding his way back to Baker Street in happy converse with a policeman.

Gone is the old London over which the shade of Mr Hansom presided like a king. Gone is the “orf horse” with all its sins; gone is the rosy-cheeked driver with his merry jokes and his eloquent whip and his tales of the streets; gone is the conductor who, as he gave you your ticket, talked to you in a spirit of leisurely comradeship about the weather,

the Boat Race, or the latest clue to the latest mystery. We amble no more. We have banished laughter and leisure from the streets, and the face of the motor-bus driver, fixed and intense, is the symbol of the change. We have passed into a breathless world, a world of wonderful mechanical contrivances that have quickened the tempo of life and will soon have made the horse as much a memory as the bow and arrow or the wherry that used to be the principal vehicle of Elizabethan London. As I watched the hansom bowling along Regent Street until it was lost in the swirl of motor-buses and taxis I seemed to see in it the last straggler of an epoch passing away into oblivion. I am glad it went so gallantly, and I am half sorry I did not give the driver a parting cheer as he flicked his whip in the face of the night.



Original



Original

ON MANNERS

I

It is always surprising, if not always agreeable, **to see ourselves as others see us**. The picture we present to others is never the picture we present to ourselves. It may be a prettier picture: generally it is a much plainer picture; but, whether pretty or plain, it is always a strange picture. Just now we English are having our portrait painted by an American lady, Mrs Shipman Whipple, and the result has been appearing in the press. It is not a flattering portrait, and it seems to have angered a good many people who deny the truth of the likeness very passionately. The chief accusation seems to be that we have no manners, are lacking in the civilities and politenesses of life, and so on, and are inferior in these things to the French, the Americans, and other peoples. It is not an uncommon charge, and it comes from many quarters. It came to me the other day in a letter from a correspondent, French or Belgian, who has been

living in this country during the war, and who wrote bitterly about the manners of the English towards foreigners. In the course of his letter he quoted with approval the following cruel remark of Jean Carrière, written, needless to say, before the war:

“Il ne faut pas conclure qu'un Anglais est grossier et mal élevé du fait qu'il manque de manières; il ignore encore la politesse, voilà tout.”

The saying is none the less hard because it is subtly apologetic. On the whole Mrs Whipple's uncompromising plainness is more bearable.

I am not going to join in the attack which has been made on her. I have enjoyed her articles and I like her candour. It does us good to be taken up and smacked occasionally. Self-esteem is a very common ailment, and we suffer from it as much as any nation. It is necessary that we should be told, sometimes quite plainly, what our neighbours think about us. At the same time it is permissible to remind Mrs Whipple of Burke's warning about the difficulty of indicting a nation. There are some forty millions of us, and we have some forty million different manners, and it is not easy to get all of them into one portrait. The boy who will take this “copy” to the printer is a miracle of politeness. The boy who preceded him was a monument of boorishness. One bus conductor is all civility; another is all bad temper, and between the two extremes you will get every shade of good and bad manners. And so through every phase of society.

Or leaving the individual, and going to the mass, you will find the widest differences of manner in different parts of the country. In Lancashire and Yorkshire the general habit is abrupt and direct. There is a deep-seated distrust of fine speech and

elegant manners, and the code of conduct differs as much from that of, say, a Southern cathedral town as the manner of Paris differs from the manner of Munich. But even here you will find behind the general bearing infinite shades of difference that make your generalisation foolish. Indeed, the more you know of any people the less you feel able to sum them up in broad categories.

Suppose, for example, you want to find out what the manners of our ancestors were like. Reading about them only leaves you in complete darkness. You turn to Pepys, and find him lamenting—apropos of the Russian Ambassador having been jeered at in the London streets because of the strangeness of his appearance—lamenting the deplorable manners of the people. “Lord!” he says, “to see the absurd nature of Englishmen that cannot forbear laughing and jeering at anything that looks strange.” Or you turn to Defoe, half a century later, and find him describing the English as the most boorish nation in Europe.

But, on the other hand, so acute an observer as Erasmus, writing still earlier, found our manners altogether delightful. “To mention but a single attraction,” he says in one of his letters, “the English girls are divinely pretty; soft, pleasant, gentle, and charming as the Muses. They have one custom which cannot be too much admired. When you go anywhere on a visit the girls all kiss you. They kiss you when you arrive, they kiss you when you go away, and they kiss you again when you return. Go where you will, it is all kisses, and, my dear Faustus, if you had once tasted how soft and fragrant those lips are, you would wish to spend your life there.” Erasmus would find the manners of our maidens a good deal changed to-day. They would offer him, not

kisses, but a cigarette.

I fancy it is true that, taken in the bulk, we are stiffer in bearing and less expansive than most peoples. There is enough truth in the saying of O'Connell which I have already quoted to make it good criticism. Our lack of warmth may be due in part to our insularity; but more probably it is traceable not to a physical but to a social source. Unlike the Celtic and the Latin races, we are not democratic. We have not the ease that comes from the ingrained tradition of human equality. The French have that ease. So have the Spanish. So have the Irish. So have the Americans. But the English are class conscious. The dead hand of feudalism is still heavy upon our souls. If it were not, the degrading traffic in titles would long since have been abolished as an insult to our intelligence. But we not only tolerate it: we delight in this artificial scheme of relationship. It is not human values, but social discriminations that count. And while human values are cohesive in their effect, social discriminations are separatist. They break society up into castes, and permeate it with the twin vices of snobbery and flunkeyism. The current of human intercourse is subdivided into infinite artificial channels, and the self-conscious restraints of a people uncertain of their social relationships create a defensive manner which sometimes seems hostile and superior when its true root is a timorous distrust. A person who is not at ease or sure of his ground tends to be stiff and gauche. It is not necessarily that he is proud: it may be that he is only uncomfortable. When youth breaks away from this fettering restraint of the past it is apt to mistake bad manners for independence, and to lose servility without acquiring civility.

The truth probably is that we do not so much lack

manners as suffer from a sort of armour-plated manner. Emerson said that manners were invented to keep fools at a distance, and the Englishman does give the impression that he is keeping fools at a. distance. He would be more popular if he had more *abandon*. I would not have him imitate the rather rhetorical politeness of the French, but he would be the better for a dash of the spontaneous comradeship of the Irish or the easy friendliness which makes the average American so pleasant to meet. I think that is probably what Mrs Whipple misses in us. Our excess of manner gives her the impression that we are lacking in manners. It is the paradox of good manners that they exist most where they do not exist at all—that is to say, where conduct is simple, natural, and unaffected. Scott told James Hogg that no man who was content to be himself, without either diffidence or egotism, would fail to be at home in any company, and I do not know a better recipe for good manners.

II

I was riding in a bus yesterday afternoon when I overheard a conversation between a couple of smartly dressed young people—a youth and a maiden—at the other end of the vehicle. It was not an amusing conversation, and I am not going to tell what it was about. Indeed, I could not tell what it was about, for it was too vapid to be about anything in particular. It was one of those conversations which consist chiefly of “Awfullys” and “Reallys!” and “Don't-you-knows” and tattle about dances and visits to the theatres, and motor-cars and similar commonplace topics. I refer to it, not because of the matter but because of the manner. It was conducted on both

sides as if the speakers were alone on a hillside talking to each other in a gale of wind.

The bus was quite full of people, some of whom affected not to hear, while others paid the young people the tribute of attention, if not of approval. They were not distressed by the attention. They preserved an air of being unconscious of it, of having the bus to themselves, of not being aware that anyone was within earshot. As a matter of fact, their manner indicated a very acute consciousness of their surroundings. They were really talking, not to each other, but to the public in the bus. If they had been alone, you felt, they would have talked in quite reasonable tones. They would not have dreamed of talking loudly and defiantly to an empty bus. They would have made no impression on an empty bus. But they were happily sensible of making quite a marked impression on a full bus.

But it was not the impression they imagined. It was another impression altogether. There are few more unpleasing and vulgar habits than that of loud, aggressive conversation in public places. It is an impertinence to inflict one's own affairs upon strangers who do not want to know about them, and who may want to read or doze or think or look out of the window at the shops and the people, without disturbance. The assumption behind the habit is that no one is present who matters. It is an announcement to the world that we are someone in particular and can talk as loudly as we please whenever we please. It is a sort of social Prussianism that presumes to trample on the sensibilities of others by a superior egotism. The idea that it conveys an impression of ease in the world is mistaken. On the contrary, it is often a symptom of an inverted self-consciousness. These young people were talking loudly, not because

they were unconscious of themselves in relation to their fellows, but because they were much too conscious and were not content to be just quiet, ordinary people like the rest of us.

I hesitate to say that it is a peculiarly English habit; I have not lived abroad sufficiently to judge. But it is a common experience of those who travel to find, as I have often found, their country humiliated by this habit of aggressive bearing in public places. It is unlovely at home, but it is much more offensive abroad, for then it is not only the person who is brought into disrepute, but the country he (and not less frequently she) is supposed to represent. We in the bus could afford to bear the affliction of that young couple with tolerance and even amusement, for they only hurt themselves. We could discount them. But the same bearing in a foreign capital gives the impression that we are all like this, just as the rather crude boasting of certain types of American grossly misrepresent a people whose general conduct, as anyone who sees them at home will agree, is unaffected, unpretentious, and good-natured.

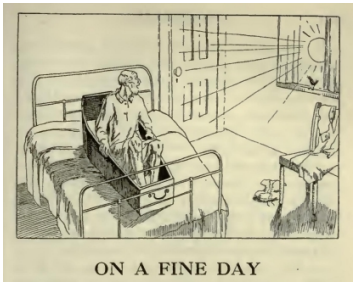
The truth, I suspect, is that every country sends abroad a disproportionate number of its “bounders.” It is inevitable that it should be so, for the people who can afford to travel are the people who have made money, and while many admirable qualities may be involved in the capacity to make money it is undeniable that a certain coarse assertiveness is the most constant factor. Mr Leatherlung has got so hoarse shouting that his hats, or his umbrellas, or his boots are better than anybody else's hats, or umbrellas, or boots that he cannot attune his voice to social intercourse. And when, in the second generation, this congenital vulgarity is smeared with

the accent of the high school it is apt to produce the sort of young people we listened to in the bus yesterday.

So far from being representative of the English, they are violently unEnglish. Our general defect is in quite the opposite direction. Take an average railway compartment. It is filled with people who distrust the sound of their own voices so much, and are so little afflicted with egoism, that they do not talk at all, or talk in whispers and monosyllables, nudging each other's knees perhaps to attract attention without the fearful necessity of speaking aloud. There is a happy mean between this painful timidity which evacutes the field and the overbearing note that monopolises the field. We ought to be able to talk of our affairs in the hearing of others, naturally and simply, without desiring to be heard, yet not caring too much if we are heard, without wishing to be observed, but indifferent if we are observed. Then we have achieved that social ease which consists in the adjustment of a reasonable confidence in ourselves to a consideration for the sensibilities of others.



Original



ON A FINE DAY

Original

ON A FINE DAY

It's just like summer! That has been the refrain all day. When I have forgotten to say it, Jane has said it, or the bee expert has shouted it from the orchard with the freshness of a sudden and delighted discovery. There are some people of penurious emotions and speech, like the Drumtochty farmer in Ian Maclaren's story, who would disapprove of this iteration. They would find it wasteful and frivolous. They do not understand that we go on saying it over and over again, like the birds, for the sheer joy of saying it. Listen to that bullfinch in the coppice. There he goes skipping from branch to branch and

twig to twig, and after each skip he pauses to say, “It's just like summer,” and from a neighbouring tree his mate twitters confirmation in perfect time. I've listened to them for half an hour and they've talked about nothing else.

In fact, all the birds are talking of nothing else, notably the great baritone who is at last in full song in his favourite chestnut below the paddock. For weeks he has been trying his scales a little doubtfully and tremulously, for he is a late starter, and likes the year to be well aired before he begins; but today he is going it like a fellow who knows his score so well that he could sing it in his sleep. And he, too, has only one theme: It's just like summer. He does not seem to say it to the world, but to himself, for he is a self-centred, contemplative singer, and not a conscious artist like his great tenor rival, the thrush, who seems never to forget the listening world.

In the calm, still air, hill-side, valley and plain babble of summer. There are far-off, boisterous shouts of holiday makers rattling along the turnpike in wagons to some village festival (a belated football match, I fancy); the laughter of children in the beech woods behind; the cheerful outdoor sounds of a world that has come out into the gardens and the fields. From one end of the hamlet there is the sound of hammering; from the other the sound of sawing. That excellent tenor voice that comes up from the allotments below belongs to young Dick. I have not heard it for four years or more; but it has been heard in many lands and by many rivers from the Somme to the Jordan. But Dick would rather be singing in the allotment with his young brother Sam (the leader of the trebles in the village choir) than anywhere else in the vide world. “Yes, I've been to Aleppo and Jerusalem, and all over the 'Oly Land,” he says. “I

don't care if I never see the 'Oly Land again. Anybody can have the 'Oly Land as far as I'm concerned. This is good enough for me—that is, if there's a place for a chap that wants to get married to live in."

Over the hedge a hearty voice addresses the old village dame who sits at her cottage door, knitting in the tranquil sunshine. "Well, this is all right, ain't it, mother?"

"Yes," says the old lady, "it's just like summer."

"And to think," continues the voice, "that there was a thick layer o' snow a week back. And, mind you, I shouldn't wonder if there's more to come yet. To-morrow's the first day o' spring according to the calendar, and it stands to reason summer ain't really come yet, you know, though it do seem like it, don't it?"

"Yes, it's just like summer," repeats the old lady tranquilly.

There in the clear distance is a streamer of smoke, white as wool in the sunlight. It is the banner of the train on its way to London. It is just like summer there no doubt, but London is not gossiping about it as we are here. Weather in town is only an incident —a pleasurable incident or a nuisance. It decides whether you will take a stick or an umbrella, whether you will wear a straw hat or a bowler, a heavy coat or a mackintosh, whether you will fight for a place inside the bus or outside. It may turn the scale in favour of shopping or postpone your visit to the theatre. But it only touches the surface of life, and for this reason the incurable townsman, like Johnson, regards it merely as an acquaintance of a rather uncertain temper who can be let in when he is in a good humour and locked out when he is in a bad humour.

But in the country the weather is the stuff of which life is woven. It is politics and society, your livelihood and your intellectual diversion. You study the heavens as the merchant studies his ledger, and watch the change of the wind as anxiously as the politician watches the mood of the public. When I meet Jim Squire and remark that it is a fine day, or has been a cold night, or looks like rain, it is not a conventional civility. It is the formal opening of the discussion of weighty matters. It involves the prospects of potatoes and the sowing of onions, the blossoms on the trees, the effects of weather on the poultry and the state of the hives. I do not suppose that there is a moment of his life when Jim is unconscious of the weather or indifferent to it, unless it be Sunday. I fancy he does not care what happens to the weather on Sunday. It has passed into other hands and secular interference would be an impertinence, if not a sin. For he is a stem Sabbatarian, and wet or fine goes off in his best clothes to the chapel in the valley, his wife, according to some obscure ritual, always trudging a couple of yards ahead of his heavy figure. He don't hold wi' work on Sundays, not even on his allotment, and if you were to offer to dig the whole day for him he would not take the gift. “I don't hold wi' work on Sundays,” he would repeat inflexibly.



Original

And to poor Miss Tonks, who lives in the tumbledown cottage at the other end of the lane, life resolves itself into an unceasing battle with the weather. We call her Poor Miss Tonks because it would be absurd to call her anything else. She is born to misfortune as the sparks fly upward. It is always her sitting of eggs that turns out cocks when she wants hens. If the fox makes a raid on our little hamlet he goes by an unerring instinct to her poor hen-roost and leaves it an obscene ruin of feathers. The hard frost last winter destroyed her store of potatoes when everybody else's escaped, and it was her hive that brought the “Isle of Wight” into our midst. Her neighbour, the Widow Walsh, holds that the last was a visitation of Providence. Poor Miss Tonks had had a death in the family—true, it was

only a second cousin, but it was “in the family”—and had neglected to tell the bees by tapping on the hive. And of course they died. What else could they do, poor things? Widow Walsh has no patience with people who fly in the face of Providence in this way.

But of all Poor Miss Tonks' afflictions the weather is the most unremittingly malevolent. It is either “smarty hot” or “smarty cold.” If it isn't giving her a touch of “brownchitis,” or “a blowy feeling all up the back,” or making her feel “blubbed all over,” it is dripping through her thatched roof, or freezing her pump, or filling her room with smoke, or howling through the crazy tenement where she lives her solitary life. I think she regards the weather as a sort of ogre who haunts the hill-side like a highwayman. Sometimes he sleeps, and sometimes he even smiles, but his sleep is short and his smile is a deception. At the bottom he is a terrible and evil-disposed person who gives a poor country woman no end of work, and makes her life a burden.

But to-day warms even her bleak life, and reconciles her to her enemy. When she brings a basket of eggs to the cottage she observes that “it is a bit better to-day.” This is the most extreme compliment she ever pays to the weather. And we translate it for her into “Yes, it's just like summer.”

In the orchard a beautiful peacock butterfly flutters out, and under the damson trees there is the authentic note of high summer. For the most part the trees are still as bare as in midwinter, but the damson trees are white with blossom, and offer the first real feast for the bees which fill the branches with the hum of innumerable wings, like the note of an aerial violin infinitely prolonged. A bumble bee adds the boom of his double bass to the melody as he goes in his heavy, blustering way from blossom to

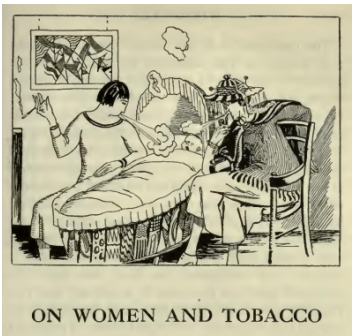
blossom. He is rather a boorish fellow, but he is as full of the gossip of summer as the peacock butterfly that comes flitting back across the orchard like a zephyr on wings, or as Old Benjy, who saluted me over the hedge just now with the remark that he didn't recall the like of this for a matter o' seventy year. Yes, seventy year if 'twas a day.

Old Benjy likes weather that reminds him of something about seventy years ago, for his special vanity is his years, and he rarely talks about anything in the memory of this generation. “I be nearer a 'underd,” he says, “than seventy,” by which I think he means that he is eighty-six. He longs to be able to boast that he is a hundred, and I see no reason why he shouldn't live to do it, for he is an active old boy, still does a good day's gardening and has come up the lane on this hot day at a nimble speed, carrying his jacket on his arm. He is known to have made his coffin and to keep it in his bedroom; but that is not from any morbid yearning for death. It is, I fancy, a cunning way of warding him off, just as the rest of us “touch wood” lest evil befall. “It's just like summer,” he says.

“I remember when I was a boy in the year eighteen-underd-and-varty....”



Original



Original

ON WOMEN AND TOBACCO

I see that Mr Joynson Hicks and Mrs Bramwell Booth have been talking to women very seriously on the subject of smoking. “Would you like to see your mother smoke?” asked Mr Hicks of the Queen's Hall audience he was addressing, and Mrs Bramwell Booth pictured the mother blowing tobacco smoke in the face of the baby she was nursing. I confess I have mixed feelings on this subject, and in order to find out what I really think I will write about it. And in

the first place let us dispose of the baby. I do not want to see mother blowing tobacco smoke in the face of the baby. But neither do I want to see father doing so. If father is smoking when he nurses the baby he will, I am sure, turn his head when he puffs out his smoke. Do not let us drag in the baby.

The real point is in Mr Hicks' question. Would your respect or your affection for your mother be lessened if she took to smoking. He would not, of course, ask the question in relation to your father. It would be absurd to say that your affection for your father was lessened because he smoked a pipe or a cigar after dinner. You would as soon think of disliking him for taking mustard with his mutton. It is a matter of taste which has no moral implications either way. You may say it is wasteful and unhygienic, but that is a criticism that applies to the habit regardless of sex. Mr Hicks would not say that *women* must not smoke because the habit is wasteful and unhygienic and that *men* may. He would no more say this than he would say that it is right for men to live in stuffy rooms, but wicked for women to do so, or that it is right for men to get drunk but wrong for women to do so. In the matter of drunkenness there is no discrimination between the sexes. We may feel that it is more tragic in the case of the woman, but it is equally disgusting in both sexes.

What Mr Hicks really maintains is that a habit which is innocent in men is vicious in women. But this is a confusion of thought. It is mixing up morals with customs. Custom has habituated us to men smoking and women not smoking, and we have converted it into a moral code. Had the custom been otherwise we should have been equally happy with it. If Carlyle, for example, had been in Mr Hicks' audience he would have answered the question with

a snort of rage. He and his mother used to smoke their pipes together in solemn comradeship as they talked of time and eternity, and no one who has read his letters will doubt his love for her. There are no such letters from son to mother in all literature. And of course Mr Hicks knows many admirable women who smoke. I should not be surprised to know that at dinner to-night he will be in the company of some women who smoke, and that he will be as cordial with them as with those who do not smoke.

And yet.... Last night I was coming along Victoria Street on the top of a bus, and saw two young women in front light cigarettes and begin to smoke. And I am bound to confess I felt sorry, as I always do at these now not infrequent incidents. Sorry, and puzzled that I was sorry, for I had been smoking a cigarette myself, and had not felt at all guilty. If smoking is an innocent pleasure, said I, which is as reasonable in the case of women as in the case of men, why should I dislike to see women smoking outdoors while I am doing the same thing myself? You are an irrational fellow, said I. Of course I am an irrational fellow, I replied. We are all irrational fellows. If we were brought to the judgment seat of pure reason how few of us would escape the cells.

Nevertheless, beneath the feeling there was a reason. Those two young women smoking on the top of the bus were a symbol. Their trail of smoke was a flag—the flag of the rebellion of women. But then I got perplexed again. For I rejoice in this great uprising of women—this universal claim to equality of status with men. It is the most momentous fact of the time. And, as I have said, I do not disapprove of the flag. Yet when I saw the flag, of which I did not disapprove (for I wore it myself), flaunted publicly as the symbol of the rebellion in which I rejoice, I felt a

cold chill. And probing to the bottom of this paradox, I came to the conclusion that it was the wrong symbol for the idea. These young women were proclaiming their freedom in false terms. Because men smoked on the top of the bus they must smoke too—not perhaps because they liked it, but because they felt it was a little daring, and put them on an equality with men. But imitation is not equality: it is the badge of servility and vulgarity. The freedom of women must not borrow the symbols of men, but must take its own forms, enlarging the empire of women, but preserving their independence and cherishing their loyalty to their finer perceptions and traditions.

But here my perplexity returned. It is not the fact of those young women smoking that offends you, I said addressing myself. It is the fact of their smoking on a public conveyance. Yet if you agree that the habit of smoking is as reputable and reasonable in the case of women as of men, why should it be secretly, or at least privately, practised in their case, while it may be publicly enjoyed in the other? You yourself are smoking at this moment on the top of a bus while you are engaged in defending the propriety of women smoking, and at the same time mentally reprobating the conduct of the young women who are smoking in front of you, not because they are smoking, but because (like you) they are smoking in public. How do you reconcile such confusions of mind?

At this reasonable challenge I found myself driven on to the the horns of a dilemma. I could not admit a sex discrimination in regard to the habit. And that being so it was, I saw, clearly impossible to defend differential smoking conditions for men and women. If the main position was surrendered no secondary

line was defensible. If men smoked in public then women could smoke in public; if men smoked pipes and cigars then women could smoke pipes and cigars. And at the thought of women smoking pipes on the top of buses, I realised that I had not yet found a path out of the absurd bog in which I had become mentally involved.

Then something happened which suggested another solution. The young women rose to leave the bus, and as they passed me a wave of scent was wafted with them. It was not the scent of tobacco, for they had thrown their cigarettes down before rising to leave. It was one of those heavy, languorous odours with which some women drench themselves. The trivial fact slipped into the current of my thought. If women adopt the man's tobacco habit, I thought, would it be equally fitting for men to adopt the woman's scent habit? Why should they not use powder and paint and wear rings in their ears? The idea threw a new light on my perplexity. The mind revolted at the thought of a man perfumed and powdered and be-ringed. Disraeli, it is true, approved of men rouging their cheeks. But Disraeli was not a man so much as an Oriental fable, a sort of belated tale from the Arabian Nights. The healthy instinct of men universally revolts against paint, powder, and perfume. And asking myself why a habit, which custom had made tolerable in the case of women, became grotesque and offensive if imagined in connection with men, I saw a way out of my puzzle. I dismissed the view that the difference of sex accounted for the different emotions awakened. It was the habit itself which was objectionable. Familiarity with it in the case of women had dulled our perceptions to the reality. It was only when we conceived the habit in an unusual connection—

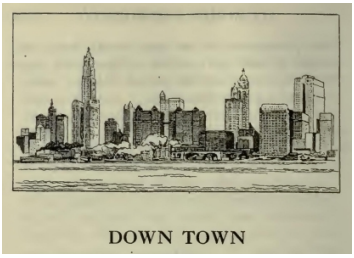
imagined men going about with painted and powdered faces, with rings in their ears and heavy scents on their clothes—that its essential vulgarity and uncleanness were freshly and intensely presented to the mind.

And that, said I, is the case with women and tobacco. It is the habit in the abstract which is vulgar and unclean. Long familiarity with it in the case of man has deadened our sense of the fact, but the adoption of the habit by women, coupled with the fact that there is no logical halting-place between the cigarette indoors and a pipe on the top of the bus, gives us what the Americans call a new view-point. From that new view-point we are bound to admit that there is much to be said against tobacco and not much to be said for it—except, of course, that we like it. But Mr Hicks must eliminate sex in the matter. He must talk to the men as well as to the women.

Then perhaps we will see what can be done. For myself, I make no promise. After forty, says Meredith, we are wedded to our habits. And I, alas, am long past forty....



Original



DOWN TOWN

Original

DOWN TOWN

Through the grey mists that hang over the water in the late autumn afternoon there emerges a deeper shadow. It is like the serrated mass of a distant range of mountains, except that the sky-line is broken with a precision that suggests the work of man rather than the careless architecture of Nature The mass is compact and isolated. It rises from the level of the water, sheer on either side, in bold precipitous cliffs, broken by horizontal lines, and dominated by one kingly, central peak that might be the Matterhorn if it were not so suggestive of the spire of some cathedral fashioned for the devotions of a Cyclopean

race. As the vessel from afar moves slowly through the populous waters and between the vaguely defined shores of the harbour, another shadow emerges ahead, rising out of the sea in front of the mountain mass. It is a colossal statue, holding up a torch to the open Atlantic.

Gradually, as you draw near, the mountain range takes definition. It turns to houses made with hands, vast structures with innumerable windows. Even the star-y-pointing spire is seen to be a casement of myriad windows. The day begins to darken and a swift transformation takes place. Points of light begin to shine from the windows like stars in the darkening firmament, and soon the whole mountain range glitters with thousands of tiny lamps. The sombre mass has changed to a fairy palace, glowing with illuminations from the foundations to the topmost height of the giddy precipices, the magic spectacle culminating in the scintillating pinnacle of the slender cathedral spire. The first daylight impression was of something as solid and enduring as the foundations of the earth; the second, in the gathering twilight, is of something slight and fanciful, of' towering proportions but infinitely fragile structure, a spectacle as airy and dream-like as a tale from the "Arabian Nights."

It is "down town." It is America thrusting out the spear-head of its astonishing life to the Atlantic. On the tip of this tongue of rock that lies between the Hudson River and the East River is massed the greatest group of buildings in the world. Behind the mountain range, all over the tongue of rock for a dozen miles and more, stretches an incalculable maze of streets, not rambling about in the easygoing, forgetful fashion of the London street, which generally seems a little uncertain of its direction, but

running straight as an arrow, north and south, or east and west, crosswise between the Hudson and the East River, longwise to the Harlem River, which joins the two streams, and so forms this amazing island of Manhattan. And in this maze of streets, through which the noble Fifth Avenue marches like a central theme, there are many lofty buildings that shut out the sunlight from the causeway and leave it to gild the upper storeys of the great stores and the towers of the many churches and the gables of the houses of the merchant princes, giving, on a sunny afternoon, a certain cloistral feeling to the streets as you move in the shadows with the sense of the golden light filling the air above. And around the Grand Central Station, which is one of the architectural glories of "up town" New York, the great hotels stand like mighty fortresses that dwarf the delicate proportions of the great terminus. And in the Hotel MacAlpin off Fifth Avenue you may be whirled to the twenty-fourth floor before you reach the dining-room to which you are summoned.

But it is in "down town," on the tip of the tongue that is put out to the Atlantic, that New York reveals itself most startlingly to the stranger. It is like a gesture of power. There are other cities, no doubt, that make an equally striking appeal to the eye—Salzburg, Innsbruck, Edinburgh, Tunis—but it is the appeal of nature supplemented by art. Generally the great cities are untheatrical enough. There is not an approach to London, or Paris, or Berlin, which offers any shock of surprise. You are sensible that you are leaving the green fields behind, that factories are becoming more frequent, and streets more continuous, and then you find that you have arrived. But New York and, through New York, America greets you with its most typical spectacle before you

land. It holds it up as if in triumphant assurance of its greatness. It ascends its topmost tower and shouts its challenge and its invitation over the Atlantic. “Down town” stands like a strong man on the shore of the ocean, asking you to come in to the wonderland that lies behind these terrific battlements. See, he says, how I toss these towers to the skies. Look at this muscular development. And I am only the advance agent. I am only the symbol of what lies behind. I am only a foretaste of the power that heaves and throbs through the veins of the giant that bestrides this continent for three thousand miles, from his gateway to the Atlantic to his gateway, to the Pacific and from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico.

And if, after the long monotony of the sea, the impression of this terrific gateway from without holds the mind, the impression from within, stuns the mind. You stand in the Grand Canon, in which Broadway ends, a street here no wider than Fleet Street, but a street imprisoned between two precipices that rise perpendicular to an altitude more' lofty than the cross of St Paul's Cathedral—square towers, honeycombed with thousands of rooms, with scurrying hosts of busy people, flying up in lifts—called “elevators” for short—clicking at typewriters, performing all the myriad functions of the great god Mammon, who reigns at the threshold of the giant.

For this is the very keep of his castle. Here is the throne from which he rules the world. This little street running out of the Grand Canyon is Wall Street, and that low, modest building, looking curiously demure in the midst of these monstrous bastions, is the House of Morgan, the high priest of Big Money. A whisper from this street and distant

worlds are shaken. Europe, beggared by the war, stands, cap in hand, on the kerbstone of Wall Street, with its francs and its marks and its sovereigns wilting away before the sun of the mighty dollar. And as you stand, in devout respect before the modest threshold of the high priest a babel of strange sounds comes up from Broad Street near by. You turn towards it and come suddenly upon another aspect of Mammon, more strange than anything pictured by Hogarth—in the street a jostling mass of human beings, fantastically garbed, wearing many-coloured caps like jockeys or pantaloons, their heads thrown back, their arms extended high as if in prayer to some heathen deity, their fingers working with frantic symbols, their voices crying in agonised frenzy, and at a hundred windows in the great buildings on either side of the street little groups of men and women gesticulating back as wildly to the mob below. It is the outside market of Mammon.

You turn from this strange nightmare scene and seek the solace of the great cathedral that you saw from afar towering over these battlements like the Matterhorn. The nearer view does not disappoint you. Slender and beautifully proportioned, it rises in great leaps to a pinnacle nearly twice as high as the cross of St Paul's Cathedral. It is the temple of St Woolworth. Into this masterpiece he poured the wealth acquired in his sixpenny bazaars, and there it stands, the most significant building in America and the first turret to catch the noose of light that the dawn flings daily over the Atlantic from the East. You enter its marble halls and take an express train to the forty-ninth floor, flashing in your journey past visions of crowded offices, tier after tier, offices of banks and publishers and merchants and jewellers, like a great street, Piccadilly or the Strand, that has

been miraculously turned skywards by some violent geological “fault.” And at the forty-ninth floor you get out and take another “local” train to the top, and from thence you look giddily down, far down even upon the great precipices of the Grand Canon, down to the streets where the moving throng you left a few minutes ago looks like a colony of ants or black-beetles wandering uncertainly over the pavement.

And in the midst of the great fortresses of commerce, two toy buildings with tiny spires. You have been in them, perhaps, and know them to be large churches, St Paul's and Trinity, curiously like our own City churches. Once New York nestled under their shadows; now they are swallowed up and lost at the base of the terrific structures that loom above them. In one of them you will have seen the pew of George Washington still decorated with the flag of the thirteen stars of the original union. Perhaps you will be tempted to see in this inverted world an inverted civilisation. There will flash on your mind's eye the vision of the great dome that seems to float in the heavens over the secular activities of another city, still holding aloft, to however negligent and indifferent a generation, the symbol of the supremacy of spiritual things. And you will wonder whether in this astonishing spectacle below you, in which the temples of the ancient worship crouch at the porch of these Leviathan temples of commerce, there is the unconscious expression of another philosophy of life in which St Woolworth and not St Paul points the way to the stars.

And for the correction to this disquieting thought you turn from the scene below to the scene around. There in front lies the harbour, so near that you feel you could cast a stone into it. And beyond, the open

Atlantic, with all its suggestions of the tide of humanity, a million a year, that has flowed, with its babel of tongues and its burden of hopes, past the statue with the torch that stands in the midst of the harbour, to be swallowed up in the vastness of the great continent that lies behind you. You turn and look over the enormous city that, caught in the arms of its two noble rivers, extends over many a mile before you, with its overflow of Brooklyn on the far bank of one stream, and its overflow of Jersey City on the far bank of the other. In the brilliant sunshine and the clear, smokeless atmosphere the eye travels far over this incredible vista of human activity. And beyond the vision of the eye, the mind carries the thought onward to the great lakes and the seething cities by their shores, and over the illimitable plains westward to sunny lands more remote than Europe, but still obedient to the stars and stripes, and southward by the great rivers to the tropic sea.

And, as you stand on this giddy pinnacle, looking over New York to the far horizons, you find your mind charged with enormous questionings. They will not be diminished when, after long jouneyings towards those horizons, after days and nights of crowded experiences in many fields of activity, you return to take a farewell glimpse of America. On the contrary, they will be intensified. They will be penetrated by a sense of power unlike anything else the world has to offer—the power of immeasurable resources, still only in the infancy of their development, of inexhaustible national wealth, of a dynamic energy that numbs the mind, of a people infinitely diverse, yet curiously one—one in a certain fierce youthfulness of outlook, as of a people in the confident prime of their morning and with all the tasks and possibilities of the day before them. In the

presence of this tumultuous life, with its crudeness and freshness and violence, one looks back to Europe as to something avuncular and elderly, a mellowed figure of the late afternoon, a little tired and more than a little disillusioned and battered by the journey. For him the light has left the morning hills, but here it still clothes those hills with hope and spurs on to adventure.

That strong man who meets you on the brink of Manhattan Rock and tosses his towers to the skies is no idle boaster. He has, in his own phrase, “the goods.” He holds the world in fee. What he intends to do with his power is not very clear, even to himself. He started out, under the inspiration of a great prophet, to rescue Europe and the world from the tyranny of militarism, but the infamies of European statesmanship and the squalid animosities of his own household have combined to chill the chivalrous purpose. In his perplexity he has fallen a victim to reaction at home. He is filled with panic. He sees Bolshevism behind every bush, and a revolutionist in everyone who does not keep in step. Americanism has shrunk from a creed of world deliverance to a creed of American interests, and the “100 per cent. American” in every disguise of designing self-advertisement is preaching a holy war against everything that is significant and inspiring in the story of America. It is not a moment when the statue of Liberty, on her pedestal out there in the harbour, can feel very happy. Her occupation has gone. Her torch is no longer lit to invite the oppressed and the adventurer from afar. On the contrary, she turns her back on America and warns the alien away. Her torch has become a policeman's baton.

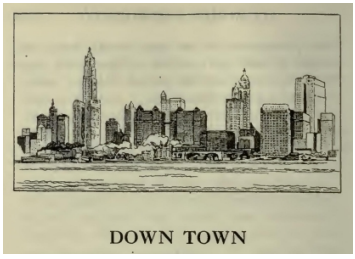
And as, in the afternoon of another day, brilliant,

and crisp with the breath of winter, you thread your way once more through the populous waters of the noble harbour and make for the open sea, you look back upon the receding shore and the range of mighty battlements. The sun floods the land you are leaving with light. At this gateway he is near his setting, but at the far gateway of the Pacific he is still in his morning prime, so vast is the realm he traverses. The mountain range of your first impression is caught in the glow of evening, and the proud pinnacle that looked to the untutored eye like the Matterhorn or the temple of primeval gods points its delicate traceries to the skies. And as you gaze you are conscious of a great note of interrogation taking shape in the mind. Is that Cathedral of St Woolworth the authentic expression of the soul of America, or has this mighty power you are leaving another gospel for mankind? And as the light fades and battlements and pinnacle merge into the encompassing dark there sounds in the mind the echoes of an immortal voice—"Let us here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth!"

And with that resounding music echoing in the mind you bid farewell to America, confident that, whatever its failures, the great spirit of Lincoln will outlive and outsoar the pinnacle of St Woolworth.



Original



DOWN TOWN

Original

ON KEYHOLE MORALS

My neighbour at the breakfast table complained that he had had a bad night. What with the gale and the crash of the seas, and the creaking of the timbers of the ship and the pair in the next cabin—especially the pair in the next cabin.... How they talked! It was two o'clock before they sank into silence. And such revelations! He couldn't help overhearing them. He was alone in his cabin, and

what was he to do? He couldn't talk to himself to let them know they were being overheard. And he didn't sing. And he hadn't a cough. And, in short, there was nothing for it but to overhear. And the things he heard—well.... And with a gesture of head, hands, and eyebrows he left it to me to imagine the worst. I suggested that he might cure the trouble by telling the steward to give the couple a hint that the next cabin was occupied. He received the idea as a possible way out of a painful and delicate situation. Strange, he said, it had not occurred to him.

Whether he adopted it I do not know. If I did I should know a very important thing about him. It would give me the clue to the whole man. It would tell me whether he was a willing or an unwilling eavesdropper, and there are few more searching tests of character than this. We are not to be catalogued by what we do in the open. We are all of us proper enough when we walk abroad and play our part in society. It is not our public hearing which reveals the sort of fellows we are. It only indicates the kind of fellows we desire the world to take us to be. We want the world's good opinion, and when we go out we put on our company manners as we put on our best clothes in order to win it. No one would put his ear to a keyhole if he thought an eye might be at the keyhole behind him watching him in the act. The true estimate of your character (and mine) depends on what we should do if we knew there was no keyhole behind us. It depends, not on whether you are chivalrous to some one else's wife in public, but whether you are chivalrous to your own wife in private. The eminent judge who, checking himself in a torrent of abuse of his partner at whist, contritely observed, “I beg your pardon, madam; I thought you were my wife,” did not improve matters. He only

lifted the curtain of a rather shabby private cabin. He white-washed himself publicly out of his dirty private pail.

Or, to take another sounding, what happens when you find yourself in the quiet and undisturbed presence of other people's open letters? Perhaps you have accidentally put on your son's jacket and discovered the pockets bulging with letters. Your curiosity is excited: your parental concern is awakened. It is not unnatural to be interested in your own son. It is natural and proper. You can summon up a score of convincing and weighty reasons why you should dip into those letters. You know that all those respectable reasons would become disreputable if you heard young John's step approaching. You know that this very reasonable display of paternal interest would suddenly become a mean act of prying of which you would be ashamed to be thought capable. But young John is miles off—perhaps down in the city, perhaps far away in the country. You are left alone with his letters and your own sense of decency. You can read the letters in perfect safety. If there are secrets in them you can share them. Not a soul will ever find you out. You may be entitled to know those secrets, and young John may be benefited by your knowing them. What do you do in these circumstances? The answer will provide you with a fairly reliable tape measure for your own spiritual contents.

There is no discredit in being curious about the people in the next Cabin. We are all curious about our neighbours. In his fable of “Le Diable Boiteux,” Lesage tells how the devil transported him from one house to another, lifted the roof, and showed what was going on inside, with very surprising and entertaining results. If the devil, in the guise of a

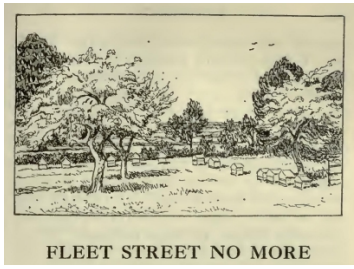
very civil gentleman, paid me a call this evening, and offered to do the same for me, offered to spirit me over Hampstead and lift with magic and inaudible touch any roof I fancied, and show me the mysteries and privacies of my neighbours' lives, I hope I should have the decency to thank him and send him away. The amusement would be purchased at too high a price. It might not do my neighbours any harm, but it would do me a lot of harm. For, after all, the important thing is not that we should be able, like the honest blacksmith, to look the whole world in the face, but that we should be able to look ourselves in the face. And it is our private standard of conduct and not our public standard of conduct which gives or denies us that privilege. We are merely counterfeit coin if our respect for the Eleventh Commandment only applies to being found out by other people. It is being found out by ourselves that ought to hurt us.

It is the private cabin side of us that really matters. I could pass a tolerably good examination on my public behaviour. I have never committed a murder, or a burglary. I have never picked a pocket, or forged a cheque. But these things are not evidence of good character. They may only mean that I never had enough honest indignation to commit a murder, nor enough courage to break into a house. They may only mean that I never needed to forge a cheque or pick a pocket. They may only mean that I am afraid of the police. Respect for the law is a testimonial that will not go far in the Valley of Jehosophat. The question that will be asked of me there is not whether I picked my neighbour's lock, but whether I put my ear to his keyhole; not whether I pocketed the bank note he had left on his desk, but whether I read his letters when his back was turned—in short, not whether I had respect for the law, but whether I

had respect for myself and the sanctities that are outside the vulgar sphere of the law. It is what went on in my private cabin which will probably be my undoing.



Original



FLEET STREET NO MORE

Original

FLEET STREET NO MORE

To-day I am among the demobilised. I have put off the harness of a lifetime and am a person at large. For me, Fleet Street is a tale that is told, a rumour on the wind; a memory of far-off things and battles long ago. At this hour I fancy it is getting into its nightly paroxysm. There is the thunder of machinery below, the rattle of linotypes above, the click-click-click of the tape machine, the tapping of telegraph operators, the tinkling of telephones, the ringing of bells for messengers who tarry, reporters coming in with "stories" or without "stories," leader-writers writing for dear life and wondering whether they will beat the clock and what will happen if they don't, night editors planning their pages as a shopman dresses his shop window, sub-editors breasting the torrent of "flimsies" that flows in from the ends of the earth with tidings of this, that, and the other. I hear the murmur of it all from afar as a disembodied spirit might hear the murmurs of the life it has left behind. And I feel much as a policeman must feel when, pensioned and in plain clothes, he walks the Strand submerged in the crowd, his occupation gone, his yoke lifted, his glory departed. But yesterday he was a man having authority. There in the middle of the surging current of traffic he took his stand, the visible embodiment of power, behind him the sanctions of the law and the strong arm of justice. He was a very Moses of a man. He raised his hand and the waters stayed; he lowered his hand and the waters flowed. He was a personage. He was accosted by anybody and obeyed by everybody. He could stop Sir Gorgius Midas' Rolls-Royce to let the nurse-maid cross the street. He could hold converse with the nobility as an equal and talk to the cook through the area railings without suspicion of impropriety. His

cloud of dignity was held from falling by the pillars of the Constitution, and his truncheon was as indispensable as a field-marshal's baton.

And now he is even as one of the crowd that he had ruled, a saunterer on the side-walk, an unknown, a negligible wayfarer. No longer can he make a pathway through the torrent of the Strand for the nurse-maid to walk across dryshod; no longer can he hold equal converse with ex-Ministers. Even “J. B.,” who has never been known to pass a policeman without a gossip, would pass him, unconscious that he was a man who had once lived under a helmet and waved an august arm like a semaphore in Piccadilly Circus; perhaps even stood like one of the Pretorian Guard at the gates or in the halls of Westminster. But the pathos of all this vanished magnificence is swallowed up in one consuming thought. He is free, independent, the captain of his soul, the master of his own motions. He can no longer stop all the buses in the Strand by a wave of his hand, but he can get in any bus he chooses. He can go to Balham, or Tooting, or Ealing, or Nine Elms, or any place he fancies. Or he can look in the shop windows, or turn into the “pictures” or go home to tea. He can light his pipe whenever he has a mind to. He can lie in bed as long as he pleases. He can be indifferent to the clock. He has soared to a realm where the clock has no terrors. It may point to anything it likes without stirring his pulse. It may strike what it pleases and he will not care.

And now I share his liberty. I, too, can snap my fingers at the clock and take any bus I like to anywhere I like. For long years that famous thoroughfare from Temple Bar to Ludgate Hill has been familiar to me as my own shadow. I have lived in the midst of its eager, jostling life until I have

seemed to be a cell of its multitudinous being. I have heard its chimes at midnight, as Squire Shallow heard them with the swanking swashbucklers of long ago, and have felt the pulse of its unceasing life during every hour of the twenty-four—in the afternoon when the pavements are thronged and the be-wigged barristers are crossing to-and-fro between the Temple and the Law Courts, and the air is shrill with the cries of the newsboys; in the evening when the tide of the day's life has ebbed, and the Street has settled down to work, and the telegraph boys flit from door to door with their tidings of the world's happenings; in the small hours when the great lorries come thundering up the side streets with their mountains of papers and rattle through the sleeping city to the railway termini; at dawn, when the flag of morn in sovereign state floats over the dome of the great Cathedral that looks down so grandly from the summit of the hill beyond. “I see it arl so plainly as I saw et, long ago.” I have worn its paving stones as industriously as Johnson wore them. I have dipped into its secrecies as one who had the run of the estate and the freeman's right. I have known its *habitues* as familiarly as if they had belonged to my own household, and its multitudinous courts and inns and taverns, and have drunk the solemn toast with the White-friars o' Friday nights, and taken counsel with the lawyers in the Temple, and wandered in its green and cloistered calm in the hot afternoons, and written thousands of leaders and millions of words on this, that, and the other, wise words and foolish words, and words without any particular quality at all, except that they filled up space, and have had many friendships and fought many battles, winning some and losing others, and have seen the generations go by, and the young fellows grow into

old fellows who scan a little severely the new race of ardent boys that come along so gaily to the enchanted street and are doomed to grow old and weary in its service also. And at the end it has come to be a street of ghosts—a street of memories, with faces that I knew lurking in its shadows and peopling its rooms and mingling with the moving pageant that seems like a phantom too.

Now the chapter is closed and I have become a memory with the rest. Like the Chambered Nautilus, I

> ... seal up the idle door,
> Stretch in my new found home and know the old no more.

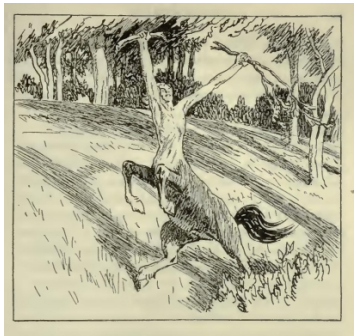
I may stroll down it some day as a visitor from the country and gape at its wonders and take stock of its changes. But I wear its chains no more. No more shall the pavement of Fleet Street echo to my punctual footsteps. No more shall I ring in vain for that messenger who had always "gone out to supper, sir," or been called to the news-room or sent on an errand. No more shall I cower nightly before that tyrannous clock that ticked so much faster than I wrote. The galley proofs will come down from above like snow, but I shall not con them. The tumults of the world will boil in like the roar of many waters, but I shall not hear them. For I have come into the inheritance of leisure. Time, that has lorded it over me so long, is henceforth my slave, and the future stretches before me like an infinite green pasture in which I can wander till the sun sets. I shall let the legions thunder by while I tend my bees and water my plants, and mark how my celery grows and how

the apples ripen.

And if, perchance, as I sit under a tree with an old book, or in the chimney corner before a chessboard, there comes to me one from the great noisy world, inviting me to return to Fleet Street, I shall tell him a tale. One day (I shall say) Wang Ho, the wise Chinese, was in his orchard when there came to him from the distant capital two envoys, bearing an urgent prayer that he would return and take his old place in the Government. He ushered them into his house and listened gravely to their plea. Then, without a word, he turned, went to a basin of water, took a sponge *and washed out his ears.*



Original



ON WAKING UP

Original

ON WAKING UP

When I awoke this morning and saw the sunlight streaming over the valley and the beech woods glowing with the rich fires of autumn, and heard the ducks clamouring for their breakfast, and felt all the kindly intimacies of life coming back in a flood for the new day, I felt, as the Americans say, “good.” Waking up is always—given a clear conscience, a good digestion, and a healthy faculty of sleep—a joyous experience. It has the pleasing

excitement with which the tuning up of the fiddles of the orchestra prior to the symphony affects you. It is like starting out for a new adventure, or coming into an unexpected inheritance, or falling in love, or stumbling suddenly upon some author whom you have unaccountably missed and who goes to your heart like a brother. In short, it is like anything that is sudden and beautiful and full of promise.

But waking up can never have been quite so intoxicating a joy as it is now that peace has come back to the earth. It is in the first burst of consciousness that you feel the full measure of the great thing that has happened in the world. It is like waking from an agonising nightmare and realising with a glorious surge of happiness that it was not true. The fact that the nightmare from which we have awakened now was true does not diminish our happiness. It deepens it, extends it, projects it into the future. We see a long, long vista of days before us, and on awaking to each one of them we shall know afresh that the nightmare is over, that the years of the Great Killing are passed, that the sun is shining and the birds are singing in a friendly world, and that men are going forth to their labour until the evening without fear and without hate. As the day advances and you get submerged in its petty affairs and find it is very much like other days the emotion passes. But in that moment when you step over the threshold of sleep into the living world the revelation is simple, immediate, overwhelming. The shadow has passed. The devil is dead. The delirium is over and sanity is coming back to the earth. You recall the far different emotions of a few brief months ago when the morning sun woke you with a sinister smile, and the carolling of the birds seemed pregnant with sardonic irony, and the news in the paper spoiled

your breakfast. You thank heaven that you are not the Kaiser. Poor wretch, he is waking, too, probably about this time and wondering what will happen to him before nightfall, wondering where he will spend the miserable remnant of his days, wondering whether his great ancestor's habit of carrying a dose of poison was not after all a practice worth thinking about. He wanted the whole, earth, and now he is discovering that he is entitled to just six feet of it—the same as the lowliest peasant in his land. “The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests,” but there is neither hole nor nest where he will be welcome. There is not much joy for him in waking to a new day.

But perhaps he doesn't wake. Perhaps, like Macbeth, he has “murdered Sleep,” and is suffering the final bankruptcy of life. A man may lose a crown and be all the better, but to lose the faculty of sleep is to enter the kingdom of the damned. If you or I were offered a new lease of life after our present lease had run out and were told that we could nominate our gifts what would be our first choice? Not a kingdom, nor an earldom, nor even succession to an O.B.E. There was a period of my childhood when I thought I should have liked to have been born a muffin man, eternally perambulating the streets ringing a bell, carrying a basket on my head and shouting “Muffins,” in the ears of a delighted populace. I loved muffins and I loved bells, and here was a man who had those joys about him all day long and every day. But now my ambitions are more restrained. I would no more wish to be born a muffin man than a poet or an Archbishop. The first gift I should ask would be something modest. It would be the faculty of sleeping eight solid hours every night, and waking each morning with the sense of

unfathomable and illimitable content with which I opened my eyes to the world to-day.

All the functions of nature are agreeable, though views may differ as to their relative pleasure. A distinguished man, whose name I forget, put eating first, “for,” said he, “there is no other pleasure that comes three times a day and lasts an hour each time.” But sleep lasts eight hours. It fills up a good third of the time we spend here and it fills it up with the divinest of all balms. It is the very kingdom of democracy. “All equal are within the church's gate,” said George Herbert. It may have been so in George Herbert's parish; but it is hardly so in most parishes. It is true of the Kingdom of Sleep. When you enter its portals all discriminations vanish, and Hodge and his master, the prince and the pauper, are alike clothed in the royal purple and inherit the same golden realm. There is more harmony and equality in life than wre are apt to admit. For a good twenty-five years of our seventy we sleep (and even snore) with an agreement that is simply wonderful.

And the joy of waking up is not less generously distributed. What delight is there like throwing off the enchantment of sleep and seeing the sunlight streaming in at the window and hearing the happy jangle of the birds, or looking out on the snow-covered landscape in winter, or the cherry blossom in spring, or the golden fields of harvest time, or (as now) upon the smouldering fires of the autumn woodlands? Perhaps the day will be as thorny and full of disappointments and disillusions as any that have gone before. But no matter. In this wonder of waking there is eternal renewal of the spirit, the inexhaustible promise of the best that is still to come, the joy of the new birth that experience cannot stale nor familiarity make tame.

That singer of our time, who has caught most perfectly the artless note of the birds themselves, has uttered the spirit of joyous waking that all must feel on this exultant morning—

> Good morning, Life—and all
> Things glad and beautiful.
> My pockets nothing hold,
> But he that owns the gold,
> The Sun, is my great friend—
> His spending has no end.

Let us up, brothers, and greet the sun and hear the ringing of the bells. There has not been such royal waking since the world began.

It is an agreeable fancy of some that eternity itself will be a thing of sleep and happy awakenings. It is a cheerful faith that solves a certain perplexity. For however much we cling to the idea of immortality, we can hardly escape an occasional feeling of concern as to how we shall get through it. We shall not "get through it," of course, but speech is only fashioned for finite things. Many men, from Pascal to Byron, have had a sort of terror of eternity. Byron confessed that he had no terror of a dreamless sleep, but that he could not conceive an eternity of consciousness which would not be unendurable. We are cast in a finite mould and think in finite terms, and we cling to the thought of immortality less perhaps from the desire to enjoy it for ourselves than from fear of eternal separation from the companionship of those whose love and friendship we would fain believe to be deathless. For this perplexity the fancy of which I speak offers a

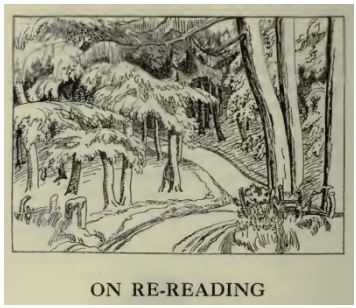
solution. An eternity of happy awakenings would be a pleasant compromise between being and not being. I can conceive no more agreeable lot through eternity, than

To dream as I may,
And awake when I will,
With the song of the bird,
And the sun on the hill.

Was it not Wilfred Scawen Blunt who contemplated an eternity in which, once in a hundred years, he would wake and say, “Are you there, beloved?” and hear the reply, “Yes, beloved, I am here,” and with that sweet assurance lapse into another century of forgetfulness? The tenderness and beauty of the idea were effectually desecrated by Alfred Austin, whom some one in a jest made Poet Laureate. “For my part,” he said, “I should like to wake once in a hundred years and hear news of another victory for the British Empire.” It would not be easy to invent a more perfect contrast between the feeling of a poet and the simulated passion of a professional patriot. He did not really think that, of course. He was simply a timid, amiable little man who thought it was heroic and patriotic to think that. He had so habituated his tiny talent to strutting about in the grotesque disguise of a swashbuckler that it had lost all touch with the primal emotions of poetry. Forgive me for intruding him upon the theme. The happy awakenings of eternity must outsoar the shadow of our night, its slayings and its vulgar patriotisms. If they do not do that, it will be better to sleep on.



Original



Original

ON RE-READING

I

A weekly paper has been asking well-known people what books they re-read. The most pathetic reply made to the inquiry is that of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. “I seldom re-read now,” says that unhappy man. “Time is so short and literature so vast and unexplored.” What a desolating picture! It is like saying, “I never meet my old friends now. Time is so short and there are so many strangers I have not yet shaken hands with.” I see the poor man, hot and breathless, scurrying over the “vast and unexplored” fields of literature, shaking hands and saying, “How d'ye do?” to everybody he meets and reaching the end of his journey, impoverished and pitiable, like the peasant in Tolstoi's “How much land does a man need?”

I rejoice to say that I have no passion for shaking hands with strangers. I do not yearn for vast unexplored regions. I take the North Pole and the South, the Sahara and the Karoo for granted. As Johnson said of the Giant's Causeway, I should like to see them, but I should not like *to go* to see them. And so with books. Time is so short that I have none to spare for keeping abreast with the circulating library. I could almost say with the Frenchman that when I see that a new book is published I read an old one. I am always in the rearward of the fashion, and a book has to weather the storms of its maiden voyage before I embark on it. When it has proved itself seaworthy I will go aboard; but meanwhile the old ships are good enough for me. I know the captain and the crew, the fare I shall get and the port I shall make and the companionship I shall have by the way.

Look at this row of fellows in front of me as I write

—Boswell, “The Bible in Spain,” Pepys, Horace, “Elia,” Montaigne, Sainte-Beuve, “Travels with a Donkey,” Plutarch, Thucydides, Wordsworth, “The Early Life of Charles James Fox,”

“Under the Greenwood Tree,” and so on. Do not call them books.

Camerado, this is no book.
Who touches this, touches a man,

as Walt Whitman said of his own “Leaves of Grass.” They are not books. They are my friends. They are the splendid wayfarers I have met on my pilgrimage, and they are going on with me to the end. It was worth making the great adventure of life to find such company. Come revolutions and bereavements, come storm and tempest, come war or peace, gain or loss—these friends shall endure through all the vicissitudes of the journey. The friends of the flesh fall away, grow cold, are estranged, die, but these friends of the spirit are not touched with mortality. They were not born for death, no hungry generations tread them down, and with their immortal wisdom and laughter they give us the password to the eternal. You can no more exhaust them than you can exhaust the sunrise or the sunset, the joyous melody of Mozart or Scarlatti, the cool serenity of Velasquez or any other thing of beauty. They are a part of ourselves, and through their noble fellowship we are made freemen of the kingdoms of the mind—

... rich as the oozy bottom of the deep
In sunken wrack and sumless treasuries.

We do not say we have read these books: we say that we live in communion with these spirits.

I am not one who wants that communion to be too exclusive. When my old friend Peter Lane shook the dust of Fleet Street off his feet for ever and went down into the country he took Horace with him, and there he sits in his garden listening to an enchantment that never grows stale. It is a way Horace has. He takes men captive, as Falstaff took Bardolph captive. They cannot see the swallows gathering for their southern flight without thinking that they are going to breathe the air that Horace breathed, and asking them to carry some such message as John Marshall's:

> Tell him, bird,
> That if there be a Heaven where he is not,
> One man at least seeks not admittance there.

This is not companionship. This is idolatry. I should be sorry to miss the figure of Horace—short and fat, according to Suetonius—in the fields of asphodel, but there are others I shall look for with equal animation and whose footsteps I shall dog with equal industry. Meanwhile, so long as my etheric body, as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle would say, is imprisoned in the flesh I shall go on reading and re-reading the books in which their spirits live, leaving the vast and unexplored tracts of the desert to those who like deserts.

II

A correspondent asked me the other day to make him out a list of Twelve Books that he ought to read. I declined the task in that form. I did not know what he had read, and I did not know what his tastes or his needs were, and even with that knowledge I should hesitate to prescribe for another. But I compromised with him by prescribing for myself. I assumed that for some offence against D.O.R.A. I was to be cast ashore on a desert island out in the Pacific, where I was to be left in solitude for twelve months, or perhaps never to be called for at all, and that as a mitigation of the penalty I was to be permitted to carry with me twelve books of my own choosing. On what principles should I set about so momentous a choice?

In the first place I decided that they must be books of the inexhaustible kind. Rowland Hill said that "the love of God was like a generous roast of beef—you could cut and come again." That must be the first quality of my Twelve Books. They must be books that one could go on reading and re-reading as interminably as the old apple-woman in Borrow went on reading "Moll Flanders." If only her son had known that immortal book, she said, he would never have got transported for life. That was the sort of book I must have with me on my desert island. But my choice would be different from that of the old apple-woman of Old London Bridge. I dismissed all novels from my consideration. Even the best of novels are exhaustible, and if I admitted novels at all my bundle of books would be complete before I had made a start with the essentials, for I should want "Tristram Shandy" and "Tom Jones," two or three of Scott's, Gogol's "Dead Souls," "David Copperfield,"

“Evan Harrington,” “The Brothers Karamazoff,” “Père Goriot,” “War and Peace,” “The Three Musketeers,” all of Hardy's, “Treasure Island,” “Robinson Crusoe,” “Silas Marner,” “Don Quixote,” the “Cloister and the Hearth,” “Esmond”—no, no, it would never do to include novels. They must be left behind.

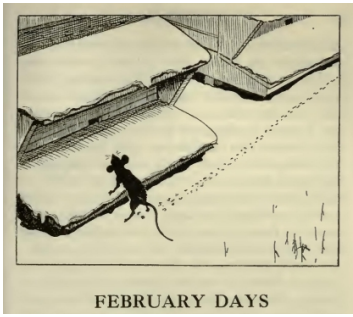
The obvious beginning would have been the Bible and Shakespeare, but these had been conceded not as a luxury but as a necessity, and did not come in the scope of my Twelve. History I must have on the grand scale, so that I can carry the story of the past with me into exile. I have no doubt about my first choice here. Thucydides (I) is as easily first among the historians as Sirius is first among the stars. To read him by the lightnings of to-day is to read him with a freshness and understanding that have the excitement of contemporary comment. The gulf of twenty-three centuries is miraculously bridged, and you pass to and fro, as it were, from the mighty European drama of to-day to the mighty drama of ancient Greece, encountering the same emotions and agonies, the same ambitions, the same plots and counter-plots, the same villains, and the same heroes. Yes, Thucydides of course.

And Plutarch (2) almost equally of course. What portrait gallery is there to compare with his? What a mine of legend and anecdote, history and philosophy, wisdom and superstition. I am less clear when I come to the story of Rome. Shall I put in the stately Gibbon, the learned Mommsen, or the lively, almost journalistic Ferrero? It is a hard choice. I shut my eyes and take pot luck. Ferrero (3) is it? Well, I make no complaint. And then I will have those three fat volumes of Motley's, “Rise of the Dutch Republic” (4) put in my boat, please, and—yes, Carlyle's “French Revolution” (5), which is history and drama

and poetry and fiction all in one. And, since I must take the story of my own land with me, just throw in Green's “Short History” (6). It is lovable for its serene and gracious temper as much as for its story.

That's as much history as I can afford, for I must leave room for the more personal companions who will talk to me like old friends and keep the fires of human contact ablaze on my solitary isle. First, of course, there is Boswell (7), and next there is Pepys (8), (Wheatley's edition, for there only is the real Samuel revealed “wart and all”). I should like to take “Elia” and that rascal Benvenuto Cellini; but I must limit my personal following to three, and on the whole I think the third place must be reserved for old Montaigne (9), for I could not do without that frank, sagacious, illuminated mind in my little fellowship. Akin to these good fellows I must have the picaresque Borrow to lend the quality of open-air romance to the comradeship, and shutting my eyes once more I choose indifferently from the pile, for I haven't the heart to make a choice between the “Bible in Spain,” “The Romany Rye,” “Lavengro,” and “Wild Wales.” But I rejoice when I find that “Lavengro” (10) is in the boat.

I can have only one poet, but that makes the choice easy. If I could have had half a dozen the choice would have been hard; but when it is Wordsworth (11) *contra mundum*, I have no doubt. He is the man who will “soothe and heal and bless.” My last selection shall be given to a work of travel and adventure. I reduce the area of choice to Hakluyt's “Voyages” and the “Voyage of the Beagle,” and while I am balancing their claims the “Beagle” (12) slips out of my hand into the boat. My library is complete. And so, spread the sails to the wind and away for the Pacific.



FEBRUARY DAYS

Original

FEBRUARY DAYS

The snow has gone from the landscape and the sun, at the hour of setting, has got round to the wood that crowns the hill on the other side of the valley. Soon it will set on the slope of the hill and then down on the plain. Then we shall know that spring has come. Two days ago a blackbird, from the paddock below the orchard, added his golden baritone to the tenor of the thrush who had been

shouting good news from the beech tree across the road for weeks past. I don't know why the thrush should glimpse the dawn of the year before the blackbird, unless it is that his habit of choosing the topmost branches of the tree gives him a better view of the world than that which the golden-throated fellow gets on the lower branches that he always affects. It may be the same habit of living in the top storey that accounts for the early activity of the rooks. They are noisy neighbours, but never so noisy as in these late February days, when they are breaking up into families and quarrelling over their slatternly household arrangements in the topmost branches of the elm trees. They are comic ruffians who wash all their dirty linen in public, and seem almost as disorderly and bad-tempered as the human family itself. If they had only a little of our ingenuity in mutual slaughter there would be no need for my friend the farmer to light bonfires underneath the trees in order to drive the female from the eggs and save his crops.

A much more amiable little fellow, the great tit, has just added his modest assurance that spring is coming. He is not much of a singer, but he is good hearing to anyone whose thoughts are turning to his garden and the pests that lurk therein for the undoing of his toil. The tit is as industrious a worker in the garden as the starling, and, unlike the starling, he has no taste for my cherries. A pair of blue tits have been observed to carry a caterpillar to their nest, on an average every two minutes for the greater part of the day. That is the sort of bird that deserves encouragement—a bird that loves caterpillars and does not love cherries. There are very few creatures with so clean a record. So hang out the cocoanut as a sign of goodwill.

And yet, as I write, I am reminded that in this imperfect world where no unmixed blessing is vouchsafed to us, even the tit does not escape the general law of qualified beneficence. For an hour past I have been agreeably aware of the proximity of a great tit who, from a hedge below the orchard, has been singing his little see-saw song with unremitting industry. Now behold him. There he goes flitting and pirouetting with that innocent grace which, as he skips in and out of the hedge just in front of you, suggests that he is inviting you to a game of hide-and-seek. But not now. Now he is revealing the evil that dwells in the best of us. Now he reminds us that he too is a part of that nature which feeds so relentlessly on itself. See him over the hives, glancing about in his own erratic way and taking his bearings. Then, certain that the coast is clear, he nips down and taps upon one of the hives with his beak. He skips away to await results. The trick succeeds; the doorkeeper of the hive comes out to enquire into the disturbance, and down swoops the great tit and away he flies with his capture. An artful fellow in spite of his air of innocence.

There is no affectation of innocence about that robust fellow the starling. He is almost as candid a ruffian as the rook, and three months hence I shall hate him with an intensity that would match Caligula's “Oh, that the Romans had only one neck!” For then he will come out of the beech woods on the hillside for his great annual spring offensive against my cherry trees, and in two or three days he will leave them an obscene picture of devastation, every twig with its desecrated fruit and the stones left bleaching in the sun. But in these days of February I can be just even to my enemy. I can admit without reserve that he is not all bad any more than the other

winsome little fellow is all good. See him on autumn or winter days when he has mobilised his forces for his forages in the fields, and is carrying out those wonderful evolutions in the sky that are such a miracle of order and rhythm. Far off, the cloud approaches like a swirl of dust in the sky, expanding, contracting, changing formation, breaking up into battalions, merging into columns, opening out on a wide front, throwing out flanks and advance guards and rear guards, every complication unravelled in perfect order, every movement as serene and assured as if the whole cloud moved to the beat of some invisible conductor below—a very symphony of the air, in which motion merges into music, until it seems that you are not watching a flight of birds, but listening with the inner ear to great waves of soundless harmony. And then, the overture over, down the cloud descends upon the fields, and the farmers' pests vanish before the invasion. And if you will follow them into the fields you will find infinite tiny holes that they have drilled and from which they have extracted the lurking enemy of the drops, and you will remember that it is to their beneficial activities that we owe the extermination of the May beetle, whose devastations were so menacing a generation ago. And after the flock has broken up and he has paired, and the responsibilities of housekeeping have begun he continues his worthy labours. When spring has come you can see him dart from his nest in the hollow of the tree and make a journey a minute to the neighbouring field, returning each time with a chafer-grub or a wire-worm or some other succulent, but pestiferous morsel for the young and clamorous family at home. That acute observer, Mr G. G. Desmond, says that he has counted eighteen such journeys in fifteen minutes.

What matter a few cherries for a fellow of such benignant spirit?

But wait, my dear sir, wait until June brings the ripening cherries and see how much of this magnanimity of February is left.

Sir, I refuse to be intimidated by June or any other consideration. Sufficient unto the day—— And to-day I will think only good of the sturdy fellow in the coat of mail. To-day I will think only of the brave news that is abroad. It has got into the hives. On fine days such as this stray bees sail out for water, bringing the agreeable tidings that all is well within, that the queen bee is laying her eggs, "according to plan," and that moisture is wanted in the hive. There are a score of hives in the orchard, and they have all weathered the winter and its perils. We saw the traces of one of those perils when the snow still lay on the ground. Around each hive were the footmarks of a mouse. He had come from a neighbouring hedge, visited each hive in turn, found there was no admission and had returned to the hedge no doubt hungrier than he came. Poor little wretch! to be near such riches, lashings of sweetness and great boulders of wax, and not be able to get bite or sup. I see him trotting back through the snow to his hole, a very dejected mouse. Oh, these new-fangled hives that don't give a fellow a chance.

In the garden the news is coming up from below, borne by those unfailing outriders of the spring, the snowdrop and the winter aconite. A modest company; but in their pennons is the assurance of the many-coloured host that is falling unseen into the vast pageant of summer and will fill the woods with the trumpets of the harebell and the wild hyacinth, and make the hedges burst into foam, and the orchard a glory of pink and white, and the ditches

heavy with the scent of the meadowsweet, and the fields golden with harvest and the gardens a riot of luxuriant life. I said it was all right, chirps little red waistcoat from the fence—all the winter I've told you that there was a good time coming and now you see for yourself. Look at those flowers. Ain't they real? The philosopher in the red waistcoat is perfectly right. He has kept his end up all through the winter, and has taken us into his fullest confidence. Formerly he never came beyond the kitchen, but this winter when the snow was about he advanced to the parlour where he pottered about like one of the family. Now, however, with the great news outside and the earth full of good things to pick up, he has no time to call.

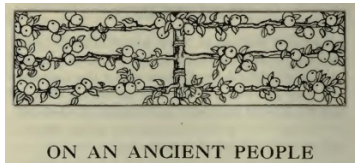
Even up in the woods that are still gaunt with winter and silent, save for the ringing strokes of the woodcutters in some distant clearing, the message is borne in the wind that comes out of the west at the dawn of the spring, and is as unlike the wind of autumn as the spirit of the sunrise is unlike the spirit of the sunset. It is the lusty breath of life coming back to the dead earth, and making these February days the most thrilling of the year. For in these expanding skies and tremors of life and unsealings of the secret springs of nature all is promise and hope, and nothing is for regret and lament. It is when fulfilment comes that the joy of possession is touched with the shadow of parting. The cherry blossom comes like a wonder and goes like a dream, carrying the spring with it, and the dirge of summer itself is implicit in the scent of the lime trees and the failing note of the cuckoo. But in these days of birth when

> "Youth, inexpressibly fair, wakes like a wondering rose."

there is no hint of mortality and no reverted glance. The curtain is rising and the pageant is all before us.



Original



Original

ON AN ANCIENT PEOPLE

Among my letters this morning was one requesting that if I were in favour of “the reconstitution of Palestine as a National Home for the Jewish people,” I should sign the enclosed

declaration and return it in the envelope (unstamped), also enclosed. I dislike unstamped envelopes. I also dislike stamped envelopes. You can ignore an unstamped enveloped but a stamped envelope compels you to write a letter, when perhaps you don't want to write a letter. My objection to unstamped envelopes is that they show a meagre spirit and a lack of confidence in you. They suggest that you are regarded with suspicion as a person who will probably steam off the stamp and use it to receipt a bill.

But I waived the objection, signed the declaration, stamped the envelope and put it in the post. I did all this because I am a Zionist. I am so keen a Zionist that I would use a whole bookful of stamps in the cause. I am a Zionist, not on sentimental grounds, but on very practical grounds. I want the Jews to have Palestine, so that the English may have England and the Germans Germany and the Russians Russia. I want them to have a home of their own so that the rest of us can have a home of our own. By this I do not mean that I am an anti-Semite. I loathe Jew-baiting, and regard the Jew-baiter as a very unlovely person. But I want the Jew to be able to decide whether he is an alien or a citizen. I want him to shed the dualism that makes him such an affliction to himself and to other people. I want him to possess Palestine so that he may cease to want to possess the earth.

I am therefore fiercely on the side of the Zionist Jews, and fiercely against their opponents. These people want to be Jews, but they do not want Jewry. They do not want to be compelled to make a choice between being Jews and being Englishmen or Americans, Germans or French. They want the best of both worlds. We are not a nation, they say; we are

Englishmen, or Scotsmen, or Welshmen, or Frenchmen, or Germans, or Russians, or Japanese "of the Jewish persuasion." We are a religious community like the Catholics, or the Presbyterians, or the Unitarians, or the Plymouth Brethren. Indeed! And what is your religion, pray? *It is the religion of the Chosen People*. Great heavens! You deny that you are a nation, and in the same breath claim that you are the Chosen Nation. The very foundation of your religion is that Jehovah has picked you out from all the races of men as his own. Over you his hand is spread in everlasting protection. For you the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night; for the rest of us the utter darkness of the breeds that have not the signature of Jehovah. We cannot enter your kingdom by praying or fasting, by bribe or entreaty. Every other nation is accessible to us on its own conditions; every other religion is eager to welcome us, sends its missionaries to us to implore us to come in. But you, the rejected of nations, yourself reject all nations and forbid your sacraments to those who are not bom of your household. You are the Chosen People, whose religion is the nation and whose nationhood is religion.

Why, my dear sir, history offers no parallel to your astounding claim to nationality—the claim that has held your race together through nearly two thousand years of dispersion and wandering, of persecution and pride, of servitude and supremacy—

> Slaves in eternal Egypts, baking your strawless bricks;
>
> At ease in successive Zions, prating your politics.

All nations are afflicted with egoism. It is the national egoism of Prussia that has just brought it to such catastrophic ruin. The Frenchman entertains the firm conviction that civilisation ends at the French frontier. Being a polite person, he does his best not to betray the conviction to us, and sometimes almost succeeds. The Englishman, being less sophisticated, does not try to conceal the fact that he has a similar conviction. It does not occur to him that anyone can doubt his claim. He knows that every foreigner would like to be an Englishman if he knew how. The pride of the Spaniard is a legend, and you have only to see Arab salute Arab to understand what a low person the European must seem in their eyes. In short, national egoism is a folly which is pretty equally distributed among all of us. But your national egoism is unlike any other brand on earth. In the humility of Shylock is the pride of the most arrogant racial aristocracy the world has ever seen. God appeared to you in the burning bush and spoke to you in the thunders of Sinai, and set you apart as his own exclusive household. And when one of your prophets declared that all nations were one in the sight of God, you rejected his gospel and slew the prophet. By comparison with you we are a humble people. We know we are a mixed race and that we have no more divine origin—and no less—than anybody else. Mr Kipling, it is true, has caught your arrogant note:

> For the Lord our God Most High,
>
> He hath made the deep as dry,
>
> He hath smote for us a pathway to the ends of all the earth.

But that is because Mr Kipling seems to be one of those who believe we are one of the lost tribes of your Chosen race. I gather that is so from another of his poems in which he cautions us against

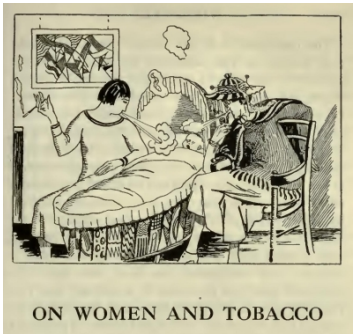
> Such boastings as the Gentiles use
> And lesser breeds without the law.

But Mr Kipling is only a curiosity among us. We are much more modest than that. But you are like that. You are not only a nation. You are, except the Chinese, the most isolated, the most tenacious, the most exclusive nation in history. Other races have changed through the centuries beyond recognition or have disappeared altogether. Where are the Persians of the spacious days of Cyrus? Who finds in the Egyptians of to-day the spirit and genius of the mighty people who built the Pyramids and created the art of the Third Dynasty? What trace is there in the modern Cretans of the imperial race whose seapower had become a legend before Homer sang? Can we find in the Greeks of our time any reminiscence of the Athens of Pericles? Or in the Romans any kinship with the sovereign people that conquered the world from Parthia to Britain, and stamped it with the signature of its civilisation as indelibly as it stamped it with its great highways? The nations chase each other across the stage of time, and vanish as the generations of men chase each other and vanish. You and the Chinese alone seem indestructible. It is no extravagant fancy that foresees that when the last fire is lit on this expiring planet it will be a Chinaman and a Jew who will stretch their hands to its warmth, drink in the last breath of air, and write the final epitaph of earth.

No, it is too late by many a thousand years to deny your nationhood, for it is the most enduring fact in human records. And being a nation without a fatherland, you run like a disturbing immiscible fluid through the blood of all the nations. You need a home for your own peace and for the world's peace. I am going to try and help you to get one.



Original



Original

ON GOOD RESOLUTIONS

I think, on the whole, that I began the New Year with rather a good display of moral fireworks, and as fireworks are meant to be seen (and admired) I propose to let them off in public. When I awoke in the morning I made a good resolution.... At this point, if I am not mistaken, I observe a slight shudder on your part, madam. “How Victorian!” I think I hear you remark. You compel me, madam, to digress.

It is, I know, a little unfashionable to make New Year's resolutions nowadays. That sort of thing belonged to the Victorian world in which we elderly people were born, and for which we are expected to apologise. No one is quite in the fashion who does not heave half a brick at Victorian England. Mr Wells has just heaved a book of 760 pages at it. This querulous superiority to past ages seems a little childish. It is like the scorn of youth for its elders.

I cannot get my indignation up to the boil about Victorian England. I should find it as difficult to draw up an indictment of a century as it is to draw up an indictment of a nation. I seem to remember that the Nineteenth Century used to speak as disrespectfully of the Eighteenth as we now speak of the Nineteenth, and I fancy that our grandchildren will be as scornful of our world of to-day as we are of the world of yesterday. The fact that we have learned

to fly, and have discovered poison gas, and have invented submarines and guns that will kill a churchful of people seventy miles away does not justify us in regarding the Nineteenth Century as a sort of absurd guy. There were very good things as well as very bad things about our old Victorian England. It did not go to the Ritz to dance in the New Year, it is true. The Ritz did not exist, and the modern hotel life had not been invented. It used to go instead to the watch-night service, and it was not above making good resolutions, which for the most part, no doubt, it promptly proceeded to break.

Why should we apologise for these habits? Why should we be ashamed of watch-night services and good resolutions? I am all for gaiety. If I had my way I would be as "merry" as Pepys, if in a different fashion. "Merry" is a good word and implies a good thing. It may be admitted that merriment is an inferior quality to cheerfulness. It is an emotion, a mere spasm, whereas cheerfulness is a habit of mind, a whole philosophy of life. But the one quality does not necessarily exclude the other, and an occasional burst of sheer irresponsible merriment is good for anybody—even for an Archbishop—especially for an Archbishop. The trouble with an Archbishop is that his office tends to make him take himself too seriously. He forgets that he is one of us, and that is bad for him. He needs to give himself a violent reminder occasionally that his virtue is not an alien thing; but is rooted in very ordinary humanity. At least once a year he should indulge in a certain liveliness, wear the cap and bells, dance a cake-walk or a horn-pipe, not too publicly, but just publicly enough so that there should be nothing furtive about it. If not done on the village green it might at least be done in the episcopal kitchen, and chronicled in

the local newspapers. “Last evening His Grace the Archbishop attended the servants' ball at the Palace, and danced a cake-walk with the chief scullery-maid.”



“ Danced a cake-walk with the chief scullery-maid.”

Original

And I do not forget that, together with its watch-night services and its good resolutions, Victorian England used to wish you “A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.” Nowadays the formula is “A Happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year.” It is a priggish, sophisticated change—a sort of shamefaced implication that there is something vulgar in being “merry.” There isn't. For my part, I do not want a Happy Christmas: I want a Merry Christmas. And I do not want a fat, prosperous New Year. I want a

Happy New Year, which is a much better and more spiritual thing.

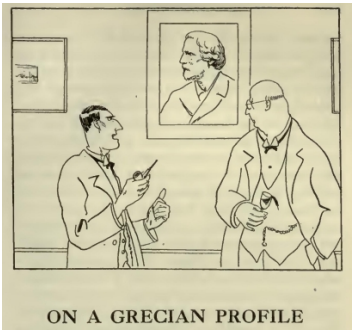
If, therefore, I do not pour contempt on the Victorian habit of making good resolutions, it is not because I share Malvolio's view that virtue is a matter of avoiding cakes and ale. And if I refuse to deride Victorian England because it went to watch-night services it is not because I think there is anything wrong in a dance at the Ritz. It is because, in the words of the old song, I think “It is good to be merry *and* wise.” I like a festival of foolishness and I like good resolutions, too. Why shouldn't I? Lewis Carrol's gift for mathematics was not less admirable because he made Humpty-Dumpty such a poor hand at doing sums in his head.

From this digression, madam, permit me to return to my good resolution. The thing that is the matter with you, I said, addressing myself on New Year's morning as I applied the lather before the shaving glass, is that you have a devil of impatience in you. I shouldn't call you an intolerant fellow, but I rather fear that you are an impulsive fellow. Perhaps to put the thing agreeably, I might say that your nervous reaction to events is a little too immediate. I don't want to be unpleasant, but I think you see what I mean. Do not suppose that I am asking you to be a cold-blooded, calculating person. God forbid. But it would do you no harm to wear a snaffle bar and a tightish rein—or, as we used to say in our Victorian England, to “count ten.” I accepted the criticism with approval. For though we do not like to hear of our failings from other people, that does not mean that we are unconscious of them. The more conscious we are of them, the less we like to hear of them from others and the more we hear of them from ourselves. So I said “Agreed. We will adopt 'Second thoughts' as

our New Year policy and begin the campaign at once."

And then came my letters—nice letters and nasty letters and indifferent letters, and among them one that, as Lancelot Gobbo would say, "raised the waters." No, it was not one of those foolish, venomous letters which anonymous correspondents write to newspapers. They leave you cold. I might almost say that they cheer you up. They give you the comforting assurance that you cannot be very far wrong when persons capable of writing these letters disapprove of you. But this letter was different. As I read it I felt a flame of indignation surging up and demanding expression. And I seized a pen, and expressed it, and having done so, I said "Second thoughts," and tore it up, and put the fragments aside, as the memorial of the first skirmish in the campaign. I do not expect to dwell on this giddy moral altitude long; perhaps in a week the old imperious impulse will have resumed full dominion. But it is good to have a periodical brush with one's habits, even if one knows one is pretty sure to go down in the second round. It serves at least as a reminder that we are conscious of our own imperfections as well as of the imperfections of others. And that, I think, is the case for our old Victorian habit of New Year's Day commandments.

I wrote another reply in the evening. It was quite *pianissimo* and nice.



Original

ON A GRECIAN PROFILE

I see that the ghouls have descended upon George Meredith, and are desecrating his remains. They have learned from the life of him just published that he did not get on well with his father, or his eldest son, and that he did not attend his first wife's funeral. Above all, he was a snob. He was ashamed of the tailoring business from which he sprang, concealed the fact that he was bom at Portsmouth, and generally turned his Grecian profile to the world and left it to be assumed that his pedigree was

wrapped in mystery and magnificence.

I daresay it is all true. Many of us have an indifferent record at home and most of us like to turn our Grecian profiles to the world, if we have Grecian profiles. We are like the girl in Hardy's story who always managed to walk on the right side of her lover, because she fancied that the left side of her face was her strong point. The most distinguished and, I think, the noblest American of our time always turns his profile to the camera—and a beautiful profile it is—for reasons quite obvious and quite pardonable to those who have seen the birth-mark that disfigures the other cheek. I suspect that I do not myself object to being caught unaware in favourable attitudes or pleasing situations that dispose the observer to agreeable impressions. And, indeed, why should I (or you) be ashamed to give-a pleasant thrill to anybody if it is in our power. If we pretend we are above these human frailties, what is the meaning of the pains we take about choosing a hat, or about the cut of a coat, or the colour of a cloth for the new suit? Why do we so seldom find pleasure in a photograph of ourselves—so seldom feel that it does justice to that benignant and Olympian ideal of ourselves which we cherish secretly in our hearts? I should have to admit, if I went into the confession box, that I had never seen a photograph of myself that had satisfied me. And I fancy you would do the same if you were honest. We may pretend to ourselves that it is only abstract beauty or absolute truth that we are concerned about, but we know better. We are thinking of our Grecian profile.

It is no doubt regrettable to find that great men are so often afflicted with little weaknesses. There are some people who delight in pillorying the immortals and shying dead cats and rotten eggs at them.

They enjoy the discovery that no one is better than he should be. It gives them a comfortable feeling to discover that the austere outside of the lord Angelo conceals the libertine. If you praise Caesar they will remind you that after dinner he took emetics; if Brutus, they will say he made an idol of his public virtue. They like to remember that Lamb was not quite the St Charles he is represented to be, but took far too much wine at dinner and dosed beautifully, but alcoholically, afterwards, as you may read in De Quincey. They like to recall that Scott was something of a snob, and put the wine-glass that the Prince Regent had used at dinner in his pocket, sitting down on it afterwards in a moment of happy forgetfulness. In short, they go about like Alcibiades mutilating the statues of Hermes (if he was indeed the culprit), and will leave us nothing in human nature that we can entirely reverence.

I suppose they are right enough on the facts. Considering what multitudinous persons we are it would be a miracle if, when we button up ourselves in the morning we did not button up some individual of unpleasant propensities, whom we pretend we do not know. I have never been interested in my pedigree. I am sure it is a very ancient one, and I leave it at that. But I once made a calculation—based on the elementary fact that I had two parents and they had each two parents, and so on—and came to the conclusion that about the time of the Norman Conquest my ancestors were much more numerous than the population then inhabiting this island. I am aware that this proves rather too much—that it is an example of the fact that you can prove anything by statistics, including the impossible. But the truth remains that I am the temporary embodiment of a very large number of people—of millions of millions

of people, if you trace me back to my ancestors who used to sharpen flints some six hundred thousand years ago. It would be singular if in such a crowd there were not some ne'er-do-wells jostling about among the nice, reputable persons who, I flatter myself, constitute my Parliamentary majority. Sometimes I fancy that, in a snap election taken at a moment of public excitement within myself, the ne'er-do-wells get on top. These accidents will happen, and the best I can hope is that the general trend of policy in the multitudinous kingdom that I carry under my hat is in the hands of the decent people.

And that is the best we can expect from anybody—the great as well as the least. If we demand of the supreme man that he shall be a perfect whole we shall have no supreme man—only a plaster saint. Certainly we shall have no great literature. Shakespeare did not sit aloof like a perfect god imagining the world of imperfect creatures that he created. The world was within him and he was only the vehicle of his enormous ancestry and of the tumultuous life that they reproduced in the theatre of his mind. In him was the mirth of a roystering Falstaff of long ago, the calculating devilry of some Warwickshire Iago, the pity of Hubert, the perplexity of some village Hamlet, the swagger of Ancient Pistol, the bucolic simplicity of Cousin Silence, the mingled nobleness and baseness of Macbeth, the agony of Lear, the sweetness of many a maiden who walked by Avon's banks in ancient days and lived again in the Portias and Rosalinds of his mind. All these people dwelt in Shakespeare. They were the ghosts of his ancestors. He was, like the rest of us, not a man, but multitudes of men. He created all these people because he was all these people,

contained in a larger measure than any man who ever lived all the attributes, good and bad, of humanity. Each character was a peep into the gallery of his ancestors. Meredith, himself, recognised the ancestral source of creative power. When Lady Butcher asked him to explain his insight into the character of women he replied, “It is the spirit of my mother in me.” It was indeed the spirit of many mothers working in and through him.

It is this infinitely mingled yarn from which we are woven that makes it so difficult to find and retain a contemporary hero. It was never more difficult than in these searching days. I was walking along the Embankment last evening with a friend—a man known alike for his learning and character—when he turned to me and said, “I will never have a hero again.” We had been speaking of the causes of the catastrophe of Paris, and his remark referred especially to his disappointment with President Wilson. I do not think he was quite fair to the President. He did not make allowance for the devil's broth of intrigue and ambitions into which the President was plunged on this side of the Atlantic. But, leaving that point aside, his remark expressed a very common feeling. There has been a calamitous slump in heroes. They have fallen into as much disrepute as kings.

And for the same reason. Both are the creatures of legend. They are the fabulous offspring of comfortable times—supermen reigning on Olympus and standing between us common people and the unknown. Then come the storm and the blinding lightnings, and the Olympians have to get busy and prove that they are what we have taken them for. And behold, they are discovered to be ordinary men as we are, reeds shaken by the wind, feeble folk like

you and I, tossed along on the tide of events as helpless as any of us. Their heads are no longer in the clouds, and their feet have come down from Sinai. And we find that they are feet of clay.

It is no new experience in times of upheaval. Writing on the morrow of the Napoleonic wars, when the world was on the boil as it is now, Byron expressed what we are feeling to-day very accurately:

> I want a hero: an uncommon want,
> When every year and month sends forth a new one.
> Till, after cloying the gazettes with cant,
> The age discovers he is not the true one.

The truth, I suppose, is contained in the old saying that “no man is a hero to his valet.” To be a hero you must be remote in time or circumstance, seen far off, as it were, through a haze of legend and fancy. The valet sees you at close quarters, marks your vanities and angers, hears you fuming over your hard-boiled egg, perhaps is privileged to laugh with you when you come out of the limelight over the tricks you have played on the open-mouthed audience. Bourrienne was a faithful secretary and a genuine admirer of Napoleon, but the picture he gives of Napoleon's shabby little knaveries reveals a very wholesome loathing for that scoundrel of genius. And Cæsar, loud though his name thunders down the centuries, was, I fancy, not much of a hero to his contemporaries. It was Decimus Brutus, his favourite general, whom he had just appointed to the choicest command in his gift, who went to Caesar's house on that March morning, two thousand years ago, to

bring him to the slaughter.

If I were asked-to name one incontrovertible hero among the sons of men I should nominate Abraham Lincoln. He fills the part more completely than anyone else. In his union of wisdom with humanity, tolerance in secondary things with firmness in great things, unselfishness and tenderness with resolution and strength, he stands alone in history. But even he was not a hero to his contemporaries. They saw him too near—near enough to note his frailties, for he was human, too near to realise the grand and significant outlines of the man as a whole. It was not until he was dead that the world realised what a leader had fallen in Israel. Motley thanked heaven, as for something unusual, that he had been privileged to appreciate Lincoln's greatness before death revealed him to men. Stanton fought him bitterly, though honourably, to the end, and it was only when life had ebbed away that he understood the grandeur of the force that had been withdrawn from the affairs of earth. “There lies the most perfect ruler of men the world has ever seen,” he said, as he stood with other colleagues around the bed on which Lincoln had breathed his last. But the point here is that, sublime though the sum of the man was, his heroic profile had its abundant human warts.

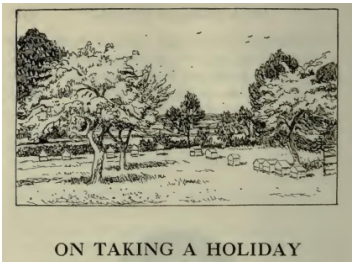
It is possible that the future may unearth heroes from the wreckage of reputations with which the war and the peace have strewn the earth. It will have a difficult task to find them among the statesmen who have made the peace, and the fighting men are taking care that it shall not find them in their ranks. They are all writing books. Such books! Are these the men—these whimpering, mean-spirited complaining dullards—the demi-gods we have watched from afar? Why, now we see them under the microscope of their

own making, they seem more like insects than demi-gods. You read the English books and wonder why we ever won, and then you read the German books and wonder why we didn't win sooner.

It is fatal for the heroic aspirant to do his own trumpeting. Benvenuto Cellini tried it, and only succeeded in giving the world a priceless picture of a swaggering bravo. Posterity alone can do the trick, by its arts of forgetfulness and exaltation, exercised in virtue of its passion to find something in human nature that it can unreservedly adore. It is a painful thought that, perhaps, there never was and perhaps there never will be such a being. The best of us is woven of “mingled yarn, good and ill together.” And so I come back to Meredith's Grecian profile and the ghouls. Meredith was a great man and a noble man. But he “contained multitudes” too, and not all of them were gentlemen. Let us be thankful for the legacy he has left us, and forgive him for the unlovely aspects of that versatile humanity which he shared with the least of us.



Original



Original

ON TAKING A HOLIDAY

I hope the two ladies from the country who have been writing to the newspapers to know what sights they ought to see in London during their Easter holiday will have a nice time. I hope they will enjoy the tube and have fine weather for the Monument, and whisper to each other successfully in the whispering gallery of St Paul's, and see the dungeons at the Tower and the seats of the mighty at Westminster, and return home with a harvest of joyful memories. But I can promise them that there is one sight they will not see. They will not see me. Their idea of a holiday is London. My idea of a

holiday is forgetting there is such a place as London.

Not that I dislike London. I should like to see it.

I have long promised myself that I would see it. Some day, I have said, I will surely have a look at this place. It is a shame, I have said, to have lived in it so long and never to have seen it. I suppose I am not much worse than other Londoners. Do you, sir, who have been taking the morning bus from Balham for heaven knows how many years—do you, when you are walking down Fleet Street, stand still with a shock of delight as the dome of St Paul's and its cross of gold burst on your astonished sight? Do you go on a fine afternoon and take your stand on Waterloo Bridge to see that wondrous river façade that stretches with its cloud-capped towers and gorgeous palaces from Westminster to St Paul's? Do you know the spot where Charles was executed, or the church where there are the best Grinling Gibbons carvings? Did you ever go into Somerset House to see the will of William Shakespeare, or—in short, did you ever see London? Did you ever see it, not with your eyes merely, hut with your mind, with the sense of revelation, of surprise, of discovery? Did you ever see it as those two ladies from the country will see it this Easter as they pass breathlessly from wonder to wonder? Of course not. You need a holiday in London as I do. You need to set out with young Tom (aged ten) on a voyage of discovery and see all the sights of this astonishing city as though you had come to it from a far country.

That is how I hope to visit it—some day. But not this Easter, not when I know the beech woods are dressing themselves in green and the cherry blossoms are out in the orchards and the great blobs of the chestnut tree are ready to burst, and the cuckoo is calling all day long and the April meadows are

"smoored wi' new grass," as they say in the Yorkshire dales. Not when I know that by putting down a bit of paper at the magic casement at Paddington I can be whisked between sunset and dawn to the fringe of Dartmoor and let loose—shall it be from Okehampton or Bovey Tracy or Moreton Hampstead? what matter the gate by which we enter the sanctuary?—let loose, I say, into the vast spaces of earth and sky where the moorland streams sing their ancient runes over the boulders and the great tors stand out like castles of the gods against the horizon and the Easter sun dances, as the legend has it, overhead and founders gloriously in the night beyond Plymouth Sound.

Or, perhaps, ladies, if you come from the North, I may pass you unawares, and just about the time when you are cracking your breakfast egg in the boarding house at Russell Square—heavens, Russell Square!—and discussing whether you shall first go down the deepest lift or up the highest tower, or stand before the august ugliness of Buckingham Palace, or see the largest station or the smallest church, I shall be stepping out from Keswick, by the lapping waters of Derwent water, hailing the old familiar mountains as they loom into sight, looking down again—think of it!—into the' Jaws of Borrowdale, having a snack at Rosthwaite, and then, hey for Styehead! up, up ever the rough mountain track, with the buzzard circling with slow flapping wings about the mountain flanks, with glorious Great Gable for my companion on the right hand and no less glorious Scafell for my companion on the left hand, and at the rocky turn in the track—lo! the great amphitheatre of Wasdale, the last Sanctuary of lakeland.

And at this point, ladies, you may as you crane

your neck to see the Duke of York at the top of his column—wondering all the while who the deuce the fellow was that he should stand so high—you may, I say, if you like, conceive me standing at the top of the pass, taking my hat from my head and pronouncing a terrific curse on the vandals who would desecrate the last temple of solitude by driving a road over this fastness of the mountains in order that the gross tribe of motorists may come with their hoots and their odours, their hurry and vulgarity, and chase the spirit of the mountains away from us for ever.... And then by the screes of Great Gable to the hollow among the mountains. Or perchance, I may turn by Sprinkling Tam and see the Pikes of Langdale come into view and stumble down Rossett Ghyll and so by the green pastures of Langdale to Grasmere.

In short, ladies, I may be found in many places. But I shall not tell you where. I am not quite sure that I could tell you where at this moment, for I am like a fellow who has come into great riches and is doubtful how he can squander them most gloriously. But, I repeat, ladies, that you will not find me in London. I leave London to you. May you enjoy it.



ON WOMEN AND TOBACCO

Original

UNDER THE SYCAMORE

An odd question was put to me the other day which I think I may venture to pass on to a wider circle. It was this: What is the best dish that life has set before you? At first blush it seems an easy question to answer. It was answered gaily enough by Mr H. G. Wells when he was asked what was the best thing that had ever happened to him. “The best thing that ever happened to me was to be born,” he replied. But that is not an answer: it is an evasion. It belongs to another kind of inquiry, whether life is worth living. Life may be worth living or not worth living on balance, but in either case we can still say what was the thing in it that we most enjoyed. You may dislike a dinner on the whole and yet make an exception of the trout, or the braised ham and spinach or the dessert. You may dislike a man very heartily and still admit that he has a good tenor voice. You may, like Job and Swift and many more, have cursed the day you were born and still remember many pleasant things that have happened to you—falling in love, making friends, climbing

mountains, reading books, seeing pictures, scoring runs, watching the sunrise in the Oberland or the sunset on Hampstead Heath. You may write off life as a bad debt and still enjoy the song of the thrush outside. It is a very unusual bankrupt that has no assets. It is a very sad heart who has never had anything to thank his stars for.

But while the question about the dish seems easy enough at first, it grows difficult on reflection.

In the end you are disposed to say that it cannot be satisfactorily answered here at all. We shall have to wait till we get the journey over and in perspective before we can be sure that we can select the things that were best worth having. It is pleasant to imagine that in that long sunny afternoon, which I take eternity to be, it will be a frequent and agreeable diversion to sit under a spacious tree—sycamore or chestnut for choice, not because they are my favourite trees, but because their generous leaves cast the richest and greenest shade—to sit, I say, and think over the queer dream which befell us on that tiny ball which the Blessèd Damozel, as she looks over the battlements of heaven near by, sees "spinning like a midge" below.

And if in the midst of those pleasant ruminations one came along and asked us to name the thing that had given us most pleasure at the play to which we had been so mysteriously sent, and from which we had slipped away so quietly, the answers would probably be very unlike those we should make now. You, Mr Contractor, for example (I am assuming you will be there) will find yourself most dreadfully gravelled for an answer. That glorious contract you made, which enabled you to pocket a cool million—come now, confess, sir, that it will seem rather a drab affair to remember your journey by. You will

have to think of something better than that as the splendid gamering of the adventure, or you will have to confess to a very complete bankruptcy. And you, sir, to whom the grosser pleasures seemed so important, you will not like to admit, even to yourself, that your most rapturous memory of earth centres round the grillroom at the Savoy. You will probably find that the things best worth remembering are the things you rejected.

I daresay the most confident answers will come from those whose pleasures were of the emotions and of the mind. They got more out of life, after all, than the brewers and soap-boilers and traffickers in money, and traffickers in blood, who have nothing left from those occupations to hallow its memory. Think of St Francis meeting Napoleon under that sycamore tree—which of them, now that it is all over, will have most joy in recalling the life which was a feast of love to the one and a gamble with iron dice to the other? Wordsworth will remember the earth as a miraculous pageant, where every day broke with magic over the mountains, and every night was filled with the wonder of the stars, and where season followed season with a processional glory that never grew dim. And Mozart will recall it as a ravishing melody, and Claude and Turner as a panorama of effulgent sunsets. And the men of intellect, with what delight they will look back on the great moments of life—Columbus seeing the new world dawning on his vision, Copernicus feeling the sublime architecture of the universe taking shape in his mind, Harvey unravelling the cardinal mystery of the human frame, Darwin thrilling with the birth pangs of the immense secret that he wrung from Nature. These men will be able to answer the question grandly. The banquet they had on earth will

bear talking about even in Heaven.

But in that large survey of the journey which we shall take under the scyamore tree of my obstinate fancy, there will be one dish that will, I fancy, transcend all others for all of us, wise and simple, great and humble alike. It will not be some superlative moment, like the day we won the Derby, or came into a fortune, or climbed the Matterhorn, or shook hands with the Prince of Wales, or received an O.B.E., or got our name in the paper, or bought a Rolls-Royce, or won a seat in Parliament. It will be a very simple, commonplace thing. It will be the human comradeship we had on the journey—the friendships of the spirit, whether made in the flesh or through the medium of books, or music, or art. We shall remember the adventure not by its appetites, but by its affections—

> For gauds that perished, shows that passed,
> The fates some recompense have sent—
> Thrice blessed are the things that last,
> The things that are more excellent.



Original



Original

ON THE VANITY OF OLD AGE

I met an old gentleman, a handsome and vigorous old gentleman, with whom I have a slight acquaintance, in the lane this morning, and he asked me whether I remembered Walker of *The Daily News*. No, said I, he was before my time. He resigned the editorship, I thought, in the 'seventies.

“Before that,” said the old gentleman. “Must have been in the 'sixties.”

“Probably,” I said. “Did you know him in the 'sixties?”

“Oh, I knew him before then,” said the old gentleman, warming to his subject. “I knew him in the 'forties.”

I took a step backwards in respectful admiration. The old gentleman enjoyed this instinctive testimony to the impression he had made.

“Heavens!” said I, “the 'forties!”

“No,” said the old gentleman, half closing his eyes, as if to get a better view across the ages. “No.... It must have been in the 'thirties.... Yes, it was in the 'thirties. We were boys at school together in the 'thirties. We called him Sawney Walker.”

I fell back another step. The old gentleman's triumph was complete. I had paid him the one compliment that appealed to him—the compliment of astonished incredulity at the splendour of his years.

His age was his glory, and he loved to bask in it. He had scored ninety not out, and with his still robust frame and clear eye he looked “well set” for his century. And he was as honourably proud of his performance as, seventy or eighty years ago, he would have been of making his hundred at the wickets. The genuine admiration I had for his achievement was mixed with enjoyment of his own obvious delight in it. An innocent vanity is the last of our frailties to desert us. It will be the last infirmity that humanity will outgrow. In the great controversy that rages around Dean Inge's depressing philosophy I am on the side of the angels. I want to feel that we are progressing somewhere, that we are moving upwards in the scale of creation, and not merely whizzing round and round and biting our tail. I think the case for the ascent of man is stronger than the Dean admits. A creature that has emerged from the

primordial slime and evolved a moral law has progressed a good way. It is not unreasonable to think that he has a future. Give him time—and it may be that the world is still only in its rebellious childhood—and he will go far.

But however much we are destined to grow in grace, I do not conceive a time when we shall have wholly shed our vanity. It is the most constant and tenacious of our attributes. The child is vain of his first knickerbockers, and the Court flunkey is vain of his knee-breeches. We are vain of noble things and ignoble things. The Squire is as vain of his acres as if he made them, and Jim Ruddle carries his head high all the year round in virtue of the notorious fact that all the first prizes at the village flower show go to his onions and potatoes, his carrots and his cabbages. There is none of us so poor as to escape. A friend of mine who, in a time of distress, had been engaged in distributing boots to the children at a London school, heard one day a little child pattering behind her in very squeaky boots. She suspected it was one of the beneficiaries "keeping up" with her. She turned and recognised the wearer. "So you've got your new boots on, Mary?" she said. "Yes," said little Mary grandly. "Don't they squeak beautiful, mum." And though, as we grow older, we cease to glory in the squeakiness of squeaky boots, we find other material to keep the flame of vanity alive. "What for should I ride in a carriage if the guid folk of Dunfermline dinna see me?" said the Fifer, putting his head out of the window. He spoke for all of us. We are all a little like that. I confess that I cannot ride in a motor-car that whizzes past other motor-cars without an absurd and irrational vanity. I despise the emotion, but it is there in spite of me. And I remember that when I was young I could hardly free-wheel down a hill on a

bicycle without feeling superior to the man who was grinding his way up with heavings and perspiration. I have no shame in making these absurd confessions for I am satisfied that you, sir (or madam), will find in them, if you listen hard, some quite audible echo of yourself.

And when we have ceased to have anything else to be vain about we are vain of our years. We are as proud of having been born before our neighbours as we used to be of throwing the hammer farther than our neighbours. We are like the old maltster in “Far from the Madding Crowd,” when Henery Fray claimed to be “a strange old piece, goodmen.”

“A strange old piece, ye say!” interposed the maltster in a querulous voice. “Ye be no old man worth naming—no old man at all. Yer teeth bain't half gone yet; and what's a old man's standing if so be his teeth bain't gone? Weren't I stale in wedlock afore ye were out of arms? 'Tis a poor thing to be sixty when there's people far past fourscore—a boast weak as water.”

It was the unvarying custom in Weatherbury to sink all minor differences when the maltster had to be pacified.

“Weak as water, yes,” said Jan Coggan. “Malter, we feel ye to be a wonderful veteran man, and nobody can gainsay it.”

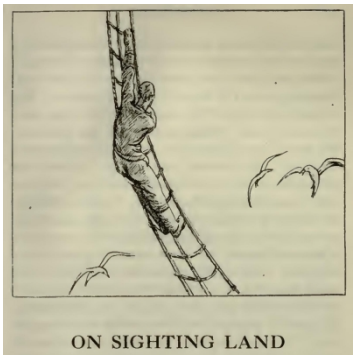
“Nobody,” said Joseph Poorgrass. “Ye be a very rare old spectacle, malter, and we all respect ye for that gift.”

That's it. When we haven't anything else to boast about we glory in being “a very rare old spectacle.” We count the reigns we've lived in and exalt the swingebucklers of long ago when we, too, heard the chimes at midnight. Sometimes the vanity of years

begins to develop quite early, as in the case of Henery Fray. There is the leading instance of Cicero who was only in his fifties when he began to idealise himself as an old man and wrote his “De Senectute,” exalting the pleasures of old age. In the eyes of the maltster he would never have been an old man worth naming, for he was only sixty-four when he was murdered. I have noticed in my own case of late a growing tendency to flourish my antiquity. I find the same naive pleasure in recalling the 'seventies to those who can remember, say, only the 'nineties, that my fine old friend in the lane had in talking to me about the 'thirties. I met two nice boys the other day at a country house, and they were full, as boys ought to be, of the subject of the cricket. And when they found I was worth talking to on that high theme, they submitted their ideal team to me for approval, and I launched out about the giants that lived in the days before Agamemnon Hobbs. I recalled the mighty deeds of “W. G.” and Spofforth, William Gunn and Ulyett, A. P. Lucas and A. G. Steel, and many another hero of my youth. And I can promise you that their stature did not lose in the telling. I found I was as vain of those memories as the maltster was of having lost all his teeth. I daresay I shall be proud when I have lost all my teeth, too. For Nature is a cunning nurse. She gives us lollipops all the way, and when the lollipop of hope and the lollipop of achievement are done, she gently inserts in our toothless gums the lollipop of remembrance. And with that pleasant vanity we are soothed to sleep.



Original



Original

ON SIGHTING LAND

I was in the midst of an absorbing game of chess when a cry brought me to my feet with a leap. My

opponent had sprung to his feet too. He was a doughty fellow, who wore a wisp of hair on his baldish forehead, and had trained it to stand up like a sardonic Mephistophelian note of interrogation. “I offer you a draw,” I said with a regal wave of the hand, as though I was offering him Czecho-Slovakia or Jugoslavia, or something substantial like that. “Accepted,” he cried with a gesture no less reckless and comprehensive. And then we bolted for the top deck. For the cry we had heard was “Land in sight!” And if there are three more comfortable words to hear when you have been tossing about on the ocean for a week or two, I do not know them.

For now that I am safely ashore I do not mind confessing that the Atlantic is a dull place. I used to think that Oscar Wilde was merely facetious when he said he was “disappointed with the Atlantic.” But now I am disposed to take the remark more seriously. In a general, vague way I knew it was a table-top. We do not have to see these things in order to know what they are like. Le Brun-Pindare did not see the ocean until he was a middle-aged man, but he said that the sight added little to his conception of the sea because “we have in us the glance of the universe.” But though the actual experience of the ocean adds little to the broad imaginative conception of it formed by the mind, we are not prepared for the effect of sameness, still less for the sense of smallness. It is as though we are sitting day after day in the geometrical centre of a very round table-top.

The feeling of motion is defeated by that unchanging horizon. You are told that the ship made 396 knots (Nautical Miles, DW) the day before yesterday and 402 yesterday, but there is nothing that gives credibility to the fact, for volition to be felt must have something to be measured by and here

there is nothing. You are static on the table-top. It is perfectly flat and perfectly round, with an edge as hard as a line drawn by compasses. You feel that if you got to the edge you would have “a drop into nothing beneath you, as straight as a beggar can spit.” You conceive yourself snatching as you fall at the folds of the table-cloth which hangs over the sides.

For there is a cloth to this table-top, a cloth that changes its appearance with ceaseless unrest. Sometimes it is a very dark blue cloth, with white spots that burst out here and there like an eruption of transient snow. Sometimes it is a green cloth; sometimes a grey cloth; sometimes a brownish cloth. Occasionally the cloth looks smooth and tranquil, but now and then a wind seems to get between it and the table, and then it becomes wrinkled and turbulent, like a table-cloth flinging itself about in a delirious sleep. In some moods it becomes an incomparable spectacle of terror and power, almost human in its passion and intensity. The ship reels and rolls, and pitches and slides under the impact and withdrawal of the waves that leave it at one moment suspended in air, at the next engulfed in blinding surges. It is like a wrestler fighting desperately to keep his feet, panting and groaning, every joint creaking and every muscle cracking with the frightful strain. A gleam of sunshine breaks through the grey sky, and catching the clouds of spray turns them to rainbow hues that envelop the reeling ship with the glamour of a magic world. Then the gleam passes, and there is nothing but the raging torment of the waters, the groaning wrestler in their midst, and far off a vagrant ray of sunlight touching the horizon, as if it were a pencil of white flame, to a spectral and unearthly beauty.

But whether tranquil or turbulent the effect is the

same. We are moveless in the centre of the flat, unchanging circle of things. Our magic carpet (or table-cloth) may be taking us on a trip to America or Europe, as the case may be, but so far as our senses are concerned we are standing still for ever and ever. There is nothing that registers progress to the mind. The circle we looked out on last night is indistinguishable from the circle we look out on this morning. Even the sky and cloud effects are lost on this flat contracted stage, with its hard horizon and its thwarted vision. There is a curious absence of the sense of distance, even of distance in cloudland, for the sky ends as abruptly as the sea at that severely drawn circumference and there is no vague merging of the seen into the unseen, which alone gives the imagination room for flight. To live in this world is to be imprisoned in a double sense—in the physical sense that Johnson had in mind in his famous retort, and in the emotional sense that I have attempted to describe. In my growing list of undesirable occupations—sewermen, lift-men, stokers, tram-conductors, and so on—I shall henceforth include ships' stewards on ocean routes. To spend one's life in being shot like a shuttle in a loom across the Atlantic from Plymouth to New York and back from New York to Plymouth, to be the sport of all the ill-humour of the ocean and to play the sick nurse to a never-ending mob of strangers, is as dreary a part as one could be cast for. I would rather navigate a barge on the Regent Canal or run a night coffee-stall in the Gray's Inn Road. And yet, on second thoughts, they have their joys. They hear, every fortnight or so, that thrilling cry, “Land in sight!”

It is a cry that can never fail to stir the pulse, whatever the land and however familiar it may be.

The vision is always fresh, and full of wonder.

Take a familiar example. Who, crossing the Channel after however short an absence, can catch the first glimpse of the white cliffs of Dover without the surge of some unsuspected emotion within him? He sees England anew, objectively, comprehensively, as something thrown on a screen, and in that moment seizes it, feels it, loves it with a sudden freshness and illumination. Or, take the unfamiliar. That wavy line that breaks at last the monotonous rim of the ocean, is that indeed America? You see it with the emotion of the first adventurers into this untamed wilderness of the sea. Such a cloud appeared one day on the horizon to Columbus. Three hundred years ago, on such a day as this, perhaps, the straining eyes of that immortal little company of the *Mayflower* caught sight of the land where, they were to plant the seed of so mighty a tree. And all down through the centuries that cry of "Land in sight!" has been sounded in the ears of generations of exiles chasing each other across the waste to the new land of hope and promise. It would be a dull soul who could see that land shaping itself on the horizon without a sense of the great drama of the ages.

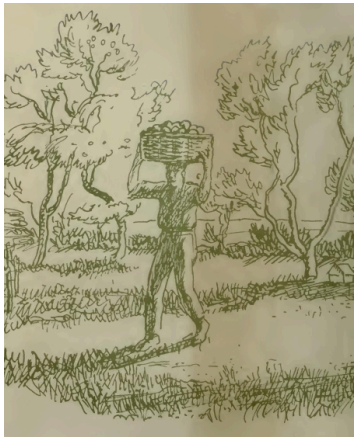
But of all first sights of land there is none so precious to English eyes as those little islands of the sea that lie there to port on this sunny morning. And of all times when that vision is grateful to the sight there is none to compare with this Christmas eve. I find myself heaving with a hitherto unsuspected affection for the Stilly Islanders. I have a fleeting vision of becoming a stilly Islander myself, settling down there amid a glory of golden daffodils, keeping a sharp look-out to sea, and standing on some dizzy headland to shout the good news of home to the Ark that is for ever coming up over the rim of the ocean.

I daresay the Scilly Islander does nothing so

foolish. I daresay he is a rather prosaic person, who has no thought of the dazzling vision his hills hold up to the voyager from afar. No matter where that voyager comes from, whether across the Atlantic from America or up the Atlantic from the Cape, or round the Cape from Australia, or through the Mediterranean from India, this is the first glimpse of the homeland that greets him, carrying his mind on over hill and dale, till it reaches the journey's end. And that vision links him up with the great pageant of history. Drake, sailing in from the Spanish main, saw these islands, and knew he was once more in his Devon seas. I fancy I see him on the deck beside me with a wisp of hair, curled and questioning, on his baldish forehead, and I mark the shine in his eyes....



Original



Original

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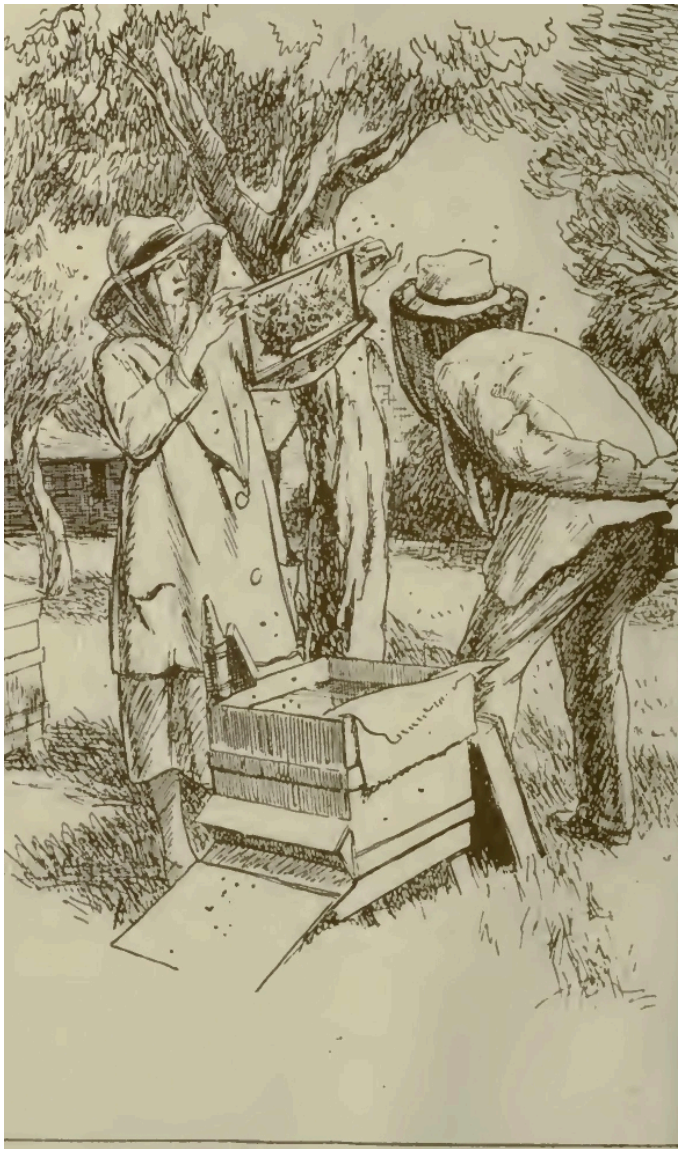
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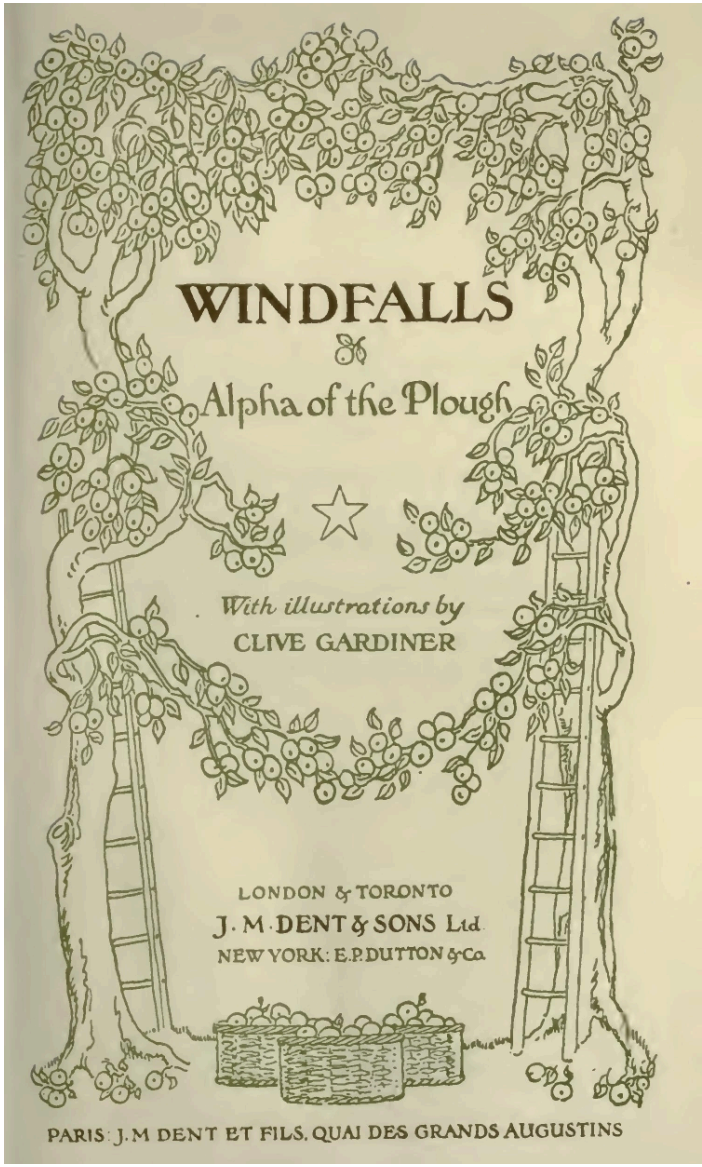


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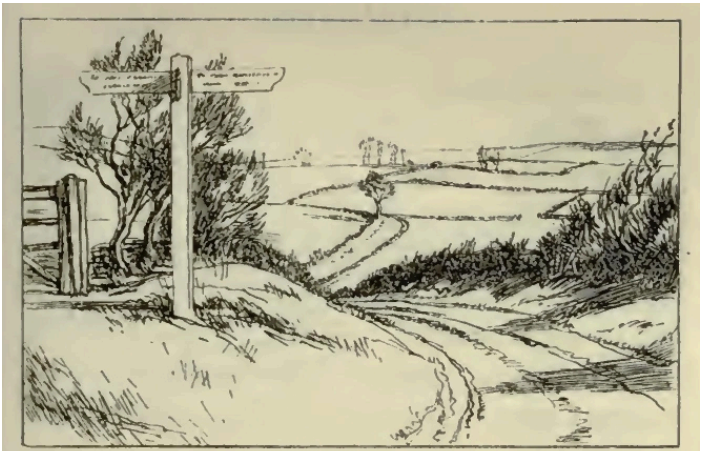


" He put on a veil and gloves and went and looked"

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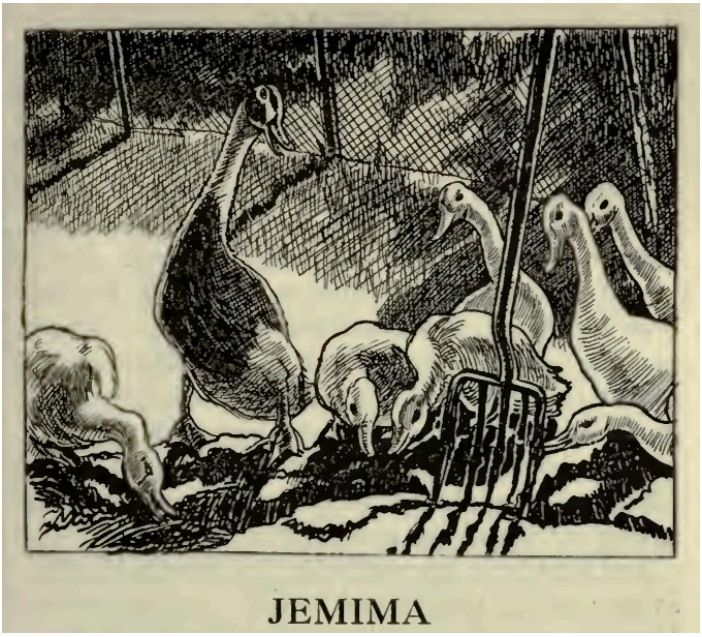
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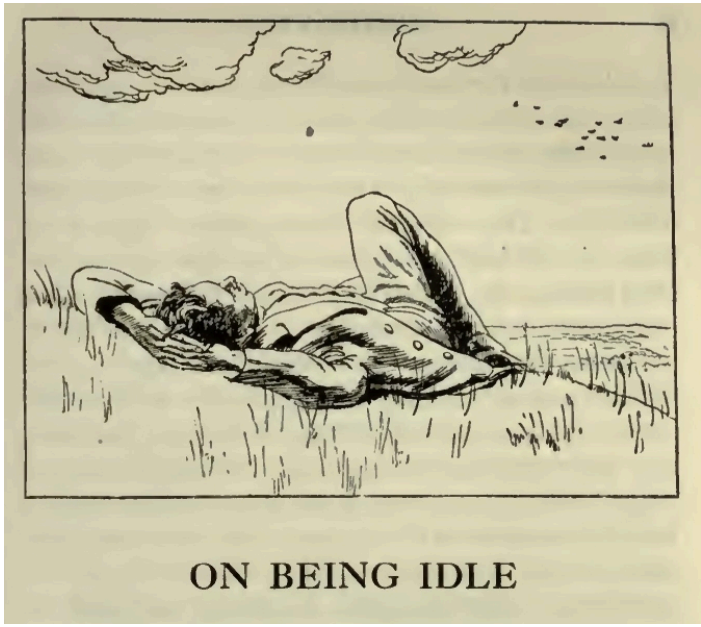


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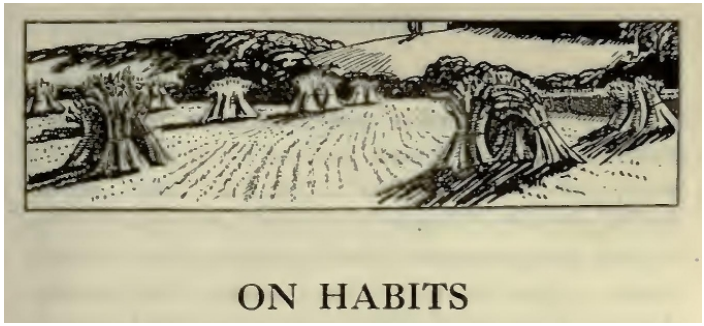


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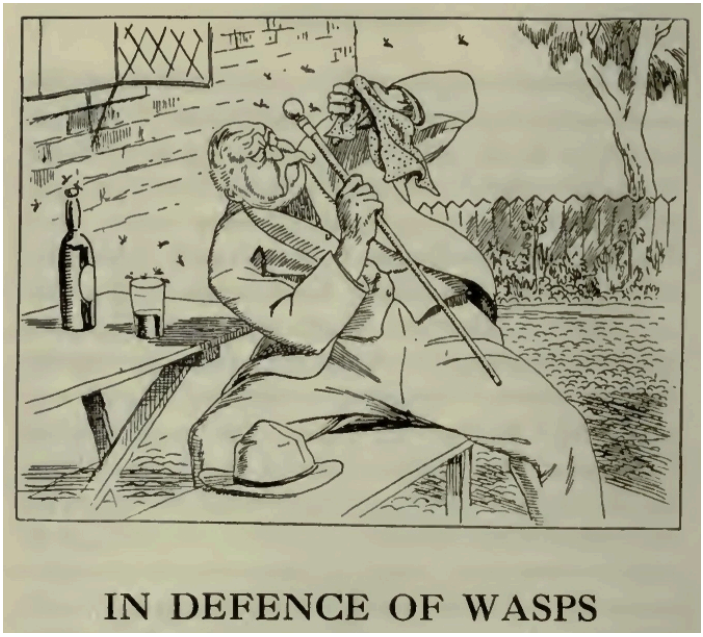


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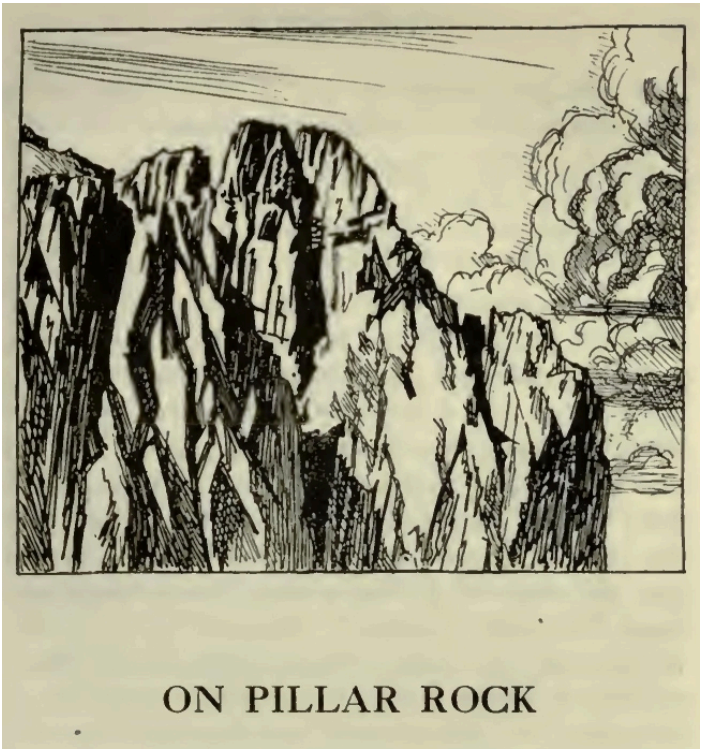


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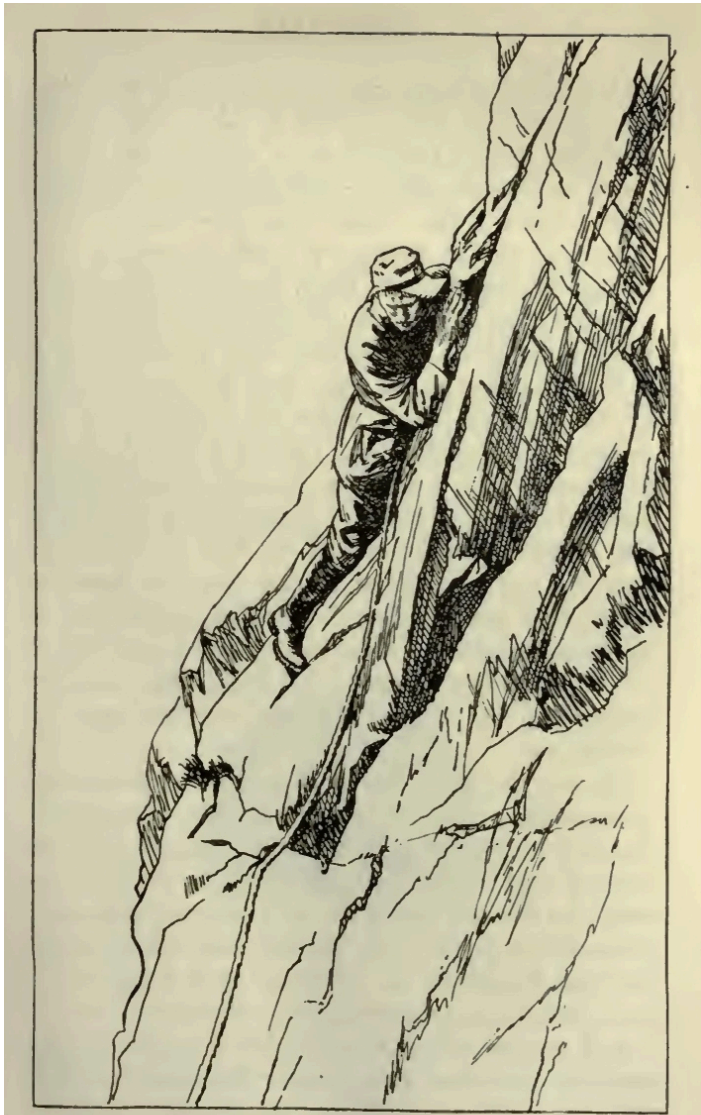


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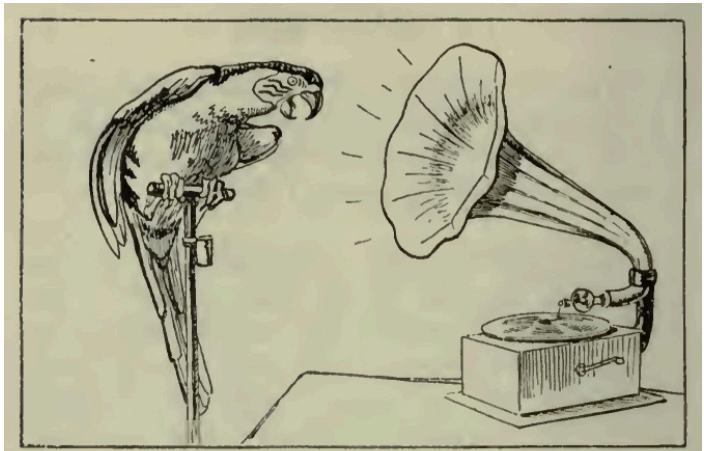


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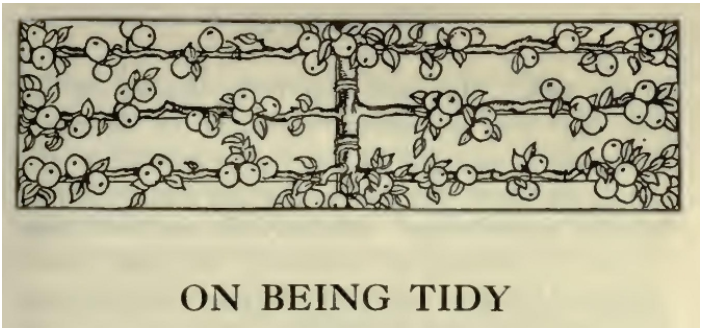


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TWO VOICES

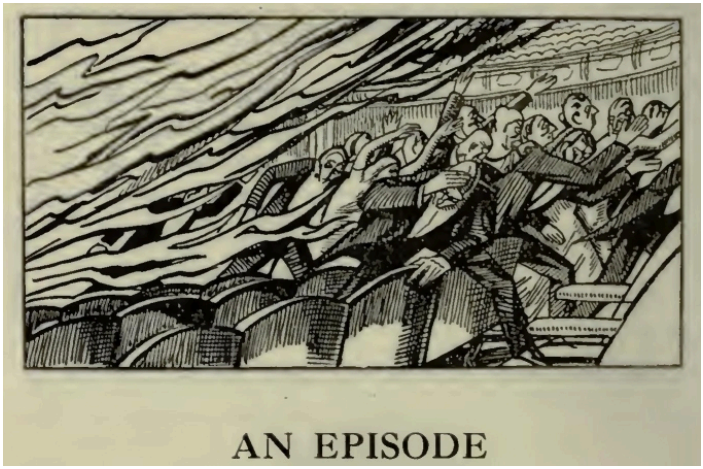
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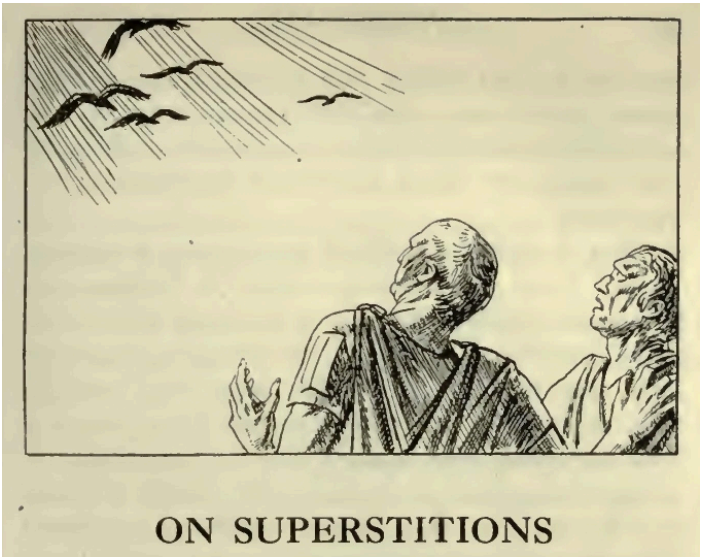


AN EPISODE

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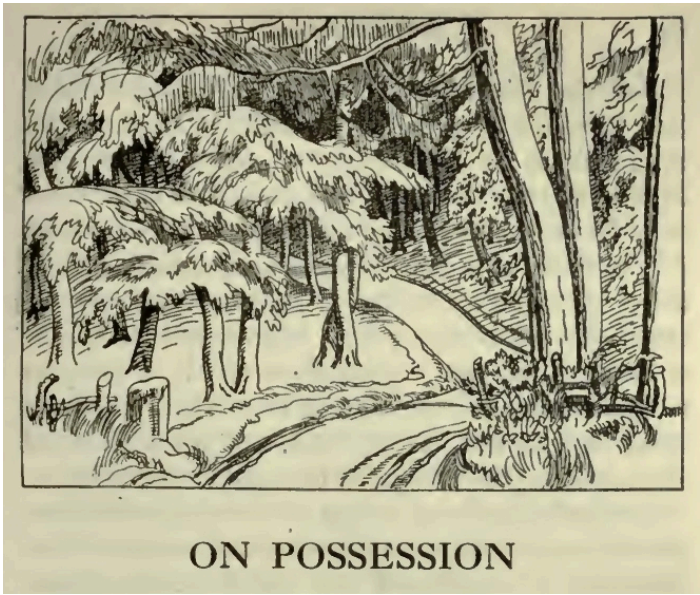
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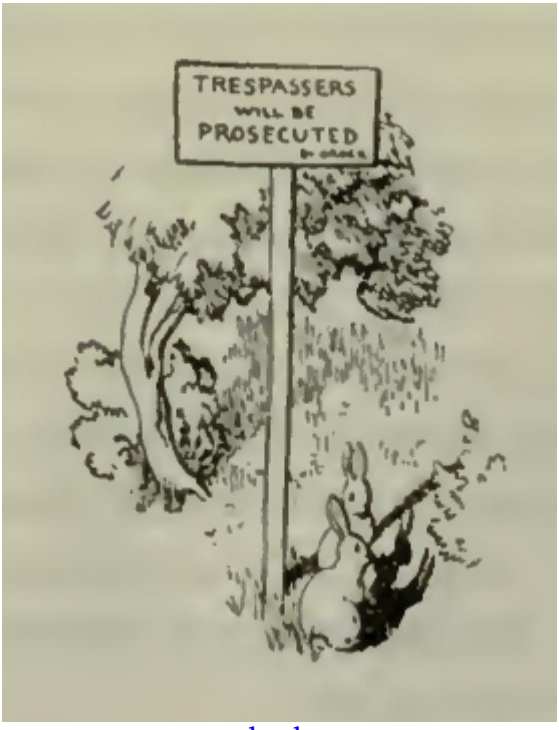


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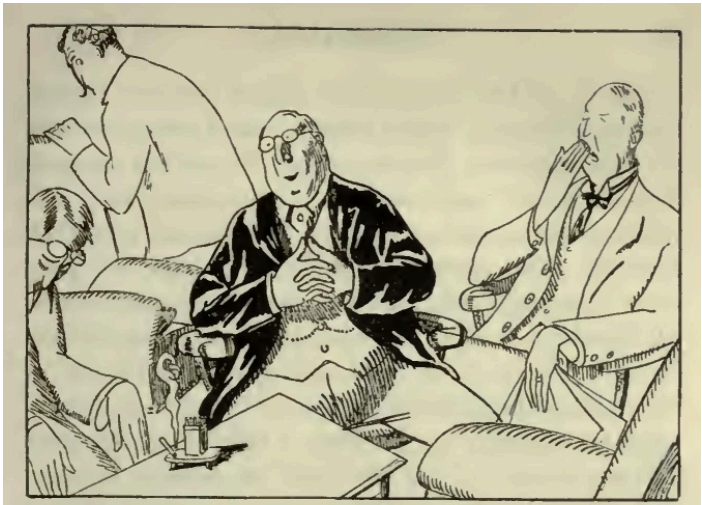


ON POSSESSION

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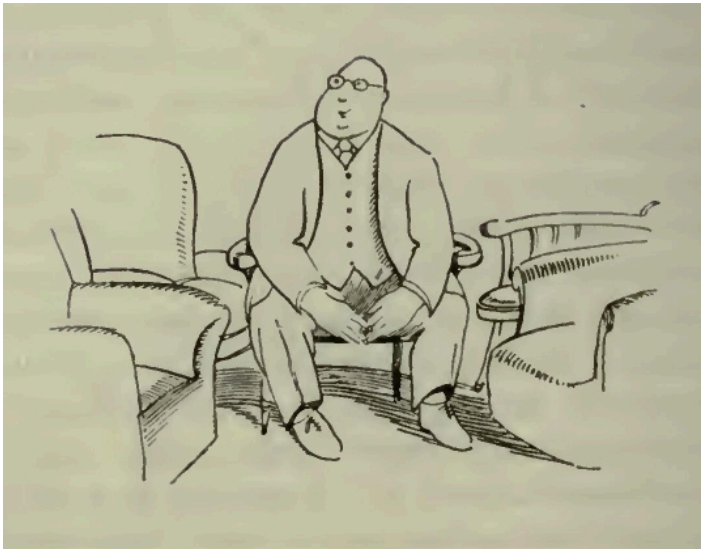


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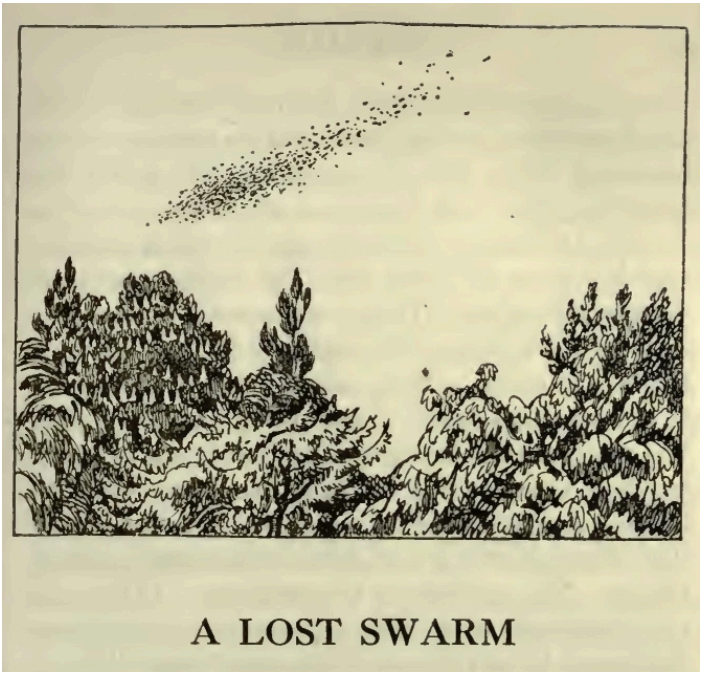


ON BORES

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A LOST SWARM

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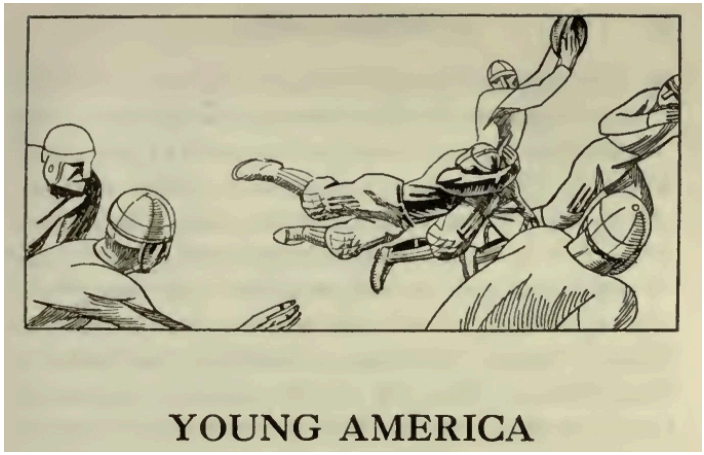


Settled in a great Blob.

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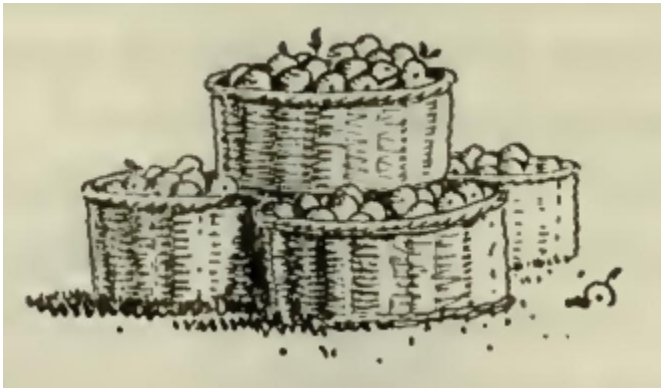


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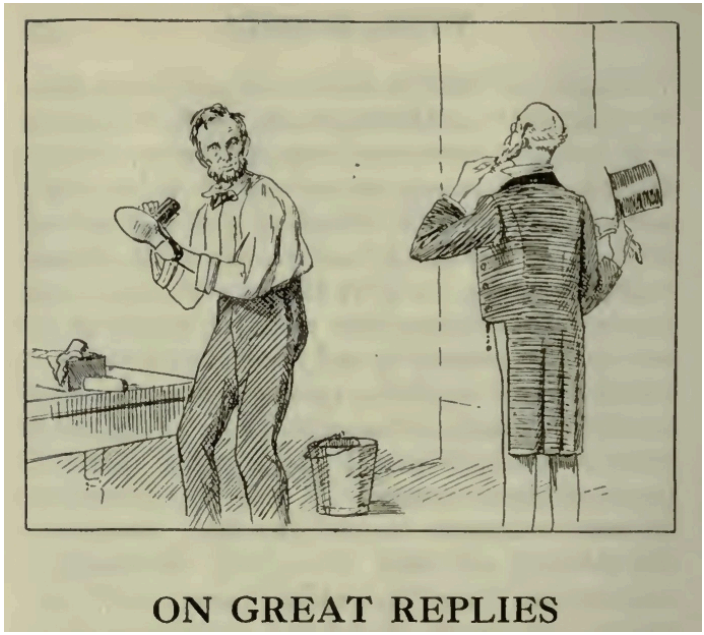


YOUNG AMERICA

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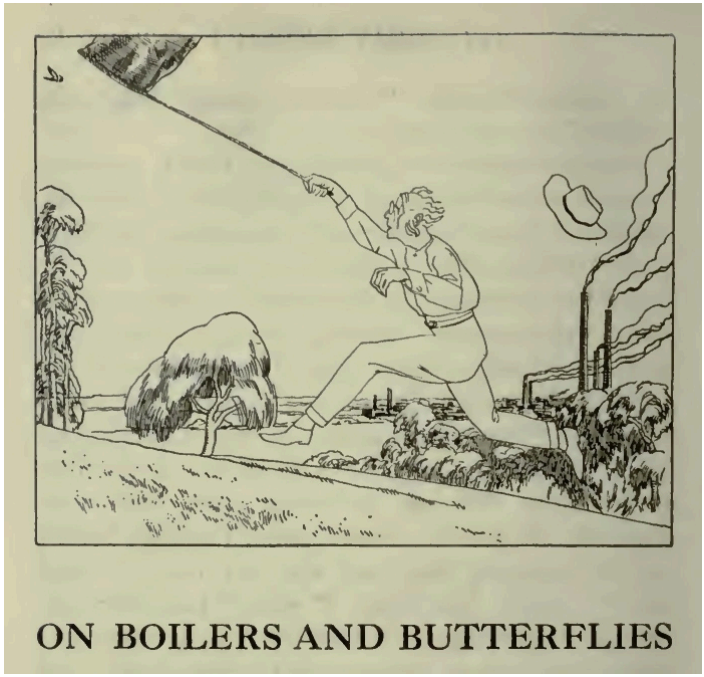


ON GREAT REPLIES

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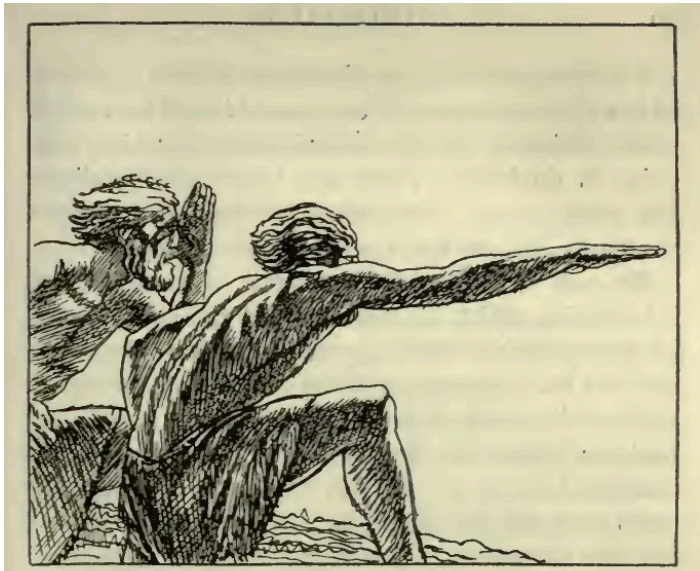


ON BOILERS AND BUTTERFLIES

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ON HEREFORD BEACON

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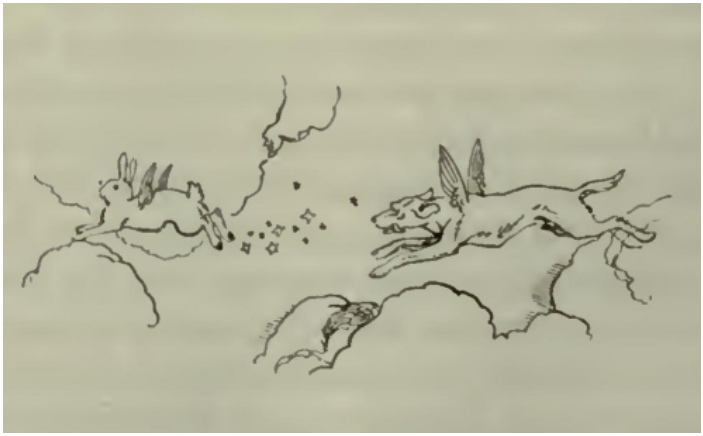


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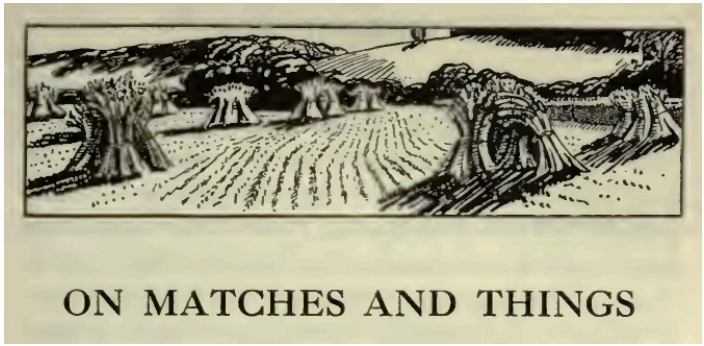


CHUM

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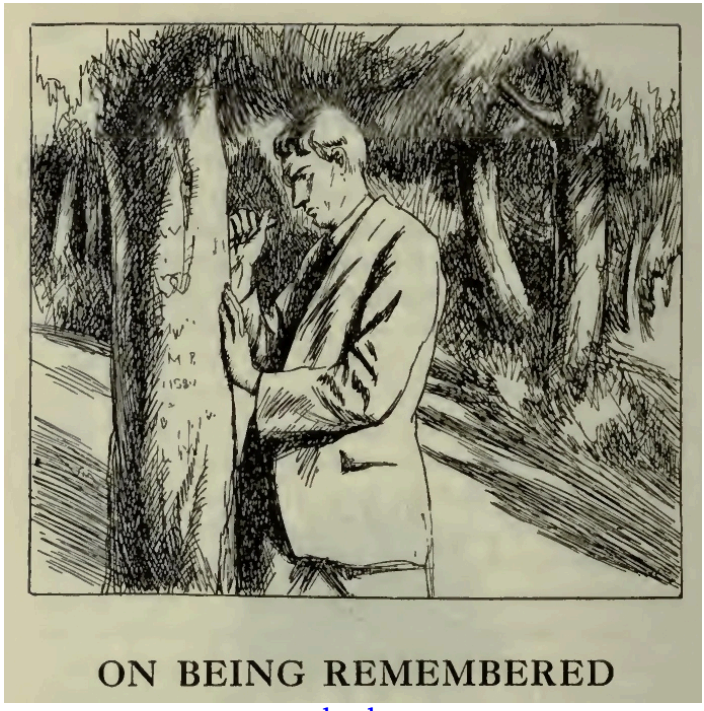


ON MATCHES AND THINGS

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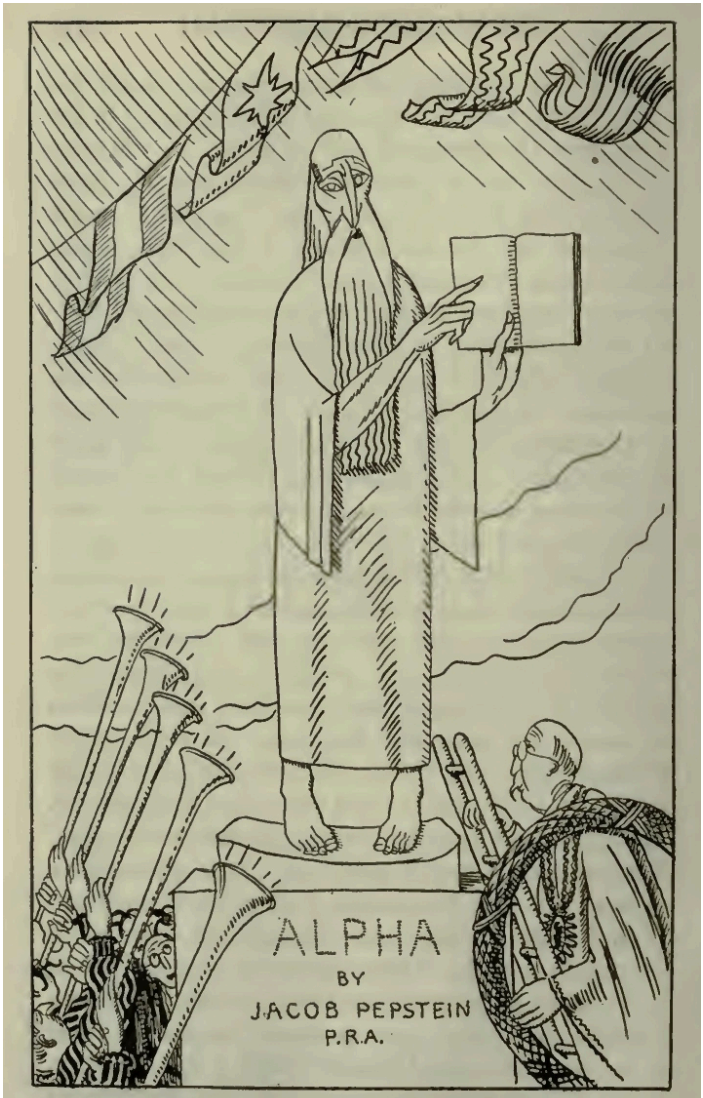


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ON BEING REMEMBERED

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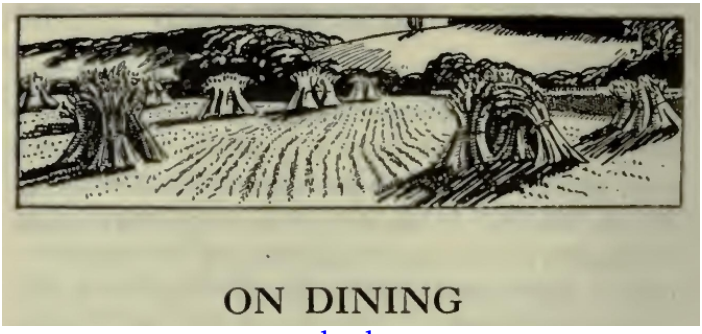


" Marches solemnly to the Statue of Alpha."

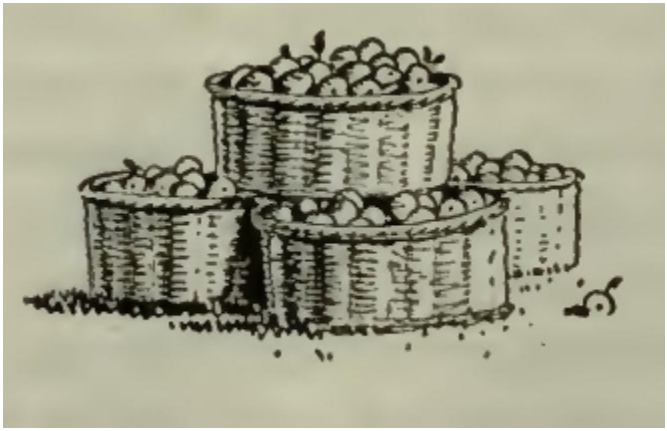
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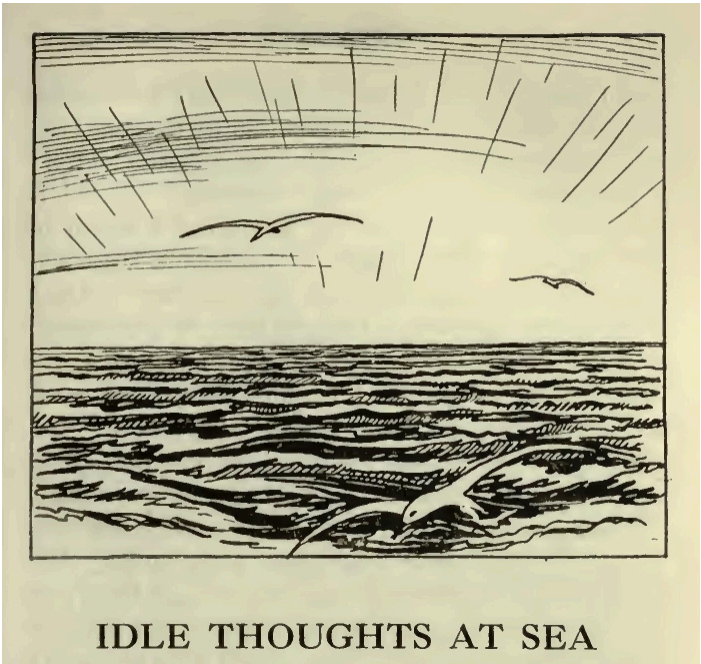
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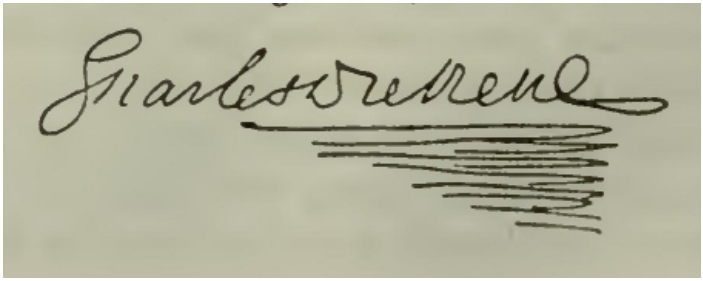


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IDLE THOUGHTS AT SEA

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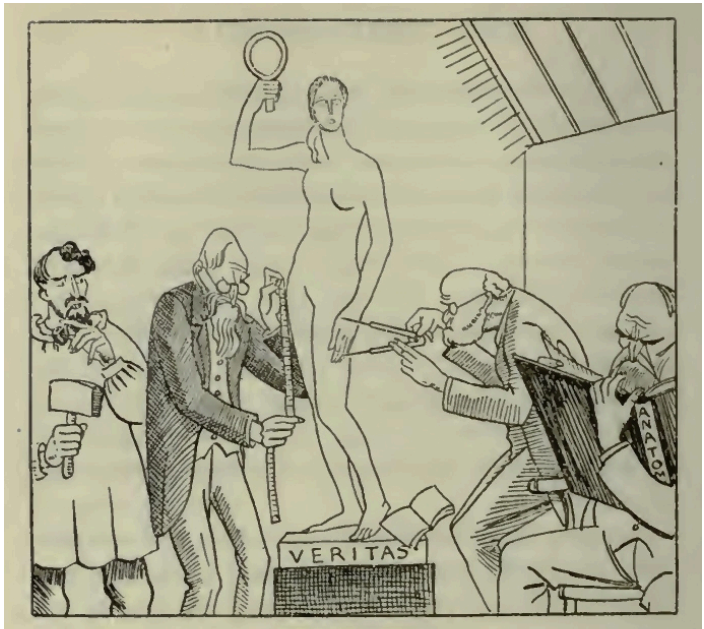


TWO DRINKS OF MILK

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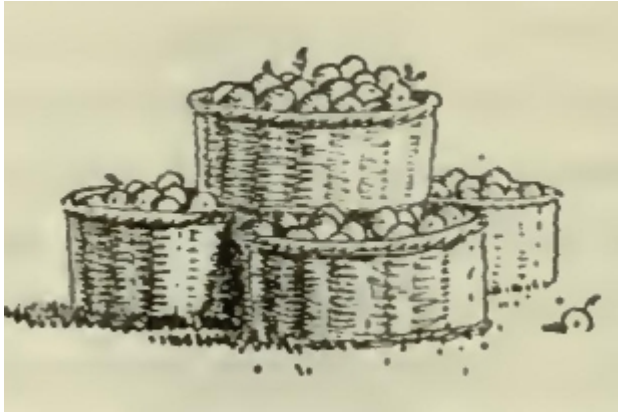


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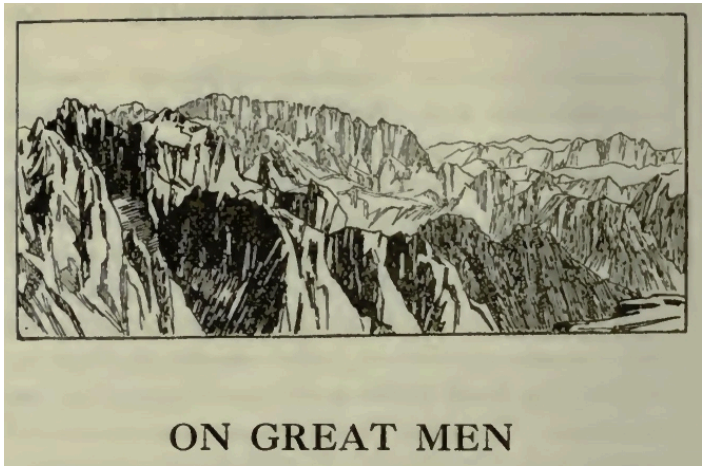


ON FACTS AND THE TRUTH

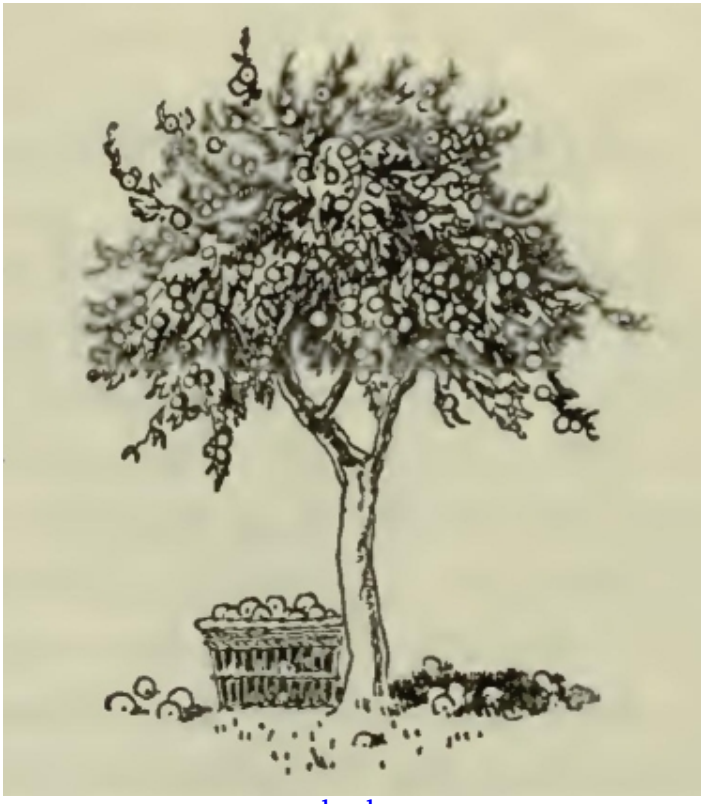
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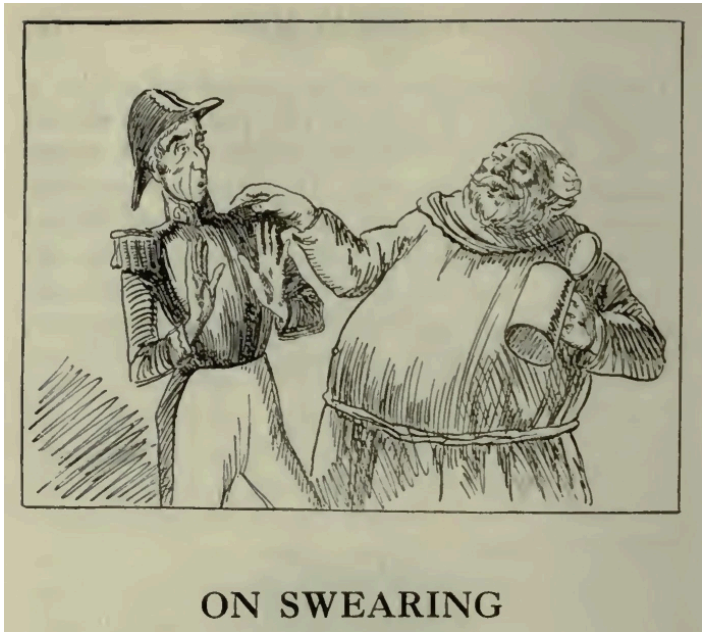
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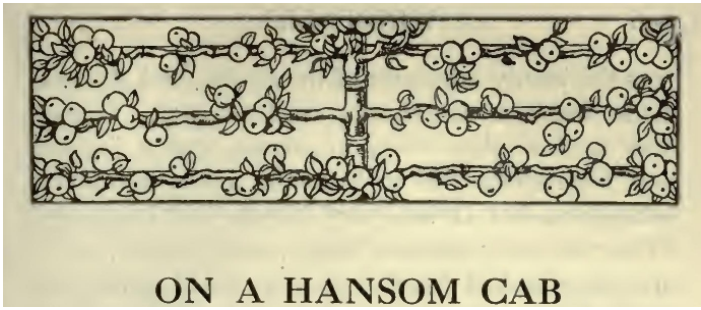
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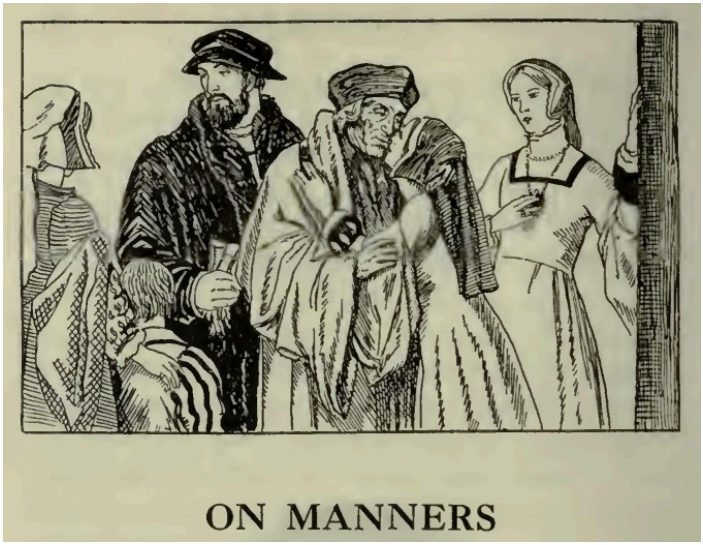
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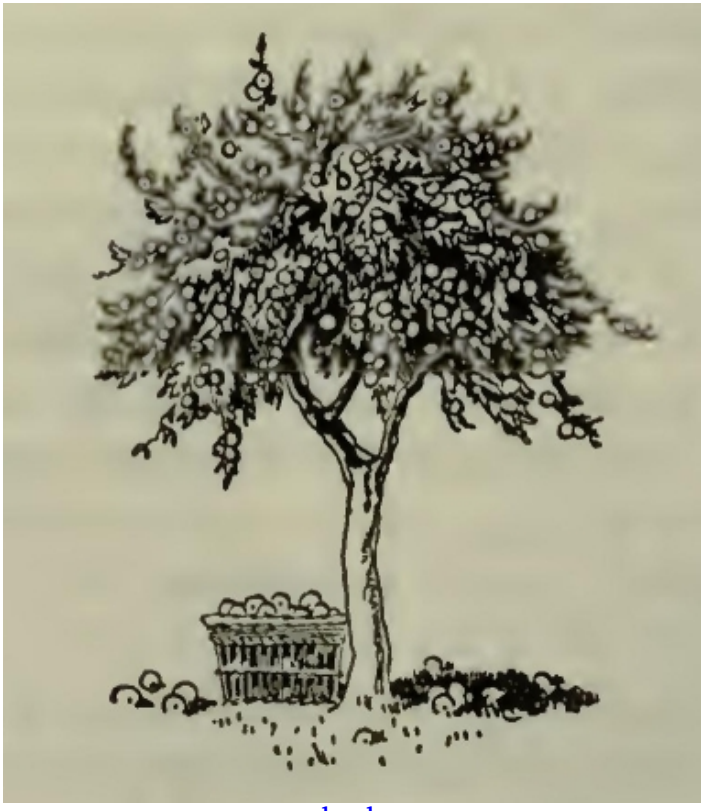
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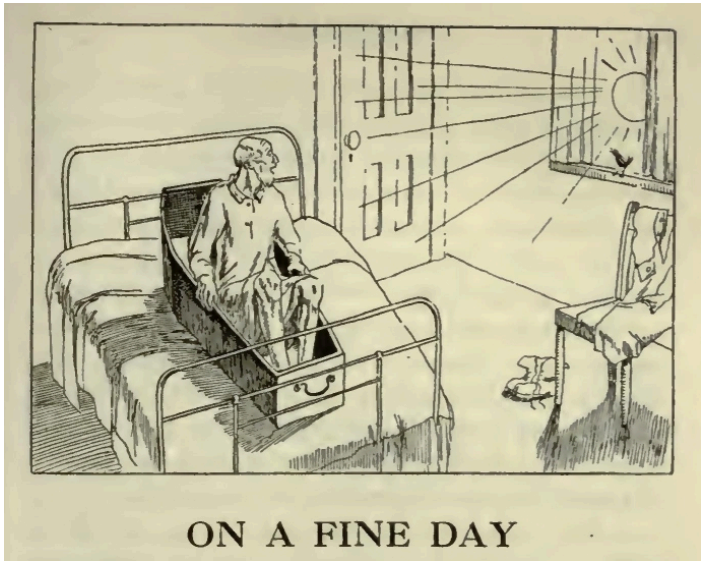
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ON A FINE DAY

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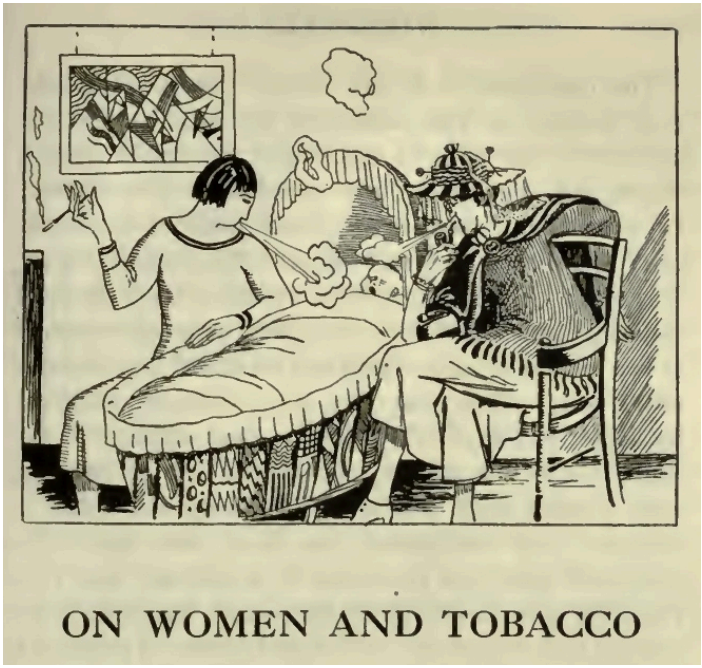


Poor Miss Tonks.

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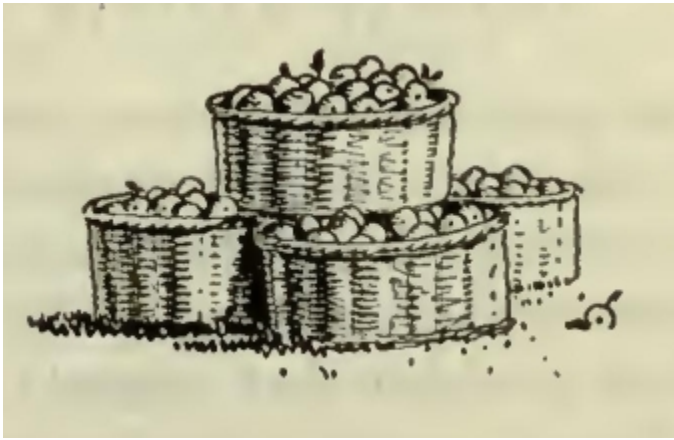


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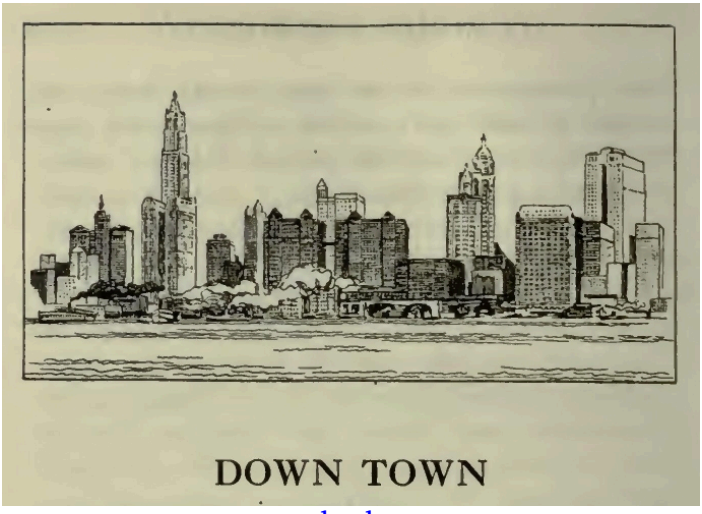


ON WOMEN AND TOBACCO

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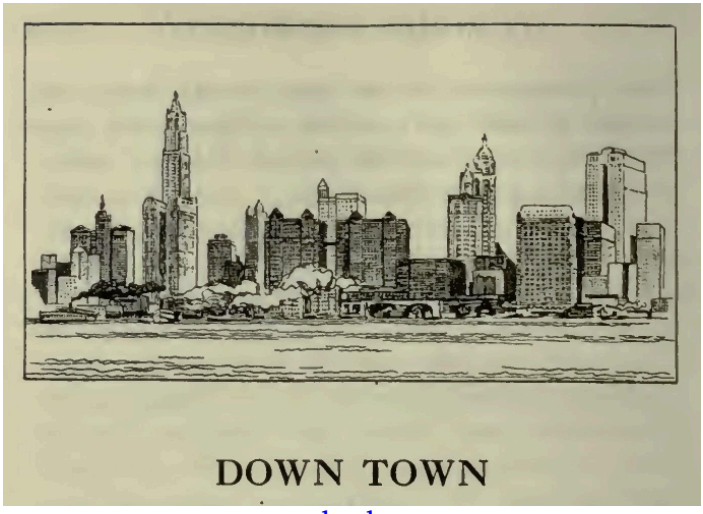


DOWN TOWN

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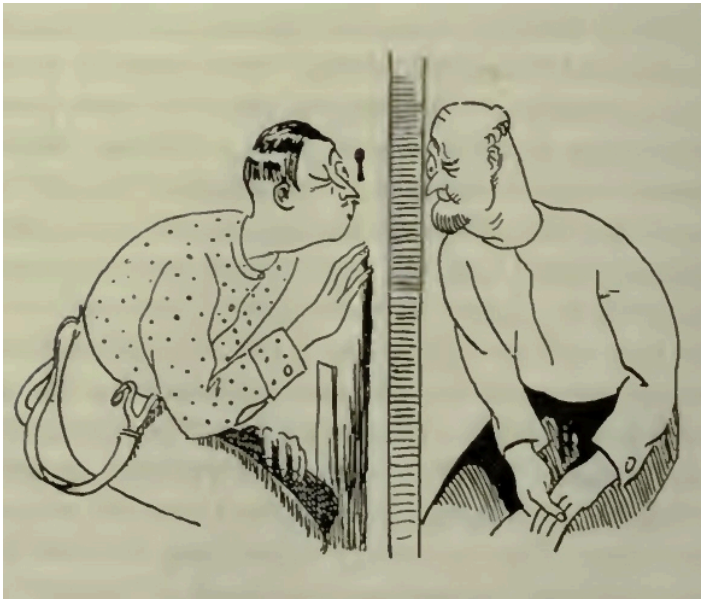


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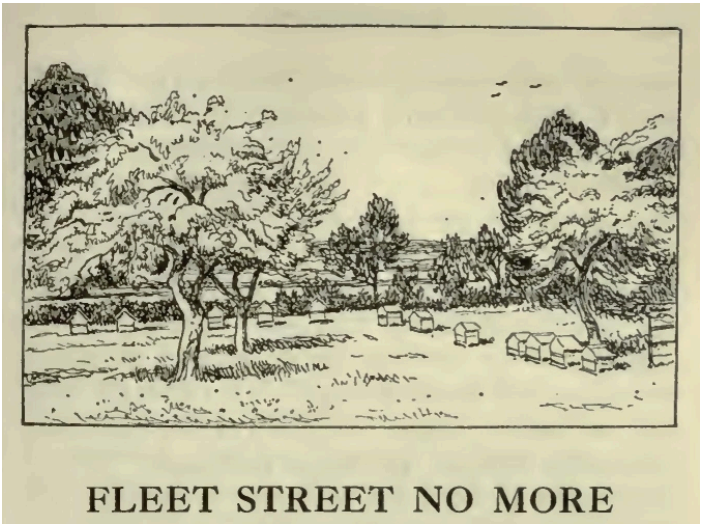


DOWN TOWN

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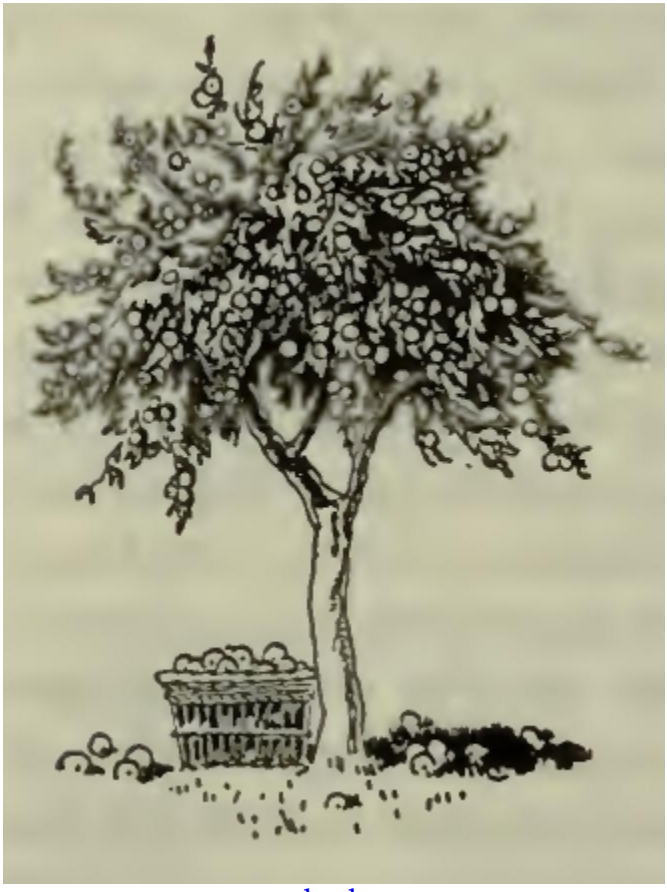


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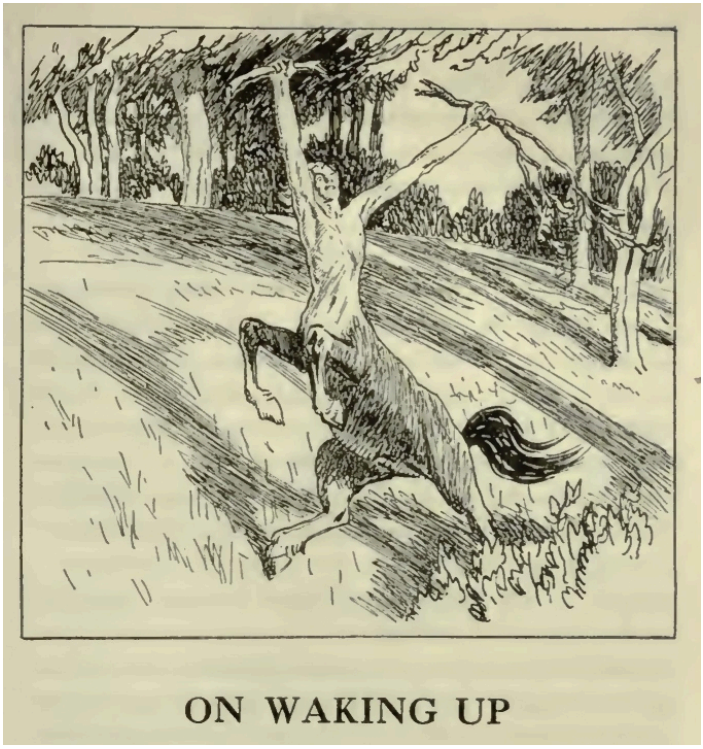


FLEET STREET NO MORE

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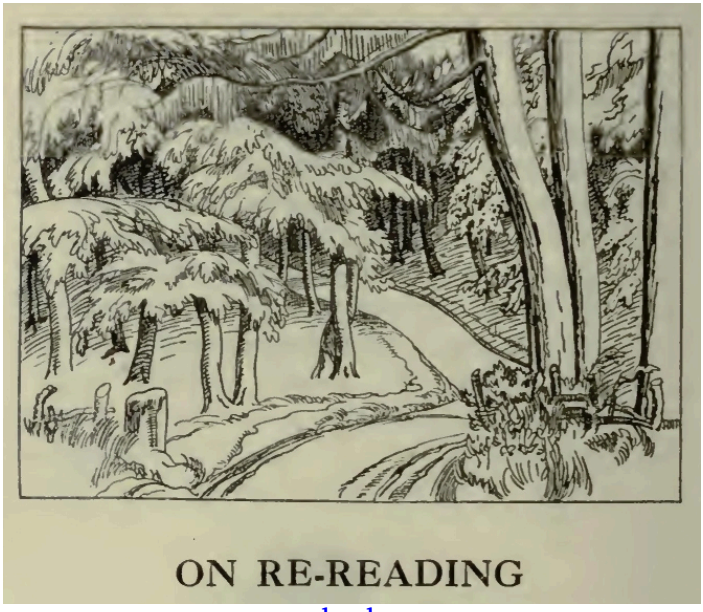


ON WAKING UP

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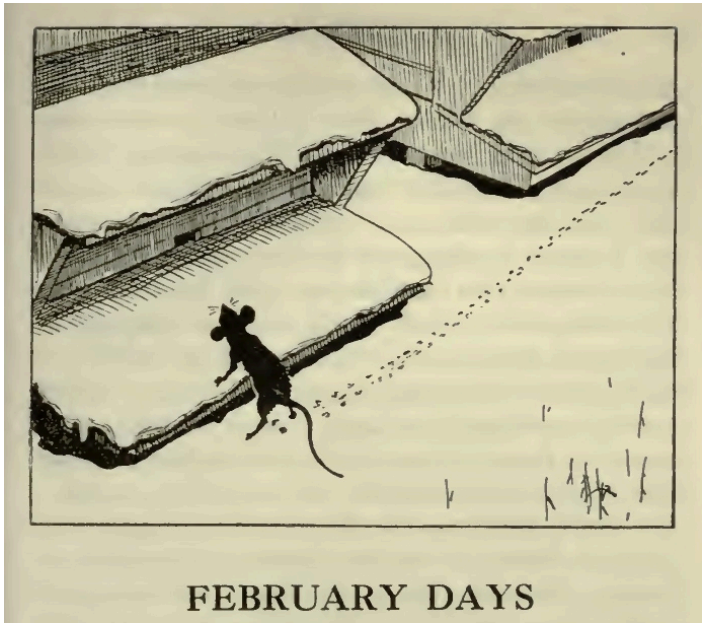


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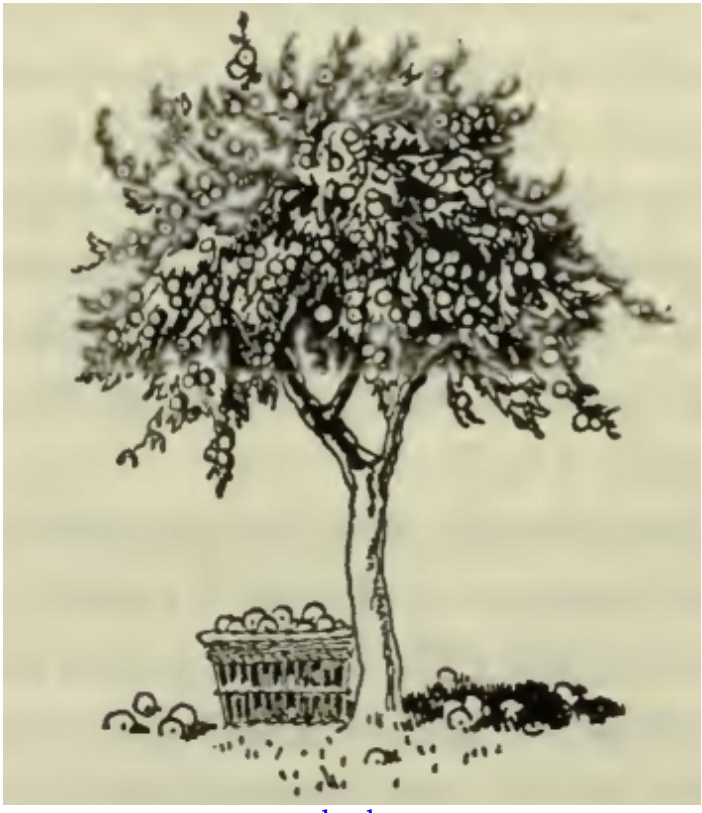
ON RE-READING

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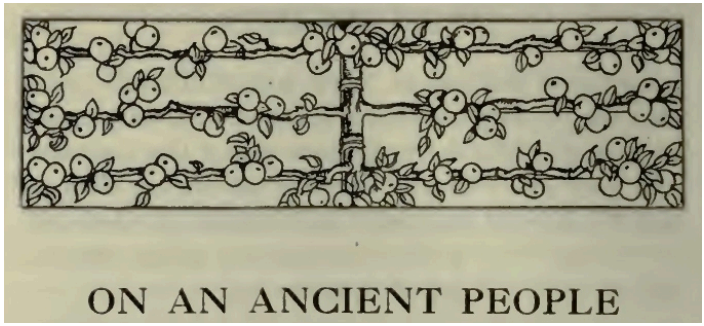


FEBRUARY DAYS

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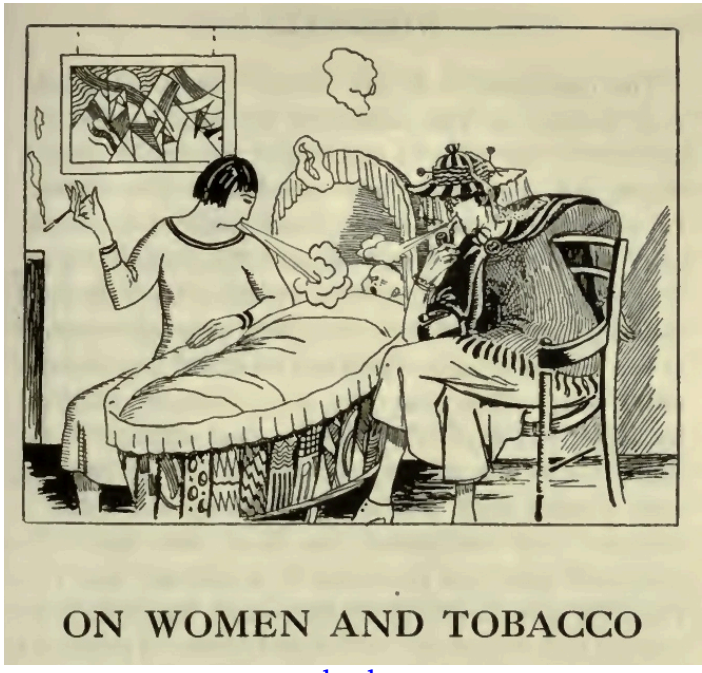
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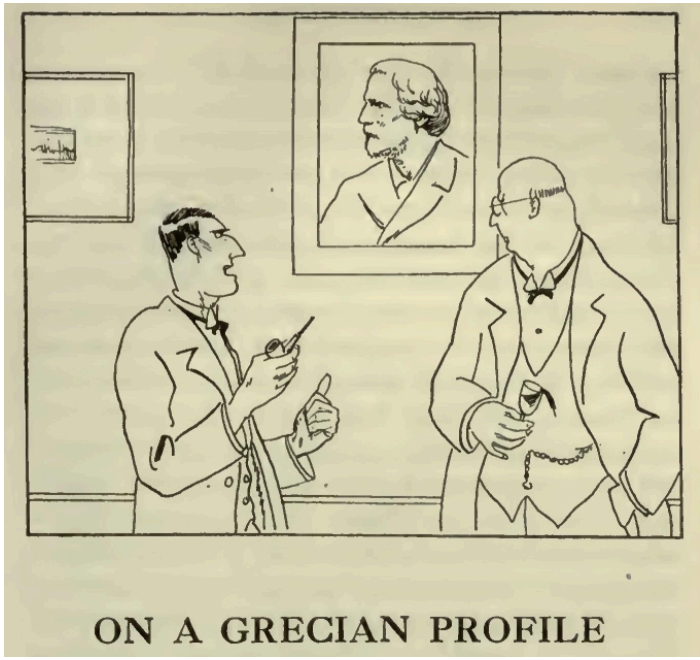
ON WOMEN AND TOBACCO

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" Danced a cake-walk with the chief scullery-maid."

back

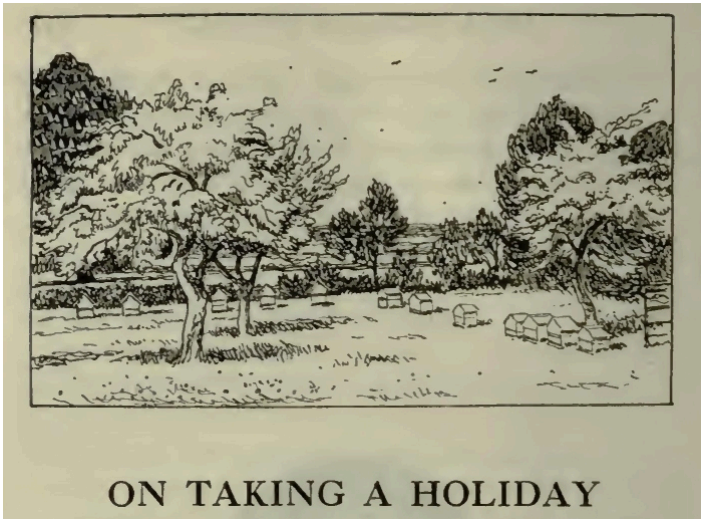


ON A GRECIAN PROFILE

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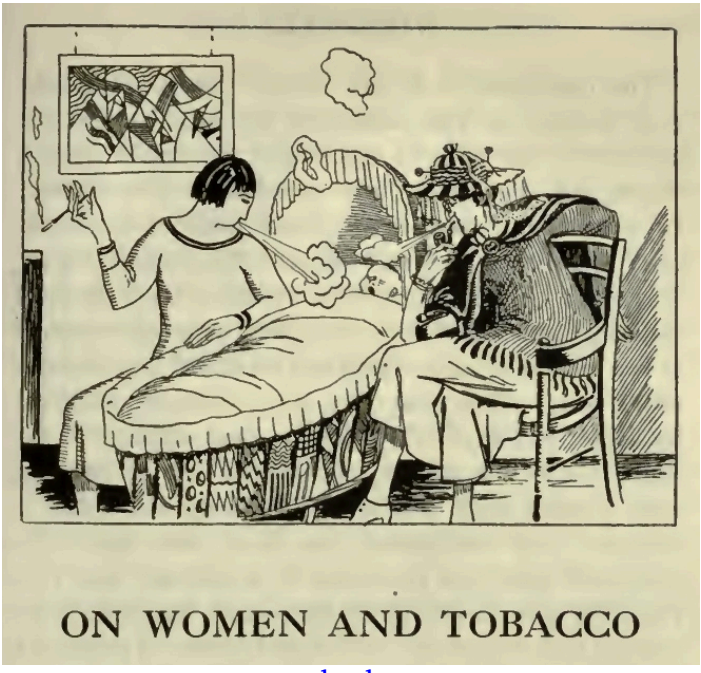


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ON TAKING A HOLIDAY

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ON WOMEN AND TOBACCO

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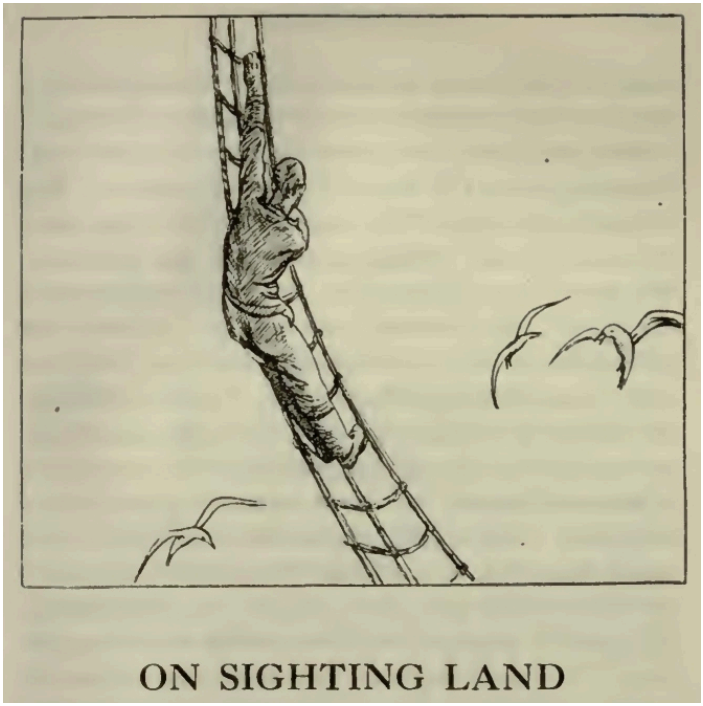
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ON SIGHTING LAND

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