

# First ONE and TWENTY



containing the first novel and  
twenty selected short stories  
by

JOHN GLOAG

# FIRST ONE AND TWENTY

An Omnibus containing  
*John Gloag's* first published novel,  
TOMORROW'S YESTERDAY—  
and the following short stories :

*Ten Tales*

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NOT FOR THE BEST PEOPLE

DOUBLE BROADCAST

THE GREAT GESTURE

BRETHREN

THE DEEPEST DYE

PETRIFIED

CONTINUITY

MELTING POINT

" THINGS'LL REACH OUT FOR YOU "

*A Selection of ten stories from—*

IT MAKES A NICE CHANGE

RIVETS

INNOCENT ABROAD

MAD MINUTE

WHOSE FUNERAL ?

PENDULUM

WAVE LENGTH

" THESE PARTS ARE ENTIRELY UNKNOWN "

RESTORATION

JUNGLE

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*Second Impression*

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## FIRST ONE AND TWENTY

An Omnibus volume  
of one long tale and twenty short tales  
by John Gloag.

This volume may well qualify for the description applied by Ralph Straus to Mr. Gloag's earlier book of stories : "The collection is a blessed addition to one's library of bedside books, to be dipped into at odd moments." Of Mr. Gloag's first novel, TOMORROW'S YESTERDAY, included in this volume, the same critic said : "A deliciously ironical book . . . piquantly out of the way . . ."

Several of the stories in this collection are well known to listeners, and some were written specially for the microphone.





FIRST ONE AND TWENTY

## BOOKS BY JOHN GLOAG

### *Novels*

TO-MORROW'S YESTERDAY  
THE NEW PLEASURE  
WINTER'S YOUTH  
SWEET RACKET  
RIPE FOR DEVELOPMENT  
SACRED EDIFICE  
DOCUMENTS MARKED "SECRET"  
MANNA  
UNWILLING ADVENTURER  
I WANT AN AUDIENCE  
MR. BUCKBY IS NOT AT HOME  
99%  
IN CAMERA  
KIND UNCLE BUCKBY

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IT MAKES A NICE CHANGE

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PROPAGANDA AND ENGLISH LIBERTY  
THE ENGLISHMAN'S CASTLE  
MEN AND BUILDINGS  
INDUSTRIAL ART EXPLAINED  
THE MISSING TECHNICIAN IN INDUSTRIAL  
PRODUCTION  
PLASTICS AND INDUSTRIAL DESIGN  
ENGLISH FURNITURE (The Library of English Art)  
ARTIFEX, OR THE FUTURE OF CRAFTSMANSHIP  
SELF TRAINING FOR INDUSTRIAL DESIGNERS



# FIRST ONE AND TWENTY

*by*  
JOHN GLOAG

An omnibus volume including  
TO-MORROW'S YESTERDAY  
and twenty short stories



*London*

GEORGE ALLEN & UNWIN LTD

ALL THE CHARACTERS AND EVENTS IN THIS BOOK (OTHER THAN  
HISTORICAL) ARE WHOLLY IMAGINARY AND FICTITIOUS

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## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

WHEN Mr. Philip Unwin asked me to write a preface to this omnibus, I was not quite sure whether it was to perform the same function as the man carrying a red flag who was once required, by the law of the land, to precede all self-propelled vehicles. I remembered that when I had ventured some years ago to write a preface to a book of my tales, that prince of story-tellers, Mr. Graham Greene, leapt upon me in the *Spectator* with an accusation of pomposity—maybe because I had discussed the technique of the broadcast story with too confident an air of authority, for at that time I was interested in telling stories on the radio. I mention this to warn the reader who tackles this preface. Here is another warning: those who like grim, depressing studies of squalor; chunks of super-fatted sentiment about the life and labour of bovine peasants; intricate political problems, or sermons on economic salvation dolled-up as stories, won't find them in these pages. During the interval between the world wars many earnest men and women, heavily freighted with scientific, economic and social uplift, wrote tracts which they insisted on calling short stories. Only a literary artist of the stature of H. G. Wells could get away with that sort of thing; and between the robust rationalism and Dickensian humour of Wells and the new Puritanism of the intellectual and semi-intellectual story-writers, lies a slough of despond where laughter is not allowed and the riches of human eccentricity and the lovable and unpredictable foibles of individual character are renounced. Such pallid substitutes for story telling, often written in honour of some "ideology," were pontifically approved by the highbrows of the nineteen 'twenties; indeed, few other forms of narrative could be safely praised by the modish unless they were popular "period pieces," like the Sherlock Holmes stories, or displayed the

haphazard mysticism and protracted analysis of unimportant motives that characterised so much of pre-Revolutionary Russian literature, or were discordant exhibitions of keening in the Celtic twilight.

Stories may thus be classified very broadly in two groups: those written from a political point of view, and those written primarily to entertain. Readers of the former go into the lecture room and are elevated, bored or infuriated; those who read the latter, sit in an arm-chair and the curtain rises for them — the play is on. That phrase, “once upon a time,” again exercises its potent magic; for a story is being told, taking the reader “over the hills and far away.” The fashion of labelling as “escapism” the adventure and excitement conveyed by those six words is some indication of the extent to which our minds have been fuddled with so-called psychological science. Even hope, that noble and sustaining property of man’s spirit, is now called “wishful thinking.” But the well-told story invariably leads us “over the hills and far away”; whether we travel with Somerset Maugham, and discover that the respectable planter and his wife with whom we have played bridge and had a couple of drinks are really capable murderers of twenty years’ standing; or visit a well-run country house with “Saki” and find that one of the guests is a practising were-wolf; or whether the room chills as some impalpable but intensely horrible presence is introduced to us by Dr. M. R. James. Often we pass into other dimensions, for when H. G. Wells started off his *Time Traveller* fifty years ago he started off a new kind of fantasy which is becoming a form of folk-lore, comparable to the national folk-lore that has grown up around the characters in the *Sexton Blake* detective romances and identified as such by Dorothy Sayers in her introduction to the first volume of the collections of *Detection, Mystery and Horror* stories, which she has edited for Victor Gollancz. A considerable literature concerned with the future, published in paper-backed magazines in Britain and America, attracts many eager readers, who organise discussion clubs and issue at irregular intervals their own



amateur magazine which comments upon new additions to this library of scientific romance. Olaf Stapledon, in a letter to me about the stories in this omnibus, has said: "All this modish playing about with time and space, which you and I have so often indulged in, is of course symptomatic of our period. It opens up new worlds for the writer of fantastic fiction, or at any rate it gives him a new and exciting game to play. The rules of the game are imposed on him by the new attitude to time and space, but he can go beyond the accepted conditions as much as he likes so long as he does not actually or flagrantly violate them, and so become implausible or even positively incredible."

The writers of the popular scientific fantasy fiction have created a golden age of their own, projected into the not too distant future, where everything is streamlined, mechanised and appallingly tidy; where atomic energy has been safely harnessed, and life is organised by an aristocracy of technicians. This literature, with its own conventions and jargon, is a manifestation of the scientific romantic movement of which Jules Verne and H. G. Wells are the great progenitors. It responds to contemporary influences, and since the beginning of the second world war has seldom featured the catastrophic theme. This theme may not be so popular in the future when so many of us have had first hand experience of large scale catastrophe. In the past it has given opportunities to writers of scientific romances: Wells used it in *The War of the Worlds*, *The War in the Air* and *The Shape of Things to Come*. Olaf Stapledon has used it in *Last and First Men*, his vast, Gibbonesque fantasy on the decline and fall of Mankind during the next few million years, which has such a disturbing air of probability. It is the theme of the story that is the core of *To-Morrow's Yesterday* in this omnibus.

That first published novel of mine, written fourteen years ago, is hardly more than a story that just fails to qualify for the description of short. Although it dates — for the sort of war I was then anticipating wasn't at all the sort of war that ultimately came — I have resisted the temptation to alter

it, apart from smoothing over a few awkward sentences here and there. (Incidentally that tale reveals how little I, in common with most people, at the beginning of the nineteen 'thirties, suspected a possible resurgence of German aggression.) Of the twenty short stories that follow it, five are fantasies that depend upon some manipulation of the time dimension. The experience upon which the story *Restoration* is based was related to me a good many years ago by Sir Edwin Lutyens. The account of that great architect as a young man, drawing a church to the dictation of a sapper who had been blinded on active service and had spent his years of blindness in the mental creation of this architectural work, is given by Robert Lutyens in that little masterpiece of biography, *Sir Edwin Lutyens: An Appreciation in Perspective*. (Country Life Limited, 1942).

Meanwhile new techniques of short story writing are arising, and old forms have gained new inspiration. "Once upon a time" has become very urgently *now*. Gerald Kersh tells stories about men, women and events with such implacable conviction that he compels us to take part in them. Peter Fleming exercises similar powers of compulsion on the all too rare occasions when he writes a short story. Another very different writer, Gerald Butler, uses for his short stories a technique that allows thoughts and dialogue to flow together in effortless revelation of the courage, excitement and delight of young people facing the hard problems of contemporary life.

The second world war has produced some fine tales, though few have attained the standard reached by Graham Greene in *The News in English*. War as a theme was exciting and romantic in the old, lost pre-1914 civilisation, as the vivid tales of Major-General Sir Ernest Swinton, written under the pen name of Ole-Luk-Oie and published in *The Green Curve*, proved by their popularity. Between the wars political, economic and sociological themes were tried and found wanting in entertainment value. Still, there may well be a healthy, creative reaction against the violence and solemnity



of the last thirty years. We shall be fortunate if it brings us writers whose gifts approach those of "Saki," H. G. Wells, W. W. Jacobs, Conan Doyle, Arthur Morrison, P. G. Wodehouse in his pre-Jeeves period, and Perceval Gibbon, who wrote what is to my mind a perfect short story, which was published in *The Strand Magazine* for May 1912 and entitled *The Poor in Heart*. Is it perhaps too much to hope for a Rudyard Kipling or an O. Henry to enchant the leisure hours of the English-speaking peoples in the second half of this turbulent and stimulating century?

July, 1945

JOHN GLOAG



TO-MORROW'S YESTERDAY

WAS FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1932

AND WAS DEDICATED TO JOSEPH THORP

IT MAKES A NICE CHANGE,

FROM WHICH TEN OF THE SHORT STORIES IN THIS  
OMNIBUS ARE SELECTED, WAS FIRST PUBLISHED IN

1938

AND WAS DEDICATED TO ERNEST S. DOWDALL

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# TO-MORROW'S YESTERDAY\*

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## I

### TRUMPETS

**R**OTARY presses roaring like a high wind; miles of paper streaming through their cylinders; and a white spot, the width of three newspaper columns and eleven inches deep, causing a recurrent flicker in the misty grey band of damp print that is sliced into page spreads at the end of its race through the cylinders, folded, and delivered in compact bundles at the mouth of a shute. A man in dungarees dismembers one of these bundles occasionally, and glances through a few copies of the newspaper that is being run off, hundreds a minute, and the white spot, eleven inches deep and three columns wide, stops his eye every time he opens the theatre page spread. It had stopped other people in the newspaper building before it was made up and cast and became part of the curved cylinder face of the theatre page.

"What about this eleven-inch triple, sir? Solus on the theatre page?" the publisher had been asked.

"Where's it from?" asked the publisher after a glance at the pull of the advertisement.

"Hamilton Trott's. It's for the New Century Theatre opening."

"I can see that."

"Yes, sir. Is it to go in, sir?"

"Have a word with them."

"We've been on the 'phone already. It came down at the last minute. These agencies are always late."

*\*First published in 1932*

"I know that. What did they say?"

"Said it didn't break any rule we'd laid down."

"It isn't fair to the other advertisers—but then it's a solus position so that won't do. Oh, let it go."

So an "O.K." was pencilled on the pull, and the advertisement became part of the newspaper, shouldering its unusual whiteness into the hotch-potch of editorial pars by the theatrical gossip writer, and photographs of newly divorced stars.

It had raised a gale of discussion in the Hamilton Trott Advertising Agency, which was handling the account of the New Century Theatre, the new "mystery" theatre of London. It was unusual enough for any theatrical concern to entrust its advertising to a big service agency, and the conditions made by the controllers of the New Century Theatre were also unusual.

Bryce had brought the account with him when he rejoined the Agency after a year's wandering about Europe. The New Century Theatre was owned by a group of Continental film companies (*Gesellschaft für Tonfilme des neuen Jahrhunderts m.b.h.*) and there were rumours that an entirely new development of the cinema was to have its permanent home there. Mysterious semi-technical remarks about three-dimensional projection were bandied about; but no facts were released for publication, and the new theatre grew rapidly in a quiet square behind Piccadilly Circus, and was presently revealed as a tower of glass and stainless steel, a simple, untroubled expanse of polished surface that was sublimely unregardful of its sedate red-brick Georgian neighbours. Somehow or other, Julian Bryce got in on the ground floor with the interests financing it; because he was able to give Sir Hamilton Trott a definite undertaking that he was introducing a respectable advertising campaign his old chief reinstated him. He had left a year before for reasons that Sir Hamilton Trott was incapable of understanding. So the advertising campaign for the New Century Theatre was placed, and Herr Gustav Glerk, who was the



resident controller of the enterprise in London, informed Sir Hamilton that the spending of seven thousand pounds in three months to put the new theatre on the amusement map would be done through Hamilton Trott's if it was understood that:

1. Mr. Julian Bryce wrote all the advertisements.
2. The policy of the advertising would be dictated, without consultation, by Herr Gustav Glerk.
3. Unquestioning obedience to these simple rules would make their business association pleasant, and they needn't trouble to send anybody but Mr. Bryce to see him.

"I thought you prided yourself on being a copy specialist, Bryce," said Sir Hamilton after his interview with Glerk: "it seems you've sold these New Century people on your gifts as a contact man. Well, carry on. I'll get Rennie to give you a hand, so the executive end will be smooth. Don't let it take up too much time; we want you for a lot of other accounts."

Then the conditions began to be applied.

"You can't get the public to a cinema that way!" said Rennie, the account executive, when the first advertisements were written, laid out, and ready to be submitted to Herr Glerk.

"I think our view ought to be put, tactfully, to the client," Sir Hamilton observed.

"It may do us a lot of harm as an agency," said the art director.

"It's a new idea and it doesn't make me scream with fear," said Naphtholt, the copy chief; "go to it, Bryce, old boy; I'm only sorry I didn't think of it myself, and I might have if I wasn't so browbeaten by clients asking me to make advertisements 'stand out' in a newspaper, as if my chief ambition in life was to make 'em sink in and disappear. The Hell of it is, that if I'd a notion like this I'd have kept dark about it, because I'd never have dreamed that any client would stand for such a thing, let alone suggest it."

"As a fact, Naphtholt, only don't let this out, I suggested it," said Bryce; "it's my scheme, and they believe in it."



"Fine," said Naptholt.

Bryce was a young man of thirty with a capacity for quiet indignation that light-hearted or unimaginative people found disturbing. He wrote copy for advertisements with a force and distinction that was seldom allowed to appear in the Press, for every word he wrote was criticized and vetoed by people who were unfitted to criticize or amend anything, but being in an advertising agency he knew that the client who pays the piper is entitled to spoil the tune, and Sir Hamilton Trott insisted that the client was always right. As some of his clients regarded the profession of advertising as Christian Scientists regard the profession of medicine, many advertising campaigns naturally became mere exercises in compromise. He employed highly skilled designers and copywriters, and allowed the results of their collaboration to be mutilated and often nullified by nervous nonentities with an itch for interference.

The business prospered while the men who created ideas, handled words, devised illustrations and married them to typographical displays, were thwarted, irritated, badgered and depressed, and drew comfortable salaries which in no way compensated them for their professional troubles. So some found refuge in grouching, some in a dreary round of dissipation, some in ambitious creative work, secretly practised in their homes and on their holidays (for Sir Hamilton was jealous of these activities—no man can serve two mistresses, he said), and others wallowed in the politics of the great advertising business, which led to a lot of public speaking at meetings and conventions, where everybody told everybody else what everybody knew already, and there was much back-slapping agreeably interspersed with back-biting.

Bryce lived quietly in a small flat in Knightsbridge. He cultivated detachment, and in observing men and women and their habits he managed to convey the impression that he was in the world, and rather amused at finding himself there, but decidedly not of it. He made no Puritan withdrawal from the pleasures of life, but he suffered from a complete inability to

take part in recreations or to share ideas that entertained other people.

"You're bitten by that blasted reform bug," Naphtholt told him, "and it brings you out in a sort of Utopian rash. That's your trouble. Julian Austerity Bryce is your name. What you want. . . ." And Naphtholt would outline a virile programme which he guaranteed would render Bryce mentally flexible.

"How the Devil you turn out such good copy is a mystery to me, if you loathe and despise people so," said Naphtholt, "yet you must understand people."

"I do, up to a point," said Bryce slowly; "but frankly, Naphtholt, does your respect for people increase when you see how easily things can be sold to them?"

"Yet you must think better of them than you pretend otherwise you wouldn't risk putting over this New Century Theatre scheme," retorted Naphtholt.

Bryce smiled. "How d'you know I'm not testing out a pet idea as an experiment, at somebody else's expense?" he asked.

"The first advertisement appears in the dailies to-morrow, doesn't it?"

"Yes, and the place opens on Saturday."

"What's it like inside?"

"I don't know."

"Don't know—I say, that's a bit steep. Won't they let you have a squint at it?"

"No, and they've kept everyone out. Sir Hamilton tried to get a private view, and they didn't mince words, they said 'no' just like that; not even 'sorry.' Not a single reporter has got in."

"That's a mistake."

"I'm not so sure. There's been lots of pars. about the mystery theatre in the evening papers."

"No title of the film announced, no names of stars, no nothing, except a sort of declaration of independence to the public. Sort of 'Blast you, come if you want to, and we don't care if you don't!' "



"It'll work."

"Bryce, you poor fish, you don't know any more than I do whether it'll work. What sort of people go to see films? All sorts. What do they want to see? That doesn't matter so much as who they want to see. The beautiful Marlene Dietrich; Anna May Wong; Greta Garbo—people who are superb film actresses and who can make any rotten story alive and exciting, if the photography's good. They want names they can trust for a good entertainment, not a mystery. The mystery will pull once, maybe, but it'll have to be a dam' good film to go on pulling."

"By the way, I've got a ticket for you on Saturday."

"Thanks. To-day being Tuesday, I've got to wait four days for your confounded mystery. And your ads. don't tell me anything."

"And yet you're counting the days until the show opens." Bryce laughed.

"Well, what is it all about, anyway?" said Mrs. Naphtholt at the breakfast table the next morning, when a newspaper with a pencil mark against the white eleven-inch triple column solus advertisement was handed to her. "It's awfully small type."

"Set in eight-point Garamond italics," said her husband. "Bryce's stunt. *I* think it'll come off."

"If you're sick of super-super films": Mrs. Naphtholt read out; "and stupendous productions; we've arranged for an unusual story that you may not like (though you won't forget it) to be shown at the New Century Theatre, Golden Square, Piccadilly Circus, at 8.15 on Saturday night, and again at 9.55." She looked at her husband.

"Darling, isn't that called the negative appeal?" she asked. "But where exactly is Golden Square?"



"The copy's done its job if it's making you ask that," said Naphtholt.

As Naphtholt was driving to the station the make-up departments of the evening papers were deploring an unwonted baldness on the amusement guide page, where the second eleven-inch triple in the New Century Campaign was dropped in to catch the lunch-time editions.

"That's a smack in the eye with a dead fish if you like!" said Rickarte, Ivor Rickarte, the presentation director of Allway Agency Services Limited, over lunch in the mock-Dickens chophouse where so many advertising men proved their kinship to journalists every day by their thirst for beer and gossip. The first of Bryce's advertisements had been dissected, and the second was under the professional knife. "It's simply telling the public to go to Hell," said Rickarte; "how did it get past the copy room w.p.b., Naphtholt?"

"You're always wailing in a shrill falsetto for something original," said Naphtholt, "and yet when you see it you yelp with horror. Why don't you come out flatfooted and say you don't like it because it hasn't been done before."

"Don't be an ass—is this sort of thing any use, I put it to you?" Rickarte held up the paper and read:

*It doesn't claim to be anything except interesting and intelligent. It's being shown on Saturday night at the New Century Theatre, Golden Square, Piccadilly Circus, at 8.15 and again at 9.55.*

Rickarte wriggled his wrists slightly, so that his close-fitting shirt cuffs extruded another inch from his coat sleeves.

"You know people won't stand for that sort of treatment," he said.

"People in advertising who start saying they know what the public wants ought to be in some kind of a home," said Naphtholt.

"But there's a definite limit," Rickarte protested. "You can't hurl highbrow brickbats through suburban windows and get away with it. This campaign will be a flop."

"What d'you know about facts or people?" demanded Rennie. "You sit in a chromium-plated studio all day mugging up ideas from German art magazines, and then you get out ads. that look like circular saws tangled up with telegraph wires. You never rub shoulders with the people who read the national dailies. You never go into a pub except this one. You crawl round a lot of cocktail parties, and meet minor poets and artists and all the Bloomsbury queers, but you don't know what a man who's earning two quid a week looks like, far less what he talks like, what he looks at, and what he thinks about. You make advertisements to please yourself."

"That's right, you know, Rickarte," said Naphtholt; "and yet you've got the neck to sit there looking surpassingly beautiful and tell us we're hurling highbrow brickbats at the p.b.p."

"Oh, shut up, the pair of you! You're the representatives of pot-house advertisement presentation."

"It's too easy, my precious one," Naphtholt laughed, "but you're the representative of hot-house advertisement presentation. Applause from the multitude? Come on, people; why don't you show a little appreciation of honest wit."

"Talking of honest wit," said a young copywriter from Hamilton Trott's, Tanner by name; "is it true, Rickarte, that the new corset campaign you're working on is to be illustrated solely by Hollywood portraits, and is to be entitled 'The Stars in their Corsets'?"

"Copyright reserved on that," said Naphtholt; "you can't hand out ideas like that to a rival concern, you young cub."

"Is it true, by any chance, that you've lost your corset account?" Rennie inquired.

"Suppose we get back to your inept cinema campaign," said Rickarte.



"Ah, then you have lost it," said Rennie reflectively. "Wonder who it's gone to."

Bryce came into the panelled alcove where they sat at lunch.

"Here's the criminal," cried Napholt. "They've nearly done with the corpse now, Bryce, and the coroner says it died by the visitation of originality. Rickarte's the coroner. Now then, let little Ivor say his piece, and don't be too shrill."

Bryce smiled.

"I know what you're going to say," he remarked. "Practically everybody's said it to me for the last four hours."

"Is it a joke?" asked Rickarte.

"Oh, yes, of course. It's come off, too. I was just speaking on the 'phone to the client. Or rather he was speaking to me: rang me up to let me know how the bookings were going." Bryce paused.

"All right, be dramatic, damn you!" said Napholt.

"Well, the box office has every bookable seat taken for Saturday."

"I have never known anybody so completely indifferent to criticism as you are," said Napholt to Bryce. They had reopened the discussion on what the public would stand, what leaves it cold, and what it won't have at any price. It was reopened every day of their lives, refreshing or embittering their work according to their temperament and the particular turn the unending speculative argument had taken. As they talked in Bryce's comfortable flat before dinner, molten lead was pouring into flong matrices, in the foundries of the big London dailies, the third eleven-inch triple advertisement of the New Century Theatre campaign, ready for Thursday morning breakfast tables and train, tube and bus journeys. This advertisement was longer than the others: it said:

*Some folk believe that if you don't give a list of stars, the public won't go and see a show. We're giving you a story that means something, at the New Century*



*Theatre, Golden Square, Piccadilly Circus, on Saturday night, 8.15 and 9.55. Bookings full for both performances, but a few seats left for Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. Box Office telephone: Charing 2000.*

That wording had been discussed and re-discussed by Naphtholt, and its bald carelessness had been upheld by Bryce.

"I'm a bit anxious about it," Bryce said; "and I'm dining with a man who's even more edgy than I am. Lembart, who designed the building."

"D'you mean to say you know the architect and you haven't had a smell of the inside of the place?"

"Lembart had to give an undertaking to Glerk that nobody except men actually employed on the job were to be allowed in. It's all part of the policy of rigid secrecy. The management had sentries who checked up on everyone going in and out—everyone had to have a pass. It's sound, you know, Naphtholt. Instead of giving a Press agent a fat fee to work puffs or crawling round Fleet Street himself, Glerk has just sent Fleet Street to the Devil by ignoring them. He's staged a mystery stunt without lifting a finger or saying a word."

Naphtholt grunted and said, "It's a comment on this age of bunk, old boy, when a man or a business that isn't panting after publicity gets it handed out for nix."

"I thought you were delighted with the age of bunk."

"I enjoy it between whiles, when I don't think too much of the copy I sweat blood over producing, and which things like Rennie and other account executives and their clients disembowel because they go through life in a blue funk of anything unusual. But it doesn't seem to worry you, having your work wrecked by unimaginative insects like Rennie."

"I don't take the job so seriously," said Bryce. "I can't believe that selling things is important. People who do serious creative work see the hopeless triviality of shouting 'buy! buy! buy!' Remember when H. G. Wells and Shaw and Arnold Bennett turned down an invitation to write advertisements?"

Money wasn't going to tempt them behind a counter to sell anybody's goods."

"Mere literary snobbery."

"Nothing of the kind. A sense of social responsibility. Call it literary integrity, if you like. The moment they started writing to *sell* goods they were letting down their readers, people who trusted their independence and their critical ideas. D'you know why I chucked Hamilton Trott's a year ago?"

"Got sick of a comfortable job, I suppose. How do I know—you wouldn't tell me at the time, and you just told the chief that you wanted a long holiday."

"I couldn't very well tell Sir Hamilton that I was sick of devising new ways of cajoling the consumer. I'd saved enough money to play about for a couple of years, and I cleared out."

"Why did you come back into it, and why didn't you choose a happier agency than ours? There are some."

"I came back because of the New Century Theatre. There's an idea behind this thing. You'll see on Saturday. Sorry, I've got to dress; but don't move. Have some more sherry, or smoke, or something."

"No, I must push off. From what you've said, I don't think you're doing any dam' good in advertising. Your copy's all right, but if you don't believe in advertising, you're better out of it."

"Don't you think advertising might be the better for a few rebels?"

"Keep your originality for livening up your work, not for poking fun at the way you earn your bread and butter."

"God, Napholt, what a servile doctrine—it sounds like Sir Hamilton himself."

"It is. It's what Sir Hamilton said to me three years ago after I'd made a speech in public on the humours of our noble calling."

"I thought you weren't serious. Thank Heaven we can keep our humour intact through these little trials. All the same, I shall take your advice, probably, and clear out of advertising."



And now I shall go off and listen to another man abusing the world and the degenerate state of his profession."

Mrs. Naylor Lembart was interested in handicrafts, and in the Cotswold farm-house where she took refuge from the twentieth century during week-ends she did a little weaving. Lembart had acquired her during his William Morris phase, and she was an unchanging reminder of ideas he had outgrown. For a long time her attraction for him had been reduced to the charms of her body. She knew how to dramatize physical passion, and had more facilities for applying her voluptuous talent than Lembart provided. She never concealed her love affairs, for when they married they had agreed upon the conventional post-War unfaithfulness pact. Their friends said it was "rather nineteen-nineteen" and laughed—a little anxiously if they were women with vampable husbands.

She had hoped to influence her husband's work, and to coax into fresh flower that old, lost association between architecture and the decorative arts and crafts; but dear Naylor became obsessed with all those hard, bright, modern materials, and in their home there would have been perpetual conflict if they had not agreed to compromise. So she expressed her taste in their Cotswold house, wherein the seventeenth century slumbered, for artificial respiration had never quite brought it to life, and in their flat in Westminster her husband had his way with stainless steel and chromium-plated fittings and plywood and glass and American cloth and patent leather and rubber. The result was rather like a stand at an efficiency exhibition.

Mrs. Lembart said that whenever she came up from Gloucestershire to the flat she felt like a goldfish transferred from a lily pond to a galvanized iron cistern. She described the sort of cistern, for she thought frankness of this kind had something to do with hygiene. She was prepared to accept a



few of the gifts of her own century, and hygiene was one of them: educational enlightenment of the go-as-you-please-and-no-repression school was another. Her three children were shaggy little savages who discussed excrement, sex and obstetrics with gusto whenever they noticed that it embarrassed people who were not completely modernized. Their habits were those of old-fashioned spoiled children. The one modern achievement she found wholly repellent was advertising. To her it meant posters and hoardings, and her first words to Bryce were:

"Oh, Julian, I'm ever so grateful that you haven't arranged for any ghastly posters about the theatre. Naylor showed me some of the advertisements, and I think they might have had something about the building in them, don't you? After all, it's rather remarkable from the outside, don't you think? Now tell us what you've been doing, Julian, and do sit next to me on Saturday. I'm tremendously excited about what they really are going to show." She speculated on what they were going to show all through dinner. ("I hope it will repay me for stifling in London away from my hills and little dreaming valleys.") She explained, in excessive detail, how films were produced by industry, not by art; how film producers were hampered in their creative work by purely commercial creatures and what she called "the engineering mind." There was no place for the artist in the film industry. She expected that the new method of film projection (if indeed there was a new method) that they were promised for Saturday had been exploited with the maximum of mechanical vulgarity.

Bryce endured it, for he liked and admired Lembart, whom he had met in Germany. After dinner Mrs. Lembart went off to a handicraft revivalist meeting where a number of artistic busybodies were going to deliver sermons, urging manufacturers to turn from their machine-made wickedness and re-establish archaic methods of production. No manufacturers were going to attend. But there would be abundant talk and heartening abuse of the machine age, and the deep comfort of

unconstructive criticism concerning everything Mrs. Lembart disliked.

Lembart was frankly impatient of what his wife called "the movement." When she had gone he said to Bryce:

"If we were heading for a crash, there might be a case for reviving handicrafts, but the memory of them is a millstone round the neck of intelligent machine production to-day. The machine's always been put to imitating something that used to be made by hand; the means of machine production have always been in the hands of small middle-class minds, incapable of originating or encouraging their technicians to originate. We're still suffering from the harm done by those medieval machine-haters, Ruskin and Morris; and as patronage for architecture and any form of design is in the wrong hands, I hardly ever get an opportunity of building frankly for my own time with the materials this century can give me. If you knew how I'd been crippled by inane regulations in putting up the New Century Theatre. . . ."

Bryce did know. He had heard many times of the battle with the building acts and the L.C.C. regulations, and of the great circumlocution campaign that had been planned, fought and won, before the steelwork of the New Century Theatre could be ordered, and the final form of the tall glass tower officially sanctioned. It comforted him to think that the difficulties that beset his work were dwarfed to a ridiculous insignificance beside the obstacles that discouraged original architectural design. He listened again, until Lembart said:

"Thank the Lord this German crowd of film people have given me a real chance of doing what I've always wanted to do."

"What's the matter with this age, Lembart?" asked Bryce, "when nearly everybody doing creative work has to fight three-quarters of their time to get the job done properly according to their conscience? I always feel humble in the presence of an architect, because his work matters and endures, and mine is a form of prostitution, or at least I think so;



maybe I take myself too seriously. But you said just now that the revival of handicrafts that your wife is keen on might be justified if we were heading for a crash. Are you so sure we aren't?"

Lembart considered, and presently said:

"It's odd that the spirit behind architecture has changed. You know what Wren said, that 'Building certainly ought to have the attribute of eternal,' but no patron of architecture to-day thinks of posterity. They have the investor's point of view, a sort of leasehold attitude to the whole business. How much can we get out of the site? Put up a building that will have justified itself economically in fifty years—that's the limit of vision to-day: half a century. And there's that damnable phrase: 'It'll last our time!' which gets applied to all sorts of enterprises and spoils them. All these new building materials that are so stimulating conspire to make this idea of impermanence commonplace. It seems as if we were afraid of looking too far ahead; but that's because the banker and the accountant are always shouting 'safety first,' and people who want money for building have got to listen to them. Well, my new theatre will see a good many new centuries unless some fool starts another war."

"That being the sort of crash you had in mind, which would justify a handicraft revival?"

"Oh, there are other ways. Complete collapse of business and credit. I feel, though I'm probably quite wrong about it, that none of these financial experts know anything at all. They have a technical jargon, just like I have; but where my jargon is used to describe things that fit into or are part of a plan, their jargon is a sort of threadbare covering for chaos."

"In every age people have expected the end of the world, or at least something damnably unpleasant to happen in a few years. We're always on the edge of collapse apparently."

"Sometimes we go over the edge. We did in the fifth century," Lembart reminded him.

"Then the Church justified itself and saved civilization



What'll save civilization now if there's a collapse—the banks? That's where people worship to-day."

"Doctors and other people who do creative work might."

"Not likely, Lembart. People like us always get shot first in a revolution or a war."

"There's not likely to be another war—not in our time. There you are, you see; I get trapped into using that damned phrase about my own miserable lifetime."

"I'm sorry in a way that if there's going to be another war that it won't come in my time."

"Good Lord, why?"

"Well, I was just old enough to take part in the last, and I'd love to put a spoke in the next lot of nonsense by proclaiming to everybody that I was going to be a conscientious objector, and as I'd fought in the Great War they couldn't say it was because of my skin, and I'd make it clear it was because of my sense."

"Not a bit of it. You'll be far too useful in writing recruiting posters: you won't be asked to fight."

"They'll have to be pretty moving to counteract a generation brought up on 'safety first,' won't they? I wonder why you and everybody else always think that advertising always means posters. By the way, have you seen to-night's advertisement for the theatre?"

"Yes. I think it would almost persuade me to go and see the show, if I was outside and not connected with it. It's so refreshing to see some undressed facts about something. Commerce will stifle itself with over-statement in time, I suppose. Still, that's your job."

Bryce was silent.

That was his job. Putting the case for things to be sold. A stimulating, exciting, never-dull job, exasperating and exhilarating, that in all his experience had brought him but one opportunity of working for something in which he passionately believed. And this child of his belief, this austere

study in reticence, this campaign for the New Century Theatre, was signalling every day to a gross total of some seven million readers. And the papers that carried the advertisements tucked away the rumblings of the world crisis behind sex, sport, scandal, and crime. In huge concrete vaults about Fleet Street the rotary presses devoured their miles of paper, and the flickering white patches of the New Century Theatre advertisements were familiar to the machine watchers by Friday night, when the last of what Bryce labelled the "mystery" drive was printed off for Saturday's consumption.

FAILURE OF ANOTHER CONFERENCE, bawled the Saturday morning headlines of the main news pages in various keys of regret or exultation, according to the temperament of the particular newspaper proprietors, but for Bryce the inability of politicians to arrange economic plans seemed less depressing than usual. His imagination was concentrated upon one thing: the opening of the New Century Theatre and the presentation of the strange new film, which held no mystery for him, for he shared the secret of its story.

## II

### STAGE

ON Saturday morning Lembart walked across St. James's Park from his flat and up the Duke of York's steps to Lower Regent Street and across Piccadilly Circus. The last hoardings were being carted away in lorries in Golden Square, and the canvas screens that partly hid the front of the building were all down, and the new theatre shone in the sun of an early spring day.

He went all over it, from the foyer with its walls of pink-tinted



mirror to the tank room of the airwashing plant in the top story. He climbed up the white-tiled stairway from the tank room to the orderly cluster of inlet tubes, with their suction fans humming softly, and out on to the smooth curving roof where the tubes terminated in a series of cowls, winged with vanes that kept their open mouths away from the prevailing wind, so that they could swallow at their own pace London's foul air. This air, with the dirt extracted, and cooled or slightly warmed according to the weather, travelled through every part of the building. He tested the escalators that drew the traffic from the foyer to the different levels of stalls, balcony and circle, ascending through tunnels of glass warmed with coloured light. He tested the fireproof cut-offs in the projection rooms, where the electricians and operators were pouring light through the embrasures on to the screen. He switched on the huge panels of illuminated white glass that filled three arched openings above the entrance canopy of the theatre, so that the programme bill, flanked by coloured scenes, was thrown at an angle from specially constructed slides and magnified to form posters of light. (The old conflict between architect and showman was ended by this device, for the lower part of the facade became a frame for the display of announcements.) Everywhere his eyes were refreshed by smooth surfaces and bold, simple shapes. It was the building he had dreamed of for years, and it was to be the first of the great buildings he wanted to design, the forerunner of a new architecture. The great Continental architects had begun to show what that new architecture could be like; but Lembart felt he had outgrown the arid morality of their crude functionalism. The New Century Theatre was a great building. Every line of its easy ascent into the London sky proclaimed its kinship with the buildings that find a permanent place in the memory of man. That dominating tower of glass crowned with a dome, which made the domes of St. Paul's and St. Peter's seem by comparison mere troubled warts. . . .

"I'm too pleased with it," thought Lembart; "there must



be something horribly wrong which I shall spot soon. But, by God, it's good!"

His inspection ended in the office of the showman who had employed him, Herr Gustav Glerk, the resident controller of the New Century Sound Film Company.

Glerk was a short, stout man, who was clasped in a light frame of chromium-plated steel tubing rather than seated in a chair. He spoke English without an accent.

"Are you satisfied with everything, Mr. Lembart?" he asked.

"Yes, I think everything's all right."

Glerk nodded.

"Everything has gone according to plan," he said; "including the censorship. I have not told you of that; but I may tell you now, and it will amuse you. You do not know what the story of our first film is, but that does not matter. It was important that it should not be touched at all, that no word should be cut out. We knew that in England, from a sense of duty, your censors will often destroy the sequence of a film. They owe it, they say, to the women and children. So we made a plan to stimulate their prejudices, and we made two scenes that had nothing to do with the story; they were outside it, quite. In one scene we introduced the figure of Jesus Christ. The Board of Censors was horrified. It must come out, they said. We took it out. It would have spoiled the film to keep it in. In the other scene a woman undressed herself to the very skin with a young man watching her. The Board of Censors was even more horrified, and insisted on it being taken out. We took it out: it had no business to be there. We were very accommodating, and they said they feared the film had suffered but that we could only show it if those two scenes were removed. They were pleased, and so were we, for they left the film unaltered really. Do not tell that story to the Press, Mr. Lembart, for we have to get other films passed, and the Board of Censors might think we had been laughing at them."

Lembart smiled.

"Thanks for the present of an idea," he said: "it never

occurred to me to load a design with something superfluous that I could cut out to please a client, though most of my clients would probably choose to keep what I wanted them to discard."

"Everything," said Glerk, "is reached by compromise to-day, and most things are spoiled by it; so why not get what you want by pretending to compromise? Ah, Mr. Lembart, you do not often have the good fortune of clients like my company. Eh? We are not afraid of new things."

A bell rang on Glerk's desk, and he reached for the house telephone, saying: "I expect that is your friend Bryce. Hello—yes, send him in."

Bryce came in with a newspaper in his hand.

"They haven't wasted any time," he said; "they must have had this shot the minute the last screen came down."

He opened the mid-day edition of an evening paper and showed them the picture page. A photograph of the New Century Theatre occupied a prominent place, and the caption made Glerk chuckle:

NOT AN AQUARIUM OR A CONSERVATORY  
BUT THE NEW MYSTERY THEATRE THAT  
OPENS TO-NIGHT IN GOLDEN SQUARE

"Typical," said Glerk. "The English always laugh at what they cannot understand, or if they don't feel quite like laughing they say it is not quite nice. Eh, Bryce, you will see that happen to-night, I expect."

"It's a compliment to be misunderstood by the popular press," said Lembart.

"I say, Herr Glerk, telling 'em to go to Hell pays apparently," said Bryce.

Glerk shrugged his shoulders, and said:

"So many people want something for nothing, that when you ignore the Press they come after you, in case they miss some news. We will take all these newspaper remarks, Bryce, and we will make an appropriate advertisement for each paper



next week. We will put in this paper on Monday a picture of the theatre, and say: 'Not an Aquarium or a Conservatory but London's new theatre for intelligent film-plays'."

"I'd better get through to the office then, and catch someone in the production department before they go," said Bryce: "we'll have to have blocks made over the week-end. Is there a photograph available?"

Glerk nodded.

"Taken this morning," he said.

"How soon can I have prints?"

"This afternoon—they will be here. Get your people to collect them."

Bryce called a number, and gave his instructions.

"And now," said Glerk, "we will take Bryce over the building, and show him where he is to sit this evening." He paused and glanced from Bryce to Lembart, and said:

"You two—you are nervous—strung up. You will lunch with me after, and then I will take you to something that will give you back peace of mind, eh? You must not be left to yourselves this afternoon, either of you."

After lunch Glerk took them to a large and popular cinema, in which commercial classic architecture was given Semitic emphasis. The Corinthian capitals of its forest of columns, fertilized by vulgarity, had sprouted such complexities of acanthus foliage that they appeared to froth into the ceiling of the entrance hall. The façade was hidden by a huge screen of canvas that depended from the cornice of the building, announcing a new SUPER FILM:

## WASTED WIVES

A portrait of the principal star blotted out the expensive stonework above the main entrance, and every available blank



space was filled with a notice that shouted in corpulent letters the news that this was a SUPER PRODUCTION BY HICKSTEIN-LOWELTZ.

"SCREENING AT APPROXIMATELY 2.30, 6.10 and 8.50," bellowed the bills on each side of the entrance.

"This," said Glerk, "is what they're used to. Come in."

Unhappy marriages between decadent Spanish baroque decoration and misunderstood Italianate ornament had been arranged by hack draughtsmen on drawing boards, and the florid offspring of these spiritless affairs sprawled over acres of imitation marble on the walls of the entrance hall and the lounge and café beyond it.

"Art for the people," said Glerk: "do not be angry, Lembart; it is very good for you. And for you, too, Bryce. Now you will see the audience, and what they will take."

### III

#### AUDIENCE

"WELL, I never thought it would end like that—Oh, I knew it would be all right—Yes, but what do people *do* who give up bootlegging?—Easy enough to get a fresh start—yes, they put their traffic cops on better machines than we do—my dear, if you don't think Maurice Chevalier's smile is worth leaving home for I don't know where your eyes are—I've always thought Gary Cooper is so good-looking—the dark type, you know, they've got such a way—get your money's worth here all right—and the place is so comfortable and toney, too—of course, dear, a fellow's not so much of a gentleman when he tries that on—I'm ever so sorry you can't see how sweet she is——"

"The film," said Glerk, as the talk around them eddied in broken sentences, "is said to be a great force in education."

"There's a difference between education and pollution," said Bryce.

The main feature of the programme, a story of uncontrollable passion, had ended in a gaudy confusion of shooting, seduction, whoopee and mass infidelity on the part of nearly a dozen erotomaniacs who had married impulsively. By a casual rearrangement of partners, the wasted wives, whose predicament inspired the title of the film, again found congenial employment for what little leisure remained in lives almost wholly occupied in dancing, drinking and motoring.

"It isn't fair to judge by this film," Bryce reflected; "it's pretty bad."

"Technically, it is excellent," said Glerk, "although we have made this sort of projection quite a back number, as Hollywood will find out very expensively, very soon. The photography is good."

"What a damnable thing the American voice is," said Lembart abruptly. "I wonder if all the people in here hate its ugliness as much as I do. The trouble is, in a cinema you can't have a gallery demonstration. What's the use of shying abuse or orange peel at a screen? Half the stuff that's put on in these shows would be hooted off a music-hall stage—but the audiences have changed. I was forgetting: I have a pre-1914 mind."

"An agreeable possession, unless it has become disillusioned," said Glerk: "well, my Bryce, how do you think these people will like to-night, eh?"

"God knows!" Bryce answered despondently. "Why don't people burn the place and lynch the manager? I always ask myself that whenever I have to sit through the average cinema programme."

"What, my Bryce," said Glerk; "has not your profession taught you that there is no sin so great in the industrial state as a critical faculty? 'Buy and be blind' is the creed forced

upon the common men and women. Shop with your eyes shut: take all things without complaint, and take as much as you can, and even mortgage your income two or three years ahead. Think of the way you can buy things easily, the 'easy terms,' and never think of the things you are buying. And you expect such sheep to be annoyed by a stupid film? Even if they are, isn't this grand place, with all this carving and gilding, enough of a compensation for them?"

Glerk laughed one of his fat, comfortable laughs.

"What are you doing after the show to-night?" he asked.

"I had fixed up a little supper party," said Bryce.

"Can you transfer it all to a table I have booked at Gallotti's, and let me have the pleasure of being host?"

Three hours later Bryce was sitting between Mrs. Lembart and Napholt in a reserved row of the stalls in the New Century Theatre. Rennie and young Tanner sat beyond Napholt. All about them were the hosts of Hampstead and Bloomsbury, so different from their fellows in the cheaper seats. Truncated sentences slid across the stream of Mrs. Lembart's talk.

"Nothing style-bound about this place—he's gone completely chromium—a little too much of it—people who are forward-looking generally haven't much to look back on—did you hear that, Sully? He's begun already. People who are forward-looking generally haven't much—rot, infant, in Vienna women are well dressed, and in Paris they think they are—and he said: 'Blessed are the poor in thought, for they shall die rich!'"—and when the clerk read out the charge and my licence had been handed up, I didn't know whether to call him 'darling judge' or 'dear sir'—nonsense, my dear fellow, a man's face is his own affair, a woman's face is usually a man's—the trouble is the past gets in front and blocks the way, so that every brute who builds wants to 'keep that old-world complexion' and does his Tudor worst—it's the sort of house



that's always teeming with last straws, where dinner's an emergency rather than a meal——"

"I wish I could persuade you to join it, Julian," said Mrs. Lembart, gaining a transient victory over the surrounding chatter; "you're just the sort of member we want, in touch with industry, and able to persuade manufacturers to do the right thing."

Bryce, a little hampered by not knowing what he was being asked to join, said:

"I don't think you can—I'm sorry about it, but I think there are too many societies and associations trying to do this, that and t'other, and what we want is a society for abolishing societies."

"Please, Julian—I'm serious." (Intense look). "Won't you?"

Oh, curse the woman! He wanted to go on taking stock of the audience. He had just realized that he was in the centre of an intellectual "pocket" in the usual cinema crowd, for powerful voices three rows behind were discussing car performance with technical enthusiasm, and the details of a crushed love affair were being exposed for inspection by two rather emphatic young women a little way in front. "And I asked him whether he thought I was a hot-water bottle, or what?"

"Julian—I don't believe you're listening to me!"

Mrs. Lembart was making severe claims upon his attention again.

"I'm sorry—I was wandering a bit," he said. "Please forgive me—I'm nervous about this show. You see, I've tried an experiment, and rather a lot depends on it."

"How seriously you take your advertising, Julian. Is it worth it? Don't you realize that the world is dropping into little pieces all around you every day, and that we shall only gather it up and put it together again if we re-learn what we are all so busy forgetting, and what the industrialists are trying to kill?"

Bryce laughed.

"I'm convinced about three times a week that civilization is finished," he told her: "I *have* thought about it, you know."

"Then you agree that we must get back to the crafts—get people back to living normal lives in clean country, and sweep away all this frightful industrial squalor? Julian, you must join us."

"Join what?" he asked incautiously.

"You haven't been listening."

"Only in patches, I confess—I've told you I was nervous."

"Join the only society that can save this civilization from smashing itself up—the Home Handwork Association."

"So that's how civilization is to be saved." He laughed, and there was a sudden lull in the conversation of the audience as the lights of the theatre began to fade, and a man behind them who had been discussing the commercial aspects of golf was caught in mid-sentence and everyone near him learnt that "if a man wants to succeed in business to-day, he's got to improve his game."

#### IV

#### FILM

LIGHTS in the New Century Theatre sink, and the arched proscenium is filled with a pink glow. The wine-coloured curtains that hide the stage suddenly divide, and are drawn to each side, revealing a huge silvery screen, rather like a cinema screen, but much bigger. The screen appears at the back of the perfectly empty stage. The pink lights go out, and converging beams from the projectors fall upon the screen which appears to swim forward to the proscenium opening, as though it were a sheet of silvery vapour.



The first bars of the National Anthem bring the audience restlessly to its feet, and then the tune merges into the Marseillaise, followed by some bars from the old Imperial Russian national anthem, which gives way to the dreamy serenity of Haydn's Emperor Quartette. This is brutally interrupted by the "Star Spangled Banner," which is presently supplanted by the dreary "International." Bits of Bloomsbury and Hampstead acknowledge their faith by rising, although few are able to distinguish the "International" from "The Red Flag."

The music appears to come from the stage; and it stops suddenly, while on the stage the projectors are throwing solid letters into a vapoury whirl. They sort themselves out and arrange themselves in words, so that the title of the film quivers for a full minute across the stage, built up of letters that seem to be carved out of blocks of granite. The title is:

## TO-MORROW'S YESTERDAY

Then the title shrinks to smaller dimensions and the audience learns that the film is produced by:

GESELLSCHAFT FÜR TONFILME DES  
NEUEN JAHRHUNDERTS M.B.H.

FOR

THE NEW CENTURY THEATRE COMPANY IN  
THREE-DIMENSIONAL COLOUR PROJECTION

Another caption floats over this and obliterates it:

THE NAMES OF AUTHOR, ACTORS,  
PRODUCERS AND MANAGERS DO NOT  
MATTER. "THE PLAY'S THE THING."

And then again:

TO-MORROW'S YESTERDAY

Followed by:

THE CHARACTERS IN ORDER OF THEIR  
APPEARANCE

8 (EIGHT).

3 (THREE).

SIR CLIFFORD JACKS, Chairman of Advance Advertising Services Limited.

EDWARD RICHARDS, an executive in Advance Advertising Services Limited.

PHILIP WEBSTER, Chairman of Webster's Near-Woolen Products Limited.

RICHARD FRANEY, a Director of Webster's.

MICHAEL FRANEY, his nephew, also a Director of Webster's.

WALTER ORDLE, financial director of Webster's.

A SHORTHAND CLERK.

JIMMY MARBIT, an advertisement designer in Advance Advertising Services Limited.

CEDRIC WAYNE, an advertisement copywriter in Advance Advertising Services Limited.

BETTY, a young woman of the town.

HENRY RICHARDS, son of Edward Richards.

A ROMAN LEGIONARY.

PONTIUS PILATE, Procurator of Judea, Samaria and Idumea.

ZANO, a Negro slave.

PERTINAX, an officer of Pilate's household.

HEROD ANTIPAS, Tetrarch of Galilee and Peraea.

JEREMY LOVEDALE, a professor of sociology.

AGATHA LOVEDALE, his wife.

DEBAUNEY, a reporter on the staff of the *Daily Gazette*.

THE ANNOUNCER of the Empire Central broadcasting station.

AL ISSACSTEIN, President of the U.S.A.

TWO NEGRO TROOPERS, of the French Senegalese Expeditionary Force.

DAN, hut builder to the Richmond Tribe.



WUNDLE, a householder of the Richmond Tribe.

ELSIE, his daughter.

THE CHIEF of the Richmond Tribe.

THREE YOUNG MEN of the Richmond Tribe.

A GIRL of the Richmond Tribe.

TWO DRUMMERS of the Tribe of the Circles.

FIFTEEN MEN of the Tribe of the Circles.

TEN PEOPLE of the world to which 8 and 3 belong.

As the list of characters fades out, there is a drift of sluggish vapour across the screen, like smoke passing before a lamp. For the space of a minute this luminous wall is soundless; then there is a thin cough, and a voice speaks from the centre of the stage. It is a clear voice, even and slow. It has a monotonous quality, as though every word was spoken by a child learning to read. Each word is carefully pronounced; too carefully for pleasantness.

THE VOICE: The air has changed.

[Coughs. A duplicate cough precedes a second voice that speaks a little faster than the first, but still pronounces each word with mechanical perfection.]

SECOND VOICE: Yes, it is harder to breathe.

[Pause.]

FIRST VOICE: We may have to stop here.

SECOND VOICE: The air cannot hurt us. They were very like us, and where they could live and breathe, so——

[A fit of coughing ends the sentence.]

FIRST VOICE: It should be a useful experiment. We shall be there, with them, in whatever time we choose, although what we shall see has happened and we take no part in it. We shall be invisible and inaudible, even though we speak and move among them and touch them, or hold the picture of them as we will. Those people who made our world must have been wonderful and strong and strange.

SECOND VOICE: We have always supposed that they were wonderful and strong and strange. We do not know.

FIRST VOICE: We shall see.

SECOND VOICE: We shall see now.

FIRST VOICE: Sound first, then light. That is the order of time focus—listen.

[A moment of silence, and then noises assert themselves. At first they are individual noises: footsteps pattering down stairs, feet shuffling over pavements, the heavy tramp of a policeman, the regular tramping of a squad of soldiers; and then bells ring, first telephone bells, then a fire alarm bell, a church bell tolls, and Big Ben chimes the hour; there is a police whistle, and the cry of first one newsboy and then another and another, until the stage is filled with a mosaic of sound. Pouring over and dominating this comes the roar of traffic, the hooting of cars and buses and lorries, the whistle of a train, and the puffing of a locomotive. Gradually the sounds all blend and soften into that murmuring background of noise that every office situated on a main London thoroughfare endures from 10 a.m. till 6 p.m. In the silvery luminosity of the screen two large smoky shapes that might be grotesque human shadows are seen for a moment, and then the screen melts away, everything is sharply focused, and a well-furnished office appears. There is a big mahogany board table running down the centre, surrounded by very ornate and highly polished reproductions of Chippendale chairs with leather seats. The walls are panelled in mahogany, and a large gilt sunray clock adorns the overmantel panel above the fireplace. There is a door right. A fire burns brightly in the polished steel grate. The wall facing the audience has three tall windows which look out at a flashing electric sign that is stretched across the façade of a building on the opposite side of the street. The silvery tops of double-decked motor-buses are just visible, passing and repassing the lower part of each window. The traffic rumbles continuously. The afternoon is foggy, and the electric sign pours a non-stop news message about trivialities in a strip below its permanent title of DAILY GAZETTE NEWS SERVICE—QUICK NEWS, SOUND VIEWS. The room has been



prepared for a meeting, and every place at the table is provided with a pad and a sheet of clean blotting paper. Standing, one at each end of the room, are two figures. They are tall, over six feet in height, and their slimness makes them appear gigantic. At first they seem to be very slender and sunburned human beings. It is difficult to determine their sex. They might be lithe, flat-chested women. They are muscular, without any bulginess of limb. They are naked, except for a metal girdle that might be made of highly polished flexible steel and from which depends a sort of metallic sporran. On the breast of each is a white disc, about six inches in diameter, with characters in black written on it. One is labelled:

8. 𐄂𐄂𐄂

and the other:

3. 𐄂𐄂𐄂

They are hairless. Their cheeks are curiously hollow, like those of a toothless old man, although their whole aspect, their tan and the freshness of their skin and the alertness of their large, tawny eyes, suggest youth. They have high foreheads, prominent eyes, and no brow ridges. Their ears are more pointed than human ears. They move with a feline lightness, and their hands have a swift delicacy in touching and handling any object. As the scene steadies and the light grows clear they look about the room ; 8. 𐄂𐄂𐄂 [who will be called 8 hereafter] moves towards the fire and examines the fireplace. 3. 𐄂𐄂𐄂 [who will be called 3 hereafter] goes to the window and looks out. Presently 3 speaks, and we identify the second voice. As 3 speaks the traffic sounds drop to a faint murmur and the moving band of the electric sign and the procession of bus tops slow down. Although 3 and 8 do not apparently use their lips for forming words, occasionally their thin lips are drawn apart, revealing two lines of silver where their teeth should be.]



3: This must have been in the beginning of machines. There are crawling animals pulling loads.

8 [whom we recognize as the first voice]: The filth there must be! Our lungs will get clogged.

[He comes away from the fire and looks out of the centre window.]

3: How small they are, and how many different shapes.

[The door opens and six men come in, followed by a shorthand typist with a notebook in her hand. It is clear that none of them are aware of 8 and 3. The men are prosperous-looking, well-dressed and authoritative, all except one, who is obviously an underling and is handicapped by ready-made clothes, but has the perky air of evening-class technical efficiency that tries to compete with public school ease of manner. A tall, imposingly fat man sits at the head of the table with his back to the fire.

As he settles himself he says to the underling:

Sit next to me, Richards—I shall want your stuff presently.

Now, gentlemen, we can get down to it, if you'll make yourselves comfortable.

[The others seat themselves, Richards on the chairman's right with his back to the audience. The other four sit with their backs to the windows. The shorthand clerk sits with her back to the audience on the right of Richards. The chairman begins to speak in a rich, fruity board-room voice, charged with a hearty persuasiveness:

Well, gentlemen, I'm glad we've got the opportunity of going into this matter thoroughly at last. I've wanted this conference for a long time, for I've one or two things to say about the advertising of your products that may sound strange at first. In fact, gentlemen, I doubt whether you'll believe me when I tell you that I, as chairman of this advertising agency, don't want you to spend sixty thousand pounds on a campaign. Gentlemen, we're all in business for something, and I'm in business for service. Service, gentlemen. To give service to my clients. To give service to British Industry in the hour of its need. To give service

to our Empire. And I conceive that my best way of giving service to your product is not to persuade you to spend sixty thousand pounds on an advertising campaign in the Press. Every other agency, including the one you employ at present, will try to persuade you to spend sixty thousand pounds. They want you to spend sixty thousand pounds, and why? Because of the 10 per cent. they get from the newspapers in which they will place the advertising, because they want six thousand pounds of commission.

[There is a pause, and clearly he has made an impression, not only upon the meeting, but upon 8 and 3, who have been attentively observing everything. A good-looking middle-aged gentleman takes advantage of the pause to say:

But, Sir Clifford, we had not contemplated spending sixty thousand pounds.

SIR CLIFFORD: Undoubtedly not, Mr. Webster. Not in your cool moments; but when the eloquence of a certain gentleman, who shall be nameless and for whose abilities and powers of persuasion I have the greatest respect, when his eloquence has been outpoured upon this subject, then, I contend, your state of mind would have changed, and you would then have spent too much, spent without studying the facts of the market. I will never allow that. I will never allow facts to be flouted and markets to be lost. I will never allow my clients to overspend, and then lose their faith in my profession, which is the lifeblood of modern business, without which the arteries of industry would wither so that animation ebbed from all our great undertakings on land and sea and in the air—advertising, which makes the world's wheels go round.

[“Hear, hear,” from an eager young man on Webster's left. Sir Clifford beams at him, and proceeds:

No, gentlemen, I don't ask you to spend sixty thousand pounds so that I may have six thousand in commission. Pay me six thousand as a fee, and let me plan a thirty-thousand-pound campaign for you, returning commissions,



so that for three thousand pounds you get an immense saving, and my organization gets for your goods twice the attention value out of half the space. And we can do that because we believe, before all other things, in the—mental—visibility—of—our—advertisements. That is our aim: mental visibility. Gentlemen, believe me——

[8 moves slightly and speaks to 3. Immediately every figure at the table becomes immobile, their attitudes fixed, Sir Clifford with his mouth open in the act of pronouncing his sales speech, every fidgety pose on the part of his audience frozen.]

8: It's difficult to follow. Their words take thought forms at once, of course; but most of their thoughts mean nothing. All this talk has something to do with gain for that one [He points to Sir Clifford], but I cannot follow it.

3: They are strange things. I had forgotten that they had different sexes. I suppose these were men.

8: There is a woman here. [He points to the shorthand clerk.] But I want to hear him end this talk.

[As 8 stops speaking the humans relax, and Sir Clifford's voice booms on as though no interruption had taken place:

——we have a secret in this agency that we share with all our clients. The secret of selling goods and services.

[He pauses before resuming in a confidential tone:

And you all think, don't you, that this is just showman's patter? Just the big drum that the advertising man always beats. Gentlemen, the big drum is dead! [He strikes the table with his fist by way of convincing illustration.] The hot air of advertising's early days has slowly rolled away. We are on the edge of a new dawn of marketing practice that heralds the sunrise of sales for British goods—for your goods, gentlemen. To-day we must deal with facts, not opinions. We must plan. Russia is planning. America is planning. Germany is planning. For the sake of British industry, we too must plan. We do not treat our clients distantly. We like to feel that they are partners with us in this great enterprise, partners in the creating of sales,



sales that will give to British homes the goods that British home-makers can use with pleasure and with the certainty that the description "British and Best" to-day has as much meaning as ever it had. But it won't do to say that and nothing else about your goods. If you had all your customers in the Albert Hall and you had them to yourself for twenty minutes and in that time you wanted to tell them about the things you make, you wouldn't take a megaphone and say over and over again for the whole twenty minutes: "Webster's Near-Woollens are British and Best!" Would you, Mr. Webster?

WEBSTER: I don't quite follow the point of the question, Sir Clifford, but of course I shouldn't.

SIR CLIFFORD: Of course you wouldn't, Mr. Webster. But—that is exactly what you are doing in your advertising now. You are addressing through the space you buy in the national newspapers of this country a far larger audience than you could ever get into the Albert Hall, and you are saying to millions of potential customers "British and Best, British and Best, British and Best!" and you are not giving them one reason why they should buy your excellent products any more than the thousands of other brands on the market to-day. I don't want you to spend sixty thousand pounds, but if you only spend sixty, and I have the handling of your advertising, I don't want it wasted. I won't stand by and see it wasted. Assertion is not argument. We all like British goods; we're proud of them; but we're not giving them a chance if we try to use out-of-date methods of selling them.

WEBSTER [deeply impressed]: You know, Sir Clifford, that's a profoundly interesting thought. Eh, Franey?

FRANEY [a saturnine man of advanced middle age who sits on Webster's right]: Our methods have been good enough for forty years, and I still think they're sound.

SIR CLIFFORD: Mr. Franey, I'm glad you said that. You are right to have faith in the methods you have tested over

such a long period. But—the world is changing. You may have read a story by that great and gifted American writer, O. Henry.

FRANEY [bluntly]: Never heard of him.

[The eager young man on Webster's right who said "Hear, hear" a few minutes ago brightens up again and says to Franey:

Surely you have, Uncle Dick. You know, when we were running the Ooling Sheet campaign we thought of getting him to write the copy for the Better Bedroom booklet, but we found he'd been dead for years.

SIR CLIFFORD [radiating kindness]: Uncle Dick! Forgive me, gentlemen, but I like to hear these happy family touches in the midst of business: it makes me understand the solid worth of the businesses we serve, and want to serve. The handing on of great traditions of organized service, from father to son, from uncle to nephew. By such associations of generations we get that blend of views, old and new, which makes for true commercial wisdom. But O. Henry, gentlemen, once wrote a story in which the ease of doing business in New York was described by one of the characters, who said: "All you have to do anywhere between the North and East Rivers is to stand in the street with an open bag marked 'Drop packages of money here'." Mr. Franey, allowing for a touch of exaggeration, wasn't business in the last century and before the War almost as easy? The methods of production were fine, unbeatable, but was there any need for selling methods when the world of consumers sat at the feet of that great mother of industry, Britannia, who ran the workshop of the world? Is that the case to-day?

FRANEY [savagely]: Of course not! The costs of production are impossible now. You can't do what you like with your own factory; you're dictated to by the Government, by the unions, by the retailer and the wholesale distributor.

SIR CLIFFORD: And the remedy, Mr. Franey?



FRANEY [promptly decisive]: Stop State interference. Get back to sane individualism, so there'd be a straight fight between employers and unions without any of this sloppy sentiment about the cost of living. Let private enterprise——

WEBSTER [cutting into what promises to be a lecture on archaic economics]: I take your points about new methods, Sir Clifford. We've been considering them, and if their adoption can coincide with the smaller advertising appropriation you mentioned, then frankly we should give them our fullest consideration: eh, Ordle?

ORDLE [a tall, rather harassed-looking man who sits between Franey senior and Sir Clifford]: As an accountant, Sir Clifford, I am always being urged to regard expenditure on advertising as an investment. Do you regard it as a legitimate part of the selling cost of a product, or as a separate cost to be sunk in the overhead charges of the business? To describe it as an investment is merely jargon.

SIR CLIFFORD: It is part of the selling cost, Mr. Ordle.

ORDLE: We've always regarded it as an overhead.

WEBSTER [impatiently]: However, we've described it in our costing, we've all felt that it costs too much. Have you any specific suggestions, Sir Clifford, to substantiate your reduction of advertising expenditure?

SIR CLIFFORD: Only a few rough indications. Richards! The first drive, please. [Richards hands him a large black portfolio.] Now, I ventured to set out [he opens the portfolio] some suggestions for a theme for a campaign, next spring, for your Near-Wool undies. I have aimed to bring warmth and hygiene into the fashion field. Let our young women be warm in near-wool, and yet feel like a Hollywood star for Parisian modishness. It's all a question of presentation.

[The meeting is abruptly arrested in its action as 8 walks across to the table and examines the pages of the portfolio.]

8: They must mean the things that cover them.

3: How many skins do they have?

[He goes across to the shorthand clerk and is about to pull

off her jumper when he is attracted by the buttons of young Franey's waistcoat. He unbuttons them.]

Another skin under all this!

[He unbuttons the shirt and reveals a vest.]

What complexity!

[He readjusts Franey's clothes.]

8 [still examining the portfolio]: They are all women shown here. Why do they make two-dimensional copies of themselves? Surely there are enough of them in the world without these flat copies?

[He holds up an enlarged photograph of a very smart young woman in very diaphanous underclothes.]

3: I don't understand. Let us focus back before they came in here.

8: Yes.

[Immediately the stage darkens and the traffic noises roar into one throbbing note which is accompanied by the continuous ringing of a telephone. The darkness is replaced by the silvery screen. On that screen there is an impression of the scene that has just passed, only with all the actions reversed, as though a blurred film had been made of the scene and was being run through the projector backwards and very rapidly. The figures of 8 and 3 do not appear in this piece of fleeting cinematography. The telephone bell rings louder and louder; the film becomes a fluttering confusion of shapes and shadows that changes into bright white light for a space with the same queer shadows that preceded the last scene flickering across its brightness, and then the stage grows clear, and an office, exactly similar to the last in shape and the position of doors, fireplace and windows, is visible. 8 and 3 stand with their backs to the audience at each side of the stage. Instead of the richly panelled walls of the board-room, cream-coloured distemper and emerald green paintwork give a brighter and less pompous effect. Outside there is watery sunlight and the room is a floor higher than the board-room of the previous scene. The traffic can be heard, but is invisible. In front of the



windows there is a long drawing table littered with papers, rolls of drawings, photographs, which partly submerge a couple of drawing-boards with T-squares, set-squares, bottles of colour, mounting paste, brushes and dirty china pans for mixing water colour. An air-brush apparatus is on the floor near the fireplace, and a tall, sleek young man in his shirt sleeves is using it to spray a thin film of colour on to a photograph. His clothes are well-cut and his shirt and tie have been chosen with an exaggerated regard for exquisite effect. He is whistling "Boléro" with conscientious monotony, obviously to the irritation of the other man in the room, who appears to be a stout, stocky individual, all that can be seen of him behind a big desk in the middle of the room. He has a thin beard, worn for the sake of effect, although the effect is unsatisfactory. He is trying to write, and is scribbling in spasms, crossing out frequently and muttering to himself. The telephone on his desk is ringing. He takes the receiver off and holds it in his hand while he completes a sentence, and then he speaks:

Yes?—Yes, I'm on it now—Well, it's no good to the Chief half-finished, is it?—Yes, I know all that, Richards, and you won't get it any faster through badgering.

[He replaces the receiver and resumes his writing, but gives it up and says in a voice of suppressed irritation:

I wish to God you'd put a sock in it, Jimmy. How the Hell can I get the Chief's pi-jaw to those Near-Wool people dolled-up for him to spout when you're whistling that infernal tune?

JIMMY: Sorry!

[He stops whistling "Boléro," and after a brief pause begins to whistle the first movement of Mozart's Jupiter Symphony.]

THE MAN AT THE DESK [savagely]: I said stop it, not change it!

JIMMY: All right, my little ray of sunshine, anything to oblige.

THE MAN AT THE DESK: Oh gosh, I should like to cut somebody's throat!

JIMMY: Mine?

THE MAN AT THE DESK: Oh no, not you—but the fools who

think that when a job's asked for it's as good as done.

JIMMY: That means practically all the executives in this show and the Chief too. I'm all for that.

THE MAN AT THE DESK: Your job's easy: you can see it all the time.

JIMMY: Yes, I've heard that one before. Everybody rubs it into the presentation side that "copy" is all that matters, what an advertisement says in words. Most of you birds forget that you've got to see an advertisement before it has an earthly chance of being read. I've got to make it visible—visibility is——

THE MAN AT THE DESK [interrupting]: Got it! That gives me just the line I was after. Visibility. Mental visibility—how's that?

JIMMY: Fine. What the Devil does it mean?

THE MAN AT THE DESK: That doesn't matter a hoot. By the time the Chief gets as far as that with his sales-jaw the prospects will be all gooey and much too full of sales-emotion to bother. [He writes.] Here you are: how's this sound? "We believe, before all other things, in the mental visibility of our advertisements. That is our aim—mental visibility." And now for the confidential touch: "Now, you all think this is just showman's patter? Just the big drum that the advertising man always beats."

JIMMY: The Chief'll never stand for that, Wayne.

WAYNE: Won't he? You don't know Sir Clifford Jacks, Knight of the British Empire. You're new to the firm. Why, before he worked his title he always used to speak with a faked American accent, because he said it was good psychology and that all English manufacturers thought that the only people who knew anything about advertising were Americans. He'll fall for this, stiff. Listen: "The big drum is dead: the hot air of advertising's early days has slowly rolled away. We are on the edge of a new dawn of marketing practice that heralds the sunrise of sales for British goods—for your goods. To-day we deal with facts."



JIMMY: It sounds the most awful bilge.

WAYNE: 'Course it does as *I* read it; but it won't when the Chief coughs it up. His voice does the trick every time.

JIMMY: The ten-thousand-a-year voice.

WAYNE: You can get away with any balderdam if you've got the vocal chords to carry it off. Still, I've tuned this stuff up to suit these Near-Wool directors: they're a mixed bunch. Their chairman, Webster, is always doing something with tremendous energy—generally the wrong thing. There's a Victorian relic called Franey, and a young pup who's his nephew, and the usual dreary accountant, all full of hot air and malice. Richards dug all that information out to encourage me. I say, are you through with that scheme yet?

JIMMY: Just peppering up the biological urge in these photos. These ads. will be the last word in sales through sex.

WAYNE: Then we're wrong: we're selling the stuff to women, not to men.

JIMMY: No woman minds the suggestion that she might look worth a million dollars in her under-beneaths, and we've got some marvellous models to figure in this Near-Wool stuff.

WAYNE [rising and examining some of the photographs Jimmy has been retouching]:

Figure is the right word. It's like a mixture of *La Vie Parisienne* and Hollywood uncensored.

RICHARDS [entering hurriedly]: Sir Clifford's just coming down. I said you'd nearly finished.

WAYNE: Lucky for you I had. There's the dope.

[Before Richards can pick up the papers Sir Clifford enters.]

SIR CLIFFORD: I'd like to have a look at my speech, Wayne.

RICHARDS: It's not typed yet, sir.

SIR CLIFFORD: Why not?

WAYNE: I've only just finished writing it, Sir Clifford.

SIR CLIFFORD: Oh. [And then more slowly]: Oh. Well, perhaps we can run through it together. Will you come up?

[To Jimmy]: How's the scheme shaping, Marbit?

JIMMY: Have a look at it, sir.

SIR CLIFFORD: No, no—presently. Come along, Wayne.

[He leaves the room followed by Wayne. Jimmy at once resumes his whistling of “Boléro.” Richards hovers round the drawing table, lasciviously intent upon the photographs of semi-nude girls.]

RICHARDS: I say—these are a bit on the hot side, aren’t they?

JIMMY [wilfully misunderstanding him]: Hot! God, yes. I should think that Near-Wool stuff would pretty well scorch the skin off any girl.

RICHARDS: If we get this scheme through, some of the Sunday papers will kick at these illustrations. Not that *I* mind them.

JIMMY: Not they: they’ll take anything so long as you don’t mention the word constipation and claim to be able to cure cancer.

RICHARDS: You must have a time in those photographers’ studios, posing all these models.

JIMMY: You’ve a low mind, Richards. All sexed-up and nowhere to go, so you won’t believe me when I tell you that when I get all these photos shot I never think of the girls at all and only of the composition and how it’s going to fit into my lay-outs for the advertisements.

RICHARDS: It wouldn’t take me that way.

[He picks up photo after photo with feverish eagerness. 8 and 3 walk over to the table and stand each side of him, watching. As they move the scene is again arrested.]

8: Why does he look at these things?

3: This must be something to do with sex.

8: Sex and selling things and making up talk for each other. Talk, talk, talk—with only a thought here and there, and then a stupid thought. What did they do to their world? It must have got broken sometimes.

3: We will see; but first let us learn how this one lived.

[He touches Richards on the shoulder, and immediately the scene fades. The flickering, blurring effect is repeated. There are suggestions in the haze on the screen of the first scene



running through not in reverse but in proper sequence and at great speed, then there is darkness and Richards' voice is heard, triumphantly recitative:

We pulled it off. Of course, I practically landed the account. I got hold of that conference from the start. The Chief did his sales talk, but everyone saw who was running it. They'll spend all of thirty thousand—sixty thousand before they're through. The old "British and Best" trouble came up, and I said that it wouldn't do to say that and nothing else about your goods. "Gentlemen," I said, "if you'd got all your customers in the Albert Hall and you had them to yourself for twenty minutes and in that time you wanted to tell them about the things you make, you wouldn't take a megaphone and say over and over again for the whole twenty minutes: 'Webster's Near-Woollens are British and Best'." Oh, that went over.

[As his voice has been wandering on, the stage has grown light and a bedroom becomes dimly visible. A girl's voice says:

Oh, Mr. Richards, you must be clever.

[The stage becomes clear suddenly, revealing Richards in the most undignified garb to which man is ever reduced. He is in his underclothes, with long pinkish woollen pants, blue and red socks, suspenders of bright orange, a pale blue-striped shirt without a collar. He is taking the studs out of the neck of the shirt, and his face reflects a mood of boastful self-satisfaction. He stands by the dressing-table of a particularly cheap and nasty pseudo-Jacobean bedroom suite. Reclining on the bed in an abbreviated nightdress and a silk wrap is a coarse, yellow-headed young woman, doing her best to look voluptuous with a relatively poor equipment for producing that effect. Her face is coated with paint, and 8 and 3, who stand on either side of the bed which is in the centre of the stage, stare at her with critical amazement.]

RICHARDS: Well, I can usually get what I want.

THE GIRL: And it's so nice of you to come to my little room and tell me about it afterwards. Will this make a lot of difference to you, getting all this new business?

RICHARDS: It'll make a difference to the firm. Not to me. Old Clifford Jacks is too close.

THE GIRL: Won't it make *any* difference?

RICHARDS [slowly unbuttoning his shirt]: We-ll.

[But he doesn't continue, obviously to the girl's disappointment.]

THE GIRL [gently coaxing, after a long pause]: You couldn't run to a flat for me, could you?

RICHARDS [buttoning up his shirt again at the shock of the suggestion]: Come off it, Betty. Think I can afford two homes?

BETTY: Wouldn't you like to have me all to yourself? As it is, I've got to get other business.

RICHARDS [scowling]: Well, I know that.

BETTY: I only wondered. [With an air of changing the subject]: Would it make any difference to you if Sir Clifford knew you came along here twice a week?

RICHARDS: I know far too much about where Sir Clifford goes nearly every night of the week for him to worry about *me*. He's keeping his secretary and a girl out of the new film studio at Natsborough, and I deal with Lady Jacks whenever she rings up the office, and keep the Chief posted with his alibis.

BETTY: You're a bright bunch, you advertising people.

RICHARDS: Yes, we see a spot of life. I was down in the photographic studios with young Jimmy Marbit when this underwear scheme was being prepared. Wonderful girls they have as models. Make your mouth water.

BETTY [heavily alluring]: Like any of 'em better than me? [She rises from the bed, and the silk wrap slips off.]

RICHARDS [making a dive for her and grabbing her violently in his arms]: Coo—not much!

BETTY: Shall I put out the light?

[She reaches for the pear-push switch by the bed, but Richards catches her arm.]

RICHARDS: No fear—I always like to see what I'm getting.



[The scene is petrified as 8 strides forward from his place by the bed.]

8: Vile things. They could only talk.

3: They all lived for themselves.

8: They must have smashed things horribly. We must go on and see.

[The scene fades out and the screen with its flickering silver light replaces it. 3's voice is heard saying:

Could this one have changed? Could such things as this have made our world?

[In the silvery screen there is a misty impression of gigantic buildings, as though the towers of New York were seen through a semi-transparent fabric. This hazy sketch of steel and concrete architecture becomes at last a definite picture of a huge zoned building, with a deep illuminated glass frieze across which messages in unfamiliar characters are passing slowly. These characters are a form of shorthand and they convey tabloid thoughts regarding the desirability of untainted breath, freedom from constipation, smart-looking luggage, smart-looking shoes, smart-looking underwear, mind-broadening ocean tours, mind-broadening aeroplane tours, mind-broadening travel generally, health-giving soap, health-giving soup, health-giving stockings, health-giving vests: anybody with a knowledge of early twentieth-century Pitman shorthand could decipher these intimate, chatty notes regarding the care of the body, inside and out, and the astonishing variety of rich foods available for the mind. As the stage becomes distinct it is apparent that the view of this building is obtained through a large window, which fills one side of a room completely. At first, against the brightness of the daylight streaming through this exaggerated window, the furniture and the figures in the room have the quality of silhouettes, but this passes and the furniture and occupants of the room are seen in detail. The chief article of furniture is a round table that is really a circular shelf of polished metal fitted about a thick polished metal column that runs from the floor to the ceiling. This

column has countersunk into its smooth curved surface bands of glass behind which lights are set so that beams can be directed upon any part of the table or can be flooded upwards to the polished, cream-coloured ceiling so as to fill the room with warm reflected light. There is a clockface in the column, which shows twenty-four hours instead of twelve. It is ten o'clock according to this timepiece. There is a black disc in the column that might be (and is) an improved telephone apparatus. There are other small discs grouped about the telephone, and immediately below the clockface is a white dial with the date on it in black letters:

MAY 9, 1963.

There are three squat and obviously very comfortable arm-chairs covered in hot brown velvet. On the black polished floor are two Persian rugs. The walls of the room are rose pink. In spite of its extreme simplicity and the efficiency of its furnishing, its colourings give the impression of bad taste. There is no profusion of ornament, but the pink walls and the brown velvet chair coverings give a suggestion of vulgarity to the room. As everything grows distinct a man's voice can be heard. It is recognizable as the voice of Richards, a little slower, a little fuller in tone, and decidedly improved in its pronunciation. He is delivering an oration to somebody, and from the mutter of traffic noises that has accompanied the emergence of the scene it is at last possible to distinguish his words:

Unfortunate, most unfortunate. And inappropriate. The night after, the very night after I have been accorded, what I think I may fairly claim to be, a great reception, I hear this crushing news about my family. I cannot conceive what your poor mother would have said.

[It is now possible to see both Richards and his audience. He is a well-preserved but fleshy old man, nearing seventy. Vigorous, with a hard, greedy face and bad-tempered eyes. He is dressed in very loosely-cut black clothes with a white soft collar and a pale grey tie in which a diamond pin flashes.



He has thin, dirty grey hair, and is a discoloured and inflated version of his youthful self, with all his Cockney self-satisfaction hardened by success into aggressive pomposity. His audience consists of a young man who resembles very closely what Richards was thirty-five years before, and this is as it should be, for the young man is his son, although a better-nourished and better-educated youth than his father ever was. He is dressed in loose-cut white flannels, double-breasted jacket and wide trousers, a deep blue shirt and a white tie. He has careless and confident social manners, an easy command of slang, and no reverence for anything. 8 and 3 stand at each corner of the window and watch the room. Richards stands with his back to where a fireplace might be, if there were one, and his son lounges in one of the arm-chairs. Richards continues after a pause in which he clears his throat:

Impossible, Harry, to imagine what your mother would have said.

HARRY: If she knew your habits as well as you think you know mine, she'd have said "Like father, like son," I suppose.

RICHARDS: What was that, sir? What was that?

HARRY: Don't be tiresome, guv'nor. You know perfectly well what I said.

RICHARDS: I could hardly believe that such a heartless reference to your dear mother could have passed your lips.

HARRY: Funny how people who make speeches can't keep to the point. The reference was to you. Like father, like son. Simple enough, isn't it?

RICHARDS: No, sir. It is not simple. I cannot accuse myself of any conduct comparable with the licentious recklessness—

HARRY [drawling his interruption]: Oh, come now! You're not addressing one of your impure book club meetings.

RICHARDS [with saddened grandeur]: I know, Harry, that respect for parents is out of fashion, but I ask you to respect the motives that prompted me to initiate the pure-book campaign.

HARRY: 'Course I do! The Honours list and what you'll make out of the advertising.

RICHARDS [ignoring the remark]: Did you read my speech?

HARRY: Well, as the last one you made was greeted with loud cries of "bilge" by anyone with any pretensions to intelligence, I thought I'd give this a miss.

RICHARDS: Had you read it, Harry, you'd have realized the magnitude of the disaster your conduct has caused. I never did approve of this companionate marriage idea. It always seemed loose to me. But when any man, and that man my son, breaks off his fourth companionate marriage and openly announces his intention of beginning a fifth—words fail me!

HARRY: Nonsense! They never do—they never have. You know you've talked yourself into being a millionaire, and you'll talk yourself into a peerage before you're through. What have you got against companionate marriage? Every enlightened girl is all for it, and I don't know a man in my set who wouldn't collapse at the idea of tying up for life in the old Church contract notion, and then faking up a bedroom scene with some tart to get a divorce. There aren't going to be any Divorce Courts in ten years' time, because there aren't going to be any binding marriages.

RICHARDS: Rank immorality! Why not defend polygamy and ask me to finance a harem for you?

HARRY: This isn't polygamy: it's common-sense monogamy. For thousands of people marriages must be, and ought to be, limited to a year or two.

RICHARDS: Until death us do part. Have those words no meaning for you?

HARRY: None whatever, and I'd like to know where you heard them, as you were married in a registry office. They'd never have had much meaning for you, anyway.

RICHARDS: My boy, I am a self-made man——

HARRY: Still unfinished. You fail on most of the test words when you forget to speak slowly. And you surround your-



self with all this ghastly period furniture and give yourself away completely in any room you occupy by the foul colour you turn on for the walls. For the Lord's sake let's have something different!

[He levers himself out of the arm-chair, crosses to the table and presses two of the little coloured studs that encircle the column just above the table level. The walls, which are apparently made of glass tinted by concealed lights, change colour and become a soft apple green.]

That's better, although nothing's right with those disgusting chairs.

[He strolls back to his chair while his father, simmering with indignation, bursts out:

Thank God I am a self-made man! And I say that honestly and sincerely whenever I see what manner of man your Oxford and your Cambridge and your public schools turn out. You've had what I never had—the best education money could buy. But I had what seems to be better: a Christian upbringing. And I slaved and worked all my hard youth guided by the light of Christian service. There was no self-indulgence, no flagrant immorality camouflaged under the fine name of "companionate marriage" in my life. I was a humble follower of the way——

HARRY [yawning]: The way of all flesh. D'you suppose Mother didn't know, and I didn't know, later, about all your mistresses? Why do you public men go through life thinking everybody is blind? If you'd ever stood for Parliament you'd have been disillusioned. There's no reticence about the back-chat of rival candidates concerning private lives and pretty ladies. To use an old-world phrase, come off it, guv'nor!

RICHARDS: I don't expect Christian charity from those who envy such success I have attained and who spread lies about me, which you apparently believe. I am content that; although not a church-goer, I am a Christian, and as such——

[With a gesture 8 and 3 stop the scene, which begins to darken and melt as they speak.]

8: Let us see the roots of this society. We have seen the rotting fruit.

3: Or shall we see the fruit fall?

8: Let us first go back.

[The scene fades into the silvery indecisions of form upon which the curtain first rose. Smoky clouds race each other across the screen, and here and there a rift discloses a snapshot impression. The sounds of traffic die away. There are some faint, trailing echoes of melody: the far-away sound of a string orchestra playing a minuet, followed by the muted blare of a trumpet, and then, infinitely remote, a choir chanting a Latin hymn. It is possible to pick up a few of the swiftly-flashed pictures that peep through the clouds: a stream of traffic flowing down Broadway: a moonless night in the no-man's-land of Flanders in 1917 with a racing constellation of Verey lights showing momentarily the sleek mud, the shell holes and the wire: finally, an old-fashioned railway train moving backwards, black smoke pouring from the tall funnel of the engine. This smoke rushes over the screen, and thereafter no picture can be distinguished. There are only rapidly-changing shapes, until all movement on the screen slows down, and something which looks at first like the dome of a church seen in the distance grows steady and assumes a hard brown metallic gleam. The scale of this object is presently altered by a great arch that curves over it, and as the scene clears it is recognizable as the bronze helmet of a Roman soldier who stands, spear in hand, in the centre of an archway at the back of a large, cool, pleasant room. There is a window, right, pierced in a very thick wall, and through it a rapidly darkening evening sky of deep blue is visible. Before the scene ends it has changed to indigo, lit by a few intensely bright stars. The walls of the room are of pale buff, with a black dado on which a band of figures is painted in bright colours: cupids, doves, garlands and women assembled in a stiff conventional pattern. The



furniture consists of a low, circular table of bronze, with three outward curving legs ending in goats' hooves; two low, bronze-framed couches arranged on either side of the table, covered with crimson cushions, and a big shoe-shaped lamp swinging from the ceiling above the table. Beyond the archway where the soldier stands is an ante-room with walls of Etruscan red. 8 and 3 walk out of this ante-chamber past the stiff, immobile soldier into the room. Directly they stop and take up observation places on either side of the archway, the soldier comes to life, bumps the butt of his spear on the ground, and stamps to one side of the archway, leaving it free for a tall, worried-looking man in a white toga. His hair and beard are carefully dressed. His sandals are laced with gold.

THE MAN: I was told the Tetrarch had come.

[He speaks with an American accent, and is an irritably efficient person, never very far from losing a rather hot temper.]

THE SOLDIER: Not yet, my lord.

[He, too, speaks with a flat American voice. The Man grunts at this answer and claps his hands, and then sits on one of the couches. His signal is answered by a Negro slave, dressed only in an orange loincloth, who comes in from the ante-room bearing a wide tray on which glasses and a tall, slender bottle are set.]

THE MAN: Is the wine cooled off, Zano?

ZANO [speaking with a voice like a bell and in the accents of an American Negro]: Ah's gat ut here, lawd. [He arranges the tray on the table.] Ah's reckoned to do de lawd Herod 'bout as well as anyone dis side of Rome.

THE MAN: Right. You can cut out the rest.

ZANO: Suttinly, lawd.

THE SOLDIER [announcing]: The Lord Tetrarch of Galilee and Peraea.

[The Man rises from the couch and a tall officer in bronze armour and a plumed helmet sweeps into the room, and standing by the archway supplements the soldier's announcement in a clear official voice:

The Lord Herod Antipas, Tetrarch of Galilee and Peraea, to see the Lord Pilate, Procurator of Judaea, Samaria and Idumea.

[A slender man with a Greek face, dark hair, and the most perfect self-possession, enters and raises his right hand in the Roman salute. His host and the officer salute in the same manner. The soldier stands stiffly to attention. Zano kneels and touches the floor with his forehead.]

HEROD: So kind of you to think of a quiet talk. It was just what I wanted.

PILATE: It was real kind of you to come. [He is awkwardly conscious that there may be an implied rebuke in Herod's words, and he hastily motions the officer to leave]: Don't wait, Pertinax. Have the guards placed beyond the ante-room.

PERTINAX [saluting and turning to the soldier]: March! [The soldier turns about smartly and marches through the archway followed by Pertinax. The sound of spear butts grounding on pavement follows, and then the voice of Pertinax giving orders is heard in the distance. Zano, who has risen from his kneeling posture, has withdrawn to a corner of the room. His colour has interested 8 and 3, but they retain their places on each side of the archway and make no attempt to examine him closely.]

HEROD: Difficult to get rid of the official atmosphere, isn't it? Still, it's always worth doing.

PILATE: It certainly is. [He waves his hand towards one of the couches. Herod bows slightly and sits.] Zano, pour the wine.

[Zano comes forward, pours out the wine. Pilate nods, and he withdraws.]

HEROD [sipping the cooled wine Pilate has offered him]: We have made the mistake of seeing too little of each other, Pilate. That is how misunderstanding arises.

PILATE [relieved]: Just what I've been thinking. [But he pauses, and there is an awkward gap.]



HEROD [making conversation]: So the city's quiet again.

PILATE: Quiet! In a way I suppose it is. But we've let that tough Barabbas loose again. He'll stir things up. The policing of this part of the Province is a full-time job for a couple of legions.

HEROD [reflectively]: Barabbas. Rather less than Rome's usual justice, wasn't it?

PILATE: If I'd only had another cohort handy I'd have shown these Jews—I'd have crucified Barabbas and scourged all the ringleaders of the riot.

HEROD: I wasn't thinking of Barabbas, but of the other man, whom you so courteously sent along to me.

PILATE: Well, his home town was in your jurisdiction—it was the least I could do. But do you begin to know the minds of these people? They howled like wolves for the blood of that Nazarene. He was only a wandering teacher, and as far as I could gather he'd never tried to upset a darn thing anywhere.

HEROD: There you are wrong, Pilate. He tried to upset the most secret of all things.

PILATE: Well, I don't quite get that. He struck me as innocent.

HEROD: No, no, my dear Pilate! Guilty—guilty of the crime of tactlessness. He told the truth, even to his own followers. And that upsets men's souls.

PILATE: But only the Jews hated him. He had plenty of other followers.

HEROD: The Jewish mind, Pilate, is an acute and terribly active thing. My affinities are all Greek, as you know, but I understand the Jewish mind. You as a Roman, if you will forgive a frank statement, are merely concerned with efficiency, with soldiers and drains and water supply, and in the vast cause of common sense you and your fellow administrators expend an energy that astounds me even though it commands my respect. You will never govern the Jews, because they always live in a mental world of their own, outside your great practical system of govern-

ment. They must therefore always see things differently; but they see things more vividly than any Roman, and they apprehend danger more vividly. These Jewish priests saw in the teaching of this Nazarene Jesus a threat to everything established, as though all men's thoughts were suddenly to be turned into new, strange roads that led to an impossible sort of world. They wanted to stop it, of course. They saw it was something strong and dangerous, and they hated the sort of world it promised. I am not altogether blaming them. I should find that new world a little bleak and flavourless myself. I'd been watching the career of this teacher before you sent him to me for trial, and I've met many of his followers. They're by no means the usual hysterical rabble clutching on to a rustic prophet—people of birth, some of your officers among them, numbers of Jews, Ethiopian slaves: an incredible mixture.

PILATE: It's all over now.

HEROD: It may just be starting. You have executed Jesus, but he has shown thousands of people that every man is really two men locked up in one body. Most of us strike out a workable compromise between the unruly pair within us, but the compromise never begets achievements that are lasting. The Roman likes naked bodies and breasts and buttocks and all the apparatus of voluptuous entertainment, but another side of him likes hard, dry work with plenty of mechanical efficiency. Personally, I like beautiful shapes and music and what my Greeks have written during the last three or four hundred years, and I am too indolent to allow myself to listen to the ambitious whispering of my other self, which is a repressed ruler and is only employed for the most superficial administrative purposes. But suppose I was compelled, like the followers of Jesus, to make a conscious selection of the best out of both sides of myself, and to dedicate that best to the making of a new world?

PILATE: Isn't that just what every Roman does?



HEROD: No. They divide themselves up into departments of work and pleasure. All one or all the other, or a little of both, according to temperament and opportunity, and the result is—the Roman world. That's a new world in a sense, but not in the sense meant by the followers of Jesus. You can be comfortable in the Roman world, but you couldn't be comfortable in the world Jesus wanted to create, and that fact wouldn't distress you in the least if you were one of his followers. What are they beginning to call themselves? Christians. Yes, Christians. Followers of the Christ.

PILATE: They called him the King of the Jews.

HEROD: I'm afraid I was responsible for emphasizing that. I knew it would irritate the priests, and I find it difficult to resist irritating people with set ideas. Set ideas make the world go on repeating the same monotonous patterns of life century after century. Eating, sleeping, coupling, begetting; birth and death, and nothing growing out of it, no thought surviving, except in books, and no books altogether surviving the muddled folly of men who always in the end destroy what they have made. And this teacher has shown a way out of the chaos, and these Christians may gain freedom from the diversity of petty aims that forces all men and all peoples into muddled waste and senseless destruction.

PILATE: Yeah, but remember most people in this city preferred Barabbas to a man who, according to you, was trying to get over something straight and sensible.

HEROD: The mob will always prefer Barabbas.

PILATE: You'll allow the circumstances were exceptional. But they won't get another chance of demonstrating their preference, and next time that tough's caught he'll be for it.

HEROD [politely explaining]: I was using Barabbas as a symbol. When I felt constrained to allow the operation of justice to remain in your hands in the matter of this teacher, and

you gave the mob the choice between Jesus and Barabbas, it merely showed that most men prefer the evil that they know to the good that terrifies them because they cannot understand it.

PILATE: What else could I have done? They'd have seen through it if I'd taken a strong line. They knew I was short of troops. Another cohort, and I'd have——

HEROD [gently interrupting]: My dear Pilate, I'm so sorry if I gave the impression that I was criticizing you. I was criticizing all mankind. To the unwisdom of men there is no end, and they will always reject the teachings of those who are inspired to show them the way out of the labyrinth of stupidity in which they stumble generation after generation. I may be wrong, but I think that this Christ has given to the world an architecture of conduct that could bring about a splendour of building and a largeness of order that even the efficiency of the Roman world has not foreshadowed.

[8 and 3, whose interest in Herod's words has been intense, now arrest the scene by speaking.]

8: There have been great ones who could see and teach and plan.

3: Christians. The thing we saw both young and old said he was a Christian. The name of this teacher remained.

8: But it was only a name. With them everything ended in words.

[As 8's slow speech ends, the scene is reanimated, and Herod continues, with a rather bitter jauntiness, as though he is ashamed of the momentary enthusiasm which had coloured his previous words:

But, of course, my dear Pilate, you know what will happen to this new teaching. Even supposing these Christians become a power over men's minds, will that power be used to release men from the monotony of their folly and to give them constructive hopes, or will it, when the genius of the teacher is a memory, become dimmed down into a



routine of repressions, of superficial laws and ceremonies—  
of cant phrases—of sickening hypocrisy——

[8 and 3 move slightly, and Herod's words become slower, the scene darkens into obscurity, and the voice of Richards senior is heard repeating:

I don't expect Christian charity from those who envy such success I have attained and who spread lies about me, which you apparently believe. I am content that, although not a church-goer, I am a Christian, and as such I have done my duty to my God, my kind and my family. I, at least, have tried to live in charity with all men.

HARRY: And in sin with most women who attracted you. [The scene has vanished in darkness, and as Richards and his son continue their wrangling, the outlines of the previous scene return until it is presently complete in every detail.]

RICHARDS: Harry, there is a limit beyond which even the modern mode of father-baiting——

HARRY: *Père*-baiting sounds better, if you'll forgive my French. But don't think I'm being sniffy for the sake of irritating you, gov'nor. I merely deny your right to arrange my life for me because you've made a success of selling other people's soap and stockings and planes, and have enough money to indulge secretly what you condemn me for practising openly. Damn it! A man must have women unless he's a eunuch! I don't wallow in sex.

[He takes a cigar out of a gold case and goes to the table, where he lights it by holding it against one of the smaller discs in the service column after he has pressed one of the coloured studs at the base.]

RICHARDS: If five companionate marriages in four years isn't wallowing in sex—— [Storming]: It puts me in an impossible position, I tell you!

HARRY: I thought there was a personal flavour about all this righteousness. Can't see your way to clinging on to the pure-book campaign stunt if your only legitimately begotten son is living in bestial promiscuity—that's the

trouble, eh? Those are the right words, aren't they? Your efficient generation with its blah about service and the mission of commerce worked up such an output of pure bilge that you forgot the facts of life, and if you ever bumped up against 'em you told lies quick, so you shouldn't have to face 'em. Gosh, guv'nor, you've the neck to talk to me about wallowing in sex when you've been doing it all your life and doing what I've never done—wallowing in hypocrisy.

RICHARDS [the old cry of the old]: My God! My God!

What is the world coming to?

[8 and 3 by speaking immediately stop the action of the scene, which becomes indistinct and gradually darkens.]

8: That is our question also. How did their world change?

3: The answer must be quite near their time.

8: Did it change or did it end?

3: Were these our ancestors—these things of sex?

8: A few years on, and we shall see.

[As they speak the darkness of the stage gives place once more to the screen with its hurrying silver clouds. There is a blurred block of huge buildings visible for a second before the screen melts away and the details of a large and pleasant room become distinct. This room has a curving bow window of plate glass, unbroken by glazing bars or joints, and extending from floor to ceiling, sweeping round from the centre of the wall, left, to the centre of the wall that faces the audience. The window discloses a view, slightly distorted because of the curvature of the glass, of undulating parkland, across which a line of elms follows a white road. There is a church spire rising from behind a clump of trees that crowns a low hill about a mile distant and beyond that a high grey tower with a bright metal top dwarfs the church and the trees. The room is furnished very simply. There is a door, right centre, and all the rest of the wall space is occupied by bookshelves that reach from the black polished floor to the cream-coloured ceiling. There is a large desk of polished teak with all the angles protected by



thin, curving bands of silvery metal. There are two squat upholstered chairs, covered in a dark silver material that has a metallic lustre. In the window, and looking hopelessly out of time and place, is a Windsor chair of oak and yew, beautifully toned and highly polished. By the desk, sitting on a chair that revolves on a metal column fixed to the floor, is a tall, elderly man, dressed in a suit of buff linen with a white shirt and soft white collar, very loose and comfortable, and a black tie. He wears white canvas shoes. There is a typewriter on the desk and a load of papers and books. The man is reading a newspaper, which he presently throws on to the floor, and then screws a sheet of paper into the typewriter. He begins typing and thereby attracts 8 and 3, who have been looking out of the window. A bell rings and the man stops typing and touches a switch on a black box that rises above the muddle on the desk.]

THE MAN [irritably]: Yes?

A WOMAN'S VOICE [proceeding from the black box]: The reporter from the *Gazette* to see you, dear.

THE MAN: I suppose I've got to see him.

THE VOICE: You said you would when he rang up last night.

THE MAN: I wouldn't have said the same thing if he'd rung up before breakfast. Oh, send him up, send him up!

THE VOICE: All right, dear—be as nice as you can to him.

THE MAN: Nice!

[He grunts with disgust and resumes his typing until the door opens and a pleasant, good-humoured woman of fifty introduces a very cool young man. The woman wears a tweed skirt and a pale green jumper, her legs are bare and tanned and her feet are thrust into white socks and soft leather walking shoes. The young man is dressed in well-fitting grey flannels, a pale blue shirt, a grey tie and grey suede shoes.]

THE WOMAN: This is Mr. Debauney of the *Daily Gazette*.

DEBAUNEY: Professor Lovedale, it is most good of you to see me.

THE WOMAN: I've explained to Mr. Debauney that you've no manners, dear, so don't mind behaving naturally.

DEBAUNEY [smiling]: Really, Mrs. Lovedale, I'm sure——

MRS. LOVEDALE: You haven't met him, Mr. Debauney, so you can't be sure of anything. Now I'll leave you to it. [She goes out, and Lovedale points to one of the chairs.]

LOVEDALE: Sit down. What the Devil d'you want to talk about, anyway?

DEBAUNEY: *I* don't want to talk—I want you to talk.

LOVEDALE: The last damned journalist who came down to worry me talked the whole time, and then published everything he'd said and attributed it to me. That was three years ago when there was a war scare on.

DEBAUNEY: There's more than a war scare on now.

LOVEDALE: What—a war?

DEBAUNEY: Yes.

LOVEDALE: Oh? Some little tin-pot state that the League wants brought to its senses about commercial concessions, I suppose. There's nothing in your filthy rag about it—I've just been reading it.

DEBAUNEY: Not a word. We knew that something might happen last night, but we weren't allowed to say so. Nobody wanted a panic.

LOVEDALE [a shade anxious]: Panic? Why, what's happened?

DEBAUNEY: The League's burst.

[The bell from the black box on the table rings, and Lovedale touches the switch. Mrs. Lovedale's voice is heard:

My dear, there's the most thrilling news bulletin coming through from Empire Central—do switch in.

LOVEDALE: Thanks. [He switches off, and as he turns a dial on the face of the box he says to Debauney]: This'll probably be about the League.

DEBAUNEY: Things'll have moved a bit—it'll be about the war. [A loud, standardized Oxford-and-Cambridge mixture voice comes out of the black box:

——unlikely that operations will begin in Europe for



several weeks, if at all, although the support of the powers, owing to treaty obligations, must necessarily be divided. An official declaration of war against the United States of America has not yet been made by the United Soviet States of Russia and China, but between three and four o'clock, world time, a fleet of long-distance planes flew over Vancouver, without any notification having been made to the Government of the Canadian Free State, and raided California, completely destroying San Francisco, Los Angeles and Hollywood, and obliterating the home of the American film industry, thus dealing a crushing blow at America's ability to organize war propaganda. A note radiogrammed from Washington to Moscow demanding an explanation has not been answered. It is seventy-nine years since the U.S.A. waged a successful European war, and the victories of 1918 have not been forgotten in the Great Republic. President Issacstein's message to the American nation was broadcast to the world at ten o'clock, world time, this morning. Empire Central will repeat this message after news. Second Bulletin: France, Poland and Italy have, in accordance with their individual interpretation of treaty obligations, commenced mobilization. All three Governments have repudiated the League of Nations. The French Government is transporting from Algeria three army corps of Senegalese troops to guard the Channel ports, purely as an emergency measure. At the request of the French military authorities, the cross-Channel air services have been temporarily suspended. The interpretation of Great Britain's treaty obligations to France, Poland, Italy and Germany will have to be referred to a committee of experts in international jurisprudence which will come into session immediately at Geneva. If the German states throw in their lot with Russia, then France will declare war against the alliance, and if France attacks Germany, no matter what Germany's commitments are, Great Britain may be pledged to the support of the German states. A

situation could therefore arise in which we found ourselves the allies of the Soviet States of Russia and China, who have already attacked the U.S.A., and will almost certainly attack the Canadian Free State. Third Bulletin: General mobilization was ordered at 10.30, world time, this morning by the War Office. Two divisions of infantry, with tanks, are to guard the Channel ports. All traffic between French and English ports is to be temporarily suspended. This is purely a precautionary measure and has no political significance. The conversion of the Empire Chemical Products plant at Birmingham, Hull, Oxford, Liverpool, Manchester and Dagenham has been ordered by the War Office, in case protective measures and powers of retaliation are required in the event of any contravention of the international anti-gas agreement signed at Washington in 1943. The agreement, which replaced an earlier one, was signed with qualifying conditions by all the powers except the Soviet States. Arrangements are to be made for a supply of protective respirators for the civil population of all cities and industrial areas during the next few weeks. End of news. Fresh bulletins will be issued at 12.45 and 14.30, world time. We are now going to repeat President Issacstein's message to the American nation. Hold on a minute, please. [Pause.] President Issacstein.

[A thick, American-Jewish voice rends its way out of the instrument:

Zitizens, we are right up against jest the biggest proposition in disaster this world has seen since Noah lit out for the gangway of ze Ark outer de rain. Say now, d'you know jest what this Goddam crisis means? It means that, right away, we've got to pull togezzer. It means zat——

[Lovedale switches off the voice, and turns to Debauney. He is agitated, but he tries to keep cool, and succeeds.]

LOVEDALE: That's about all I can stand of America.

DEBAUNEY: Quite. Now, Professor Lovedale, what's going to happen?



LOVEDALE: Haven't you any imagination?

DEBAUNEY: Oh, there'll be a flare-up, of course, and Wall Street and the Stock Exchange'll go dippy, and the pound and the dollar will be worth about a penny each; but I meant what'll happen to the people? You're a world authority on sociology, and the three and a half million readers of the *Gazette* want to know what you feel about it all. How d'you think it'll affect them? Will they stand for the sort of war propaganda that was pumped into them eighty years ago by the Press?

LOVEDALE: Your readers don't want to know that, but you and your proprietors do.

DEBAUNEY: I'll put in anything you say, within reason.

LOVEDALE: Well, put down four things: death, starvation, disease, barbarism. They'll all happen in that order, unless this war's stopped within a few hours. Those that aren't choked with gas will starve and rot and end their lives as lousy peasants grubbing a potato patch among the ruins of all this.

[He points out of the window at the rich countryside.]

DEBAUNEY: I can't say that, sir. It'd do your reputation a lot of harm and might frighten people.

LOVEDALE: Man, don't you realize it doesn't matter a tinker's damn whether it does my so-called reputation any harm or frightens a few of your three and a half millions of readers? In the old days of capital punishment a condemned man didn't worry about the prospect of a toothache a few hours before he was hanged. We're in exactly the same position. Civilization's going to be executed, perhaps in a few hours. [He gets up and strides over to the Windsor chair.] D'you see this chair? [Debauney nods.] Well, it's out-of-date, old fashioned, an antique. But I like the shape and feel of it, and I've a weakness for old things that is quite illogical and stupid sometimes. It doesn't matter much in art and the shapes of things; after all, art's only froth and trimmings and'll disappear if intelligent people ever

make a continuously expanding civilization that doesn't overbalance through having too many wooden heads at the top of it. [Debaune is making rapid shorthand notes in a book.] What does matter about this old, silly habit of liking antique things is that people will mix the romantic politics of the eighteenth century with the mechanical accomplishments of the twentieth. You can't have chemists and engineers and unimaginative politicians and soldiers making contributions to the same civilization. This war is two hundred years out of date in everything except weapons. The world's so rich and prosperous that everyone's forgotten that the last war didn't pay. Nobody knows now what the last war was like. Nobody reads the thousands of books that were written about it, except a few keen soldiers who read the explanations the various German, French and English generals made to excuse themselves for not winning a decisive victory. Everybody thinks America ran the whole of the 1914-18 war, and won it, too. There's been over three-quarters of a century of American film propaganda devoted to establishing that view. The Russians understand all about the power of propaganda: that's why they've smashed Hollywood first and killed America's voice. The Russians are realists. Remember, they've struck without any declaration of war. They've cut out all the old-fashioned interchange of warnings. That'll happen here. Now planes are driven by power broadcast from stations with ranges of thousands of miles and all they have to lift are gas bombs and a couple of hundred troops each to occupy the ruins after they've made a raid, anyone can strike anywhere. D'you think anybody except our politicians is going to wait for the views of a committee of experts as to which side we're on? No, the power that thinks we're dangerous will shove us out of the way, quick. French planes will be across the Channel to-night.

DEBAUNEY: Or German. But surely it won't be as quick as that. In a few days, perhaps, but not in a few hours.



LOVEDALE: Don't put that down as one of my views by mistake. Not that it matters, for it's most unlikely that what you are putting down will ever get printed.

DEBAUNEY: Professor Lovedale, are you really serious about this?

LOVEDALE [standing by the window and looking out]: Yes. I'm standing here looking at all this because I believe it's one of the last chances I shall have of seeing peaceful, ordered country, and airway lighthouses and church towers and trees shading a road. All this must go because men are chattering monkeys, because the ape in us is selfish and silly and lascivious. One day, if it hadn't been for this war, science might have done what Christianity tried to do: made all men constructive and self-controlled. Who was it said that Christianity had not been tried and found wanting, but had been found difficult and not tried?

DEBAUNEY: That's neat. I've never heard that.

LOVEDALE: No. People don't read the early classics of this century. It was Chesterton, I think. It's true. Christianity was too difficult for things with monkey blood in their veins. The laboratories might have succeeded where the churches failed, and by planning life by the light of increased knowledge of analytical psychology and biochemistry—but all that's a dream now. The dark ages are coming back, and there's no great church now to salve the accumulated wisdom of the world as there was when the Roman civilization went under. We shall all go back to the soil, young man, back to the soil, those of us who aren't under it; unless your proprietors and all the other publicity and news service controllers force the Governments to stop the war now, before it gets beyond the wit of any man to stop it.

DEBAUNEY: Then, professor, your view of the situation is generally pessimistic.

LOVEDALE: Would you be an optimist if you were about to be lynched by a mob of lunatics?

DEBAUNEY: No; but I don't think the present crisis is comparable with that situation.

LOVEDALE [looking out of the window, his back to Debauney]:  
I do. Good-morning!

DEBAUNEY [rising]: Would you like me to read over my notes?

LOVEDALE: Don't trouble. They won't appear.

DEBAUNEY: I hope you're wrong, sir.

LOVEDALE: So do I, but I doubt if you'll even get back to London.

DEBAUNEY: Many thanks for the interview, anyway.

LOVEDALE: Good morning.

[He comes away from the window and switching on the radio on the desk stands and watches it. As Debauney goes out the instrument blares into activity. President Issacstein is working up to his peroration.

—vell, and vot then? I'll tell you. There will be a world war, and we shall triumph as we triumphed of old. We are zitizens of the greatest nation in the world, and until we have redooced our enemies to ze dust—

[Lovedale switches off and walks back to the window where he stands for some seconds looking out at the sunny landscape. At last he says softly:

How long, oh Lord, how long?

[The scene abruptly darkens as 8 and 3 leave their places on either side of the window and walk forward to Lovedale's desk.]

8: Those who were wise were without power.

3: And without plan.

8 [as the scene becomes indistinct and disappears in darkness]:

Did anything of theirs endure?

[The question is answered partly by the scene clearing and showing Professor Lovedale's study once more, but not as it was. There are changes. The bow window is shattered, jagged teeth of glass marking the line of its curve on the ceiling and floor. The bookshelves are disarrayed and emptied here and there, while a few piles of books are kicked about



the floor. The desk is pushed into a corner. The revolving chair has gone, leaving a ragged tear in the floor where its fixed base has been violently uprooted, and the upholstered chairs are occupied by two large Negroes in pale blue uniforms, with gas masks in brown cases slung over their chests and dark red, leather-peaked forage caps on their heads. They have taken off their heavy marching boots and puttees and are greasing their feet with butter. The floor of the room is muddy, and stacks of infantry equipment are piled here and there—cartridge pouches, packs, belts and haversacks of dark brown webbing. Through the broken window, beside which 8 and 3 are standing, the view has changed. The tall grey tower has vanished and a shaking finger of smoke comes from the clump of trees on the hill. The church spire is still intact. Something has been driven across the land in the foreground at right angles to the road, something that has ploughed up a twenty-foot-wide band of grass and has blotted out the road and splintered nine of the trees that shaded it. The radio is giving out a continuous stream of war bulletins from its place on the desk, to which the Negro soldiers listen as they doctor their feet. The voice of the announcer changes from a blur of sounds into monotonous clarity as the scene becomes visible in all its details:

—now consolidated. Endeavours to hold the line of the Thames have been unavailing and troops have withdrawn to prepared positions on a line running north-east from Bristol to the Wash. The southern counties from Devon to Kent are occupied by Senegalese divisions of French Colonial troops. Surviving population has been successfully evacuated, following gas released from enemy planes. London, Oxford, Winchester, Portsmouth, Brighton, Reading and Salisbury have been bombed after the first gas attacks, and all London south of the Thames has been on fire for thirty hours. Fires have also started in Kensington, Chelsea and Shoreditch. Nothing can be done to arrest their progress. Fifth Bulletin: Air Force report that Paris and

Bordeaux have been gassed out and that Paris is in flames. There has been a successful combined attack on Rome by Russian, Austrian and German air squadrons. St. Peter's and the Vatican are uninjured, but it is reported that the Pope has been killed while blessing Italian military planes at the Ostia aerodrome, which was the principal objective of the raiding squadron. There has been a retaliatory raid by Italian planes which has reduced Vienna, Salzburg and Munich to ashes. Sixth Bulletin: Emergency rationing. The influx of population into the Midlands and the North has created a grave situation——

[A burst of atmospherics interrupts the message. One of the Negroes begins to put on his boots and puttees. The radio resumes after an interval of crackling and spluttering:

——further arrangements to be announced later. Sixth Bulletin: The Irish Free State declared itself an independent republic at 15.30 yesterday afternoon. President Mullins immediately proclaimed the strict neutrality of the republic, and followed the proclamation by a message to the President of France, wishing all success to the French arms. Owing to the destruction of Paris and Bordeaux, the present seat of the French Government is unknown, and no reply has yet been sent to the Irish——

[There is a rending crash, and the view outside disappears in a gush of yellow smoke, which splashes over the country and swirls up in a menacing cloud to the window. The Negroes leap up, and one of them blows a blast on a whistle that hangs from a lanyard tucked under his shoulder strap. They both put on their gas masks. Wisps of yellow smoke are already threading their way through the window. 8 and 3 cough and stagger.]

8 [raising both arms]: Quick! We must go on.

[The scene grows dark, but for a space the voice of the radio announcer is heard:

——Canadian independence recognized by Washington. The American front is expected to collapse owing to the



interruption of food supplies and the declaration of independent sovereign states by the consolidated gangsters of New York, Detroit, Chicago and St. Louis. President Issacstein was assassinated yesterday morning by the orders of Bombaleini, the cocaine controller of Chicago, known as the Snow King. Bombaleini has declared the war off so far as he and his organization are concerned, and has compelled War Secretary Schultz to notify Moscow of America's willingness to negotiate. Moscow does not reply, having been razed to the ground with high-powered bombs by combined French and Polish air squadrons yesterday. It is rumoured that the Russian Government——

[The voice trails off into faintness and fades out, while the dim suggestion of the scene has brightened into swirling silver clouds once again. 8's voice is heard, slow and precise, pronouncing judgment:

So that was the end.

3: Could they have built it up again?

8: It must have been built up again.

3: By those things?

8: By somebody.

3: See what happened in four centuries. They might have started to rebuild.

[The scene clears rapidly, and the gaping windows and doors of a ruined house come into focus. It was once a prosperous suburban villa, with rough-cast stucco and sham half-timbering masking its brickwork; but it has shed these disguises in the course of centuries, together with any pretensions to being weatherproof, and now, a roofless ruin, it shelters a family from the worst of the wind and a little of the rain. What was once the front garden is now a miserably untidy vegetable patch, filled with discouraged-looking cabbages. Running diagonally across this patch from the left and reaching almost to the door of the house is the trunk of a pine tree. Right and left of the patch, and running up to the house, are ragged thickets of thorn, growing out of a tangle of brambles. 8 and 3

are standing on either side of the door into the house watching a man who is sitting on the pine trunk, modelling a little clay figure in his hands. He is a young man of twenty or so and four hundred years earlier he would have worn loose tweed clothes and arty-crafty shirts and ties; but the resources of his century only permit him to tie his long hair into half a dozen little pigtails at the back of his head and to colour his bare arms and legs bright yellow, an effect which he gets from rubbing the livid juice of bocconia on to his skin. He is a dark-eyed, pleasant-faced youth, with the first silken fluff of a young beard. It is clear that he seldom washes and has never heard of soap. His only garments, a sleeveless tunic of ill-dressed hide and a loin-cloth of coarsely-woven straw, are filthy. On his feet are roughly-shaped soles of wood, tied with thongs of woven rushes. These primitive sandals and his feet and legs are splashed with grey mud. He is whistling the ghost of a familiar tune that might be "Here we go round the Mulberry Bush," if some of the notes were altered. He stops whistling as an old man comes out of the house into the afternoon sunlight. His clothes are much the same as the youth's, but he has a cloak and his limbs are unpainted and there is a grubby patchwork of beard and whisker on his face.

THE OLD MAN: Wacher want, Dan?

DAN: Elsie.

THE OLD MAN: I won't 'ave Elsie running wiv you. You don't do no work till you 'ave to. You couldn't keep no woman. 'Sides that——

[He stops and looks uneasily at Dan, sucking his teeth meanwhile.]

DAN: 'Sides wot? Come on, Mister, wot were you going to say?

THE OLD MAN [grinning]: I think she'll do better for 'erself. The Chief's bin 'ere more than once.

DAN [scowling]: I know that.

THE OLD MAN: Oh, do yer! Bin watching us, 'ave yer?

DAN: 'Course.



THE OLD MAN: Well, make yourself at 'ome. Elsie ain't 'ere. [He squats down on the doorstep and turns up the edge of his skin tunic to search for lice.]

DAN: Look 'ere, Mister Wundle, I know I'm a bit different from the other chaps, but I'll make Elsie 'appier than a man 'oo just grubs about and grows potatoes. Don't I build everything for the 'ole tribe? Why, I've kep' the rain off your 'ead with the roof I made last winter. Need I be like the others when I do different work?

WUNDLE: Precious lot o' work you do at any season.

DAN: That's only 'cos you're all afraid to let me build what I want to.

WUNDLE: You've no call to want to build anything 'cept wot's wanted. An 'ouse 'ere, and an 'ouse there.

DAN: Wot we want is a tower for the Chief. A place we could see things from.

WUNDLE: You can see all you want to from Richmond 'Ill.

DAN: You've got to climb a tree fust, and wot's the good of that? [Wundle, busy with the seams of his tunic, makes no reply.] People used to build towers, I'm sure of that. High things; higher than [he counts on his fingers, laying down the clay figure carefully on the trunk to free his hands] one—two—three houses, all on top of each other.

WUNDLE [grumpily]: Rubbish!

DAN: Don't you believe in nothing that you 'aven't seen?

WUNDLE: Oh, there's Devils' work everywhere that I 'aven't seen.

[Before Dan can think of an answer a girl comes through a gap in the thorn hedge, right. She is short and rather pudgy, with thick yellow hair that hangs loose over her shoulders. She wears a sleeveless skin tunic like the men and a skin kilt with a broad woven rush belt round her waist. She has twinkling blue eyes and a ready smile.]

DAN: 'Ullo, Elsie!

ELSIE: 'Ullo, Dan!

DAN: 'Ere, Elsie, straight now—is the Chief after you?

WUNDLE [rising angrily]: I won't 'ave that asked, mind you. If you 'ad a father, Dan, 'e'd 'ave bashed your spluddy cheek outer you. Asking the girl that, and in front of me! You, Elsie, get along in!

ELSIE [meekly]: Yes, father. [She goes through the door, and as she passes her father he deals her a ringing smack on the cheek which sends her whimpering and staggering into the house.]

WUNDLE [decisively]: Sort of man I am. Sorter man you'd be if your mother hadn't let you moon about making things instead of growing them. Lot of food we'd 'ave if things was left to the likes of you.

DAN [stuttering with rage]: Listen, old fool. That's my woman you've just clumped. If you give her to anyone else——

WUNDLE: The Chief'll get 'er, if he wants 'er.

DAN: 'E won't keep 'er. [He stops abruptly.]

WUNDLE: Threatening the Chief, eh? Want to go up before the Tribe Council, eh? You know what 'ud happen then.

DAN [threatening]: I know what 'ud happen to the man as sent me. [Picking up the clay image and holding it up.] See this?

WUNDLE: Wot's that for?

DAN: Look at it. Who does it look like?

WUNDLE: It's Devil's work—I don't like the look of it. Take it away.

DAN: Look at it. Who does it look like? Eh, who does it look like [in a sort of chant], who does it look like, who does it look like, Father Wundle, who does it look like, who does it look like, who does it look like, Father Wundle?

WUNDLE [putting his hands over his eyes and screaming]: Take it away! Take it away!

ELSIE [running out of the house]: What are you doing to father?

DAN: Frightening him because he clumped you.

ELSIE [as old Wundle groans and dithers on the ground, his hands over his head]: I won't have father frightened.



DAN [maliciously]: Give him some new guts, then he won't be!

ELSIE: You're a lazy, yellow coward!

DAN: And you're going to be the woman of a lazy, yellow coward.

ELSIE: Run away, yellow legs, the Chief's coming. He's coming to-day—any time.

DAN: I'm not afraid of the Chief.

WUNDLE [pulling himself together]: There now, that's enough o' that wicked talk. Everyone's afraid of the Chief. It ain't decent not to be! You, Dan, get out o' this. You needn't be afeared I'll tell the Council of you. You're a poor spluddy fool, and everyone knows it, so I wouldn't have nothink to tell 'em that they didn't know.

DAN [suddenly thrusting the clay image into Wundle's face]: Yes, but you haven't told me who this looks like.

WUNDLE [collapsing after a glance at the figure]: It's the Chief, the Chief. Devils' work.

ELSIE [trembling but curious]: Let me see.

DAN [withholding it]: No.

A VOICE BEYOND THE HEDGE: Let *me* see.

[A tall, powerful man swaggers through the gap into the group. He is bearded, and his beard is dyed red. His forehead below his matted mane of black hair is painted in red and blue horizontal stripes. He is naked to the waist, and his muscular body is banded with stripes of red and white. Suspended by a cord of plaited rushes about his neck is a large ebony and ivory crucifix. He wears a long kilt of hide, and in his hand he carries a staff about six feet long, with a polished brass knob that once adorned a metal bedstead at the upper end of it. Stuck into his belt is a knife, and dangling by a loop from the belt is a rusty iron fire poker. On his head he wears, like a morion, the remains of a white-enamelled colander, from which the enamel has flaked off in ragged patches. He is regal in his bearing, as befits one who wears sacred jewellery and is master of the Richmond Tribe, the third largest tribe in Britain.]

WUNDLE [in a loud voice]: The Chief.

DAN [also shouting]: The Chief.

[Elsie puts her hands to her lips and bows her head.]

THE CHIEF: What is this about Devils' work? Let me see, Wundle. *I* am the master of the Devils.

WUNDLE [chanting]: And Lord of the River and all its Valley,  
Master of the Twickenham Ford, Guardian of Richmond  
'Ill, the Thames Father, Chief of us all, World without  
end.

THE CHIEF [easily complacent]: There's trouble 'ere, I can see.  
Why ain't you at work, Dan?

DAN [sulkily]: I've finished work for to-day.

THE CHIEF: Oh, you 'ave, 'ave you. Then what are you doing  
here?

DAN [making up his mind to face things]: Came to see the  
woman I'm going to 'ave.

THE CHIEF: 'Oo? [Pointing to Elsie.] 'Er?

DAN: Yes.

THE CHIEF: 'Ave you asked me yet?

DAN: No.

THE CHIEF: Don't you think you'd better?

WUNDLE [interposing]: Chief, 'e's never even asked me. This  
ain't none o' my doing, it ain't nothing to do with me.

THE CHIEF: All right, Wundle. You 'op orf and take yer  
girl with you. Go away from 'ere and take everybody yer  
meet away too, till dark. There's trouble 'ere [pointing  
to Dan] which I've gotter cure.

WUNDLE [repeating a liturgical formula]: Chief's Law, Chief's  
Law.

ELSIE [repeating]: Chief's Law, Chief's Law.

[They scuttle through the gap, right, and the sounds of their  
running feet die in the distance before the Chief turns once  
more to Dan.]

THE CHIEF: You've gotter learn to be like other chaps, Dan.  
Because you can do a few different jobs, like building and  
putting bits of wood and stone together, it doesn't give



you the right to set yourself up above me. You can't 'ave Elsie, 'cos I'm going to. See?

DAN [slowly, fingering the little clay image]: Chief, I can do other things, not only building. Things my mother taught me.

THE CHIEF: Wacher mean?

DAN: Things no other man in this tribe can do. You'll learn wot, if I don't 'ave Elsie.

THE CHIEF [shooting out an arm and catching Dan by the shoulder and shaking him]: Wot's that? I'll pulp you if you threaten me, tear you up, and show the Council wot I've torn, too, as a warning to everyone; and you won't want no woman if you get over wot I'll do to you!

[He kicks Dan, who tears himself loose, jumps over the tree trunk and faces the Chief, holding up the little clay figure.]

DAN: Stop, Chief! Look at that!

THE CHIEF [staring]: Devils' work! [He steps back a pace, deflated.]

DAN [chanting]: Who does it look like, Chief? Who does it look like, Thames Father, Lord of the Valley, the Ford and the Hill? Who does it look like? Who does it look like?

THE CHIEF [white to the lips]: Was that wot you was showing Wundle?

DAN [drawing a knife from his belt]: I've only got to prick this 'ere, there or anywhere, and you'll get a pain in the place I prick, Chief, a pain that'll make you 'owl.

THE CHIEF [regaining command of himself]: 'Ere, stop it! Now then, Dan, this is all wrong. I'm Lord of all Devils, and yours can't 'urt me. Now I'll overlook wot you've said this once mind. Now go!

[He points to the gap in the hedge. Dan walks towards it, pausing as he passes the Chief.]

DAN: Wot abart Elsie?

THE CHIEF: 'Ave 'er, if you want 'er. Off with you.

[As Dan turns his back on him to go through the gap, the

Chief unhooks the poker from his belt and smashes it down on Dan's head. Dan drops, and the Chief with a sigh of relief bends down and feels his heart.]

THE CHIEF: 'E wasn't safe.

[He turns Dan over and looks at the clay image which is still clasped in his hand. In falling Dan had plunged his drawn knife into the figure's left thigh. This perturbs the Chief, who begins muttering to himself:

Coo! 'E did stick 'is knife into it. Into the leg. Must 'ave done it as 'e fell. 'Ere—quick!

[He drops the figure and tugs off the crucifix which he holds on to his right thigh.]

That oughter do it. Wot sort of Devils 'ad 'e got, I wonder.

Oh, spluddy 'Ell, it's the wrong leg!

[He looks again at the figure.]

Here's an 'ole through the left leg.

[He hurriedly changes over the crucifix, and sits for a minute holding it to his left thigh, sweating with fear.]

This oughter to do it. This oughter do it. It saved me in the flood last year.

[He takes it off and feels his leg cautiously.]

Spluddy 'Ell! It's getting hot.

[Back goes the crucifix.]

It's no good! It's no good! 'E's got me! Dan! Dan!

I won't take Elsie, I won't take 'er, only stop your Devils.

Take 'em orf my leg. How it burns!

[He has risen and is hopping about frantically.]

Burning, burning, burning! You can 'ave Elsie, Dan.

I'll give 'er to you.

[He takes a whistle from his belt and blows a long, gurgling blast.]

I'll get 'er 'ere now for you.

[He sits down on the tree trunk, writhing with pain, putting the crucifix on different parts of his leg without any effect. There is a sound of people approaching through the undergrowth. Wundle runs through the gap, followed by three



young men and Elsie and another girl. They stop and look at Dan's corpse. The Chief masters himself and stands up.]

THE CHIEF: I've promised Dan that 'e should 'ave Elsie. It is for the good of the Tribe.

ALL: It is for the good of the Tribe. The Chief! The Chief!

THE CHIEF: Elsie, you are Dan's bride; 'is woman to 'ave and to 'old. Come 'ere.

ELSIE [walking towards the Chief and kneeling down before him]: I am Dan's bride.

THE CHIEF [stabbing her in the throat with a short knife he has taken from his belt]: To 'ave and to 'old. Go to 'im, now.

ALL [as Elsie collapses, choking]: To 'ave and to 'old.

[The Chief picks up Elsie's body and carries her over to Dan and lays her down beside him. Then he waves the others away, and as they creep off through the gap he passes his hand anxiously over his thigh and sits down on the tree trunk to wait. Presently his face clears and he strokes his thigh and smiles.]

THE CHIEF: The burning's gone. 'E's accepted 'is bride.

[8 and 3 step into the patch from their posts by the doorway, and the scene once more fades into sketchy silver clouds.]

8: It would take them a thousand years to climb back to what they were.

3: Two thousand at least. Still, there was plenty of time. We were three million years away from our world. Things were made and re-made and destroyed and re-built thousands of times before they grew strong and certain.

8: But not by those chattering creatures.

3: Ten thousand years must have altered them.

8: That we must see.

[The cloud patterns on the screen form and reform continually, until at last they resemble the thin wavering spokes that sunlight drives down through tropical foliage to the floor of the jungle. As the scene sharpens into detail, a vibrant thudding is heard; it rises and falls, and grows louder and louder, until

it is identifiable as the beating of tom-toms. In the uncertain light of the sun a circular clearing is seen with a little raised platform, in the centre of which a clumsy wooden wheel, upraised on a forked stand, is slowly revolving. Six avenues, or rather tunnels, through the tall jungle grasses converge upon the clearing and they are lit here and there by streaks of filtered sunlight, but in a few yards they become lost in blue mist. At the foot of the platform two dusky savages squat, beating tom-toms with the palms of their hands. Their bodies are painted with interlacing circles of scarlet. Around the platform is a circle of kneeling savages. They wear grass kilts and their pale brown bodies are painted with interlacing white circles. 8 and 3 are standing in one of the avenues to the right of the clearing. One of the tom-tom drummers suddenly drops his drum and springs to his feet. He touches the wheel and spins it faster, and cries out in a high sing-song tone:

Awana! Awana! Awana! Awana! Children of the Circles and the Wheels that once were, and of the voices that once called across all the jungles, remember.

ALL [in chorus, mournfully]: Awana! We remember.

THE DRUMMER: Once we could cross the hills like the birds of the air.

ALL: Once we could cross the hills like the birds of the air.

THE DRUMMER: Once we could speak, and our voices were loud to the ends of the earth on the wings of our magic.

ALL: Once we could speak, and our voices were loud to the ends of the earth on the wings of our magic.

THE DRUMMER: Once we could run with our wheels more swiftly than birds can fly or the seekers of meat can spring.

ALL: Once we could run with our wheels more swiftly than birds can fly or the seekers of meat can spring.

THE DRUMMER: Awana! Our wheels are broken, and we give of our men and our women to the seekers of meat so they leave us in peace to the care of our crops.

ALL: Awana! Our wheels are broken.

THE DRUMMER: We could shoot our arrows with the sound



of thunder and none could withstand them; we were the masters and the lords of all that flew in the air, or ran on the earth, or swam in the waters under the earth.

ALL [wailing]: We remember the glory and the power.

THE DRUMMER: We were the lords of creation.

ALL: We remember the glory and the power.

THE DRUMMER [spinning the wheel faster]: Turn, oh wheel, and remind us of the glory and the power.

[The men rise, and joining hands they begin to dance in a ring about the platform, while the drummer spins the wheel faster and faster and the seated drummer increases the pace of his drumming. As the dance proceeds the drummer at the wheel sings lines to which the dancers respond.]

THE DRUMMER: We strode over every river with dry feet.

CHORUS: We strode over every river with dry feet.

THE DRUMMER: We swam over all water without getting wet.

CHORUS: We swam over all water without getting wet.

THE DRUMMER: There was no fear in the world, for our hands were strong with weapons of fire.

CHORUS: Without fire in our hands there is fear in our hearts.

THE DRUMMER: Can the wheel save us from fear?

CHORUS: The wheel can save us from fear.

THE DRUMMER: How then must the wheel be served?

CHORUS: The wheel must be fed, so that the seekers of meat are given their meal.

THE DRUMMER: Awana! There is fear again in the world. Save us from fear, oh wheel!

CHORUS: Awana! The wheel must be fed.

THE DRUMMER: For the wheel to be fed there must be sacrifice.

CHORUS: We are here to provide.

THE DRUMMER: The wheel will point.

[He squats down again and beats his tom-tom. The dancers go faster and faster as the wheel turns slower and slower, until at last it stops, and the man who is opposite the edge cries out:

I am the chosen.

[The drummers stop. The circle breaks, and everyone draws

away from him. Then the drummers rise and approach the man, binding his hands and feet and lifting him on to the platform beside the wheel. Led by the drummers the dancers march round the platform chanting:

Food for the wheel and the seekers of meat. Bathe in blood, oh wheel! Be satisfied, oh seekers. Save us from fear and leave us in peace, so we may think of the days of our lordship and our glory and our power.

[The drummers lead them away, and the procession files off down the centre avenue and is lost in the blue mist of the jungle. The bound man on the platform is praying:

Oh wheel, take fear away from me. Let me be blind and deaf before the seekers of meat, the cats of the jungle, come to tear me. And let the masters of the jungle strike quickly, so there shall be no pain.

[There is a rustling in the forest that silences him. He catches his breath sharply, and then his quick, frightened panting can be heard. The forest grows a little darker, and something, some large, light-stepping creature, approaches down one of the avenues. It is visible only as a black mass, but as it moves the light glints upon a pair of green eyes. The man on the platform wriggles round and sees the eyes, and then screams and struggles. The scene goes dark, and there is a deep purring sound. The screams stop, and as the purring dies away 8's voice is heard:

8: They went back and back. There was no rebuilding.

3: They had a tradition of achievement, but it all ended in words. They were worshipping the memory of their machines.

8: We could not have evolved from those things of words and fear. What took their place?

3: Some better animal.

8: On then, to see the creation and growth of our world. [The darkness of the scene is again transformed into cloudy silver. There is a long-drawn, hissing sound, like waves breaking on a shingle beach. Across the screen there is a



rushing torrent of shadows, and then quite suddenly they stop, and as the scene is disclosed 8's voice is heard saying:

And so we returned.

[The scene reveals 8 standing on a little circular platform of milky glass that is illuminated, so that all shadows disappear from the lithe figure that is addressing an audience. 3 stands beside the platform, and ten figures, exactly like 8 and 3 in every detail of shape and dress, all with glittering identity plates upon their chests, are standing attentively about the platform. The room in which these people of the future stand is part of a domed structure. The walls are curved and plain, pale green in colour, and broken only by a circular window, left, that shows a strong blue sky.]

8 [continuing]: We perfected our trial methods of focusing time through reflecting back atomic waves, and thereby reproduced exactly scenes from all periods of the past accompanied by their physical conditions. Although interference with existing waves is not possible, the psychic emanations from those waves persist in a form that renders them capable of reconstruction so they can be refocused into animated continuity in the present. Therefore, every extinct form of life in its individual manifestations can be revived for the purposes of record and study. To demonstrate the possibilities of this discovery we have revived a specimen of the species that preceded our own in the control of the earth. The failure of this species may be partly explained when we have the opportunity of observing the mental reactions of this specimen. These creatures never progressed beyond the use of sound waves, so that spoken and written language were their only methods of communication, amplified and transported by such elementary electrical mechanisms they had invented. The thoughts that flow directly from my mind to your minds would take the form of familiar words to any member of this vanished human race that came within range of the thought waves. So that to men I should appear to be speaking and emitting

sounds. We will now examine the specimen, a male and of high intelligence, who came from the highest point human civilization reached before its archaic elements had reduced it to a permanent level of savagery.

[Every figure has remained perfectly still as 8's thoughts flow out to them. 3 now turns to the wall, right, and presses its surface with his fingers. An oval gap appears, about seven feet high and three feet wide. There is a glimpse beyond of a dazzling white floor and the sky meeting it in the distance. Then a shadow falls across the doorway, and Professor Lovedale walks in, blinking. The wall slides into place and the oval doorway is closed. Lovedale regards the assembly with astonishment. He is dressed as we last saw him, but his linen jacket is rumpled and bloodstained, his tie has gone, and he is unshaven and dishevelled.

LOVEDALE: Good God! I thought they only had Negro troops. What on earth are these?

8: Where do you come from?

LOVEDALE: From my house near Bridport, in Dorset. Sorry if I'm rather stupid. One of your Negro troopers knocked me on the head with a gun and I can't remember much.

8: Do you know where you are?

LOVEDALE: No, unless [with a faint smile] I'm dead and this is a sanatorium in Heaven. [He looks about him bewildered.] By the way, d'you mind telling me who and what you are and if by any chance I *am* dead?

8: You are still in the world, although it is not the world you knew.

LOVEDALE: What year is it?

8: According to the year you last saw the world, which was 1997, it is now the year three million, one hundred and ten thousand, three hundred and eighty-eight.

LOVEDALE: Are you men?

8: No.

LOVEDALE [apprehensive in spite of himself]: Are there any men in the world?



8: There have been no men in the world for over two million years.

LOVEDALE: How did I get here? Have I dropped through a chink in space and time?

8: We have focused psychic emanations from waves that are still travelling in space with records of your life and of all life in the world you knew. Do you understand?

LOVEDALE: No doubt it would have been clearer to Einstein.

8: Who is Einstein?

LOVEDALE: A great mathematician who changed every way of thought about mathematics in the early part of my century.

8: We will bring him here.

LOVEDALE [startled]: Can you? Can you bring anyone? Shakespeare, Wells, Darwin, Shaw—anybody?

8: We intend to bring back all the men who were wise, and we shall focus back into time and find them.

LOVEDALE [bitterly]: Does it matter, if everything they created was smashed and lost by fools?

8: They may be of use to us.

LOVEDALE: You didn't tell me who and what you are.

8: We evolved from the savage mammals that preyed on the last men.

LOVEDALE: Savage mammals. Wolves would fit that. Do you mean that you evolved from things like that just as men had evolved from things like apes? Excuse me, I'm rather baffled. I want to get things straight, although, of course, I'm still dreaming and will find myself back when I wake up in that Hellish mess the French bombers and troops had made of my home.

[He wanders up to the platform and feels its surface. His hand accidentally touches 8's foot. 8 draws it away with an involuntary movement of disgust.]

8: You are not dreaming.

LOVEDALE [turning away from the platform and facing the ten people of 8's audience]: Very well, I'm not dreaming.

Let's see, you were talking about arranging for me to meet Einstein, and Shakespeare, and, I think, Bernard Shaw. [He puts his hand to his head.] Oh, God! I wish these people wouldn't look so wooden. You were telling me that you'd evolved from wolves, was that it?

- 8: No. We have evolved from the cat tribes, the most potentially intelligent species contemporary with man, the creatures who could concentrate on a purpose, and who had relegated their sexual disturbances to set seasons, so that sex didn't deflect the main current of their endeavours.

LOVEDALE: Cats! Good Lord, they were awfully savage brutes, especially the big carnivorous ones. And the domestic cat, which was getting pretty rare when I was alive, was a totally unambitious creature, fat and comfortable and abominably selfish, but with a queer sort of sardonic detachment. Surely you don't claim descent from that source? [He looks from one to the other.] Do you mind if I sit down? I'm rather tired, and the floor will do. [He squats on the floor near the platform.] I suppose men had to go, because they smashed everything like petulant children, like the apes they were. Silly and selfish and lascivious. Lord, when did I say that last? To that tiresome ass of a journalist yesterday morning. Yesterday? Yesterday? That was millions of years ago, now. You know, this is a marvellous nightmare. Men packed off with all their gods and quarrels, wiped off the world, and cats in the saddle. [He laughs idiotically, but checks himself quickly.] Why did men go? Did those who could create get tired of having their minds and works misused by fools?

- 8: After your time men dropped back and back to savagery and never climbed up again. They were full of fear and lust, and when cats grew clever in their hunting of men and lost their animal fear, all the fear they lost was gained by men. As our kind developed their brains they conquered fear and lust, for the first scientists soon learned to mechanize the reproductive processes, so that in half a



million years sex was altogether silenced, leaving us a freedom men had never known. We concentrated on the conquest of every problem that science discovered, and we are still only in the beginning of knowledge, even though we have colonies in the stars and have ranged back into time and found, what some of our early biologists suspected, that there had been a strange experiment in civilization before ours—the experiment of man. This experiment will serve us and our world, for, as we told you, we shall draw from that past of man the great minds that rose above their kind and tried to teach and make things that would endure. Of these, you are the first, and we chanced upon you in our first visits to the world you knew. You will help us to bring back all the wasted wisdom of man to the life of the world, and great men shall live again.

LOVEDALE: By courtesy of another race. They will be torn from their hopeful yesterdays to enjoy the full knowledge of ultimate failure.

8: Their minds will be of use to our world.

LOVEDALE: Our minds are to be of use—suppose men reject the splendour of this immortality? Suppose they prefer oblivion to bitterness?

8: Then men will be refusing their last chance of creating anything.

[As these words are spoken the scene slowly darkens, and, standing on the glowing platform, 8 becomes, momentarily, a figure of golden fire before the curtain falls.]

## AUDIENCE

THE lights of the theatre came on, gradually strengthening from a dull glow to full brilliance. There was a space of whispering, and then applause began feebly and quickly died out. It was apparent that the audience was not quite clear whether the show was over, but the National Anthem roused them, and then the escalators brought them down from the galleries and circles and up the aisles from the stalls. They were moved out of the theatre without effort, without crowding, comfortably transferred to the huge foyer with its walls of pink mirror and its floor and ceiling of illuminated milk-white glass.

Lembart and Bryce watched the crowd. The architect was satisfied: the experiment had worked. The moving ways poured their multitudes along without congestion or confusion. A score of doorways coaxed them out of the foyer to the canopied footway where the queues were already beginning to flow into the pay entrances for the second performance.

Bryce was listening to scraps of conversation as the crowd passed.

"My dear, what a screaming notion about cats—I can't see why they got an American actor to do Pilate—well, wasn't it meant that way?—gives you the creeps, doesn't it?—I'm glad we didn't bring Dad and Mother, they would have been awfully shocked—can't say I see the point—sheer scare-mongering—godless nonsense, I call it—eighth-rate Wells in a Shavian medium, and damned dull at that—I liked Herod, just the type I admire, dear—but how could cats turn into men, it's most unconvincing—not a woman worth looking at in the whole show—the photography was too marvellous, and this three-dimensional projection gets away from the screen altogether—I bet this'll make Hollywood sit up and take



notice—hope they get a decent show on here soon—man, there's a moral to the whole thing, but I doubt if you've the wit to see it—pacifist propaganda from beginning to end, with Russian money behind it, I've no doubt—I do think the Home Office ought to take steps about it—well, where shall we go to get the taste of that out of our mouths?—oh no, it wasn't his son by that little slut in the bedroom, it was by his wife, only we never saw her, you know—but it was all so ugly, and unnecessary——”

Naptholt came up to Bryce:

“Is advertising really like that?” he asked. “I say, Sir Clifford Jacks is perilously like Sir Hamilton Trott. This thing has been written from the inside. They don't give the author's name, I see. Wonder who's put it together.”

“What do you think of it as a whole?” asked Bryce.

“Oh, bloody sermon from start to finish,” said Naptholt; “what's your view?”

Bryce hesitated, and then said:

“I don't know.”

“Get any idea of what the audience thought of it?”

“I listened-in a bit. Mainly unfavourable. Didn't gather much, though. Look here, Naptholt, you've got to come along to Gallotti's with me—I was going to get you along to my place, only Glerk insisted on my bringing you to his party. It's an early supper party, and it's going on from now until after the end of the second performance. I didn't see your wife anywhere—didn't she come?”

“No. Your ads. failed to pull at the last moment. She's playing bridge to-night.”

“Well, I've got to gather up young Tanner. He's talking to Mrs. Lembart—are you coming, Lembart?”

Lembart shook his head.

“Not till later,” he said: “I want to time the change-over of audiences, and then I want to go over the service sections while everything's in action.”

“What did you think of the show?” asked Bryce.

"I'm not quite sure," said Lembart: "I'll tell you when I see you later."

"I wish," said Bryce as Lembart left them, "that I could collect a few views about the film."

Before midnight he was bewildered by the diversity of opinions he heard from the people who joined Glerk's party at Gallotti's.

Mrs. Lembart, supported by Jacob Sorbain, the furniture designer, told Bryce how wrong it was for the authors of *To-morrow's Yesterday* to suppose that the crafts would die out even if there was a big war which destroyed industrial civilization. We might re-establish a simple, contented peasantry, and resurrect all the dear mediæval delights, innocent fun, and joyful work, and the crafts——

Always the crafts. . . .

Weaving.

Particularly weaving.

And, of course, simple woodwork.

The old colourful background.

Chip-carving.

A few decorative roundels on rugged surfaces.

Honest joints.

Folk dancing.

Humble tools.

Joy.

Skill.

A tall man, with a round, clean-shaven, good-tempered face, sat near and listened to Mrs. Lembart and Sorbain as they chanted antiphonically the creed of their old-world paradise. Presently he interrupted them:

"It seems that you, and the authors of that film, overlook the fact that you can't build a brick wall without mortar to hold it together. Without religion civilization drops apart. That's what's happening to-day. The best civilization that's happened up to date was in the Middle Ages, and that dropped apart when discontented men incapable of faith began to say



that truth wasn't truth, and a gross king wanted adultery legalized."

Bryce recognized the speaker as Wilbur Heron, the most spectacular convert Rome had gained for years; a critic, poet and author, who laid about him with a fountain-pen that dripped holy water. Before Mrs. Lembart or Sorbain could reply, Bryce said:

"Are you suggesting that the scene between Herod and Pilate could possibly have been conceived by anybody who wasn't deeply religious?"

"It was a grossly material conception," said Heron: "it tacitly denied the divinity and immutability of Christ."

"Surely that view is a little out of date," said Sorbain.

"Truth is never out of date," said Heron.

"Oh, but surely—we aren't discussing truth," said Sorbain pityingly: "if you insist on the immutability of Christ, how, for example, do you explain the temptation in the wilderness? Doesn't it become a practical joke at the expense of the Devil?"

"How quickly things travel," said Heron, beaming: "I was asked that question, in those words practically, only two weeks ago, by a very promising young writer who insists on pretending that he's a pagan. But there was one excellent point in the Herod and Pilate scene. Pilate was represented as a go-getting American administrator. The Romans were like Americans. Efficient, vulgar, pleased as children with material success, incapable of spiritual understanding, and concerned only with the outside of things, devoid of subtlety."

"What do you think of the story of the film?" asked Bryce.

"Rather unnecessary, amusing in places, and utterly unconvincing," said Heron. "Preaching of that sort is harmful, amateur muddling. It is without authority."

"Leave it all to the priest, eh?" said Sorbain.

"There is a delicious touch of late Victorian rationalism in that sneer," said Heron with his sunny smile; "if you leave engineering to engineers, why have a prejudice against those whose vocation is the healing of men's souls?"

Young Tanner, who had been listening, said with an air of finality:

"All priests want is church-fodder."

"What do you think of the film, Tanner?" asked Bryce, as Sorbain re-manned his heavy agnostic artillery and Heron dodged about the trench system of orthodoxy.

"Hopelessly H. G. Wells, therefore pre-War, therefore dull—all except the advertising part. I wonder who did that. It might have been our own show, edited a bit. Sir Clifford What-you-may-call-it wasn't unlike Sir Hamilton Trott."

"That's what Naphtholt said. Still, you don't seem to think much of it as a show."

"The truth is," said Tanner, "I always rely on a good film to stimulate me and put me into shape for doing some creative work that'll get past Naphtholt. I'm landed with producing a series for the new cigarette campaign that begins in three weeks. I can only say after seeing *To-morrow's Yesterday* that 'we are not stimulated,' and I've got to sweat to-morrow to produce something for Monday's conference with Naphtholt and the Chief. What *can* you say about Virginian cigarettes? They all taste of burning rubbish, which is described as cool, fragrant, delectable, soothing, gentlemanly, ladylike, or what-not. I'd say the blasted tobacco is steeped in selected aperients before being made up, so that the cigarettes are a safe and pleasant cure for constipation, only, as that bloke said in the film, the pure newspapers won't publish the word constipation."

"That's about the only thing that hasn't been claimed for a cigarette yet."

"Well, nobody's suggested that any brand can cure that distressing and almost universal complaint! But, Bryce, this campaign is a curse. I've just got off with your friend, Mrs. Lembart, too. Invitation to lunch to-morrow—week-end in the Cotswolds later. I know where that'll lead. She has bed eyes. Tell me, in confidence, Bryce, is Lembart a man of violent and ungovernable temper, or would he be a gracious cuckold?"



"Tanner, you're tight. Shut up and go home."

"Seriously, Bryce, I'm not—it's your Puritanism that makes you want to suggest I'm tight, because I'm offending your delicacy by discussing prospective misconduct—I spare you a coarser word. I'm not treading on your toes, I hope—I got the impression that the woman bored you. She'd bore me, but there won't be too much talking; that isn't what she's for. But what about Lembart?"

"You've been introduced to him, you must work out your own damnation."

Tanner looked solemn. "A glass, and some more champagne," he said, "are now urgent needs. Bless you, Bryce—you are a *pukka sahib*! I've never met one outside of Kipling. We must drink to Empire Free Love."

Bryce urged him not to be an ass. Tanner, encouraged by a fresh supply of champagne, smiled blandly.

"Things are looking brighter," he asserted: "the difficulties of the cigarette campaign are slowly rolling away. What was it the way-up ad. man in the film *der-amma* said? 'The hot air of advertising's early days has slowly rolled away.' Yesterday is now to-morrow, Bryce—it's past midnight. I must go."

"So must I," said Bryce; but before he went Glerk drew him aside.

"Don't be too discouraged," said the little German director. "It may not be liked; but it cannot be ignored."

## VI

### PRESS

**G**LERK was right. The popular papers were indignant on Monday morning. A sub-leader in one of them (the most offensive one) was headed:

#### TRIFLING WITH THE PUBLIC

It was obvious, it stated, that Russian money was behind this blasphemous and indecent piece of socialist propaganda. No doubt the Home Secretary would see fit to take action: meanwhile the film, produced in an ex-enemy country, was poisoning the minds of young people and offending the taste of older citizens. An amount of foolish misrepresentation about a great and honourable profession, that of advertising practitioners, was another undesirable feature of this totally worthless and wholly mischievous production.

A rival paper described the film, also in a sub-leader, as:

#### AN INSULT TO CHRISTIAN MEN AND WOMEN

It said:

“The ugliness of the present-day scenes is unnecessary and untrue, and the prediction of promiscuous anarchy that is defended under the name of companionate marriage must outrage every decent man and woman to whom the ideal of family life is the greatest of Christian ideals. The replacement of humanity by sexless, soulless creatures that evolved from cats is the vision of a drug-deranged mind, and is in the highest degree offensive to those who reverence the beauty of the teaching that God made man in His own image.”

That was written on Sunday morning by a man who had not seen the film and was cheerfully incapable of reverence for anything. He jerked the typewritten sheet out of his portable



machine, flung it over to another man who had been to the New Century Theatre the night before, and said:

"There's the dope—that squares up with our good old God policy."

His companion read it through, and said:

"Remember in *Stalky and Co.* when Beetle was lecturing the sixth for the little accident about kissing that he missed out a frightfully important word?"

"Boy, you're right. I've left out the vital word *obscene*. Chuck it back."

So the sub-leader was reinforced by an additional sentence:

"It is disturbing that the carefully calculated obscenity of this film should have eluded the vigilance of those who are responsible for maintaining the clean standards of the British Cinema."

Another paper saw the "Hidden Hand" of malicious enemy propaganda, seeking to create bad blood between France and the British Empire. It was indignant that out-of-date war scaremongering should be thrust upon the British public under the guise of entertainment.

As all the papers were printing their protests, telegrams were ticking in from the Far East with facts about bloodshed, and news editors were selecting them for dramatic exploitation, discarding those that might weaken the policy of their proprietors, and leader writers and diarists were assuring their readers that the finances of the world were every day getting better and better. Everything was right with Britain and the Empire. The blessings were counted, and recounted, and the results were added up to a heartening total.

The great rotary presses droned into activity and optimistic commentary and sex-flavoured news came streaming out of them.

War among foreigners doesn't matter to us!

*Trifling with the public.*

Let the yellow men fight it out among themselves.

*Trifling with the public.*

Build a wall round the Empire.

*Trifling with the public.*

We owe the Dutch one over rubber.

*Trifling with the public.*

A good thing if America does understand what unemployment means.

*Insult to Christian men and women.*

Details of stockbroker's extraordinary harem.

*Insult to Christian men and women.*

How I came to love him in spite of sin—interview with typist who first gave details to police.

*Insult to Christian men and women.*

Love life of sex-mad stockbroker—exclusive.

*Insult to Christian men and women.*

“——the replacement of humanity by sexless, soulless creatures that evolved from cats is the vision of a drug-deranged mind——”

*These remote wars are outside the affairs of the Empire.*

“——it is evident to every sane British mind that Russian money has financed this blasphemous and indecent piece of socialist propaganda. It is to be hoped that the Home Secretary will use his powers to ensure the speedy withdrawal of *To-morrow's Yesterday*, produced in an ex-enemy country, and



poisonous in its influence upon young and receptive minds, and no less distasteful to every right-thinking citizen——”

*Trifling with the public.*

“The thing that doesn’t pay, doesn’t last, and war, apart from the bickering of semi-barbaric peoples, does not come into practical politics to-day, although if the Empire’s armaments are reduced to dangerously low levels, then Britain takes the grave responsibility of inviting attack from hostile or jealous countries.”

In the Midlands, as millions of readers were swallowing the Press prescriptions that Monday morning, the chairman of a great manufacturing business was addressing his directors. The long boardroom, furnished in the almost-Adam manner, looked out upon the fantastic muddle of unplanned growth a century-old industrial plant often represents. The smoke from a score of active chimneys got between the factory and the sun.

“I cannot predict, gentlemen,” the chairman said, “to what extent the policy of disarmament, that is receiving the favourable consideration of many Governments, will affect a very important section of our business. So far as this year’s financial position is concerned, the extensive orders from the Far East have been most opportune. . . .”

These remote wars are outside the affairs of the Empire.

Seven thousand miles away a tired man was writing telegrams to the fact-selecting machinery of a newspaper proprietor. He was dressed in a soiled grey flannel shirt, a khaki jacket with bulging buttoned pockets, khaki riding breeches, and muddy boots and puttees. He sat in the corner of the waiting-room of a railway station in a town that was still in the corrugated-iron stage of civilization.

The town was full of troops, and the sidings by the railway were choked with trucks and wagons, painted a dirty grey.

The station building was painted grey and flecked with splashes of raw pea-green. The approaches to the station and the goods yard were protected by a deep belt of barbed wire. The main street of the town, which straggled away from the station, had been partly destroyed by fire, and the black, empty shells of houses and shops looked like decayed teeth in the jaws of a skeleton. In one of the burnt-out houses an anti-aircraft gun was mounted, its pointing muzzle draped by a tarpaulin, its crew lying about it on the cindery floor, mostly asleep.

There had been an unexpected air-raid two days before, but the war correspondent had been forbidden by the town commandant to cable the fact to his paper. The raid had been made by an aeroplane piloted by an American airman and a Canadian observer, who had volunteered for service with the small and inefficient national army of an invaded state. That army was slowly retreating before the forces of the extremely competent and ruthless power that had organized a smash-and-grab military raid. Because the invaded state had accepted help from Russia, their soldiers were described as bandits by the papers the war correspondent served, for policies must be honoured before facts, and editing is always simplified when it is laid down that everything Russian is wrong.

An English doctor, who lived in the town and was on the staff of a European mining company, came into the waiting-room and interrupted the newspaper man.

"Got a spot of news for you, Wentward," he said. "There's an armistice in the air—heard it from old Yousoki. He's a particular friend of mine, you know."

Wentward was interested.

"I must get after this," he said, "though I doubt if they'll let it get past."

Four hours later he was allowed to telegraph that a rumour of an armistice was current in the town, and in Fleet Street the roaring of the rotaries was checked for twenty minutes or so, and Tuesday's editions held up while columns were



sliced out, and subs sweated, and headlines were set which screamed:

**BANDIT HORDES TO ESCAPE PUNISHMENT ?  
CHECK ON LAWLESSNESS TO BE ABANDONED  
RUMOURS OF NEGOTIATION**

Two hundred miles from the town where Wentward had written his telegram, and slightly under seven thousand miles from Fleet Street, a swift, night-flying aeroplane took off from an improvised aerodrome. The American volunteer who piloted it was the son of a Californian fruit farmer, whose fortune had been captured in the Japanese invasion of the Pacific Slope fruit industry. The Canadian volunteer observer liked living dangerously, and was able to satisfy that appetite in the East.

The aeroplane climbed to ten thousand feet, and flew north-east for an hour and a half. Then a searchlight swayed over the sky, and the pilot climbed higher in a wide, sweeping spiral. In the east there was a faint light, early promise of dawn, and far below the grey earth was marked with black lines and rectangular shapes, where the occupied town lay. The beam from the furnace of a locomotive flood-lit a cloud of steam that was puffed out of its funnel. From the aeroplane it looked like a quivering patch of luminous white jelly.

The observer blinked as a searchlight swung below them. The ground seemed darker after the swift passage of its brilliance.

Then the railway, the station and the goods yard, the main street and the sheds and transport park of the town mapped themselves out again, and the first bomb was released.

It fell among the packed commissariat trucks in the goods yard. Fragments of wood and steel, and clouds of grain from burst sacks, tore through the air. The shock of the explosion hurled Wentward across the waiting-room, where he was sleeping on a bench, and broke his arm and three ribs. He was

just conscious of the agonizing pain when the second bomb destroyed the station and ended his consciousness for ever.

Within four minutes the searchlight had picked out the hostile machine, and the anti-aircraft gunners were bracketing shells about it while it dropped the rest of its cargo of bombs, one of which smashed the searchlight and blew the operators into tatters of flesh and clothes. The gun, blinded, continued to fire, but the aeroplane was on its way back.

The pilot and observer were reasonably pleased with their efficiency.

The English newspaper correspondent, Wentward, and the English resident doctor were dead; so were the remaining civilian inhabitants of the town, all except one small yellow girl of eleven, who lived for a week, in spite of two legs crushed to bloody pulp. Of the troops occupying the town, thirty were dead and over eighty injured.

Within twelve hours a retaliatory raid had destroyed all life in twenty "suspect" villages in the neighbourhood, but had left untouched the hostile aerodrome and its staff. Only civilians perished. Another correspondent enabled Fleet Street to say:

### BANDITS PUNISHED

### NEGOTIATIONS POSTPONED

War among foreigners doesn't matter to us.

These remote wars are outside the affairs of the Empire.

Let the yellow men fight it out among themselves.

Trifling with the public.

"—war, apart from the bickering of semi-barbaric peoples, does not come into practical politics to-day—"

Anti-war scaremongering.

"—It is to be hoped that the Home Secretary will use his powers to ensure the speedy withdrawal of *To-morrow's Yesterday* . . . poisonous in its influence . . . distasteful to every right-thinking citizen—"



No paper refused to publish on Tuesday the advertisements that filled ten-inch double column spaces with forceful lines, delivering their message with the mechanical clarity of the Erbar typeface:

## **TO-MORROW'S YESTERDAY HAS BEEN CALLED**

**"BLASPHEMOUS,"**

**"OBSCENE,"**

**"SILLY,"**

**"UGLY,"**

**"UNNECESSARY,"**

**and described as:**

**"SOCIALIST PROPAGANDA,"**

**"POISONOUS IN ITS INFLUENCE."**

**etc.**

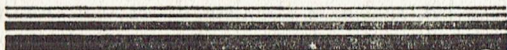
**WE DON'T AGREE. WE DO KNOW  
IT HAPPENS TO BE GOOD ENTERTAINMENT,  
A LITTLE INTELLIGENT PERHAPS, BUT THEN  
EXPERIMENTS ARE ALWAYS NOVEL AL-  
THOUGH THEIR RECEPTION IS USUALLY THE  
SAME.**

**COME AND SEE WHETHER YOU AGREE  
WITH US OR THE CRITICS.**

**TO-NIGHT AT THE NEW CENTURY THEATRE**

**GOLDEN SQUARE, PICCADILLY CIRCUS**

**8.15 AND 9.55**



WEDNESDAY. Morning Newspapers. (Penny Coloured—popular.)

*Letters from our Readers*

"... as a mother, I can only say how grateful I am for the warning about this terrible film. My little ones are as yet only tots, but had they been of age, I should have forbidden them to enter the doors of the theatre where their minds could easily have been poisoned for life. . . ."

"... what feeling of safety we have in this loose age is due to papers like yours, which act as the champions of morals. I have not seen this film, and I cannot think that any decent-minded man or woman would want to either. . . ."

"... I have seen this German film, which you rightly describe as an 'insult to the Empire,' and I do not hesitate to say that no God-fearing person should be liable to such an outrage, produced in the name of innocent entertainment. . . ."

*Unpublished letters from readers*

"... and I heartily agree with all you say about this offensive alien film, but I cannot understand why you publish an enormous advertisement which contradicts everything you have said, and urges people to go to the New Century Theatre. . . ."

"... the world is going up in flames, and the most horrible wrongs are being done to God's creatures in the Far East, and yet you condemn an honest effort to make people think of the consequences of war to the future of civilization. I, as a minister of the Gospel, feel that it is my duty to tell my flock to see a film that has in it the substance of true religion . . ."

"... how much longer is the egomaniac who owns your lying rag going to kid himself that Englishmen are fools? It would deflate his vanity if he visited Golden Square twice every evening for a bit and saw the length of the queues trying to get into the show he condemns because it is not down to the level of his pettifogging provincialism. . . ."

"... as a personal question, Mr. Editor, do you know Jesus



any more than the authors of the dreadful, irreligious film you condemn? 'Judge not, that ye be not judged.' And what will you have to say at the Throne when you are asked why you put in your paper such vile stories about sex and sinfulness? . . ."

THURSDAY. Morning Newspapers (Twopence Plain—Gentlemen Only.)

### CORRESPONDENCE

"... and, sir, as the Cinema business no doubt anticipates the day when it will be said of their productions: *hinc lucem et pocula sacra*, I venture to suggest that that day is not yet. The unbalancing effect of such films as *To-morrow's Yesterday*, especially upon the juvenile public, should engage the attention of those self-constituted bodies that claim a right to curb the worst excesses of this industrialized species of entertainment. How far we have departed from the traditional idea of what is seemly in amusement is demonstrated by this deplorable performance, which, I may add, is most appropriately housed in a building that has brutalized every civilized canon of architectural taste. *Heu pietas! heu prisca fides!* . . ."

"... in my experience of administrative work among the native tribes of M'Goba-Kalaki, I have never found a trace of that degrading fear of animal life that the authors of *To-morrow's Yesterday* attribute to what appears to be a debased Bantu race. The tom-tom, or rather *locali*, shown in the film was of the Ba-Kwiri type, a specimen of which used to be in the collection of native instruments at Government House, Hick-Horri, and which was later transferred to the British Museum. . . ."

"... and in what respect will our boys hold the military profession if these pacifist sneers are allowed to misrepresent the glory of war undertaken for the most righteous of causes, for King and for Country? In my young days the sort of performance described by your correspondents would have

been hissed off the stage of any music hall or theatre, for Englishmen a generation ago did not tolerate alien fads, and were not amused by so-called intellectual trash. . . .”

FRIDAY. The Solemn Weeklies. (Economics. Amateur Statesmanship. Gentlemen's Politics. Intellectuals' Socialism. Art. Letters. Music. The Theatre. Even the Cinema.)

“... like the Fat Boy, the authors of this film want to make our flesh creep; but they are a little too anxious to secure their effect. The satire of the contemporary scenes is cumbersome, while the horrors of the future are slightly ridiculous . . . .”

“... the idea of a Time Machine is not new; but as there is a Wellsian precedent for nearly every pseudo-scientific anticipation of the future, the film should not be discredited on that account. The rather oppressive earnestness of its propaganda is the principal objection; for propaganda invades the story at every phase, now directed against the bombastic stupidities of high-powered salesmanship, now against hypocrisy, and now against war; disrupting the artistic continuity of the film, and conveyed with a technique that properly belongs to the stage. . . .”

“... essentially a nightmare, worked out with ruthless devotion to a grim belief that there is no hope for humanity, and that the cause of Man's ultimate fall is daily nourished by the selfishness of individuals. Apart from the note of intellectual revivalism in the scene between Pilate and Herod, the film is a satire, and is likely to be unpopular with the public. It is worth a second visit. . . .”

“... there is an attempt at fraudulent conversion, when the authors of the film introduce a scene that is clearly intended to persuade the audience that their theme is religious. But the whole conception of the film is deeply irreligious, inhumanly chilled by the frozen materialism that is called scientific detachment. To give Christian authenticity to their frantic fantasy, they twist Chesterton to their use in a later scene. . . .”



Bryce pushed the marked newspapers and piles of press cuttings across his desk. Through the window of his office, which was on the sixth floor of a new building in the best city man's classic style, he could see the Thames and the Shot Tower on the south bank, and Waterloo Bridge in its pitiful splints, half hidden by the temporary steel relief bridge, and beyond the County Hall and the Gothic towers of Westminster. Down the river came a string of barges behind a smoking tug; an intermittent procession of bright red L.C.C. trams with yellow-framed upper decks slid back and forth along the Embankment; plumes of steam wavered above Hungerford Bridge as an express drew in to Charing Cross.

It all seemed so secure in the afternoon light of a sunny spring day; so remote from interruption or possible disaster. London had endured for centuries: its active life of trade had withstood every threat and circumstance of war, had survived the wreck of Roman Britain, had helped to civilize the Saxon—fighting men had hammered at its gates, and it had given them gold or steel, as means and occasion demanded.

As Bryce watched the scene, a little silver shape crossed the upper panes of his window, and presently above the rumbling rise and fall of traffic noises he heard the hum of an aeroplane. It flew from the Surrey side, circled above Waterloo Station, and then went upstream, disappearing in the brightness of the sky.

It reminded him of the reports that followed the Air Force manœuvres every year; reports that underlined the fact that London could not be saved from a well-organized air raid.

The danger was obvious to everyone who thought about it; and yet the Press howled down every real attempt to make war impossible. There was no "news" value in peace. Pacifism itself was a negative cause. You couldn't enthuse people over negative causes. Perhaps that was why *To-morrow's Yesterday* had failed. Every critic had missed the point of it. It was still filling the New Century Theatre, four performances a day, and bookings were keeping up, but that was only because the

Press warnings had stimulated the curiosity of the public.

His musings were ended by Tanner, who came into the office.

"I've been creative enough for one day," said Tanner, shoving aside the papers on the desk top and perching on the cleared space. "I've wrung blood from my brain in the cause of better smoking, and my thoughts, suitably enshrined in exquisite typographical form, will cause thousands of gallant men and tender virgins to clamour for the cigarette to which blue blood instantly responds. And what are you doing—brooding?"

"Looking through the Press cuttings about the New Century," said Bryce.

Tanner picked up a clipped extract.

"Hullo, here's this ass Wilbur Heron spreading himself," he said: "listen to it. Slow music and double allowance of incense: 'But the whole conception of the film is profoundly irreligious'—Gosh!—'To give Christian authenticity to their frantic fantasy, they twist Chesterton'—that sounds difficult, and I should think he'd hate it—'to their use in a later scene.' Anything else? Ah, here's a highbrow Red rag denouncing 'the deliberate misrepresentation of Russia as an aggressive military state in the Europe of the future.' Your little friend Glerk doesn't seem to have any friends, does he? He's raised a fine mixed stink with this highfalutin' film. Still, it won't be 'news' after this week, and it'll be off in another fortnight."



## VII

### STOP-PRESS

**I** BELIEVE you're depressed because this film is finished," said Napholt to Bryce as they sat smoking after lunch over coffee ten days after *To-morrow's Yesterday* had ceased to be "news."

"I am rather," Bryce admitted; "you see, I believed in it—it was trying to do something."

"Well, it's put the New Century Theatre on the map with the shindy it's raised, and you said the bookings were still good."

"Falling off a bit, and Glerk isn't going to risk a lot of empty seats; so it'll come off after Saturday."

"I suppose you've got fresh announcements in hand now for the next film, whatever it is? You've become practically a solus worker on this account."

Bryce shook his head. "I shan't handle it any more," he said; "Glerk's been seeing Sir Hamilton about it this morning."

"There hasn't been a bust up, has there?"

"Oh, no. But I'm leaving again."

"Why?"

"Taking your advice—clearing out of advertising for good." He paused. "I can't go on, Napholt," he said. "I've got to do something that matters, and selling things doesn't matter—can't you see, we're all shouting across counters at people who don't know what they want, and all over the place professional soldiers, who do know what they want, are fingering triggers and fiddling with fuses and longing for 'the real thing.' The world's back where it was in 1914, except it hasn't got a jackass with a waxed moustache and a gilded helmet as the figurehead of its folly. All these tariffs and barriers to international trade, and this open talk of economic war between

nations—what d'you suppose its leading to? Peace on Earth; Good Will towards Men. What happens now when you or I or anybody who was in the War meets? We've forgotten about the mad trap we were in, how we weren't fighting Jerry really, but the war itself, the idea of war; how we used to have fits of the horrors, thinking we'd never escape from the damned inhuman thing that had snatched us up and shoved us into a place, and kept us there until we were damaged and a refill was needed. We've forgotten all that, and the dirt and the lice and the smell, and that icy fist in the pit of your stomach at zero hour. When we meet we swop yarns about the different sectors we were in, the patrols we took out, and we bore the generation that missed it all with our 'old veteran' touches and our technicalities about 'minnies' and 'retaliation' and the old, old jokes about our own artillery shelling the reserve lines and the jealousy that still makes us sneer at 'the staff.' Others trot out the snob stuff about their regiments: in the so-and-so we did so-and-so; just like Kipling's beastly Anglo-Indians. That's all the War means to most of us now. That's why I want to see more things like that film produced and shown and shoved down people's throats. I don't care what the public wants: nobody who's ever made anything worth making has cared a damn about what people wanted, or even thought of that thick-headed fool, the man in the street. I'd give the public what I think they ought to have to jolt them out of their fool's paradise of security."

Naptholt laughed, and said: "Blessed are the reformers, for theirs is the kingdom of bunk."

"There are times, Naptholt, when you talk just for the sake of talking. I happen to be serious."

"I don't doubt it, old boy. You must be if you've chucked up a fairly comfortable job. You can't help it, though. You're suffering from the Utopia complex, caused by overdoses of H. G. Wells during adolescence. But what are you going to do? How are you going to force your medicine down the public's gullet?"



Bryce did not reply immediately, then he said: "Glerk's given me a job."

It was the last night of the film, and there had been a celebration organized by Bryce. It had ended up at Tanner's flat in Bloomsbury.

Tanner had been entrusted with the handling of the New Century Theatre advertising, and he was explaining Herr Glerk to the company.

"The man is a genius," he said. "He has found a new way of coining money by the exploitation of the highbrow. To Hell with the Press and the Public! Wring dividends out of reformers. Make pessimism pay."

"Spill us something about the next film," said Napholt.

"The title will be announced in due course," Tanner replied impressively; "to be exact on, Monday night, when the curtain goes up."

"I happen to know what it is," said Bryce.

"Of course you do," said Tanner; "I was forgetting Glerk was your boss now. Any harm in letting 'em know?"

"As long as it isn't handed to the Press," said Bryce: "we don't want the attack to start *before* the show. The film's called *War Gods Wake*."

Napholt groaned, and said: "More scaremongering."

"That doesn't matter as long as it pays," said Tanner.

"It's a war film of the future," Bryce told them.

"Hell's Wells!" protested Napholt: "another uplift flop like *To-morrow's Yesterday*, I suppose. And what a title: *War Gods Wake*!"

Tanner shook his head sadly and murmured: "Trifling with the public."

At the end of the street a newsboy ran shouting.

"That's a pretty late edition," said Napholt, yawning.

"Somebody's been bumped off in Ireland or India or some

part of the far-flung Empire," said Tanner; "does it matter if they have?"

"There's more than one boy shouting," said Bryce.

"What's he saying?" said Napholt, going to the door; "shut up a minute, Tanner—it sounded like 'crisis'——"

"Another one," said Tanner sleepily; "they ought to be under proper control."

Napholt ran downstairs, and Bryce opened a window and looked out. Presently he could pick out words from the shouting:

*"Special. Great European Crisis. Special. Grave Threats. Special."*

Napholt came upstairs, three steps at a time, and they read the headlines of the damp newspaper he brought.

"Had to pay threepence for it," he said: "gosh! things look pretty sticky!"

POWERS WITHDRAW FROM CONFERENCE, said the main headline, and below:

THREAT OF ULTIMATUM—IS IT WAR?

Tanner whistled. "God, that new film will be topical," he said; "I'd better phone Glerk and see if we can't get the copy for Monday's ads. lined up with all this."

"D'you suppose Glerk'll be such a fool as to put that film on now?" said Bryce: "if this is true, the Press would egg on the mob to smash up the New Century Theatre if it was showing an anti-war film. You'll find Glerk will switch to some innocent variety stuff: he's got a good many stop-gaps of that kind up his sleeve."

"I say, Bryce, this reads just like some of the scenes in *To-morrow's Yesterday*," said Napholt; "it sounds pretty genuine, too."

Bryce read the front page report, and then the stop-press column, which gave one bald, disturbing piece of news:

"A Royal Proclamation, declaring a State of Emergency, was signed at 10.40 p.m."

As he walked home to Knightsbridge at midnight the sky was barred with searchlights.



# TEN TALES

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## THE CIGAR

### OR NO SMOKE WITHOUT FIRE\*

**B**ENEATH the shade of some feathery trees two men sat on a stone seat. One was a nondescript youth, dressed in a rather neglected white uniform. He was obviously ill at ease, and his manner was nervously apologetic. He smoked cigarettes, one after the other, making them himself with deft twirls of his yellow-stained fingers. His lack of distinction was cruelly emphasized by the impressive appearance of his companion, who was a man at the end of middle age; about sixty, with a lean, erect body and a masterful face. His hair was jet black; but his short pointed beard and heavy moustache were white, and his bushy eyebrows were grey.

Above them was a cloudless sky, yellow with heat. A few yards away from the patch of shade the two men shared was the double track of a railroad, with the whitewashed buildings of a station beyond.

A long train slid into the station; the locomotive stopped under a tall circular tank; Negro Pullman conductors put steps against the car platforms. A handcart filled with blocks of ice was wheeled along the train, and the Pullman conductors fed dripping chunks into the mouths of the air-conditioning plant. A few passengers alighted and strolled about. Most of them preferred to remain in the cool, dust-free Pullmans.

A gentle, hot wind hustled little puffs of sand across the desert that surrounded the tiny town which provided an excuse for the station.

\* From: *Mr. Buckby is Not at Home*. Also included in *Best Broadcast Stories*, edited by Hilton Brown, 1944.

The two men on the seat attracted the attention of several passengers.

"That old guy's got a fine face," said a man in the club car, "seems kind of familiar."

The old man was examining a long cigar, a pale brown cylinder, irregularly blotched with patches of soft green.

"You should smoke cigars," he said to the youth beside him. "A cigar is one of the great pleasures of life; probably the greatest pleasure in life." He paused, and then added: "Yes—without doubt it is *the* greatest pleasure."

The young man nodded gravely, and the other continued, speaking slowly in his rich voice:

"You must observe, I beg of you, a correct and respectful ritual in the smoking of a cigar. You cannot derive any depth of satisfaction from those fleeting things called cigarettes. They are mere stop-gaps in experience; a hasty snatch to slake an appetite as yet unformed. Tobacco is a sacred gift, and we should enjoy it only in its most exalted form. It is curious that in lands less happy than ours, a cigar is regarded by those who do not smoke them as a symbol of brutal oppression. Perhaps it is envy that invests them with political significance.

"Now observe, my young friend, that an Havana cigar is of all the works of man the most noble. When you prepare to smoke an Havana, you should crack the end. Other cigars should be properly pierced. You will remember having had this lesson from me in the art of smoking. It is something I am proud to pass on. Chance has made you the recipient."

"I—I am deeply honoured," stammered the youth.

"Do not, pray, be misled in the matter of piercing a cigar," the old man proceeded. "Permit the superficial sleek magnificence of a silver or even a gold piercer to leave you unimpressed. The abrupt plunge into the end of a cigar of a sharp tongue of metal—ah! my friend, *that* is cruelty. It is wrong, barbarous!—an irreverent approach to the act of lighting. Now, first obtain a wooden match. See: the square-cut end of that wooden match should be pressed, ever so delicately—so—against the



cigar. It will make an even, square-shaped incision. Now, shake the dust gently from that aperture; and then blow from the other end."

The young man nodded and watched attentively.

"A further precaution in the lighting: do not, I charge you, be content with one match only. A cigar should, like a human body, be broken in by degrees to a change of temperature. Allow it to enjoy the introduction of some preliminary warmth—a flame from your first match held at a little distance from the end is the correct procedure. Then permit the match to burn down to the butt, and strike another. With your second match you may light a little of the end of the cigar: with your third, continue the process. Then blow lightly upon the few patches that have become ignited. Finally, with your fourth match take the cigar in your mouth, hold the flame a little above the end, and draw, so that the flame may leap down gladly to complete the process of ignition, like an ardent mistress leaping from a balcony to the arms of her lover.

"There, my friend, you have the only civilized way of lighting a cigar."

The old man leant back against the seat and expelled a cloud of fragrant smoke. "Yes," he mused, "you may try everything once, but a cigar overpasses all the pleasures and triumphs and the little feverish excitements that other people mistake for life and adventure. Nothing like a cigar."

The young man rolled another cigarette and lit it from the glowing butt of his last.

The old man smoked on. The bell of the locomotive began to clang. The Pullman porters shouted, "'Bord." Passengers flocked back. The steps of the cars were drawn up, and with its bell still tolling the train pulled out. A cloud of sand and dust trailed after it. The loungers who had drifted into the station went back to their various nooks to sleep. The chief event of the morning was over. The station and town slumbered again, and the old man on the seat had nearly finished his cigar.

He glanced at it regretfully, and then said: "Always leave the last inch. Cast it away. It is like the last bitter dregs of life: leave pleasures in their prime, my friend."

The young man nodded. He lit another cigarette.

"And how many cigarettes have you smoked?" asked the old man.

"Twelve," was the reply.

The old man sighed. "Twelve cigarettes," he said. "Twelve brief, unsatisfactory flashes of imitation pleasure, while I have enjoyed the greatest pleasure of all."

He drew once more on the cigar; allowed the smoke to trickle through his nostrils, and then flung away the butt.

The young man stood up and threw away his cigarette.

"If you are ready, sir," he said politely.

"Perfectly," answered the old man rising.

They walked towards a squat white building near the station.

"Have you any special wishes, sir?" enquired the young man.

"No," was the reply. "There will be no bandaging, of course."

"Not if you wish it."

"Thank you. Your courtesy has been perfect, and I greatly appreciate your indulgence."

"It was a privilege, my dear sir." The young man coughed, and then added, "We were proposing to arrange matters over there, sir, if that will be convenient."

"That will suit me admirably."

And a few minutes later the young man asked: "Is there anything you would care to say?"

The old man, calmly regarding the firing party drawn up in front of him, replied:

"No. It is both absurd and undignified to express regrets over the butt end."

The young man gave three sharp orders. The crack of rifle-fire woke the little town for a few minutes.



At the next stop, three hundred miles away at a frontier city, the passengers in the train got newspapers printed in their own language, and headlines informed them that another rebel general had been shot in the country they had just left. A smudgy portrait on the front page caused a man in the club car to say:

"That was the old guy we saw on the seat way back in the one-horse town in the desert. I reckoned he was somebody."

He took a cigar from his breast pocket, bit off the end, spat it out, and added:

"I guess those dagos'll never be civilised."

## NOT FOR THE BEST PEOPLE

THE seventh verse of the fourth chapter of Philippians: "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding . . ."

That text was uppermost in the mind of a man, who in the eyes of many of his fellow men and in his own eyes was a particularly righteous and worthy and commendable man; and he was thinking about those words most deeply and earnestly because he was just being wheeled out of his private ward in a hospital to the operating theatre. The wheels creaked a little, and as he came into the clean, white theatre, with its glistening apparatus, its shaded lamps, and its white-clad surgeons and nurses it seemed that here, in this place, blanched and scoured to an almost inhuman purity, was a foretaste of that peace, which passeth all understanding.

The man was not frightened: he was immensely interested. He knew he had lived a good life, according to his lights. He had done well in the world. If the operation was successful,

then the dignity of being a bedridden invalid awaited him: a few years of bearing with patience and fortitude a burden of weakness, surrounded by every circumstance of comfort did not daunt him; nor did the alternative.

If he died under the operation, his family would be reasonably well off: not exactly rolling in money, but in easy circumstances. And if he died: what happened to *him*?

It was a question that he had often had the courage to ask himself. He had toyed with all manner of pretty theories: he had imagined that death was but an incident in some experience that was already complete: that time was a static thing, predetermined, inevitable; and that death was merely a focussing of the spiritual vision, that enabled all life to be examined in detail, so that a man, once dead, could flit hither and thither, choosing and rejecting episodes and experiences—tasting again and again old joys, living through once more the fervent hopes that gave a particular savour to life; regaining youth; rediscovering first loves.

He had also thought of the possibilities of a cold, scientific justice: meeting out rewards and punishments.

He was, you see, a singularly well-pleased man, a child of his century, which was a century of unbelief; and he dismissed the old heavens and hells that his father and grandfather had believed in: he was broad-minded, and he rejected anything that hampered his right to imagine just what he pleased about all things and people.

But, oddly enough, he found himself clinging to that phrase about the peace of God, which passeth all understanding. The promise of peace, a deep, profound rest from the turbulent world in which he had struggled so successfully and profitably, was alluring. He even regarded the possibility of absolute extinction without much regret: it was a pity to end, to go out—he was aware that he was a great personality, but he had left his mark on things: he had passed on his name; he had two sons and three daughters; a knighthood, that in another year or two might have become a baronetcy; and he had built



at least one small brick into the temple of human knowledge. He would not be altogether forgotten.

There were a few things that he regretted. He had missed opportunities: a momentary lack of courage had lost him a post of honourable responsibility that would certainly have brought that baronetcy nearer: still, a K.B.E., at fifty-six, and nearly sixty thousand pounds, were not to be despised. He had achieved it all by personal effort; by fighting his way up from a small, a humble beginning. He had begun on the lowest rungs of the ladder, and there was a certain luxury in admitting how hard and bitter his early struggles had been. And now, all that lay before him was the peace of God, which passeth all understanding.

The insistence of that thought, clothed in those words of light and love, suddenly convinced him that he was but a few short minutes away from death.

He was on the operating table now. They were administering the anæsthetic, and he was conscious of a lightness, a buoyancy that was soothing. He felt that he was being released. The earth no longer tugged insistently at his weary body: the pain that had gripped his side for so many months and weeks had vanished, and as in a dream he saw the operating theatre and the surgeons and nurses and, lying on the table, his own body.

He watched the operation; watched it with a quite impersonal calm, and then after a few seconds lost all interest in it. That white shrivelled thing on the operating table wasn't really worth bothering about; what a ridiculous fuss we all made about our bodies. They were never worth the care and anxiety we wasted on them: they were, after all, only vehicles for us. Us—us—us—it was strange that he had ceased to think of himself as I. He had, in some inexplicable fashion, become a partnership—a we, not an I. And it was natural and easy and obvious to think thus. He realised that he was dead, that the operation had been nearly successful, but that his body down there in that sleek, gleaming operating theatre

had died of heart failure. But death amalgamated him with other lives, and he was simultaneously his father and his mother, his grandparents, his great-grandparents, his great-great-grandparents: all his multitudinous ancestry glowed and lived in a composite personality, a vast mosaic of memories, of sins, and virtues, fame, folly, pettiness and patience, narrowness, nobility—all the human failings and splendours pulsed and throbbed in this great soul, which seemed strangely apprehensive of some impending event. It waited in the timeless silence that is eternity. And at last this vast amalgamation of human spirit heard a voice ask:

“What has been added unto us?”

And, instantly it answered:

“Nothing!”

For in the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, only truth may be spoken.

The young curate who had preached the sermon regarded the congregation with his dark, sad eyes for some seconds before he left the pulpit. He glanced at the Bishop, and smiled a little for he knew what his sermon had done for him. The Bishop looked, and indeed felt, very uncomfortable. He was a worthy, unimaginative and conventional churchman, and it was not at all the sort of sermon he had expected to hear from a candidate for a most important living. That young man, he decided, wasn't the right type: really quite unsuitable for a living where, above all, tact was needed, if the Church was to get proper support from people who mattered.



## DOUBLE BROADCAST

**W**HAT I'm telling you happened on Friday, May 19th, 1939, in two places at once. It happened in New York, in the bandmaster's office of the British Pavilion at the World's Fair between 4 and 4.15 in the afternoon, Eastern Standard Time, and between 9.30 and 9.45 p.m. English Summer Time, at 15 Kressell Street, East Sheen, London, S.W.14, England. I was in both places at once; and don't ask me to explain how—that problem's in the Einstein class. But a woman's death has to be explained, and a man's life should be at stake, and what I'm saying isn't evidence; for we don't know enough yet—science doesn't know enough—for it to be accepted as evidence.

My name is James Heswall, and I'd been staying at the Hotel Pennsylvania, which is on Seventh Avenue, opposite the Pennsylvania Railroad Terminus: I always stay there when I'm in New York—I like the business bustle of the place, and its efficient comfort. It was handy for the Fair too: the Long Island Railroad was running hundreds of trains to their own special station in the Fair Grounds at ten cents a time, from the Pennsylvania Terminus: it only took a few minutes.

I'd promised to meet my old friend, John Bland, at the British Pavilion at 3.30; and to sit in the studio the American Broadcasting people had improvised in the bandmaster's office, for John who is a publicist and critic and all that sort of thing, was going to broadcast his impressions of the World's Fair across the Atlantic, from 4 to 4.15 that afternoon, so it would appear in the B.B.C. National Programme in England from 9.30 to 9.45 in the evening. While he was talking the band of the Coldstream Guards would be playing in the bandstand just outside the office to the people who were taking afternoon tea in the Pavilion restaurant and on the terrace.

The band would provide a faint background of music for the talk—it would be “harmonious noises off.”

John Bland was as nervous as a kitten when I met him: he was fussing about in the office, while the broadcasting officials were hanging curtains, and adjusting the microphone, and moving the bandmaster's gold-braided cap off the table on to the filing cabinet and back on to the table again. John was shuffling his script about, dog-earing the corners of it, so he could pick up the sheets and read 'em without the sound of paper crackling.

“It's the most important thing I've ever done in my life, Jim,” he kept on saying: “I'm terrified of some hitch.”

“There won't be any hitch,” said the official in charge. “Now let's run over the announcement—it takes fourteen seconds. Go right on when I drop my hand.”

Poor John. I felt sorry for him, in that state of flap. I wasn't feeling too good myself: but then I'd just come to the end of a bout of overwork. That's the trouble with New York: the place is so darned stimulating that you do twice the amount of work you would anywhere else, and it's so hospitable that you leap from party to party, cutting down on sleep, till suddenly you crack up and have to rest. I'd reached the cracking up stage, and I just dumped myself into a small office chair in a corner, and thanked my stars I wasn't putting on John's act. I planned to go into the country for a long rest: some friends of mine had a yacht up at Essex on the Connecticut River, and I was taking a train out of New York that night—at least, I thought I was.

It was five to four, and John had got himself calm, and the officials were all set, and the microphone nicely adjusted on the table. My head was swimming, and I felt that I could do with some sleep. I wasn't being uncomplimentary to John or anything—he's a good broadcaster and he's usually got something peppy to say—but I was all in. However, I couldn't risk dozing: I might snore, and that would get relayed over the air along with John's stuff.



The senior official stood, watch in hand, then he nodded, bent over the microphone, made the announcement, dropped his hand, and John started.

"Good evening," he said. "I'm speaking from the British Pavilion in the most exciting and stimulating exhibition that's just outside the most exciting and stimulating city in the world."

Then—it happened.

I remember thinking that John was speaking rather fast, and that he'd adopted a slight American accent for the occasion, which struck me as silly: then, I realised that I wasn't in that little sunlit office behind the bandstand of the British Pavilion any longer. I could still hear John's voice; but it was coming from a radio set that stood in the corner of a long sitting room. The room was familiar. I recalled the rust red chair coverings, the violet curtains, the pale golden walls, and the big Chinese rug of purple and faded gold. I was lying on a sofa, feeling desperately ill. Somebody, I couldn't see his face, was sitting at the window, his head turned from me looking into a dark garden: for it was night outside, and the room was lit only by a couple of shaded lamps and a flickering fire.

John's voice went on: "It's the machine age gone gay—it's industrialism kicking up its heels and saying, 'Let's have fun!' It's the grandest piece of showmanship that's happened anywhere in the world. It's a shining proof of America's genius . . ."

The man at the window looked at me.

"Feeling any better?" he asked.

I shook my head, and said: "No."

Then I had a shock, for I wasn't speaking with my voice: it was a thin, unmanly voice: it was a *woman's* voice.

The man came forward into the light of one of the lamps, and I recognised him. I'd no particular reason to like him. His name was Oliver Mooley, and he'd married my girl Eleanor: the only girl who'd ever meant a darned thing to me. He was talking to me again. He said:

"Shall I turn the thing off, dear?"

"No," I replied, without thinking. "I promised John I'd listen to it—hush, you'll disturb him."

He looked at me oddly; and then the strangeness of the whole business overwhelmed me. I sat up on the sofa, and noticed that I was in a silk dressing-gown, and that my feet, which were ridiculously small, were thrust into fluffy mules.

"Here," I said; "where the devil am I—*who* am I?"

I was on the edge of some nightmare revelation, I knew; but I resisted an impossible, a hideous conclusion.

"What am I doing here?" I cried. Then I remembered that I mustn't talk, or utter a sound, otherwise I'd wreck John's broadcast. Not that it seemed to disturb him, for I could hear his voice booming away in full blast, letting himself go about the wonders of the World's Fair.

"In the Theme Centre, there's a huge three-sided white needle, over seven hundred feet high, called the trilon," he was saying. "The vast globe beside it is called the perisphere. They are the symbols of the Fair."

"Eleanor, Eleanor——" Oliver was crying; "what's the matter?"

"Who the hell are you calling Eleanor?" I demanded, still putting up a fight against the horror of admitting what I suspected.

He rushed out of the room, and I gasped with pain. I managed to rise from the sofa, and holding on to various bits of furniture, I made my way to a mirror on the wall.

A thin, haggard woman looked back at me from the glass.

Then I knew, that by some inexplicable trick, I had been flung, together with John's voice, across the Atlantic: that we were doing a simultaneous broadcast, but that my thoughts had slipped into the receptive mind of my old and only lover. Eleanor Mooley was a receiving set for my mind. Don't ask me to explain, as I said before. I'm just giving you the facts, and perhaps you won't dismiss them as fancies after you've heard the next lot,



Although my thoughts were working through Eleanor's mind and I seemed to have control of her body, she was *there* too, if you see what I mean. She wasn't very much there: I think she must have been almost dying when I picked up her wavelength of thought and got super-imposed on her personality, if you follow me. We were mixed up, so I was thinking with part of her mind; drawing on her memories as well as my own; and that, believe me, was *my* particular hell on earth: to be in on her memories of life as it was lived with that glum, cruel swine, Oliver Mooley. She more than half suspected he was poisoning her, and she didn't care or bother about it—she was glad to be out of that sort of a life. Who'd want to go on with it? She knew, as well as I did, what a mistake the marriage had been.

But she was glad to go—glad to go. And she was going—almost at once. I—she—that is, both of us, although it was *her* body, hung on to the back of a chair.

"No," I said to myself; "he's not going to get away with it."

On the top of a black bookcase, was a visitor's book, bound in green leather. I reeled across to it: there was something I wanted to do before Oliver came back. I opened the book—I turned back a few pages: it wouldn't do to write on the next blank page. Then I staggered to the bureau, sat down, and wrote on the back of one of the pages this message:

"Oliver has been poisoning me slowly. I know it: he's too clever to be found out, but don't let him get away with it." Then I signed it, replaced the book on the top of the bookcase, and slipped back on the sofa, just as John's voice from the radio set was saying:

"It's impossible not to be filled with admiration for this superb example of salesmanship, and not to feel happily at home with the friendly, light-hearted crowds that throng the Fair Grounds. Good-night."

And as he spoke, I found myself back in that sunny office behind the bandstand, with the Coldstream Guards' band

playing outside, and the hot blue afternoon sky of New York filling the upper half of the window.

I wasn't sitting in the chair; I had slumped down on the floor, and the broadcasting official was giving me a glass of water. John, with concern on his face, was gathering up his papers. He said:

"What's happened, old man?"

"I'm all right," I said feebly.

"You don't look it," said John bluntly. "You old ass, I know you—you've been working yourself sick again."

"I've got to send a cable," I said.

"Why?" he asked.

"I've got to tell Scotland Yard," I gasped. I was feeling faint and giddy again, but I wasn't going to let Oliver Mooley get away with murdering my Eleanor.

"Now take it easy, old chap," John was saying.

"Gosh, I nearly passed out myself when I saw him crumple up on the floor there directly you'd started," the official was saying. "I couldn't do a thing—I had to keep your mind off any trouble."

They half carried me out of the place, and put me into one of those sight-seeing chairs pushed around by the boys who're working their way through college. I was all in; and I missed that train out of New York.

John looked after me; but I couldn't sleep that night. I managed to send my cable to Scotland Yard.

"Investigate circumstances Eleanor Mooley's death," I wired, and gave them that address in East Sheen, and told them to look in the visitor's book.

An Inspector called at the house a few minutes before Eleanor died, I'm told. A doctor had been attending her, and everything seemed above board, and nobody—neither the doctor nor Oliver Mooley—made any objection when a post-mortem was suggested.

Oliver Mooley even got away with it when it was proved that she died of arsenic poisoning. He said she'd often



threatened suicide, and was a moody, unaccountable woman who suffered from constant fits of depression. Who wouldn't, married to *that* sort of a brute.

But *I* know the truth; for I've listened-in to Eleanor's thoughts. She wrote the truth in the visitor's book: but that message to the police doesn't get anywhere. It was obviously written the day before she died—the freshness of the ink proved that to the police. But—and they can't explain this—it's not in Eleanor's handwriting, but in mine; and it's signed: "James Heswall."

But we haven't got far enough—in spite of that bit of evidence that can't be explained—to accept the whole of this statement as evidence. We don't know enough yet about the forces that can shoot our voices, our music, and our minds, to the other side of the world; but I know enough of your character, my *dear* Oliver Mooley, to realise that this statement will make you very, very uncomfortable. You can't do anything about it, because the police have got it too, though it's no use to them as evidence; but it's enough to make them regard you as a suspicious character for quite a while.

But don't worry, Oliver Mooley. I shan't come back to England. I might be tempted to call on you; and it's much better to leave you to put up as good a show as you can about something suspicious that can't be explained.

## THE GREAT GESTURE

**M**R. AUGUSTUS LIONEL LARKINS belonged to the old school, a school of manners and habits so old that it has long passed away and is now almost forgotten. His character was consistent, and his friends found much in it to attract and retain their admiration.

He was a courtly old gentleman, and he was a bachelor for a very good Victorian reason. He had been disappointed in love in his early youth; his girl, his Caroline, had married another man, chosen by her parents, and when, some thirty years later, she became a widow both she and Mr. Larkins decided not to marry. Instead they preserved a deep but delicate friendship. There was more than a touch of Colonel Newcome about Mr. Larkins; and Caroline Hartover, the only woman in his life, had a Victorian air that was exactly the right accompaniment to his respectful gallantry.

The first thing that you noticed when you saw Mr. Larkins was his moustache. It was a superb ornament. It spread its wings, so to speak, on either side of his rather boyish face. It flowed and curled, ornate, enormous and impressive, completely hiding his mouth, descending like some great canopy, and of a silken, silver white. How it stayed in position was always a mystery; but like twin banners flung outwards, it gave both dignity and an astonishing virility to his countenance. Apart from the moustache he would have passed as a dapper but rather old-fashioned gentleman.

He had pale blue eyes, a narrow forehead, a well-shaped nose, and he was slim and carried himself very erect. He dressed with a fastidious but restrained elegance. His clothes always had a slight air of the 'nineties about them. They were always quiet, of choice materials, but their cut made him seem almost a period piece. The trousers were a little tight to the leg; something about them that suggested the cavalry, and that might have been a tribute to a commission he had held in the Volunteers, away back in the 'seventies or 'eighties. There was a certain amplitude about his coats; and when he entered a taxi it became miraculously transformed into a hansom—or so it seemed for just one fleeting moment if you caught a glimpse of him stepping jauntily into the cab.

There was always something a little military about him; something in his walk, his neatness, his regularity, and the routine of his life which suggested the retired Army man.



He lived in Richmond, in a small old red-brick house on the Hill, and he walked daily on the Terrace, a sedate promenade taken in all weathers, three times up and three times down the Terrace, with an occasional pause for a glance at that incomparable view of the curving Thames, winding from Twickenham.

Three times a week he would take tea with Mrs. Hartover. She also lived on Richmond Hill. When other visitors were present on these occasions they would be struck by the respectful attention that she accorded to his lightest remark.

Mr. Larkins would discourse upon a variety of subjects; without pretending to be well-informed about anything in particular, he always spoke with an air of quiet authority. His utterance was short, rather clipped—a little abrupt even. She believed everything he said, and, to the best of his belief, he never uttered a misleading sentence in her presence; nor in anybody else's for that matter.

Nobody knew his age; he might have been sixty, seventy or eighty; but somehow or other we felt that he was younger. Perhaps it was that terrific pride in his appearance which conferred upon him an air of youth.

His hair was white and abundant, but you never noticed his hair, nor indeed anything except the superlative moustache which dominated the scene. He never smoked cigarettes, only cigars, and he used a long amber holder, effectively shielding the moustache from any contact with nicotine. When he drank a glass of sherry it almost disappeared from view; the moustache curving out and over hid the slender glass. He drank tea with an extraordinary neatness, producing a vast white silk handkerchief to dry the fringes of the moustache. Coffee he never used: coffee leaves stains.

And so, year in year out, he followed his orderly routine of life; going to Bournemouth for three weeks in the winter to recover after his annual attack of influenza; visiting friends in the country for a little shooting in August and September, but always cutting short these visits, always returning to his

Richmond home, which was beautifully run and managed by a quiet, competent manservant and his wife. We felt that he was never really happy when separated from Mrs. Hartover.

His Caroline was seldom ill, although she was one of those frail-looking women. But her slight frame could sustain any amount of fatigue, and she was trained to absorb any amount of sympathy, because her friends were always saying: "How ill poor darling Caroline looks."

Then one winter she *was* ill. The illness began with a cold, and from that small complaint other and more serious things developed.

Mr. Larkins, who didn't believe in the telephone, and wouldn't have one in his house, called to make enquiries about three times a day.

Caroline Hartover grew steadily worse. Nobody ventured to mention her illness to Mr. Larkins in order to express sympathy; but one day we observed that he was a little brighter.

"It was touch and go, you know," he said to his rather abrupt, jerky voice. "Shan't be allowed to see her for a long time. Still, worst over now, they tell me."

Some weeks passed before he was able to see her, before she was able to descend to her small, overcrowded drawing room. He was her only visitor. Nobody else was permitted to call; nor even her relatives.

Those who met Mr. Larkins returning from that first visit noticed that he seemed preoccupied.

The very next day everyone who knew him had a shock.

He appeared for his morning walk upon the Terrace erect, dapper, quick-stepping as usual, but —*clean-shaven*. Without that colossal moustache he looked an old and wizened man, with a curiously crumpled face.

Nobody liked to say anything; indeed it seemed impossible to make any comment. He was too reserved, too dignified to permit liberties of any kind; but he came round to the subject himself.

"Hm!" he said explosively—and when he spoke the fact



that he had a very long pale upper lip was emphasized—"hm, I suppose you're all wondering why I've shaved?"

Nobody dared to admit that they were curious; but he went on.

"Caroline, y'know—got to have some intelligent conversation some time, poor dear girl—so, no alternative."

This, of course, merely bewildered us.

"Take some time for her to pick it up, of course," he continued; "got to do everything to help the girl."

"Yes, yes, of course," said his friends, wondering what on earth he was talking about.

"Dreadful shock, dreadful blow," he went on. "Illness left her stone deaf, and she's learning to lip read."

## BRETHREN\*

THE Belgian frontier officials and customs officers had finished with the train. The stout, troubled-looking little man who was the only other occupant of my compartment, looked affectionately at his U.S.A. passport after it had been stamped, and then returned it to an inner pocket and sighed. Since the train left Cologne he had hardly spoken a word, but now he turned to me and said, "It's grand to be breathing free air again, sir; don't you feel that way yourself?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "Oh, I don't know," I said, "after all, every country has its own ideas about government."

He smiled. "That's so," he replied. "But if you don't mind, sir, I'd like to tell you a story. I've been wanting to get it out badly and I've been bottled up ever since I came back to what used to be my country, twenty years ago."

I was badly supplied with reading matter, and with Ameri-

\* From: *Manna*.

cans you never know—sometimes you may be treated to a dissertation on the beauties of their home town and its cultural achievements, or details of a recent operation performed on a valued relative; but now and then you hear something unusual.

“Go ahead,” I invited.

It begins like an old-fashioned fairy story, he said. A man had three sons. One good, one bad, and the other doesn't matter because he's right out of the picture, anyway. This man was the best type of German gentleman. He'd got a good business, and he'd retired and was quite comfortable. He'd served in the army, he brought up his sons well, gave them a good education, and they were just old enough, all three of them, to serve in the last years of the War. Fischer was the name. The two boys I'm telling you about were called Ernst and Kurt.

Ernst was no good. He was just one of those people who went all wrong from start to finish. Do you know, some people have a crooked twist in them, and this boy just got across everything straight and decent at an awkward angle, like Broadway runs across New York, making sharp points and shapes for everybody in the way he lived and thought and the things he did. He got all the bad that you can get out of Army life. He was just darned crooked, and he knew it, and he liked it. Now, old man Fischer was a good father, but he was a hard one, and it seemed to be one of Ernst's ambitions in life to get back on his father for having tried to knock some sense into him when he was a boy. He was always tanking up with booze, and there was such a lot of trouble with women that he had to quit his native town now and then until things blew over, and he was always milking dough out of the old man, and burning money right and left, and when his father closed up on allowances to him, he started schemes for helping himself. The old man was hit, like everybody else, during the inflation period after the War, but what hit him more than the loss of part of his income was the fact that Ernst was



spending a good deal of that time in prison. After he'd served two or three terms of imprisonment, he got mixed up with a gang of tough boys who were in what they called politics, but which was little better than blackmail and beating folks up and threatening them, and plain, open robbery. The trouble with Ernst was he was good-looking, he was plausible, and he'd got the sort of voice that would persuade people to do almost anything. One night, when he was in his native town, he went too far. He lived in a lovely town, one of those places full of spires and towers and ringed by mountains, and high up, with keen air, and a place where you could live a happy, carefree life on very little money; where you could hear good music, eat good food, drink good wine, and life, even in the worst days of that after-War depression, could be a pretty fair proposition.

Ernst had been monkeying about with a girl, not just for the sake of a bit of fun, but because he wanted to lift as much cash as he could off her people. They got wise to it and this girl's brother laid for him and beat him up, and the gang Ernst was with laid for that brother and beat him up in turn, so badly that what was left was hardly worth burying, and they got hold of the girl too—well, I needn't go into details of what they did to her. All this happened while Ernst was recovering in hospital, but when he came out he hobbled around on crutches for just exactly twelve hours before he was bumped off by a man who had been hitched up with this girl-friend of his before Ernst happened along. The scandal and the row, and trouble, and the murder trial afterwards, just about broke old Fischer up. I don't think he minded so much about Ernst's death. In a way it was a relief—it was the circumstances of the death and the all-round rotten life Ernst had lived that finished him. He died a year afterwards. But there was one bright spot in his life, and that was Kurt.

Kurt was just the other side of the picture. He was the silver lining to the cloud, so to speak. He was a good guy; not one of these sissy things that are only half male, but a

man with a mind and a soul, who wasn't afraid of work, and who was darned capable. Now Kurt, even during the depression, was making plans to carry on his father's business. It was a small factory, and he worked hard and he won out through the depression, and by the middle of the 1920's he'd got it going grandly. Ernst was knocked off in 1924. When his father died at the end of '25, Kurt had built up a good, big, flourishing business on new lines. He tried experiments in running his factory; he came over to the States; studied industrial production methods, welfare plans for his operatives, and he ran a model show, and it paid. But he didn't take too much out of it himself. "Put most of it back into the business," was his motto. He married a wife who was as good an organiser as himself. They had a couple of children, and they were the happiest, most united family you could wish to see, making money, doing a good job of work, alive and interested in everything in the world. He was a grand man, Kurt. There aren't enough people like him knocking around.

I heard about all this, of course, and I saw him when he came over to the States in '27. And then you know—and this is where my story really begins—I didn't hear about him at all for a bit. It was two years ago when I stopped hearing about him, and then, a couple of months back, I got a letter, posted in New York.

It was from Kurt's wife.

It said: "I dare not post this letter, but I am giving it to a friend who is leaving the country, and I have asked him to post it to you when he reaches America. Kurt has disappeared, and I don't know where he is. We have nothing to live on. Our business has been taken over by some good Party people, and we aren't good Party people ourselves. Kurt was too independent. He wouldn't get rid of the people he was told to get rid of. He wouldn't let good Party men who know nothing come in and run his business for him. So he has disappeared, and I have been living on what I can sell, and I have been hoping and hoping, but I have heard nothing.



And I want you to come and help me if you can. You are a free citizen of a free country."

There were a few more things in the letter which I won't trouble you with. It was enough to make me uproot myself and let my own business alone for a few weeks while I made tracks for that town in Germany where Kurt and Ernst and his father and their family had lived for generations.

Well, sir, I arrived. I found Kurt's wife and her two children living in one room of their house. The rest had been let off as apartments, and things weren't too good with them. I didn't recognise them. All three of them looked old and ill, and, gosh! I've never seen people so frightened. They'd missed a day in their eating that week, because she'd had an unstamped parcel through the post and she'd had to pay postal charges on it, and it had just swallowed up what she'd set aside for food for one day. She'd have scraped all the money in the world together to pay the postage on that parcel, for the postman told her and the note on the label told her, that it was from her husband.

She opened it, and there was a box of ashes inside, with just an official letter slipped in with it, saying that Kurt had committed suicide in a concentration camp where he had lived for a couple of years, and that his ashes were delivered herewith. Please sign the receipt.

"For God's sake," I said, "what's he done? Why was he shoved into a camp?"

Kurt's wife just shook her head at me, and said, "There was no trial. He was just taken off by the police."

She seemed absolutely hopeless, listless, and incapable of any sort of emotion. I told her she'd got to get out of there. She said she'd do anything to leave and take the children with her. I saw I'd got an organising job in front of me, and I began to get busy, but I was mad at the whole thing and I was all for tearing round and raising Cain, and asking for explanations and whatnot. Kurt's wife stopped me. She said, "I can't talk. I can't tell you the life we lead here. But something

I will show you will explain what the world is like to-day."

She put on her hat, and then I thought she was haywire, because she said she was going to take me to the public square and I would then understand everything. We took a taxi. It set us down in the public square, and I didn't recognise the place. All the old buildings I'd known had been torn down, and there were two or three great big blocks that looked like barracks, and a big, sort of temple with a couple of boys in black uniforms and black helmets on guard as sentries in front of it.

Kurt's wife walked me over to the temple. We went up some steps, and she saluted, and told me I'd better salute too, so I did, and I found myself looking down at a row of twelve tombs in marble.

"Look at them," said Kurt's wife, pointing to the third one from the end. All those tombs were alike, but they all had inscriptions, and this one said:

"On everlasting guard, liberator and  
saviour of the State, Ernst Fischer."

"What!" I said, "*that* thug?"

But Kurt's wife stopped me.

"Don't say anything," she whispered. "He's a hero and a martyr, and if you say what he really was, American citizen or not, you'll never pass the frontier."

When I got back to her house, the children weren't there, but one of those people in the Party uniform was.

"We want to ask you a few questions," he said to Kurt's wife, "so you'd better come along."

"What have you done with my children?" she said.

"All children belong to the State," he answered. And then he turned to me, this young pup, turned to me, an old soldier, who had fought for Germany, and said, "People who betray their country by becoming citizens of a rotten democracy had better get out. You're not wanted here!"

The little man stopped talking, and bit his hand.

"What happened?" I asked.



He looked at me, and then said, "Hell, what could happen? I went. That was yesterday, and I haven't stopped running since. I couldn't do anything for them, could I? I've got my own wife and children back in Toledo, and I'm the last of the Fischers anyway. I was the third brother who didn't matter."

## THE DEEPEST DYE

MRS. METAL was the postmistress of Kendyke, one of those little, wholly uneventful villages in the Norfolk fens. Nothing ever happened in Kendyke; and Mrs. Metal was a mild, sociable, but rather nervous widow of sixty, a newcomer who had only settled in the village eight years ago. She lived a life of slightly fussy precision. The post office, where you could buy newspapers, tobacco, stationery and exhausted-looking sweets from gleaming bottles, was beautifully neat and orderly.

Nothing ever threw Mrs. Metal off her balance; not even when the Vicar and his wife celebrated their golden wedding, and thirty-eight greetings telegrams arrived during one morning. Mrs. Metal kept her small stock of nervousness to herself; she was always prepared to rise to an occasion. It was because he was quite ignorant of Mrs. Metal's secret pride about this, that an inexperienced, but determined young gentleman parked a high-powered stolen car outside the post office at eleven o'clock on an autumn morning, and striding up to the counter, stuck a revolver through the wire grille, and said, "This is a hold-up, see. You empty that till, see."

His name was Jimmy Sales; his trouble was a misplaced flair for adventure, an inability to concentrate, and a dislike for work. A small legacy, quickly dissipated, had focussed his

defects, and he had started a new career rather abruptly that morning by stealing a car in Cambridge. He was proposing to steal a succession of cars, and raid a succession of post offices, assuming that one raid on a post office, if it was followed up quickly by another, fifty to a hundred miles away, would furnish him with ample funds as a result of a couple of active days.

"Come on," he said to Mrs. Metal as she stared at him blankly. "Don't gape at me, you old cow. Just pull that till out and empty it on the counter, or I'll let you have it."

Jimmy Sales was quite pleased with the professional note that was creeping into his voice. He was delighted to find that he was completely steady. The hand that held the revolver was as firm as a rock; but in congratulating himself he had forgotten that the revolver barrel was supported by the wire grille. Unfortunately, Mrs. Metal didn't give his remark the right reception.

"You're no gentleman," she said, looking at him severely. "Who brought you up to call ladies cows?"

"You shut your trap and hand out that cash," snapped Jimmy.

"You're young to be doing this sort of thing," returned Mrs. Metal, her two hands placed squarely on the top of the counter. Actually, she was holding herself up by the counter, for her legs were feeling desperately wobbly.

"Now look here," Jimmy exploded, "I don't want to have to rub you out. But unless you hand out that cash—well, this gun's going off."

"Let me tell you something, young man," said Mrs. Metal; and suddenly Jimmy realised that her round, rosy face with its iron-rimmed spectacles reminded him of a severe and active aunt who had once attempted to change his ideas about life and responsibilities by hitting him over the head with a hair-brush when he was ten. A gust of anger shook him and he found his finger tightening on the trigger.

His voice was quieter and he said, "I'm quite serious about



this. Don't think it's a joke. Now then, how much money have you got in the till?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Metal. "But I'm not going to give it to you. Good gracious, you don't think I'd be as soft as that, do you?"

"Unless you hand out that money before I've counted ten," said Jimmy, "I'll shoot."

"But suppose somebody comes into the shop," Mrs. Metal parried.

"That'll be just too bad for them, because they'll get it good and hot."

"I'm not going to let you be hanged," said Mrs. Metal placidly; "there's a lot of good in you, though the dear Lord Himself knows where it's gone to at the moment. But you could be a decent, honest ——"

"Will you shut up?" yelled Jimmy. This chattering woman reminded him so vividly of that interfering aunt of his, that his left hand instinctively crept up to his head; he could remember the welt he got from that hairbrush even now. Mrs. Metal shook her head at him.

"You can't pretend to frighten me," she said slowly. "I'm sorry for you. Sorry that such a decent young man should be so wrong-headed."

"Listen," said Jimmy. "I'm beginning to count, *now*. Remember what'll happen when I've counted ten, unless ——"

"You can go on counting till you're black in the face," Mrs. Metal told him. As she said that, her eyes roved along the counter.

"One," shouted Jimmy.

"It doesn't make any difference," said Mrs. Metal.

"Two — three — four — five ——"

"Besides, if you let off fireworks in here, everybody'll come rushing in. Why, there's Mrs. Winnett just over the way—and there's Mr. Timpey next door. You see, it's so quiet."

"Six," Jimmy almost screamed. "Seven — eight — nine ——"

There was a pause.

"You daren't do it," said Mrs. Metal. As she spoke, Jimmy saw her right hand moving. In panic he fired. Mrs. Metal had the experience of hearing a bullet whistle by her ear, but her hand had grasped the weapon she was seeking, and Jimmy had a fresh experience too. The revolver had jerked out of his hand. Swearing at the top of his voice, dabbing his hands over his face, and trying to recover the revolver on the floor, he heard somebody entering the shop.

He made a dive for the door, knocked over an elderly clergyman and yelled, "You old ——."

He jumped into the car and drove off.

The clergyman picked himself up and said, "My dear Mrs. Metal, what on earth ——?"

"Excuse me, Mr. Colnebrooke," said Mrs. Metal, "but I've got to telephone." And she called the Police Station.

"I didn't get the number of his car, sergeant," she said when she was connected. "But you can't mistake the young man. He's tall and dark, and he's got the best part of a bottle of ink over his face and collar and hands, and I don't think he'll have time to get it off. It's our best blue-black."

Then she turned to the clergyman and said, "Trying to rob the till indeed. Quite a nice young man he seemed; but he must be punished. A pity. I expect he began just as a spoiled child. I tried to cure one once, but I didn't have the time. He turned into a real black sheep in the end, and we haven't heard of him for years." She sighed. "He might have been different," she added, "if only his mother had let me go on teaching him with that hairbrush."



## PETRIFIED

THE body of a well dressed man, who had apparently died from starvation, was discovered at 11.45 on the morning of Tuesday, May 16th, 1939, on Richmond Green, almost opposite the gateway to the Old Palace, by Police Constable John Trist. The constable was on his beat, and had just walked past Maid of Honour Row, and was looking across the Green, when suddenly a huddled shape appeared on the grass.

Constable Trist blinked, rubbed his eyes, and said to himself that it was rummy. That chap hadn't been there a minute ago, and now he was lying asleep on the wet grass on a cold, drizzly day. It seemed, he said afterwards when he made his report, as if he'd dropped out of the sky. The constable stepped over the white painted railings that border the Green, and walked slowly towards the sleeping man. He shook him by the shoulder and said:

"Here, matey, you'd better move on, if you don't want to move into hospital."

Then he realised that he was speaking to a corpse. He turned the body over, and saw the thin, wasted face of a middle-aged man. He was hatless; his clothes were of good material and well-cut, and nearly dry, although it had been raining all the morning. They weren't sodden as they certainly should have been if he'd been lying in that exposed place for long. These details Constable Trist observed presently: what claimed his whole attention at first and gave him, as he admitted, a nasty jolt, was the expression on the haggard face of the dead man: it was compounded of suffering, fear and despair—it concentrated in his features such weary hopelessness that Trist, a kindly, optimistic man, was for a moment quite unnerved. He pulled himself together, stood up, and beckoned to a milkman who was on his rounds.

"Keep an eye on 'im," he said; "I'll call up the station."

"Who is he?" asked the milkman.

"Doesn't look like a tramp," the constable answered; and then the milkman exclaimed:

"Why, it's Mr. Prawl!"

"You know him?"

"Why, of course I do—he's on my round. Lives near Well Way, up towards the Park. But he don't look like this: not usually: 'e's a nice gentleman, and in the best of 'ealth." The milkman paused, then said: "There's something wrong 'ere. I saw Mr. Prawl yesterday morning, going out for a walk—and he looked all right then."

"How did he look?" demanded Constable Trist.

"Not like this," replied the milkman: "he was well an' fit—not like he'd been through a long illness. But it's 'im all right: 'e was wearing that very suit."

"Well, we'll want you to say all that at the station—but 'ang on 'ere for a jiffy while I get on to them."

The death of Artemus Prawl puzzled the police. The circumstances were suspicious, the available facts were bewildering. The medical evidence was irrefutable: the unfortunate gentleman had died of starvation. He had been without food for at least a week, probably longer, said the doctors. But his housekeeper attested that on the morning of Tuesday, May the 16th, he had eaten a good breakfast: scrambled eggs, coffee, toast, marmalade, and an apple. He had breakfasted at his usual hour, nine o'clock. How was it possible for a man to die of starvation between 9 a.m. and 11.45 a.m.? The facts were nonsensical, and the police were baffled, until three days later they were called in to investigate the disappearance of another resident of Richmond, Dr. Isaac Glassing, F.R.S., the well-known psychiatrist, who lived on the Terrace.

Dr. Glassing and Artemus Prawl had been great friends, and a document found in the laboratory of Dr. Glassing's house furnishes the only explanation that covers the facts.



It is not an explanation that commends itself either to police officers or to coroners; and it was not published at the time. I should never have heard about it, if I hadn't become friendly with—well, I won't mention names. But I've been a special constable in my spare time since the war began, and I've seen a typescript copy of the document the police found on the table in Dr. Glassing's laboratory. The original was written in pencil on the pages of a small note-book, and in the hand of Artemus Prawl.

This is what it said:

I don't know whether anyone will ever read this. I have been wandering about Richmond now for six days. I am very weak, and there is still no sign of movement in my surroundings. I feel that I should leave some kind of record, in the hope that it may warn others against making this experiment. Fortunately, I had this note-book in my pocket.

The experiment began in Dr. Glassing's laboratory at 11 a.m. on Tuesday, May 16th, 1939. By my reckoning it should now be 4.30 p.m. on Monday, May 22nd; but the world about me is fixed at 11.45 a.m. on May 16th. About three-quarters of an hour after the experiment began I appear to have entered a time-phase of my own. Dr. Glassing presumably entered another time-phase, because upon the completion of the process by which we were translated into different time dimensions, he disappeared, but I remained—perhaps through some defect in the process—attached to the spatial dimensions of the world as I had always known it, but in a different time-beat or time-series.

It is difficult to make this clear, without using a lot of technical terms. They slip so easily from the lips of dabblers in science like myself, although my old friend, Dr. Glassing, would no doubt have made things much clearer. For a long period Dr. Glassing had been making experiments in what he called *time-phases*. He believed that it was possible with the help of certain electric waves to attract living objects and

move them about in time dimensions as a magnet attracts certain metals and can move them about in space. Not only did he contend that it was possible to move animate beings and their normal integument of clothes from their immediate present and transfer them to some past time-phase, or to a parallel time-phase, or perhaps to a future time-phase, but he asserted that such transfers occasionally took place.

He instanced that remarkable book called *An Adventure*, which contained the experiences of two English ladies who, during a holiday in France, found themselves transferred to a past time-phase in Versailles, and for a while wandered about the royal gardens as they had been in the late eighteenth century, meeting people in the costume of that period. He drew my attention to a significant footnote in one of the latest editions of that book. It mentioned that on the dates when these English ladies had their strange experience meteorological records showed that electric storms had taken place in that part of Europe.

Dr. Glassing had followed up this suggestive fact, and with infinite trouble had established that when electric storms were recorded in different parts of Europe, stories were sometimes heard about people momentarily dropping back into the past, or finding themselves in unfamiliar surroundings. He had made an immense study of the subject and had collected evidence from all over Europe, searching the files of local newspapers and interviewing hundreds of people.

He had worked out what he believed to be a transference technique for switching people from their normal life in a series of linked, what he called "specious-presents," to a new linking of specious-presents, or perhaps into some entirely fresh form of time-life. I cannot pretend to explain the apparatus or the intricacies of the process, nor do I know the proper term for the "waves" he employed; but I do know that I was immensely interested and excited by the idea of movement along time. I particularly wanted to move into the future,



away from the uncertainties and threats of the year 1939; but Dr. Glassing would promise me nothing.

"To move into the future is a sentence of death so far as your body is concerned," he said. "You must realise that any departure into time-to-come means complete severance with the present time-phase and no possibility of return. With past time-phases it is different. But, there may be other time dimensions, either parallel with what we call the present, or striking off at right angles, as it were, from our known time dimensions."

He was careful to explain all the risks to me.

"That's all right," I said. "It's better to take a big risk, trying to find out something that may release men from their troubles, than to go on and get involved in troubles that are not of one's own making."

"It may not work at all," he warned me; "we may merely electrocute ourselves. You must be perfectly prepared for death when I begin to operate the process."

We had often talked about making the experiment, so that I had given the matter plenty of thought. I agreed without any reservations. *I want it to be made clear that Dr. Glassing is in no way responsible for my death, if indeed I am dead.*

However, I am growing weaker and I must finish this account. At 11 a.m. the experiment began. It took place in the laboratory, which is a long light room on the first floor of Dr. Glassing's house on Richmond Hill. Outside there is a balcony, and you can see over the Thames Valley, with the river winding round to Twickenham, and the Terrace Gardens falling away immediately in front.

When I grasped the terminals and Dr. Glassing turned on the switches, and I watched the hands of the dials creeping round as power poured through the apparatus into us, I suppose I must have felt like a man who has decided to hurl himself from the top of a high building and has just over-balanced beyond recall and knows that a swift rush through

the air is all that stands between him and the earth which is dashing up to destroy him. Soon I became unconscious. The room grew dark.

When I opened my eyes I saw that my fingers had fallen limply from the terminals, and that the hands of the clock on the table stood at a quarter-to-twelve. Dr. Glassing had disappeared. I rose gingerly from the chair and found that I was rather weak and giddy. I held on to the table. I had some difficulty in focussing my eyes at first, but presently my vision grew steady and my legs grew stronger. I walked over to the window and looked out.

The familiar scene was still there. There seemed to be nothing unusual about it until, glancing down at the Terrace, I realised that everybody was standing still. It was exactly like the two minutes silence on Armistice Day when crowds everywhere suddenly become motionless. Nobody moved. And then I got a real shock. Three seagulls hung completely motionless above the trees of the Terrace Gardens. Their wings were outspread, and they were fixed, exactly as if they had been painted against the cloudy sky.

I realised that in some fashion I had moved into a time-phase that was not corresponding in speed (I expect Dr. Glassing would be outraged by the terms I am using) with the world that I had known three-quarters of an hour earlier. The clock on the table had stopped.

My own wrist watch was going. With my clothes it had been transferred by Dr. Glassing's process into my new time-phase. The hands showed me that it was five minutes past twelve, so presumably I had spent twenty minutes of my new time-phase in the laboratory, trying to realise what had happened after I had regained consciousness. The door was open, and I passed through it and went downstairs, rather gingerly. I moved very lightly. The first difficulty presented itself at the front door. It was shut and I could not move the latch. My fingers slipped round the knob of the lock, but I was unable to budge it. Fortunately, the French windows to



the garden were open and the door to the long drawing-room was open too.

I was incapable of moving window catches or handles in that strange, static world. Everything I touched had an unyielding rigidity.

I walked down the Terrace towards Hill Street, and cars, bicycles, dogs, people and birds were all petrified. Nothing moved. No wing fluttered, no eyelid blinked. Down in Richmond it was raining, and I dodged between the immobile, transparent drops, which were as hard as bullets.

My weakness prevents me from prolonging this account. I have returned to the laboratory so that I may write it away from all those terrible, stiff, ghastly figures with glazed eyes and set features, that don't move and won't move. I can no longer bear the sight of them. In the crowded streets I am more lonely and afraid than a man has ever been before.

I have been six days now without food. I cannot eat anything. Food displayed in shops is beyond my reach. The vegetables and fruit outside the greengrocers' shops are hard, with the bitter hardness of arctic ice, and I cannot move them.

The world I see about me is a world veneered with steel.

Now that is all I can write, and I wonder if it will ever be read. I am going to walk about until the end.

## CONTINUITY

**I** DIDN'T tell the Police Inspector the whole story. I thought it wouldn't be believed. You see, I'm an author; and there were no records of the circumstances that led up to the affair at Grindel Hall. Dreams aren't evidence. Eve was the only person who could corroborate what Bill had said, and would her testimony be accepted?

I'd known Eve and Bill for years, long before they grew rather gracefully prosperous. If ever people deserved money they did; and Bill made it rather easily at the Bar. Although he was a pretty hearty fellow and a good mixer, he wasn't over-devoted to games, though he played and talked about his round of golf. He read a lot; and his library was a delight. It occupied a panelled room in that rather odd sixteenth century house he had bought in Suffolk.

I'm not just working up atmosphere when I say that Grindel Hall seemed a bit sinister. It was built on the site of a much older house. It lay in a saucer-shaped hollow, with wooded edges. A stream trickled through the grounds, all that remained of a large river that, five centuries ago, had flowed down to the sea through Oakbridge, ten miles away. Grindel had once been a port; Vikings had brought their ships there when they raided the fat lands of East Anglia.

Bill was interesting about the topography and history of the district. He had a theory that Grindel Hall had been continuously inhabited since Roman times, and that the house began as a Roman villa. (He'd dug up some Roman tiles in the garden.) He collected armour and weapons to hang on his old oak panelling.

Two years ago Bill told us about his dream. There was always a party at Easter, and at breakfast on Good Friday, 1935, Bill related the dream that began this trouble. Only Eve and I were there. There were three other people staying at Grindel; two breakfast-in-bed women and a man who overslept and didn't appear until lunch. Bill began telling us this dream in a rather troubled way.

"I had an idea I'd dreamed it all before," he said. "It was so real. The way a perfectly ordinary dinner here in the evening with Eve merged into something quite terrifyingly different still haunts me. You see, I dreamed that we had coffee in the dining-room—we often do—and I'd just lit a cigar, when I suddenly noticed that the table was much nearer—nearer my face, I mean, and I realised that I wasn't sitting in



a chair, I was lolling on a wicker couch with loose cushions; and Eve wasn't Eve—she'd become quite different, with dark hair and greenish-brown eyes.

"But she wasn't a stranger. She was my wife, I was talking to her, and I had a feeling that I'd just remembered something frightfully important, and then it passed in a flash, and I was somebody else, in some other place and time, although I *think* the place was Grindel—but as it may have looked sixteen hundred years ago.

"I was certainly in a room in a Roman house. There was no fireplace, but the floor was warm. The walls were painted with a pattern like a cheap wallpaper—leaves and garlands—and there was a brownish red dado. The floor had a mosaic, not unlike a cheap linoleum."

He described that room minutely, as if he was making an inventory.

"All this was violently interrupted," he continued. "The contrast between that dinner, the familiar dishes, and my best Sicilian wine that the sub-Praefect had given me the year before, and what happened before we'd finished the fruit and vegetable salad that little Nubian slave of ours had just brought in, I can't remember her name, but I'd picked her up with an odd lot of field-men in an auction when I'd last been at Lun, just after they had to build those walls in such a hurry, before Carausius cleaned up the coast raiders in—I forget the year.

"No matter—I got her cheap because the dealers always think that Nubians can't stand the climate. The fogs kill them off; but we only get sea mist up here, not the dank river mist they get at Lun. But, as I was saying, it was all so peaceful and comfortable—the room at a perfect temperature, for I'd had the under-steward and the furnace man flogged a week ago for letting the feed flues of the hypocaust get fouled with old wood ash.

"I'd just been saying that now the Count was watching the Ickenny coast, and the rearmament programme gave him enough ships to act quickly if raids were threatened, we could

breathe more freely. Before that we'd considered arming the staff. I've a prejudice against that—put weapons in the hands of a slave and it gives him ideas. These savages from the White Lands used to drop in when they felt like it, and although they never got far inland, they'd have war-galleys half way here up the river.

"I suppose we were congratulating ourselves too soon, for as the bowl of hot spiced wine was brought in to end the meal there was shouting in the courtyard, and barbarian voices yelling 'Ahoy! Ahoy!' I saw my wife's face whiten in the soft lamplight, and as I was hurrying out a huge man came through the curtains, stooping to get his feathered helmet under the arch.

"He grasped a red-spattered axe, and his golden beard came halfway to his waist. He stood in the archway grinning and gloating, while our little Nubian girl screamed continuously on one note. How that irritated me; but slaves have no control, no dignity. My wife ordered her to be quiet. I stared at this big, leering barbarian until he dropped his eyes, and then I said: 'Get out, savage, if you don't want to be nailed on a cross—there's a Legion at Camul.'

"He looked round the room, avoiding my eye, and roared with laughter. Then he shouted in broken-Latin, full of the vile, thick gutturals the woodland Germans use in the forests and marshes Rome doesn't want, beyond the Rhine palisade—he yelled out: 'We're masters here, my moulting eagle. Aye, and we're away back with more than a handful of feathers to show that we've plucked the Ickenny Coast, Count or no Count.'

"He roared with laughter again, and added: 'He doesn't know a ship from a horse. We met him—and he's at the bottom, and we're at the top.' Then his mood changed, and he heaved up his axe, and I picked up a heavy wine vessel—and then—"

Bill stopped, and looked perplexed. Then he went on slowly: "It's a bit bewildering. There was a quick change, and I was back at dinner with Eve, about half an inch of my cigar had



been smoked, and I had a feeling that I'd just forgotten something of immense significance. I seemed to *remember* all this when I was lying awake last night, as if it had actually happened at dinner one night when Eve and I were alone, and I'd only just remembered it in the night. The whole thing, dinner and all, may have been a dream."

"I wonder," said Eve. "You sometimes sit and look mooney when you first light a cigar, and don't speak for a few minutes."

We left it at that. I put some of the dream down to Bill's historical erudition, and I should have forgotten it, but on Good Friday a year later, that is 1936, we three were breakfasting again.

To my surprise Bill began to tell us precisely the same dream that he had related a year ago; but he obviously didn't remember that he'd told us before. I think Eve and I realised that simultaneously.

Looking rather apprehensive, he related that dream almost in the words he had used before. There were some minor additions. He said he'd been out on his estate in the afternoon; he'd noticed crows hanging about expectantly; and he might have been worried if coastal defence arrangements hadn't been so well organised, for crows in some uncanny way always seemed to know when a pirate raid was coming off—there were plenty of pickings for a few days afterwards until the Legion at Camul sent up burial squads and tidied everything. Then he continued the scene after dinner. He said that the sea-rover heaved up his axe, and then he went on like this:

"He'd got his axe jammed for a moment in the archway, but he wrenched it out. But in that second I threw the wine jar, and it caught him in the face and smashed. He bellowed with rage and came for me, the axe whirling over his winged helmet. And then—I was back here with Eve, in this room: after dinner, with half an inch of my cigar smoked, feeling chilled."

We were stupidly wrong; but we told him about the

repetition. He wasn't the man to do a bit of mysterious and pointless leg-pulling; and he was genuinely astonished, interested too; but I could see that he was worried.

We all speculated about the cause of this duplication of a dream. We wondered whether it was going to be an annual affair; and Eve said (and I wish she hadn't) that perhaps he would dream a little more every year.

"I don't want to dream on any further in that situation, thanks," said Bill.

"It'd be interesting to know what happened after he'd taken a swipe at you with his axe," Eve ruminated; and it was naughty of her to say that, for Bill was rather fond of his own safety.

Well, as everybody knows now, last Easter the trouble started.

I got down to Grindel on Thursday night, and I was the only guest. Before we went to bed we'd talked about the anniversary of Bill's dream. Eve suggested that it was connected with the Paschal moon. Bill, usually full of theories about odd happenings, seemed weighed down with foreboding. You'll say I'm working hard, creating an atmosphere, but remember Prior, the butler, testified that Bill had three whiskies instead of his usual solitary night-cap.

The tragedy occurred at 3.10 a.m. on Good Friday. Eve called. I woke and ran into their bedroom, which was next to mine. The light was on, and Bill was lying on the floor.

"He's dreamed it again!" Eve cried. "I heard him muttering in his sleep—words I couldn't understand, look—look!"

Across Bill's forehead was a straight wound, as though an axe had crashed into his skull. Blood oozed from it slowly.

"My God!" I exclaimed; "that was the end of the dream."

I did some quick thinking—the wrong thinking. I didn't know what I ought to do; but I did know what juries can believe.

Am I suggesting that Bill was killed by a dream that reconstructed a murder done long ago in Roman Britain?



Yes—I am. The post-mortem showed that he'd got a heart that might have been stopped by a big shock. The wound on his forehead was only superficial. The doctors said shock killed him.

Why did Eve swear that he'd fallen and cut his head on the bedroom fender, and why did I back the lie? We both said that because the truth looked too fishy, and I'm telling the truth now because the police have satisfied a jury that the weapon that gave Bill the shock that killed him was one of those antique battle-axes that hung on the wall of my bedroom, and that my motive for using it was Eve.

Because, although the appeal has failed, there's a petition. Don't dismiss all this as an author's invention, and say that an author goes on writing stories, even when he's writing the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, in the condemned cell.

### MELTING POINT\*

MILES HOMER made his final decision to commit a profitable murder as he smoked his after-dinner cigar. Simon Chase, his intended victim, and Eileen Chase, his wife, had just enjoyed a little intimate dinner party in his rather over-dressed apartment. Miles Homer's apartment was not quite in Millionaire's Row, but it was in a nice affluent position on Fifth Avenue, and from the fifteenth floor he could look across Central Park, although the satisfaction of that view was diminished by the rather uninspired buildings on the west side. Everything about his apartment showed that he was a professional man of taste. He never stopped supporting his character as a connoisseur for one moment, not even in

\* From: *Ripe for Development*.

the privacy of his bathroom, for in that paradise of plumbing a vast mural of sleek brown nudes incomprehensibly intertwined did the decorative honours. "The Mexican School," he would say to people who pressed inquiries. It wasn't, but most people left it at that. Few Americans care to argue with an art expert. His sitting-room was full of raving shadows for there was a glass skirting that protected a continuous line of light. Illumination flowed upwards from this low level and gave the queerest exaggerations to familiar shapes.

He liked Eileen and her gifted husband. He had been so kind to that friendless young couple from England, so helpful and so protecting; and he had adjusted the temperature of his friendship with Eileen to a nice fatherly glow which occasionally rose to a degree of genial playfulness which nobody could resent and which Eileen made no attempt to parry.

Miles Homer was plentifully equipped with the fatherly figure. He was a squat, square man, and his head was cast in an ancient Levantine mould. The seafaring traders who first brought Woolworth cargoes from Tyre to Cornwall may have looked very like him. From his swarthy face with its overhanging brows a pair of violet-blue eyes twinkled. Lines of good humour were etched about them. A heavy, greying moustache hid with deliberate untidiness the sensuous cruelty of his mouth. Clean shaven, he would have looked what he was, a ruthless crook. That moustache had allowed him to maintain his reputation for charm, for kindness and for discerning patronage.

He had invented one of the most unusual rackets in New York. He "discovered" young painters and sculptors and designers of genius. He "produced" them, as a play is produced; presented them to an exclusive public; handled their business affairs; turned them into a fashion and secured an adequate share of the profits earned by their reputations. He had been clever enough to anticipate a change in the taste of that small but well-endowed section of the American public which had hitherto collected antique masterpieces. He had by guile and



patience, and by knowing the right people, and buying the right things, spread the belief that it was smart to be modern; that to be modish, to be original, to be manifestly in possession of a unique personality, it was necessary to patronize contemporary genius. Miles Homer, the great connoisseur, the great art critic, the helpful patron, and the able dealer, "discovered" budding talent, preferably in Europe. In the sweet, keen, stimulating air of New York that talent blossomed, and the fruit that followed fell ripe and golden into Homer's banking account. He avoided native talent. When he did by accident become aware of the work of some promising young American, if it had saleable qualities, he insisted that its creator should assume a European name.

There was a glamour attached to his patronage and it became known at last throughout the art schools of Europe, and particularly in the dens and attics of the artists' quarter in Paris, and in Chelsea, Fulham, Hampstead and Bloomsbury in London, that if Miles Homer took you up, you were *made*.

Now Simon Chase was a sculptor who seemed permanently stuck in the attic stage of his career. Before he had married he had lived, uncomfortably, on practically nothing; but Eileen, who believed in him passionately, helped him with encouragement, and helped him financially too, for as a free-lance fashion journalist she contributed the little trickle of funds which kept the attic flat going. She was proud and independent and for two years she lived with Simon, simply and barely, almost in the shadow of the four tall chimneys of the Lots Road Power Station, at the remote end of Chelsea.

It was Eileen who had heard of Homer. She made Simon write to him and send him photographs of his work. When Simon first wrote Homer was engaged in the delicate task of introducing to America the heavy-handed variety of modern sculpture, stuff with an almost Mayan brutality about it, and Simon's work would not have fitted into that programme at all. Simon, who was articulate only with his hands, put lithe, sensuous beauty into the shapes that he brought striding out

of blocks of stone. There was nothing cruel or ugly or savage about his work. But Eileen's persistence and Homer's constant quest for new manifestations of modern art at last secured an invitation to visit New York. Unfortunately, Miles Homer omitted any offer of expenses.

"It won't do to cry poor," Eileen had said. "We'll get the passage money and go third and say we came first."

"How on earth are we going to get it?" asked Simon.

"I'll get it," said Eileen. "I'll jot down a whole lot of titles on what modern American women do to keep their husbands' love, and so on—scores of things—and get an advance on them. Meanwhile, I'll work like stink for a few weeks."

She made Simon write and accept the invitation.

How exquisitely, how ornately kind the great connoisseur had been. He had entertained them regally. He had, after Simon had signed a contract, refunded their passage money. He had advanced on account of prospective sales two thousand dollars to Simon; set him up in a studio in Greenwich Village; and started his propaganda plans for creating an "atmosphere" round the work of this delicate, talented, good-looking young man.

Simon Chase was tall and dark; a beautifully poised ornament of a man; selfish, irritable, and the fragile vehicle of two tremendous passions—his creative work and his love for Eileen. A third passion was latent, but Eileen kept him reasonably sober. The capable beauty of his hands as much as his free and vivid work had convinced Homer that he was a man to back. His work was unusual, and Homer knew that those hands, given freedom, could cut a fortune out of stone. Nor had Simon disproved his judgment. A year in New York had developed his genius richly, and Homer was beginning to dispose of his creations discreetly but profitably. (He possessed the exclusive rights for disposal). But there had been an unforeseen and an unbusinesslike complication. Miles Homer had quite unexpectedly fallen in love with Eileen. But



he never allowed her to think he was anything except fatherly.

Now Homer perceived what Simon never suspected and what Eileen never admitted, even to herself: that she was consumed by a passion for the limelight. She was prepared to wait for the beam to isolate her and make her character and talents and beauty resplendent in the eyes of beholders; but, almost unconsciously, she used her husband, and she was attempting to use Homer, for driving her way to the centre of the stage. Beneath her business capacity, behind her labour to help Simon's work, Homer saw, stark and ruthless, an expression of organized selfishness that in his heart he admired, and from which he wished to win something for himself. If Simon died—and he was so delicate—Homer, with Eileen, would be the guardian of his work, and together they could build a great, paying legend about his genius. Meanwhile, the value of his work would appreciate. No genius pays like a dead genius. Often Homer had wished that his talented finds would die before those cunning, long-distance contracts expired.

That evening, when Eileen and her husband were his only guests, he decided that he must murder Simon. He had planned to do it for some time; but he did not come finally to his decision until the first creamy section of ash fell from his long cigar and feathered out into a grey star in the saucer of his Coffee cup. For weeks he had been pondering about the advantages of an early death for Simon Chase, and then, with the falling of that cigar ash, the sentence was passed.

Across the room Eileen was standing on the balcony with Simon. They were looking over the Park. Miles Homer sighed, levered himself gently out of his armchair, and joined his guests.

If Eileen wanted limelight he would give her bigger and better limelight than she could ever borrow from that slender and handsome bundle of nerves who was her husband.

"Won't you have some more brandy, Simon?" he invited as he stepped on to the balcony.

"How many glasses have you had?" demanded Eileen.

"He's only had one," said Homer, "but you just had to drag him away before he could have a chance at another."

"Don't overdo it," Eileen pleaded, "it makes him either stupid or painfully amorous. He's got an awfully weak head."

Homer nodded. He knew that. He knew a lot about the physical properties of Simon Chase. He knew that great heights made him giddy; he knew also that fortified by two glasses of brandy his giddiness disappeared. That was why he had suggested the second glass of brandy; that was why after Simon had drunk it he suggested a visit to a party that was being held by some friends of his who lived in the penthouse at the top of that tall apartment block. He knew that, emboldened by brandy, Simon would wander round the roof garden and look, as he loved to look, down-town, at the city of palpitating light. He also knew precisely how he could break Simon's brandy-given courage. Eileen had once shown him what should be done. It had happened one night when Simon had drunk too much, and Eileen with maternal severity had insisted on sobering him.

The party in the penthouse was cheerful and noisy, and, as Homer knew, they were drinking cocktails.

"No," he said to Simon, "you do not insult my brandy with a cocktail; you have come up here to walk round the garden and see New York as she should be seen, from above." And Simon stood by the slender iron railing of the roof garden, which came barely to his waist, looking at a hundred quivering towers of light. He saw the shining surface of Fifth Avenue far below. The terrific elevation had no effect on him at all at that moment. He stood there and did not notice when Homer left his side.

Homer stepped into the big sitting-room that was filled with noise and cigarette smoke. He picked out of an empty glass, that had held an old-fashioned cocktail, an instrument he needed for murdering Simon Chase. He had exactly calculated the time and the effectiveness of the weapon. Chase was still standing where he had left him; his head bent forward



gazing at the lights; the thin neck with the hollow in the back of it, leaving a space between the skin and the stiff collar. Homer calmly and deliberately slipped a cube of ice down his neck.

"Say, what the hell!" said an outraged voice, and a young man, who was not Simon Chase, spun round and grinned. "Getting gay, aren't you?" he asked. "I never thought a way-up art guy like you had that in him. What's the idea anyway?"

Homer suddenly saw Simon standing in a patch of shadow a few feet away.

"I just couldn't resist doing that," said Homer lamely. He was not going to say that he thought his victim was someone else. To everyone except Eileen, Homer's lapse seemed inexplicable. But at a non-stop cocktail party nobody puzzles long over anything. Eileen said, when they returned to Homer's apartment: "You know, dear Simon has been so tired lately that I think he must be ill. I'm sure it would be a mistake if he did any more work for at least a year or two. Couldn't you organize a holiday, Mr. Homer, in Italy or the South of France or somewhere, or perhaps Florida?"

"Say, are you just off your head?" asked Homer angrily.

"Oh, no," murmured Eileen; "I'm perfectly cool—cool as a block of ice."

Miles Homer went to his bureau and opened a cheque book.

"THINGS'LL REACH OUT FOR YOU!"\*

"YOU'RE fond of Grunswood, Professor," said farmer Fergus, "you go there every morning. You must know every track and twig in the wood."

Professor Fellen nodded, and the farmer continued.

\* From: *Mr. Buckby is Not at Home.*

"It's a big wood, for these parts, but it wants caring for. There's bad stuff there—trees that ought to make way for their betters, and other bad stuff."

"What do you mean by other bad stuff?" asked the Professor.

"Well, it's not easy to say. You don't know the wood by night."

"No, of course I don't."

"No—and there's not many who'd care to."

The Professor sniffed, and a slow smile lightened the farmer's face. He succumbed to a temptation that had often plagued him whenever he found himself with his paying guest: it was the superior quality of that academic sniff that made him fall.

Professor Henry Fellen was spending the Christmas vacation at a farm near Kendyke, in the Norfolk fens. He was young for his job; for he held the chair of anthropology at a great northern university, and was only thirty-two. He had a big programme of reading before him; he liked solitude and comfort, and he got both at Grunsditch Farm. It was half a mile from the village of Kendyke, a large yellow bricked house built on a slight eminence, so that on all sides it overlooked the black earth of the fenland. Twelve miles away to the south west, Ely Cathedral stood, lead-coloured under the winter sky.

John Fergus, who owned Grunsditch, was a cheerful and competent farmer—a tall, sinewy man with red hair and a round, smiling red face. He was manifestly of different stock from his neighbours, although the Fergus family had farmed the Grunsditch land for generations. This interested Professor Fellen, who traced the family back to a seventeenth century Scottish ancestor named Fergusson, who was taken prisoner in the Civil War, and set to work on the big draining schemes that changed the Norfolk marshes to rich fields. John Fergus was the opposite of the Professor, who was a thin, wiry little man with a large head and a set, stern face. But a pair of twinkling grey eyes relieved the severity of his expression;



he appreciated wit, and enjoyed the cut and thrust of an argument, though only with those whom he accepted as intellectual equals. People unqualified for such privileged recognition found the Professor both arid and arrogant. He knew exactly what he believed; exactly what he didn't believe, and exactly what you ought or ought not to believe. He gave most people the uneasy feeling that anything they happened to know was probably wrong, and even if correct, was quite unimportant.

His method of instruction was to deflate the confidence of his students, and then gradually to pump them full of approved information, so that, relieved of the tiresome need of thinking for themselves, they automatically supplied the right answers to the sort of questions examiners ask. An intimidating man, with the instincts of a hermit, and yet with such a profound interest in the study of mankind, and with such a mastery of his subject, that he enjoyed an international reputation as an anthropologist.

One of the few people he was unable to intimidate was John Fergus. The farmer got nearer to pulling the Professor's leg than any other human being; but he was genuinely fond of his paying guest. Year after year the Professor spent weeks of the winter and summer vacations at Grunsditch Farm. Fergus was ten years older than the Professor; he was a widower, with three sons—the eldest seventeen, the youngest twelve. The farm was quiet, orderly and well-run by his mother, a dark-eyed, silver-haired old woman of seventy.

Professor Fellen did his reading in a small, cosy sitting-room before a wood fire. He organised his day rigidly. He rose at half past seven, breakfasted at eight, read and made notes until eleven thirty, and then lit a cheroot, and did a five mile walk to Grunswood before lunch. From two to three he wrote up his notes, and then walked another four miles before dusk. Upon his return he made himself some coffee, smoked another cheroot, revised his notes, and, if he felt like it, chatted for a few minutes with John Fergus in

the farm kitchen. He read until dinner, and afterwards rested his mind by playing patience until ten, when he went to bed.

It was during one of those chats with John Fergus in the kitchen that the subject of Grunswood made the Professor feel what a gulf lay between him and this apparently quite level-headed and intelligent fellow. The ruins of an enormous tea still cluttered the kitchen table. Slabs of bread and butter, tinned salmon, vinegar, cheese and strong tea, stewed until it was the colour of Guinness, had satisfied the farmer's appetite; and now he stood before the kitchen fire, stuffing tobacco into a little black clay pipe and lowering himself to the mental level of a child or a simple savage.

"No," he ruminated, "you wouldn't get man nor boy from Kendyke to stay a minute in Grunswood after dark, not for ten pound you wouldn't."

"Well," said the Professor, creasing his face into a grim smile; "what's the local fable, Fergus?"

"It's each according to himself," replied John Fergus.

"You mean, every man has his own pet lie?"

"That's a hard way of putting it—but it's about what I mean. Only it isn't all lies—not by a bit, it isn't. You see, that wood's been let go. After Squire Clovid died, his cousin got it, and never came near the land. But even if it hadn't been let go, the wood's a bad place. You'd see what I mean if you went there by night."

"Have you been there by night?"

"I have."

"Well?"

"You wouldn't get me there again—that's all."

"Nonsense, Fergus—you're an adult."

The farmer shook his head.

"I'm not afraid to say I wouldn't go into that wood at night," he declared.

"But what did you see or hear that scared you?"

"Well, it takes each man a different way; but if you go there, things'll reach out for you!"



"What things?"

"Who's to say—you just know that things are *against* you; trying to keep you from getting in; and when you're in, they try to keep you from getting out. That's all—it doesn't sound much, talking here in a room with a light, but I'll bet you a crown, Professor, that you won't go alone into Grunswood at night and feel the same about it next day as you do now."

"Nonsense," said the Professor. He wanted to take the bet, but it would disturb his routine. But after a moment he realised that it would disturb his conscience far more if he didn't lay this ridiculous local superstition about a haunted or creepy wood. It was his plain, inescapable duty to take that bet.

"You'll lose your five shillings, Fergus," he said; "I'll go to-night."

The first departure from his routine was to make coffee after dinner. He lit a cheroot and reflected awhile upon the survival of legends. It would be interesting to discover how many variations of the Grunswood superstition existed. He would collect all the views he could about it, with the help of Fergus, for the villagers would probably be a bit shy of him.

At half past nine he put on his overcoat, took a pocket compass, an electric torch, his ash stick, and left the farm.

"I'll be back about eleven," he promised.

"I'll wait up for you," said Fergus.

It was a crisp frosty night with a young moon to brighten a cloudless sky. Grunswood was nearly two miles away; to reach it he had to turn off the main road, and walk half a mile along a lane flanked by ditches. He could see the wood on that clear night, lying like a dark cloud across the flat landscape.

He enjoyed the keen air. It was years since he had been out for a night walk. Queer how that old, primitive fear of the dark still haunted country people and enabled legends about ghosts and terrors to be preserved. It was easy for people without education, without intellectual resources, and with untrained minds, to be governed by their instincts and their traditional beliefs. People were still credulous about magic—

fortune-telling, astrology and all that fantastic rubbish. There was a genuine Victorian flavour about the Professor's sturdy rationalism. The shining armour of commonsense enabled him to walk into Grunswood at night as if it had been broad daylight—well, not quite. He was conscious that he was unperturbed as he took the path that ran through the heart of the wood. It was the only clear path; every other track was choked with undergrowth, fallen trees, and decayed stumps.

It was warmer in the wood, and the path was soft and boggy in patches. It was a mixed wood of conifers and beech, overgrown, full of diseased trees, heavy with the dank smell of decay. No moonlight penetrated to the path, and the Professor blundered once or twice into tree trunks, and once he stumbled over some sprawling roots.

How terrified those villagers would be, he thought, how easily they would panic and miss their way, and all because of pre-conceived notions about some nameless terror in a neglected piece of woodland. His reflections were interrupted by a bramble, that clutched his legs, tripped him, and made him drop his torch.

He stooped and felt round for the torch, but after twice grasping barbed brambles, he took out his matchbox, and struck a light. The tiny flame illuminated a huge bramble bush, that seemed to shrink back from the light, like some many-armed creature. The effect was so extraordinary that he allowed the match to burn his fingers.

He lit another match. It disclosed the bramble, crouching—a little closer it seemed.

"Remarkable!" said the Professor. The illusion of stealthy movement was really quite interesting.

The second match suddenly wavered and went out. A puff of warm wind came through the wood, and accompanying it was a faint rustle of twigs and branches. The place seemed to be awakening.

The Professor stooped, and lit a third match, but drew back abruptly and nearly fell over.



"I must have moved," he said to himself, for he appeared to be walking into the bramble, which had coiled an octopus tentacle round his left ankle. The farmer's phrase flashed into his mind: "Things'll reach out for you!"

"Nonsense!" he said aloud; and realised that he had barked the word like a military command.

The third match went out.

"This is ridiculous," said the Professor firmly: "I must find that torch."

He lit a fourth match. The head flew off. He struck a fifth. Its flame dazzled him momentarily, then he stooped and searched for the torch. Before the match went out, he saw the torch lying a few feet away, half under the bramble bush.

"I suppose it really is the torch," he said as he struck the sixth match. There was no doubt of it, but the bramble barred him from it, like a tangled portcullis. He hesitated, then plunged into the bush, stooped through the tearing stuff, and grasped the smooth barrel of the torch as the match died. His fingers closed on the metal; it wriggled like a serpent and glided from his grasp.

The Professor leapt backwards, dropped the box of matches, and trod on them. A bramble that he had not noticed appeared to be behind him; he fell back into it, and swore. His overcoat would be torn to shreds unless he got out of this confounded place. The velvet darkness was baffling. His eyes were still dazzled by the succession of matches he had struck, and he had to wait until he regained some dim sketch of vision that made the path partly visible.

Meanwhile, the wood rustled, and although he was standing still, he seemed to be drawing nearer to unseen but solid things. It was almost as though trees and bushes were growing up round him. He thrust out his walking-stick, and it struck a tree trunk. He moved a little, and was immediately caught by a thicker and more tenacious bramble than the last he had encountered. He fought himself free, and turning about tried

to retrace his steps. But at every turn he met fresh brambles.

They seemed to grow as he moved.

His eyes had got used to the dark; but presently he realised that the wood had grown much lighter. It was flooded with a gloomy, fluttering twilight; and it changed its shape continually. The trees flowed and spread; the bushes puffed into new forms, and although it was January, they changed in and out of green and gold foliage to bare brown bones—back and forth, back and forth, as though the seasons were rushing on, and the growth of decades was being packed into minutes.

"I must have fallen and knocked myself silly," screamed the Professor at the top of his voice, as he fought and struggled to get out of the wood. The path was blocked in a score of places. Rivers of dead leaves lapped his ankles. Trees crashed down and rotted into the soil as he staggered on; a white rash of fungus spread like spilt milk over fallen trunks. Bushes marched about, and bore down on him. His clothes were slashed and torn and soaking wet, as though he had spent a night in a storm. That quivering twilight confused him.

Suddenly the wood ended. He stumbled down a steep bank, and saw a road he had never seen before. A wide, amazing road with a polished black surface. As he stood in utter bewilderment, the twilight deepened into night, and he stepped on to the road.

A huge shape with glaring lights raced towards him, and he ran—ran like a rabbit, and never knew what struck him down.

The inquest on the body of an unknown man was over. The motorist who killed him was exonerated from blame, and afterwards the Coroner, a kindly, understanding man, had a quiet talk with a red-headed, middle-aged farmer.

"Your father's getting old, Fergus," he said; "and while I think he's quite all right, I *think* I should have some medical advice. It's only kind."

What had prompted this speech was the testimony of old John Fergus of Grunsditch Farm at the inquest. The old man



was an impressive figure. His hair was white, but his back was as straight as a boy's. He had said:

“I swear, by Almighty God, that the man whose body I have seen was wearing the overcoat and clothes that Professor Henry Fellen was wearing when he left my house to go to Grunswood thirty years ago, where I, God forgive me, sent him for a fool's joke. As you all know, the Professor disappeared, and his body was never found. It's said that this dead man must have found those old clothes somewhere in the wood—but I swear that not only are those the Professor's clothes, but the man in them, who was killed by the car in the new road, is Professor Fellen. It's him as he was thirty years gone, and not a day older nor changed in looks, bar the terror that's on his face. He's wandered that wood for thirty years, and God forgive my sin in sending him there.”





# A SELECTION OF TEN STORIES FROM “IT MAKES A NICE CHANGE”\*

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## RIVETS

**B**IG Alec Mars stood on a platform of planks seventy feet above street level and tossed red-hot rivets to his pal Jim Rogan on a lower platform across a twenty-foot gap. Big Alec with a long pair of tongs plucked the rivets out of the forge, where a fitter was heating them to a white glow, and with a swing of the tongs shot them accurately into the sand bucket that Jim held—half a dozen, one after the other. As Jim caught them, a man who stood beside him, operating a mechanical riveter, nipped them out of the bucket, and drove them, still glowing, into the girder junction around which the lower platform was built. *Prrrrrumpb—prrrrrumpb—prrrrrumpb!* was the purring, roaring song of the mechanical riveter; and it went on ceaselessly as the steel skeleton of the vast new office block grew higher and higher.

The platforms with the forges and the riveters crept up with the steelwork day by day; and nearly every shift brought the fitters, who tossed and caught the hot rivets, fresh gaps to bridge with their skill. It never failed them. No rivet ever overshot the mark, to streak downwards on a deadly path through the maze of girders and scaffolding. Big Alec and Jim were craftsmen; not of the old creative kind who made wood and stone come alive; but machine craftsmen, who worked with every thought and word and action palpitating to the shuddering notes of the riveting. *Prrrrumpb—prrrrrumpb!*

Big Alec was twenty-three; a tall, fair giant of a man with

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shining blue eyes; and his smile was good-tempered. Jim Rogan was a muscular, sallow-faced youth, a year or two older than Big Alec, with dusty red hair and a smile that was ready enough but perhaps too mechanical to be pleasing. Jim and Big Alec changed over jobs every day, the one who was pitching in the morning, catching in the afternoon.

After the steelwork was up thirty feet, Jim began to be a bit uneasy when it was his turn to catch. Big Alec stood away above him, swinging the tongs, and the rivets would swoop across like flaming birds, and hiss into the damp sand in the bucket. The song of the riveting gets right through to the bones of a man and makes them quiver, and it begins to tell on him if he isn't in the pink of condition. Jim felt fit enough, but he was worried as he kept his eyes on the end of Alec's tongs, waiting for that streak of fire, and jerking the bucket forward to meet it and back again quickly, just a few inches either way to break the jar of receiving the rivet. And Alec always smiled; faintly, but unfailingly, and then another bright bird would take flight, and Jim would catch it accurately. When they changed over, he was relieved; and as he swung the tongs he noticed that Alec, catching the rivets down below, no longer smiled. He fancied he was tense, and anxious.

Now if Jim Rogan had been a different sort of man doing a softer sort of job, he might have talked about nerves and being run down; but men who serve steel have no nerves, though being men, they have other weaknesses. And day by day, as the steel bones of the new building ascended, so did Jim's weaknesses begin to sap his courage.

The swooping rivets that flew from Alec's tongs seemed daily to grow a little larger. Sometimes they appeared almost too big for the bucket. They crashed into it, and kicked it back against him, as though they wished to drive him over the edge of the platform. As they flew towards him he longed to close his eyes. His eyelids were puckered in resisting that dangerous temptation to blink. But he forced himself to track the flight of every rivet, however hot and menacing they



looked, as Alec tossed them down to him, always with that slight smile on his face.

Seventy feet above the crowded street Jim for the first time began to think of what was going on below. In the spells between catching, he would sometimes glance down at the procession of silver 'bus-tops that crawled, like an endless belt of dish-covers, along the Strand. The planks of the platform trembled; the *prrrrrrrrump!* of the riveting drowned out the noise of the traffic. A thin blue haze of fuel fumes spiraled up from the street. Then he would hear Big Alec's whistle, shrill and distinct amid the chattering din of the riveting, and he would take up his bucket again. They were pals, of course; nothing to worry about with a pal—but then there was that smile of Alec's. No getting over that. A smile that seemed to hint at secret enjoyment as though the big fair man was luxuriating in a sense of power. And Alec had power all right with those tongs and those red-hot shots he aimed so truly.

Jim wished he hadn't thought of the notion of aiming. After that the rivets seemed less like birds, and more like his idea of shells. Not that he had first-hand knowledge of shells—but his father had always been yapping about the War and the row shells made as they came at you—minnies, or whatever they called the things. He couldn't get it out of his mind that Alec was throwing those things at him, because—well, it couldn't be because of anything.

But then didn't that smile mean something? Old Alec was always grinning; but Alec was his pal—always had been. They'd been on scores of jobs together. Alec couldn't mean anything by that smile—just habit. After all, you got into ways. Off the job, Alec was the same as he'd always been; and every evening they had a couple of pints together after they'd taken the tram to Battersea where they both lived. Always ready with a bit of a joke, Alec was—a good sort, and, taking him all round, a quiet sort too.

The morning after the platforms were fixed in their final positions, when the steelwork had climbed to eighty feet, Jim

saw that Alec's smile had changed. He stood on the upper platform, with the sun shining on his fair hair, and his smile held nothing of good-nature or pleasure: it seemed like a smile of hate triumphant, and Jim went cold inside as the rivets came over. They leapt at him like blazing stars, unquenched meteors that grew steadily bigger and bigger. Faster and faster Alec pitched them over, until to Jim they seemed to be a swaying stream of solid fire that pressed him ever nearer the edge of the platform.

As he caught the last of that chain of rivets, the platform, and the whole branching framework of steel, gradually began to tilt towards the street. He saw the 'buses and the taxis starting to climb up towards him. They rose, ever so slowly, their roofs coming up and up, nearer and still nearer, while the rust-flecked, red-painted girdering sloped away from him.

In the distance he heard a man shrieking.

For a moment it seemed the only sound, for the song of the riveting was suddenly cut off.

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The Press photographers and the reporters reached Big Alec's home before he did. They told his wife what they had come for, and when Alec arrived she sat, white and silent, while they took a flashlight shot of him and got his story of the accident.

"God, Flo, isn't it awful?" he said, when they had gone. She did not answer him.

"Right over the edge," he continued; "shoved his hands over his eyes and over he went."

He walked up and down the little kitchen that was also a living-room, a cold pipe between his teeth.

"He went faint, or giddy or something, the doctors said," he rambled on, half to himself; and then his wife spoke, sharply, suddenly.

"Do you suppose I don't know that you did him in?" she said.



Big Alec stopped in astonishment.

'Have you gone dippy, Flo?' he demanded. 'Jim was the best pal I ever had.'

Then her face told him exactly what Jim had been.

## INNOCENT ABROAD

**Y**OU folks certainly do try," said Jaco Picelli, as he surveyed with approval the tall pile of golden brown corn cakes on the enamelled plate that had just been put on the table. "But, say," he added, with a note of anxiety in his tone, "just what's that stuff?" He nodded towards a shallow bowl of pale yellow transparent liquid.

"It's golden syrup," said the man who had brought in the meal.

"Looks sorta weak," said Jaco. He sighed, and thought of the jugs of dark brown maple syrup from which he had anointed so many succulent plate-loads of corn cakes; syrup that flowed slowly and soaked lusciously into every surface of the pile of cakes, spreading outwards so that the little crisped curls of bacon or the small, browned sausages became submerged around the edges of the plate. The last time he had corn cakes with the proper accessories was in that place on Seventh Avenue, between Thirty-third and Thirty-fourth Street—Solgarni's, or maybe that wasn't the name. And there hadn't been much time, that last day he was in New York. Trouble from Chicago had followed him, and he'd had to make a quick get-away.

He sighed again, and ladled the golden syrup out of its bowl over the cakes. It seemed thin, dispirited stuff, like the English idea of coffee. Still, he had to hand it to them that they were trying. This was the only place where anybody had

taken the trouble to get him the sort of food he asked for. But why any of them thought they were drinking coffee beat him; it wasn't coffee at all; didn't taste of coffee. And that wasn't the only thing these English guys didn't know. There was a whole heap of things. They never acted proper, and if you were going to handle any sort of proposition in their darned country you had to have that fact right before you all of the time.

And now they'd taken to asking him all sorts of questions that got him worried. Third-degree stuff, but at the wrong end. Well, he hadn't been most of his life in Chicago for nothing even if he'd had to leave there in a hurry: but the last two days he'd been wishing he was back where he belonged. Things you learnt in Chicago or even in New York didn't seem to mean a lot over here. It was all so stately; just like a movie shot; but it kept on going on; and if you tried to liven it up, folk just looked, or did just everything that a crazy guy would do.

He consumed a mouthful of corn cake thoughtfully. It wasn't such a poor imitation of the real thing. But it was an imitation all right. That's what was the matter with the whole blame' country. It was an imitation. It just didn't get there. Look at their poor little cars, gasping up hills; and look at the way drivers crawled off the mark when the lights changed. They'd hear something from a New York or a Chicago cop if they didn't snap into it when the traffic lights went green. Well, he'd shown 'em something about driving; but it wasn't any use—they couldn't learn anything. Just weren't interested.

"Taste all right?" asked the man who had brought in the tray.

"Fine," said Jaco with his mouth full. "Say," he added; "what's the dope back of all these questions they've been handing out?"

The man paused.

"I shouldn't rightly tell you," he said reluctantly.

"I won't go back on you," promised Jaco; "it sorta spoils



the comfortable way you folks have made me feel, not knowing."

"I can't help feeling you're a stranger and you ought to know," said the man slowly; "if I 'ad *my* way I'd tell you and done with it. I'm sorry for you, you see," he explained, "you're so green, and you've been took advantage of, afore you had time to learn, in a manner of speaking." He nodded. "I was in the Navy myself, and a bloke always had time to learn where he was. You—you've just jumped into everything. I don't see why you shouldn't know."

"All right, spill it," said Jaco.

"After all, they ain't going to ask you any more questions, so it can't affect it, one way or the other."

"What?"

"Well, it all come of the way you 'andled that car."

"I ask you, could I have got around it any other way?" Jaco Picelli looked astounded. Why, there wasn't anything to do but the thing he'd done; and here these darned Englishmen were probing it all at this hour. He couldn't get the hang of the way their minds moved.

What else *could* he have done?

He had run short of cash. He'd changed his gran' of greenbacks, and they'd handed him nearly two hundred pounds. That didn't go far. He had to have a car. He had to eat. He had to go places and see what could be done and where. He had to learn this cockeyed way of driving a car the wrong side of the road. And all he'd got was an automatic and fifty rounds, and as much chance of getting any fresh food for his rod as finding a snowball in Hell. He had to hold up that post office; and although he'd got away with twenty pounds it hadn't been quiet or easy. The number of people who get in the way in a quiet little London suburb and who didn't seem to know that bullets meant anything. That sap who'd picked up a spade from a sidewalk display outside a store, and who'd nearly got him with it. Well, he'd got his.

He'd had to move after that first English hold-up. Twenty

pounds. A hundred bucks, near enough. That wouldn't last—and he had to get after some more right away. He'd raced up the Great North Road, far past Welwyn, and then he'd tried another post office. He only got seven pounds there, and there was a cop who heard the shot and had tried to stop him. Got into the car as he drove off, and said his piece as he was coughing blood, before Jaco could get the door open and shove him out. What was it that cop had gasped out: sort of set piece, like they used afterwards. "I have to warn you that anything you say may be taken down and used as evidence against you." And the guy getting rid of that with his lungs full of blood. Gosh—they just didn't know how!

Then he'd had to move. There were only forty-four rounds left. He'd have to get at some more if he was to keep going. He turned the car off the snaky grey main road, and cut across country westwards.

He'd put up at a little joint ninety miles away from London, sunk deep in a Cotswold valley. A grey stone inn. It was dark when he got there, and he spent a pleasant evening in the bar, beside a big fire, listening to the dance music that came over the radio. Then there had been a police message before the news, and, he had to hand it to them—they'd got the number of his car. That cop had got it sure, and he'd given it in before he passed out.

"They'll get him," the landlord had said; "can't play those tricks over here."

"Why?" Jaco had asked; "tell me, buddy—I'm an American and I'd be glad to know why."

"Can't do that sort of thing in England," said the landlord solemnly.

"Looks like somebody's doing it, though," objected Jaco, wondering how he could get his car away without anybody spotting the number. A horsy-looking man who had been drinking rum and water steadily the whole evening, said:

"OIT4453. That's 'is number. They've got it. All right, wot next? 'E'll have to change his car. All right, wot next?"



He buys another, or pinches another. All right, wot next? They gets a record of that, and so on." He shook his head.

"'E carn't escape," said the landlord. "I'll make a note of that—wot was it, Mr. Gamble?"

"OIT4453," said Mr. Gamble, handing up his glass; "and the same again, Mr. Pride."

The landlord measured out some more rum, and said slowly; "OIT4453. Now where 'ave I seen that number?"

Jaco acted quickly. "Forget it," he snapped, standing up and whipping out his gun. "Say, you—get out of that bar and start my car up right away, bring it round here."

"'Ere, 'ere, wot's the game——?" began Mr. Gamble.

"That's enough out of you," said Jaco. "Get along after that car, mister."

"'Ere, this won't do," said the landlord, scratching his head.

"Put 'em up," said Jaco.

"I'm sure we've all been amused with the gentleman's little joke," said Mr. Gamble uneasily.

"Come on, now, guv'nor, come off it," advised a burly young man who had been playing darts with some farm labourers at the other end of the bar.

"I say, that's his number," said the landlord, quickly—"it's an Armstrong car, and I noticed the number—he's——"

"Put 'em up," shouted Jaco. Gosh, what saps they all were. "Get around after that car."

"I can't drive a car," protested the landlord.

"Can't drive, my pants," said Jaco contemptuously, "are you a man or a monkey?"

"No call to be rude," said Mr. Gamble.

"Stay here, all of you," said Jaco.

"Here, we can't let him go like this," said the landlord, as Jaco began to back towards the door.

"No," said Jaco, "I guess not. Hand it over. All you've got in that cash register."

"Don't use a cash register," began the landlord, when Jaco, feeling that he'd argued enough, let him have it.

"Try moving, any of you," he threatened, and then he uttered a cry of pain, for one of the dart players had thrown his feathered and weighted dart with accuracy, and it had pierced Jaco's ear. The automatic stuttered, as Jaco swept it in a half-circle, and he slipped through the door, as the group of dart players collapsed groaning on the floor of the bar. "That'll stop 'em," said Jaco savagely. "Trying to make a proper monkey out of me. Why don't they act right?"

But the inn door was flung open, and the bar disgorged a crowd of angry and shouting men. He ran round to the garage in the yard, got into his car and started her up. There was a narrow gateway to be negotiated, and there were people in the opening, trying to close the gate on him.

He got through.

There were people clinging to the car.

He drove on.

The automatic spoke again.

There were lights at the end of the village.

The village hall doors were open, and a tongue of light lay across the road. There had been a dance and there were girls and young men all over the road. No sense of traffic. He had to make his get-away, and it had to be snappy, and if they couldn't move when they heard a car coming——

The crowd was thicker than he thought—so thick it had nearly stopped him.

The radiator parted it, like the bows of the liner that brought him over had parted the waves. The car rocked and bumped, and he had shot away into the dark, and had driven all night.

And now they were asking him questions about that crowd, asking him what he'd said and shouted as he'd driven through it. Well, maybe he had said: "I'll show the goddam saps!" But why bring that up?—it didn't make sense, now—after they'd got him.

But it took them three days to get him, and would one of their cops look at a handful of pound notes? Didn't seem to



know what they were for. He'd heard English magistrates and judges were that way too. They just didn't act right.

And now these questions.

"What are they getting at?" asked Jaco plaintively.

"They're thinking of Broadmoor," said the man who had brought his food.

"Broadmoor?"

"Thinking you wasn't quite right in the head, like," explained the other.

"Meaning I'm haywire?"

"If you mean dippy—yes."

"But—an't they got *any* sense?" asked Jaco.

"They don't think a normal bloke would have driven through that crowd of people."

"But—I had to get away. What the hell?"

"Well, that's all I can tell you."

"Say, just how long does this Broadmoor proposition last?"

"During His Majesty's pleasure."

"Why bring your King into it?"

"It's a manner of speaking."

"Anyhow, how long does his pleasure last?"

"For life—usually. I say, I shouldn't be telling you all this."

"D'you reckon I'm for Broadmoor?"

The man shook his head. "Can't say," he answered. "It's a case for the 'Ome Office."

"Meaning that they're trying to get straight with themselves whether I'm dippy?"

"Yes."

Jaco gave up trying to understand. He just felt angry.

"Try and get some maple syrup to-morrow, buddy," he said, as the prison clock struck the quarter and the warden took the empty tray out of the condemned cell.

## MAD MINUTE

AL WONTNER had a large, mobile, good-humoured face, full of expression, lit by sharp, shining grey eyes that looked out from below eyebrows that were almost exclamatory, for they were bushy and turbulent. It was an unforgettable face, and, while it was not good-looking, it was good to look at; full of boisterous vitality; a tonic face. And in a barber that was an asset.

Nine-tenths of the time a man spends in the barber's chair he is looking at the barber in the mirror over the basin, and only in the submerged moments of the shampoo does he lose sight of him. When you dropped into the saloon where Al worked with thirty other barbers in the basement alongside one of the big hotels in Thirty-fourth Street, you might be feeling like the worst Monday in any month, but a haircut with Al's face shining back at you from the mirror seemed to burnish up your sense of values.

There was a lot of competition for Al. He was No. 11 in the saloon. He had a waiting list. People would call up to book times with him all through the day. And he enjoyed every moment of his day. He liked his job; liked imparting some of his terrific vitality to the people he shaved and trimmed and shampooed. He always felt that he had no real need of a machine when he had to give a high frequency treatment; there was enough of the real juice, the real vital energy, pouring out of his own finger-ends to make that spluttering, crackling, electric machine with its tap-dancing violet sparks seem cumbersome and unnecessary—almost an insult to his own powers.

He got up every morning singing; brewed his own coffee; smoked a five-cent cigar, made richer to the eye by its coloured "cellophane" wrapping; jammed himself into the subway and got to the saloon at eight o'clock; changed, had a mouth-wash



to take away the tang of the cigar, and, clad in white tight-fitting buttoned-up tunic, white trousers and canvas shoes, he would shout to the saloon: "Well, boys, it's another day! Ain't that just grand?"

"Aw, to hell, you cheerful guy!" somebody would mutter; but they all liked Al, except one customer, a man who seemed incapable of liking anything or anybody. He was a large, solid, inexpressive man who spoke in monosyllables and generally grunted when spoken to. Al had never succeeded in melting this particular customer. He came in regularly once a fortnight and had a haircut, close; an oil shampoo with a pine wash-out afterwards; and then an electric friction treatment. He gave a handsome tip but no conversation. He sat in the chair with a polka dotted cloth around him and the paper band tucked round his neck, looking, as Al said, "Like a fried egg that'd gotten on to the wrong dish."

"Boys," said Al every time he had finished with this inexpressive creature, "if ever I qualify for the hot squat it'll be for doing something desperate to that dumb guy just to wake up his ideas. He just sits and sits and sits—and how!"

One spring morning in New York when the subway gave up its crushed cargo of early workers at Thirty-fourth Street, Al felt his blood moving faster, felt indeed that spring was setting the pace in his veins. The streets were full of early golden light; the sky was dazzlingly blue; the towers of New York pierced upwards, white, glittering and glorious; and the shining metal finger that crowned the Empire State Building flashed and shimmered in the sunlight. The keen air was like wine. The noise of the traffic was like hell. The rushing throng on the sidewalks was like chaos. But it was all like New York; incredibly alive, incredibly stimulating. A staggering pageant of energy. Al felt fine. Everything was fine. He loved everything. That long glittering saloon with its nickel and chromium-plated fittings; its big white expanses of wall; its mirrors; the little sterilising cups of boiling water sizzling over every basin, where razors and clippers and scissors were immersed;

the white adjustable chairs; the big white enamel cash register by the door; the boss, distinguished from the operators only by a white coat, instead of a tunic, that showed the well-cut collar (of the sort that leads to managerships and other business distinctions) and his austere grey foulard tie—it was grand, Al felt, to be working in all that efficient glitter; grand to be chinning with congenial folks while you did your stuff to their heads or their faces; it was a great life.

And then the first cloud came over that spring day.

At nine-thirty Al saw the glum customer taking off his coat and collar by the cloakroom, heard his grating voice saying to the boss, "Date with No. 11." Al felt it was just too bad that this guy should have happened along to spoil the morning. Still, there it was—that was the job. Couldn't always be on the crest of the wave.

The grim, ample man, looking more than ever uninspiring in his shirt-sleeves, settled down in the chair and grunted. "Usual," he said.

"Haircut, oil shampoo and friction, that's the programme, isn't it?" said Al, smiling.

The customer grunted. And then said unexpectedly: "Gimme a shave first, make it close."

"Sure," said Al. His face brightened. This was unusual; this was a departure from the depressing routine. He adjusted the chair, tilted it back, mixed the lather and brushed it on, studying as he did so every line, every dimple, every undulation of that large round flaccid face that he knew so well and disliked so much.

The customer was absolutely impassive, completely unconscious of the thought that Al was giving to every hill and dale of his face, so that presently when the razor was drawn like a thin wire lightly brushing the skin, no little nick drew blood, no slip occurred. Al had never shaved him before. He sponged the face, sprayed it, powdered the chin, wiped off the powder with a towel, readjusted the chair; and then began the ordeal by reflection. Those cold, fish-like eyes stared at him from the



mirror. That face, so expressionless, so wooden, like a carving half completed and tightly draped in yellow cloth, was positively intimidating; its dullness was so concentrated, almost malevolent.

The hair was cut. Thin, wiry hair, half dusty brown, half dirty grey. Then vigorous brushing. The loose hair flew from the customer's head under the rushing tattoo of the brushes Al wielded. Then the head lightly wrapped in a hot towel, turban-wise, so that for a couple of minutes something Oriental seemed to be sitting in the chair; then the oil massage, with Al's skilful fingers stirring and irrigating the roots of the hair while he looked over the customer's head and met those expressionless eyes in the mirror. Al's face alive and lit up formed an almost uncanny contrast with the immobility of the man he was shampooing.

"Gosh, I'd like to wake this guy up," said Al to himself; and he became aware of an irresponsible desire to do so; to do something incongruous and violent and ridiculous to the corpse-like thing that was so unresponsive under his hands. He shook liquid soap out of a bottle on to the oiled hair; worked up a frothing crown of lather; and then, guided by that same irresponsible imp that had been tempting him for some moments, took down the oil bottle again, and deftly untucking the towel from the back of the customer's neck, poured the contents of the oil bottle into the gap between his shirt-collar and his neck. He went on pouring, his face shining with delight; he went on pouring until two-thirds of the bottle had disappeared and a bellow of rage from his victim disclosed the full enormity of his act.

He had certainly animated the dull customer. The man leapt from the chair like a wounded elephant. All the words he had been saving up for years came chattering out like a burst of fire from a machine-gun. They were missiles rather than words. The man danced with rage; he raved. "Play those goddam tricks on me!" he was shouting; "you're fired; get that, you're fired! Where's your boss? There he is. Hey, you,

get quit of this right now! Playing me for a sucker! You and your monkey tricks, you——” His words rushed out so fast that he stammered. But Al, fascinated, was watching a large spreading stain of oil oozing through the back and the sides of his vest, and was smiling to himself.

“Say, are you just plum crazy?” asked the boss. “Anyway, get the hell out of this. You’re through.”

The outraged client cut in. “And that’s not all,” he yelled. “Give me his name and address; he isn’t through with me; no, *sir*! And say, you, send up to that store for a noo shirt and get me fixed up with a bath right away. Hell, I feel like an olive in a bottle.” He shook his fist at the boss, and to Al said: “You’ll be hearing from me. Don’t you try any get-away stuff.”

Half an hour later the sustaining magic of that impulsive moment had evaporated. Al found himself strolling gloomily along Thirty-fourth Street, wondering what was going to happen next. His first notion was to get out of New York. He had an uneasy feeling that the man he had lubricated with such extravagant disregard for the consequences might be a police department chief, the big shot of a racket, a gunman, a way-up politician, or something equally dangerous. New York was going to be unhealthy for him if the ex-customer was any one of those things; but somehow he funkcd going to his room, packing up and clearing out. They knew his address. Anything might be happening there. For two hours he wandered about, unable to make up his mind, growing more and more perturbed. “Well,” he said to himself, “I guess I’ve got to make my get-away. It’s not going to be too easy starting up again. Not the sort of thing you can explain to everyone.”

But as time passed he found it difficult not to be cheerful on that spring day. He still felt it had been a good impulse, and only when he got to his apartment was his rising cheerfulness extinguished by apprehension.

“Hello, Al,” said the porter. “There’s a guy waiting for you.”



"Oh," said Al carelessly, "has he been around long?"

"Most of an hour," said the porter.

"Hell," said Al.

He was too late. It wasn't any good. If the cops were after him and that guy had turned nasty he might as well give up right away.

"O.K.," he said lightly, and ascended to his room.

A young man in correct business dress, dark clothes, beautiful collar, and the most distinguished kind of horn-rimmed spectacles, sat by his door.

"You're Mr. Al Wontner?" he challenged.

"Sure, I am," said Al.

"We want you to come right down to the office," said the young man.

"Why?" asked Al.

The young man smiled with mechanical precision, and said:

"Now, Mr. Wontner, don't let's have any trouble. I know *just* what happened. Be easy, and come right along."

"O.K." said Al.

"We'll take a taxi," said the young man, when they reached street level. They walked a couple of blocks and hailed one.

"Well," said Al to himself, "this ain't a death car, anyway."

The young man gave the driver an address which Al didn't catch, and the taxi raced off. Presently they crossed the Queensboro Bridge. It was a long ride. They passed through Long Island City and away out on the Parkway. Al was getting rather nervous. But presently the taxi turned off down a by-road, then slid through a belt of woods and halted at last by a long, low white building that seemed to stretch over most of the surrounding country. The young man paid the driver and said, "Cum'on."

Al followed him through interminable corridors with beautiful mahogany doors, numbered and lettered, and at last passed through one of the doors into a large, blank, lofty room. Set up against one wall was a mirror, a toilet basin, toilet cupboard, shelves, and a big barber's chair in front of

the basin. Sitting in the barber's chair was a large, placid man with an expressionless face. Sitting in a deep leather arm-chair with a couple of bespectacled young men in shirt-sleeves standing behind him was Al's gloomy customer. He nodded grimly when he saw Al. "Now you," he said; "just go through that performance that you went through this morning. There's your model. Just you act the same way with him as you acted with me."

Al looked at this incomprehensible audience and at the immobile figure in the chair, and said: "Just what is all this?"

"Now lookat here," barked the ex-customer, "you just do what I say. You don't have to think. Just do what you did this morning."

Al found that his hands were trembling. Then he steadied himself and said: "Everything: Shave, haircut, shampoo, and, and——"

"And oil," said the ex-customer. "Everything's there for you. Start right in."

Al smiled and began. He shaved the man in the chair; he clipped his hair skilfully. Then brushed it, and began the oil massage. The man in the chair was absolutely still and unresponsive. Al's face was again full of lurking mischief; his eyes twinkled; his eyebrows passed confidential remarks to each other; his lips moved. He applied the lather; worked up a white foaming crown; and then reached for the oil bottle again; and as he reached his face took on the expression of a triumphant child achieving some peak of sheer barbaric naughtiness. He whisked out the towel from the back of his victim's neck, and tilted the bottle of oil. The man in the chair sprang out of it and said, "What the——?"

But the ex-customer interrupted: "That'll do, Mivin; part of the job. Get out and change; that's all I wanted you for." Then to the young men behind him he said: "Well, boys; think we've found anything?"

"Sure," said one of the young men; "I can use *him*."

The glum ex-customer nodded. "Well," he remarked, "I



don't often make discoveries." And to Al he said: "You're engaged. We can use that dial of yours—maybe it's what the public wants."

"But——" Al was beginning, when he was cut short by his ex-customer, who got up out of the arm-chair, patted him on the shoulder, and said: "We'll have to get something snappier in the way of a name for you if you're going to star in our movies. You're on the pay-roll from now on. Take him off and give him tests, boys."

"But," protested Al, "I'm a barber."

"Can it!" said the ex-customer, "you're a born clown!"

## WHOSE FUNERAL ?

**M**R. SEPTIMUS MOON was dressed in improvised mourning. The coat was a short black jacket with waistcoat to match, but the trousers, a little shiny and worn, were not of the same cloth. Actually they were an old pair of dress trousers from which the braid had been hastily unpicked. He wore a white dress shirt with the front unstarched, a perky little wing collar and a new black knitted tie. A pile of letters lay on his writing-table. A packet of notepaper with heavy black edges and envelopes to match lay beside his correspondence.

It was right and proper that he should be getting many letters of condolence. He observed a similarity in the phrasing his various friends employed. They used a stock pattern for written grief. All of them came out strong with the fact that Emily had been such a good sort.

One or two of the older generation were fulsome about angelic virtues, but on the whole they sized up Emily pretty accurately.

That was how she had seemed to the world; a pretty good sort.

Septimus Moon felt that, on the whole, he agreed with this estimate. As a wife she *had* been a pretty good sort; difficult to manage and not exactly what he had wanted, although he had wanted her badly enough at the time they married. He prided himself on being able to regard his bereavement with impartiality. He was able to achieve impartiality because he could not feel that it was really an occasion for grief. It had been, perhaps for both of them, "a happy release."

He opened another letter.

"My dear Septimus," he read, "*I am wordless, but I do want to say, with all sincerity, that I am thankful, as you must be, too, that the illness was a short one. Dear Emily, what a tower of strength she was to all her friends! How she loved life and made the most of it!*"

Septimus stopped reading. For somebody who began by saying that they were wordless this letter seemed excessive. Methodically he replied to each letter after he had read it until he came upon a typewritten envelope with the postmark of Quendon Magna, in Somerset.

Before he opened it he remembered that the man to whom Emily had been engaged when he proposed to her fifteen years ago was a doctor, or veterinary surgeon, or something in that part of the world. What a queer sense of obligation some people had! Fancy that fellow writing after all these years! Must have seen the obituary notice.

He opened the letter.

"Dear Moon," he read, "*this is the second letter. If you should open it before my first, the first one will, of course, have no chance of doing its work. It was written merely to test a suspicion, and I am old-fashioned enough to believe that if the suspicion is justified Providence will see to it that you open the other letter before this one. Accept my sincere condolences. I hope Emily was as happy with you as she would have been with me.—Yours sincerely, Aldous Mitcham.*"



Septimus Moon frowned. What exactly was the fellow driving at?

He re-read the letter, and then looked through the pile of unopened envelopes until he found another that bore that West Country postmark.

"A touch of melodrama," he muttered and opened it.

*"Dear Moon," he read, "I happen to know how she died, and why. I have an analytical mind, some powers of deduction, and a little medical knowledge which helps me to deduce things. I have no doubt that you have left no evidence. But you can never be sure, can you? I hope she was as happy with you as she would have been with me, but I have a feeling that she was not. I shall probably investigate in my own time. It must be disturbing for you that Emily was so opposed to cremation, and told everybody so.—Yours sincerely, Aldous Mitcham."*

Septimus Moon re-read that letter.

"The fellow's a lunatic," he said. What was the best thing to do? It might be very awkward. Many a man had got into a horrible predicament through malicious gossip, generally started by some fool of a woman. Perhaps he had better ignore the letters, or perhaps place them in the hands of his solicitor. That would be the wise, the prudent, thing to do. After all, it was a form of blackmail, surely? At least, defamation of character. Hazy legal phrases floated through his mind. The law was such a nuisance whether you started it yourself or somebody started it for you. But what was the fellow getting at, anyway? He hadn't been near them for years as far as he knew. Emily had not seen him since—oh, when was it? It must have been when they motored down to Devonshire six, or was it seven years ago?

She had seen him then, unless . . . he was suddenly moved to go through his wife's papers again. They were all neatly docketed in a box file. Damn this fellow, upsetting a whole morning like this! Still, he must check up on the facts, if there were any facts.

He recollected that the typewritten envelope with that post-

mark had been quickly familiar to him. He must have seen an envelope like it before. Item by item he went through his wife's letters and could find nothing. And then he remembered when he first went through those unrevealing and commonplace records of her life that there had been a torn envelope, empty but addressed in typescript and with that postmark of Quendon Magna blurred over the stamp. He had thrown it away. That meant—it must mean—that Emily had been in correspondence with this fellow.

That might mean that Emily, with her copious powers of self-pity, had used this old lover of hers as a repository for all the little woes and troubles that accumulate in married life, when the solace of partnership has gone out of it. Emily had always been one of those untidy, excitable people, with impulsive appetites that abraded Septimus Moon's sense of order. Of course, she had been a good sort; she saw that people had a good time when they came to tea and dinner or to late Sunday supper. She created the impression of boundless hospitality, and would have spent her life in a social whirl with bridge, cocktail parties, an intemperate use of the cinema, and everything that disrupted the secluded comfort that her husband desired. He disliked the strenuous and resolute pursuit of pleasure that, uncurbed by him, would have occupied her whole time.

Of course, she had complained. But she was loyal, in spasms, to her husband. She defended his love of quiet, and his passion for precision and an unexciting life whenever her friends were disposed to be sympathetic; he had heard her doing it, and had used this instinctive woman's loyalty of hers as evidence against her unquenchable desire for a fuller life. In his austere but forcible way he would say that her ideas were unnecessary, extravagant and wild. He did not use the word "respectable" when reinforcing his arguments. Emily had once said: "If you use that damned word again I shall scream and throw things!" And she had done both.

Little things, that didn't really matter, minor jolts in the



agreeable routine of life, could be tragically exaggerated. And Emily always did exaggerate. Poor Emily—all things considered, it was as well she had gone. And she might be alive still if she had not insisted upon buying that refrigerator, so that she could have real ice in cocktails and stage still more extravagant hospitality. Why people couldn't get satisfaction out of sherry, which was cheap enough, always puzzled him.

What a tale she could have made out of all those occasions when, for the sake of peace and quiet, he had to thwart her. And there wasn't a doubt of it that Aldous Mitcham had heard it all; in serial form, probably; an instalment every so often, when Emily felt like it. He could imagine the vicious comments of Emily unburdening a grievance. If she wrote as she talked, the man Mitcham must have a pretty portrait of a Bluebird.

He re-read the letters. That remark about Emily's dislike of cremation was in very bad taste. There was sinister innuendo attached to such a suggestion. He had half a mind to take legal advice.

But supposing, if he did, it led to the Home Office having an official pry into the matter? Suppose an exhumation was ordered? Suppose, in all innocence, some arsenic was found: small quantities, he knew, because he had once read up the subject rather carefully, were often found in—remains. Even though what they found was quite natural, not present in sufficient quantity to cause death, there would be suspicion. Suspicion based upon hysteria; upon the unfaithful correspondence Emily had conducted with an old lover. It would be difficult to live down that sort of suspicion; it would mean uprooting himself from his comfortable home, and settling elsewhere. He could do it quite easily, of course, now that Emily's three hundred a year of her own had been added to his income.

Septimus Moon decided that it would be wiser to ignore those letters. Legal advice seldom led to anything except bills. He left his correspondence, and glanced at himself in a mirror.

His wrinkled, yellowish face looked, he thought, less tired than usual. His eye was clearer. He appeared a neat, rather prim little figure; not the sort of man anybody would willingly believe was a murderer.

Then he remembered a visit to the Chamber of Horrors at Madame Tussaud's, years ago, and recalled that neat, prim little men were occasionally murderers, and that juries had no difficulty in believing that murder was an occasional aberration on the part of quite respectable people.

"But there must be *evidence*!" he found himself saying, with a nervous catch in his voice. He was startled; for he was not in the habit of talking to himself.

"My nerves are getting in a bad way," he thought. Those letters had been upsetting; no denying it; not that they meant anything. They didn't mean anything except suspicion and the desire on the part of an unfeeling and jealous man to give him a shock.

"I think, perhaps, I will see about getting a tonic," he said. "After all, I have experienced some strain owing to Emily's death."

The doctor he consulted had attended Emily. He got his tonic, for Doctor Macey was a sympathetic salesman, but the doctor's private opinion was that he had never seen Mr. Moon looking quite so well. As the weeks went by Mr. Moon, as a widower, seemed to gain a freshness of skin and a clearness of eye that made many a bosom friend of dear Emily inform the world in confidence that the poor man's life must have been nagged out of him.

"Look at the change in him!" said everybody. Doctor Macey, modestly attributing the improvement to his tonic when congratulating Mr. Moon, was secretly puzzled, as general practitioners with imagination often are. He did not believe that relief from harassing psychological conditions could have made such a marked physical difference. He just wondered.

Septimus Moon succeeded in forgetting those nerve-jarring



letters. He ignored them. It was, he felt, the wisest thing to do. But he kept them carefully.

He had been a widower for nearly a year, when one evening, a few minutes before midnight, the telephone rang with the continuous, insistent note that proclaimed a trunk call.

"It's certain to be a wrong number," thought Mr. Moon.

"Is that Anagram four-five-three-o?" asked the operator.

"Yes," said Mr. Moon.

"One moment, please—Quendon Magna calling."

Mr. Moon was startled.

"You're through," said the operator's voice, and then a rather thin voice said: "Is that Septimus Moon?"

"Speaking," said Mr. Moon.

"Mitcham here—Aldous Mitcham."

"Yes."

"You recall the name?"

"Yes."

"I'm dying."

Mr. Moon hardly knew what to say. He arranged the beginning of a sympathetic throat noise, when the speaker continued:

"D'you feel in fairly good health, Moon?"

"Excellent, thank you."

"Ah—I thought you would."

"Is that what you rang me up about?"

"Yes."

Mr. Moon felt immensely relieved. He knew now that he was dealing with a lunatic. Those letters marked the first stages of a mind becoming unhinged.

"I'm not expected to last out the night," that reedy voice proceeded; "so I don't mind telling you that I think you acquitted yourself about those letters I sent you. I thought perhaps you'd found out or got suspicious, and had killed Emily."

"Found out what?" asked Mr. Moon, half smiling at the

innocence of his remark. This telephone call had confirmed every suspicion that the old envelope among Emily's letters had aroused. But he was not expecting the answer he got.

"I thought perhaps you'd found out that Emily and I had been trying to poison you on the instalment plan for nearly a year!"

"My God!" said Septimus Moon, and replaced the receiver. "My God!" he repeated. "To think, that if I hadn't given her that glass of iced water that night after her operation, I might have been dead by now!"

### PENDULUM\*

IT was some time since I had driven in London, and I found that all sorts of streets were barred to me. There were roundabouts, difficult to negotiate if you came fresh into town after three years' burial in the country. I suppose that is why I came to grief in Piccadilly Circus. I didn't realise that I had to go to the left of the Eros statue, and I went to the right of it on my way east, and far too quickly for a man travelling against the traffic. The policeman on point duty shouted and then I pulled up, skidded, and the bus hit me. I heard the screech of brakes and the crash and some shouting; then all sound was cut off abruptly.

I saw the remains of my car jammed under the 'bus, and I wondered how I had managed to escape. People were crowding round, policemen were keeping them back, and the 'bus driver was climbing out of his cabin with a face like putty. It must have given him a bad turn, poor chap. I thought I had been deafened by something exploding, for I had never known such absolute silence. There was all this bustle, crowding and push-

\* First published in *The London Mercury*, June, 1936.



ing and talking, and the traffic circling round, but sound waves failed to reach me. I might have been enclosed in a stone cell with walls six feet thick.

It was uncanny; faintly sinister, too. I tried to reassure everybody by saying: "I'm all right, I'm all right," and I got another shock because I couldn't hear myself speaking, not even inside my own head. When there's a frightful noise going on, maybe inside an aeroplane, although your words are drowned, you feel the vibration of them in your head. Well, I didn't.

Then I got another new experience. I found that I was seeing in a complete circle.

What I mean is, that we always look ahead of us, and only see things vaguely on each side, for our field of vision is limited by the range of our two eyes. For me that field of vision had become enlarged and completed as a panorama, so that I could see on every side of me simultaneously. Over the heads of the crowd I could see all the buildings of Piccadilly: the Pavilion, the Criterion, the buildings on the west corner, Swan and Edgar's with its two towers and the gilded thingummies on the top, the big Insurance Office on the corner with its arcade, the Monico, the mouth of Shaftesbury Avenue, and round to the Pavilion again. It was like having a glass ball for a head; a sort of crystal that took in everything around one and focused it inside.

"Good Lord," I thought, "that's odd, I must be dreaming or something, or I've had an almighty crack on the head to be seeing things this way."

There were a couple of policemen kneeling in the centre of the crowd over something they'd pulled out from under the 'bus. A white ambulance came down Shaftesbury Avenue, and presently the crowd opened to let a stretcher through, and they lifted a fellow on to it, and it wasn't until I recognised his mackintosh that I realised it might be me.

I haven't got much imagination, but it didn't need a lot to make me think that I might be closely connected with that

mackintosh. It wasn't until the body was taken away on the stretcher and the crowd began to thin that I said to myself: "Look here, this is all wrong."

Even then I didn't admit what I was beginning to suspect.

A breakdown gang came along and started clearing up the ruins of my car, and the 'bus was towed away by a lorry. The spectators dispersed and traffic went on in what was I suppose the normal way in Piccadilly Circus. It was new to me because I hadn't seen the roundabout system at work. My deafness didn't leave me, and presently I said: "Facts have got to be faced." But I hesitated to admit what I really knew, because I was afraid that if for a moment I admitted it I should fade out like a puff of smoke and be nothing. As it was I stayed there, and the day went on. Night came; the theatre traffic filled the streets; then they emptied until the theatres closed, and were packed again for nearly an hour, and then, except for an occasional taxi and a late-running 'bus, Piccadilly Circus was quiet, though still bright with illuminated signs. They went out half an hour after midnight, but those big electric lights they've got all round the Circus kept on.

I stayed there all night. I say that I stayed; but I had no choice. I was anchored there, encircled by a noiseless, animated panorama.

Dawn came, dirty and foggy, and with it, vegetable carts, market carts, all sorts of early traffic. Piccadilly and Lower Regent Street were sluiced down with hoses by men who wore hats like Australian troopers. The dull grey streets brightened when the first 'buses started and I realised how much colour London gets from its 'buses.

It wasn't until midday that I was driven into a final acknowledgment of my condition. The road had been damaged by my accident and there were barriers up. No one came near my particular place; for workmen were repairing the roadway. They finished just before midday and the barriers were removed. A 'bus presently drove right over the place where I was, and for a moment I was inside it, seeing all the



people and seeing my complete panorama of Piccadilly Circus through the 'bus windows. That settled it. "All right," I said to myself. "I'm dead! What happens next?"

I waited, expecting that the admission would drive me off like vapour to—I wasn't quite sure what. But there I stayed.

Night came. The next day. And day after day I remained in that place. I wondered whether the released self, which persists after the body is done with, remains for ever at the exact place of death. How carefully people would choose their locality for dying if that was known. I thought it must be so as day after day and week after week I stayed in Piccadilly Circus, with the life of London moving round me, and the seasons progressing. Summer emerged from the wet, uncertain English spring. Hot days, blue skies, unexpected rainstorms and then presently autumn, and thick coiling clouds of fog blacking out the buildings so that only Eros was visible, a darting figure perched in a glowing fog bank.

A year passed, and I began to wonder what eternity was. Day and night fluttered by like blinds flicked up and down.

As the years sped there were changes, chiefly in the sky signs. Here and there buildings were replaced. The 'buses changed too. I remember realising one summer's day that they were no longer the familiar red and grey 'buses but were long, shimmering shapes of glass and metal with their wheels sheathed by the body. The sky seemed to be clearer and cleaner. There were no fogs. Most of Lower Regent Street was being rebuilt. The Pavilion had been pulled down, and a soaring tower of glass and polished copper stood in its place, a tower aflame with light in the evening.

Then one day fog came. I hadn't seen fog for many years. It grew thick and yellow, and all the traffic stopped. Dimly through the murk I saw the pavements crowded with people lying down, immobile. That fog lasted for days, and when it cleared I saw the results of some dreadful disaster.

Lower Regent Street had collapsed like a card house; roadways were blocked with wreckage and jagged skeletons of

steel. The tower on the site of the Pavilion was bent and twisted and its glass shattered. Everywhere hundreds of corpses were heaped, and a few men in dark uniforms with masks and goggles were lifting them into ambulances. When the dead had been removed London seemed to stay like that for a long while. Many years. Then rebuilding began.

The years were flapping away behind me now so swiftly that I lost count. Twice again I saw this part of London in flames, and after the last time I was surrounded for several centuries by dark ruins that sank gradually into the ground. Advancing towards me up Lower Regent Street, and along Piccadilly, round the curve of Regent Street itself and down Shaftesbury Avenue and from Leicester Square came a green army of bushes and young trees. Slender silver birches which grew swiftly like thin grey branching needles, and other trees.

I began to measure time again when the hillside of Lower Regent Street became a dense wood of oaks. It must have been ten or fifteen centuries after the day I crashed my car when I found myself begirt by a forest that had conquered the old West End of London. There were no people, and that frightened me because all my personal interest in life, all my fears about the nature and duration of death, had been submerged by one absorbing interest, one profound love—love of my kind, and a torturing desire to know its future fate. I endured agony as, century after century, I saw no sign of men.

The forest closed in on me. The sky overhead was blotted out by foliage. About me were lush grasses, undergrowth, and a deepening carpet of leaves. The exuberant and wasteful growth of the forest choked my view. I wondered if man after destroying civilisation had lost his chance of surviving, or whether England was just suffering the fate that overtook countries when commerce and traffic followed new routes. There were animals in the forest, gaunt, grey, shabby-looking creatures, half-dog, half-wolf. I hated them. They seemed such dilapidated conquerors; mean, unworthy successors to man.

Then one day I saw a little party of men hacking a path



through the undergrowth. England was being rediscovered. The explorers cut their way through completely, and I saw, with rather a shock, that they were black. Not Negroes as I remembered them; not the fellows with cheerful almost simian countenances, thick lips and gleaming teeth, but men with dark, plum-coloured skins and Nordic features. They passed through my panorama of vision and disappeared. They wore no clothes, but each man had a wallet strapped round his waist, an axe and a stick.

It must have been at least a hundred years before I saw more men. They were black, but not savages. They made clearings in the forest. Soon they were making a road which passed from east to west almost along the line of old Piccadilly. Soon there was traffic, drawn by clumsy machines that went jerkily over the stony surface of the road, squirting steam and dragging wagons behind them. It was the beginning of a new machine age.

More clearings were made in the forest, and the hillside where Lower Regent Street had been was shorn of its trees, and at its foot was a great lake, or it might have been a river. The Thames may have shifted its course, flowing over the site of the Mall and Whitehall. The lake was very wide, and the far side was invisible. Then buildings of wood and iron and glass uprose in the clearing. I watched a city grow for eight hundred years. It was burnt down twice in that time and raided by some tribe of killing people. Then I suppose the machine age which had stayed in a crude stage for many centuries got some fresh impetus from invention for, within a hundred years, the buildings changed in type, became tall and gracious, and soon little shining shapes were flicking across the sky, and I knew that men were flying once again.

That new city was set in a great park with radiating avenues, lakes and gardens. It only lived for another century. It was destroyed from the air, as London, its squalid predecessor, had been destroyed.

The oak forest came back, and again I was darkly sur-

rounded by great trees. Century after century the forest stood, impenetrable, gloomy, and without human life. The years seemed to be passing more slowly, and I found that the whole of my movement through time was slowing up.

One day I saw men creeping through the forest. They did not walk erect, but crept, stoopingly, putting an occasional hand upon the ground, peeping back at each other over their shoulders. They were naked and filthy, with bushy manes of reddish hair. They had large mouths and slobbering lips; revolting, vile caricatures of men. And as the years dragged by, getting slower and slower in their passage, I saw more of these foul creatures. They settled in the forest, living in crudely thatched huts. They were cannibals, but with this horrid difference from any cannibal that I had ever heard of: they ate their victims living.

In time they disappeared and the jungle, for jungle it had become, was peopled only by black, lithe panthers. The huts rotted away. The trees grew thicker; it was a land of twilight with starless nights. Only the green lamps of panthers' eyes moved between sunset and dawn.

One day I stopped. Time ceased to move, or rather I ceased to move through time. I had completed my journey. It must have been many thousand years in length, thirty thousand, perhaps forty thousand. How long I stopped in that dark copper twilight I cannot say. Measurement lost meaning for me. Imperceptibly I noticed that the dreary twilight was fading. Sunset came and then a long night. Infinitely slow and protracted was the passage from sunset to dawn, and then another long day.

Two such days and nights passed until I realised that the sun was sinking in the east and rising in the west.

"Surely," I thought, "the earth cannot have reversed its rotation."

I wondered whether my long pause had not been a pause in time but a period when the earth had no movement, and that now, inexplicably, it had begun to rotate in the opposite



direction. Many centuries passed and then I saw ruined huts rising through the undergrowth. Presently those huts had ceased to be ruins and were complete, thatched, crude, but familiar. In a few years they were inhabited by men, like the brutal and depraved cannibals that I had seen before. They moved oddly, always crawling backwards. This horrid parody of mankind passed, and again the forest was deserted. Then, as the centuries slipped by, I saw ruins of great buildings appearing among the trees and I suddenly understood that my consciousness had slipped into reverse and that I was swinging back through all I had seen, back perhaps to my own time, perhaps to my own life.

The years began to fly faster. I saw again the Negro city; the first road; the first clearing party; everything in reverse. Soon I was within a few hundred years of the twentieth century, watching London under the last air-raids. Back and back I came, until I was within a few days of my accident. The speed never slackened. Soon I was within a day of my accident, then it was only a few hours away.

Then came the moment of the accident, and I saw it all from the outside. The ambulance, the stretcher, the crowd, and the crash. Then I saw myself in my car receding backwards into Piccadilly.

Everything was in reverse, and I found that I was slipping back into time, hours before the accident. But not in my own life. I was still rooted in Piccadilly Circus. The days and nights raced by, and soon I was approaching war-time London. I saw the joyful anarchy of Armistice Day, and I saw London under the first air-raids, with searchlights fingering the sky. Soon I was back among horse 'buses, with here and there a rare motor-car darting in and out of the slow-moving traffic. Where would it end, and why was I journeying? I wondered.

I saw hansom cabs, four-wheelers, 'buses with knife-edge tops; and presently the streets were bright with private carriages and people in clothes far more decorative than I had ever imagined. The scale of London changed. Streets which

I had known as dark lanes with high buildings, became, without changing their width, sun-filled and smiling shopping parades. I saw old Regent Street with its arcades and its cream-painted buildings. Presently I watched it vanish in scaffolding as it was built.

The past hurried towards me. Now I was among coaches and lackeys and the elaborate gentlemen and ladies of the Georgian age; gardens and orchards gradually filled the West End; the houses fell away until eastwards I could see St. Paul's high above the other buildings. Soon St. Paul's itself was webbed with scaffolding and disappeared. I saw the sky red at night and darkened with smoke by day, while the Great Fire raged. Then a tall square-towered church stood where St. Paul's had been and that church grew a lofty spire, and I remembered reading that the spire of Old St. Paul's had gone years before Wren's cathedral was built.

London and the surrounding hills had many shining spires. Piccadilly was now a miry track. I saw occasional horsemen and countrymen, and now and then a farm cart. London receded. Windmills were dotted about the countryside, and a hamlet lay at the foot of the Haymarket hill. The centuries speeded up and they rushed by me until I was back in the first city, the Roman city, with its walls and pink towers, and its official-looking buildings of brick and stone standing upon the high places beyond Ludgate Hill.

Then the forests began to close about me again. River and city vanished in a cloud of trees, and only a track, occasionally traversed by men dressed in furs and woven cloth, came within my vision. Back and back into time I dropped, until, in the sparse beginnings of a forest struggling out of half-frozen ground, I found my pace slackening again. My backward journey ended in a bleak and snowy land, a treeless uninhabitable waste, which I thought must be the last Ice Age. Again my direction in time changed, and I slid down the centuries back to the twentieth, back to the time and place of my accident. I wondered why.



I passed the time of my death once more, and then I was back on that journey to the future. But this second time I did not travel so far; my pace slackened soon after the cannibals had disappeared, and then I swung back, passing my death time again, back through the Middle Ages to Roman London, to the prehistoric forests of Britain, and beyond to the Ice Age. I stopped short at the beginnings of that age, and as I swung forward once more into time I knew that my consciousness was acting as a pendulum, swinging back and forth in time, and that pendulum was hinged, as it were, on the moment of my death.

Back and forth, making ever shorter journeys, my mind hurried through time, until the swing was shortened to a century on either side of my death. Then it swung only a few weeks before and beyond my death, shortening to a few days, then to a few hours.

\* \* \* \* \*

This statement was written by Mr. David Jarnid upon regaining consciousness, following a motor accident on March 22nd, 193-. His injuries were not serious, but he never recovered, for he seemed to be without any wish to live.

## WAVE LENGTH

THE Vicar of Meldon Parva lay in a tent at the bottom of the Vicarage garden shivering with fear. It was nearly midnight. He had retired to the end of the garden because that was the only place where he could find any rest from the invasions to which his mind had been subjected for the past ten days; and now on this serene June night the dank fingers of terror were plucking at his nerves. Wave after wave

of inarticulate fear floated out to him, awakening all manner of old buried, instinctive fears; the fears that men have put behind them since the last wolves died in England; jungle fears—black, raw terrors, happily forgotten by modern man.

"This," said the Vicar, "is intolerable." He got up, fumbled with his feet for his slippers, and lifting the flap of the tent, went outside into the moonlight. From the neighbouring box hedge there was an agitated twittering and chirruping, and presently from the mulberry tree which reached its arms above the hedge, a large dark shape flopped down and sailed away.

"An owl," said the Vicar, and then realised as the twittering ceased that the waves of fear that had destroyed his sleep emanated from the hedge-sparrows' nest in the box hedge, where a terrified bird household was threatened by the sinister, predatory creature on the mulberry tree.

"The cruelty of Nature!" exclaimed the Vicar, and sighed. He had been sighing a lot lately. It was impossible for him to be philosophic about the peculiar misfortune that had befallen him. He could not even be scientific about it, for this little, round, chubby, comfortable man was the unhappy victim of a deplorable miracle. It was impossible to explain the miracle.

He had mentioned it casually to the Archdeacon, and had been advised to take an early holiday. At first the Archdeacon seemed to think that the Vicar was merely preparing the ground for some new scheme of church lighting, or even for the installation of electric light in the Vicarage.

Now the Rev. Colin Dallaway was one of the most unself-seeking and generous little creatures. In appearance rather like a crudely-fashioned cherub, he was beloved by his parishioners as kind and guileless people can be beloved by those who are destitute of such virtues, and who even considered them as disadvantages rather than virtues. The Rev. Colin had a fat living, an easy existence, a charming country parish in Norfolk, a housekeeper who could cook, and the most complicated apparatus that could possibly be devised for receiving the programmes of the British Broadcasting Corporation. He was



an amateur electrician, and some unkind people who had been subjected to his electrical enthusiasms said that he lived for his valves. It is possible to collect apparatus without any understanding of what affects it, and the Vicar was easily satisfied by innocent little accomplishments, such as receiving the chimes of Big Ben in every room of the Vicarage. He had even connected up the Parish Hall with the gargantuan receiving set which occupied one-third of the potting shed.

The miracle had happened during a thunderstorm ten days before. It was a sultry afternoon late in May, and threatening clouds had gathered over the black fen country. The Vicar was playing happily with the involved and complicated appliances that in the early days of broadcasting had given to many homes the likeness of power stations. Although receiving apparatus had improved, he clung to his gadgets, and disliked the thought of a compact box which did everything obediently as one turned a dial. The storm broke and drifted nearer and nearer until the dark clouds seemed to rest on the four pinnacles of the church tower, a hundred yards from the Vicarage garden. And then came the lightning flash.

The Vicar could remember nothing except dazzling violet fire flung in and about the interior of the potting shed. His gardener picked him up unconscious and carried him into the house.

When he came to himself he had a confused idea that half a dozen people were trying to speak to him and he murmured: "One at a time, gentlemen, please. Now then, the next question." And then, quite distinctly, the gardener said, and it was most disrespectful: "I always knew no good would come of them dratted muckings—burn the whole blurry lot I would!"

The Vicar sat up. "Really, Simmons," he said, "really!" But Simmons was not there; only his housekeeper. "Where's Simmons?" demanded the Vicar.

"Just outside, sir," said the housekeeper.

"Will you please tell him," said the Vicar, "that he's not to use that language." And then he felt a little faint because

the housekeeper without moving her lips distinctly said to him: "Poor daft child, knowing no better than to stay out with all those lightning conductors and what-all when there's thunder about. He wants turning up and spanking."

"Mrs. Rivers," said the Vicar, blushing slightly, "what did I understand you to say?"

"I said that Simmons was just outside," said Mrs. Rivers.

"No, but after that?" insisted the Vicar.

"I didn't say anything," said Mrs. Rivers.

The Vicar looked severe. "You were very disrespectful," he said, "I quite understand that——" And then he stopped, for two or three other people, including the doctor, seemed to be trying to speak to him at once. He distinctly heard Simmons say: "I hope the doctor orders the whole blurry lot to be smashed up—never did hold with having 'em in the potting shed." And the doctor appeared to be saying: "Well, I wonder what this fool wants; I had hoped to finish those notes for the *Lancet*. Blast! A doctor's at the mercy of every ninny."

Now that was not at all the sort of remark the Vicar expected to hear from Doctor Kendall. With as near an approach to sarcasm as he was ever able to command, he said: "I am sorry to have disturbed your literary work, doctor, but I appear to have had an accident."

Doctor Kendall looked a little startled, and said: "Literary work?" And then, dropping into his best, brisk bedside manner, said: "Well, well—now what's wrong?"

The Vicar pressed his hands to his head. All these voices knocking inside his mind saying disrespectful and contradictory things were too perplexing.

The doctor ordered him to bed. His hands were slightly burned and had greenish splashes on them. He went to bed but not to sleep, for the housekeeper and the maid and the gardener were obviously holding a conference about him and his accident although they did not appear to be having a conversation. They all talked in a maddening and highly



personal monologue as though they were ruminating. People came to inquire about him, but the doctor had forbidden visitors; nevertheless he heard various remarks, clearly not intended for his ears. They came floating up into his consciousness as the visitors approached the Vicarage; they faded out as they left. It was midnight on the day of his accident before the Vicar was forced to admit to himself, that in some horribly inexplicable way he had become a receiving set for human thought, and that his mind through some impish miracle had become attuned to a wave-length that bore the innermost secrets of human reflection.

It became impossible to sleep in the Vicarage. People, he discovered, went on thinking when they were asleep, and relayed their thoughts to him even though they were as far away as the gardener's cottage. Really he would have to get rid of Simmons. He appeared to be a man wholly without delicacy; and he began to have his doubts too about the maid. Of course, he knew that girls were more flighty than they used to be, but really, *really*! As for Mrs. Rivers, she seemed to be in the throes of a complicated love affair with the local publican, but it became increasingly clear that it was the publican's stock-in-trade rather than the publican that attracted her. There was a yearning for ardent spirits about Mrs. Rivers that the Vicar found even more shocking than the bestiality of Simmons.

Reluctantly, the Rev. Colin found himself losing his kindly faith in his fellow-men. It was agony for him to go about the village. His parishioners who, as he honestly believed, liked him, seemed also to regard him as an amiable imbecile. They were tolerant of what they called his stupidity. They laughed at his innocence.

His only refuge had been the tent in the garden, and now that an owl had selected the vicinity for a hunting-ground, its peace was broken. Animals, he found, radiated emotions, not thoughts. From their tiny minds were broadcast fears and an array of lusts that made him understand the wisdom of the

doctrine that denied souls to the beasts of the field. Every day his tragic bewilderment grew, until his courage reached the temperature that allowed him to seek an interview with his Bishop.

He visited the small town that, because it was appended to a gigantic cathedral, was called a city. The cathedral had always been beautiful in his eyes; and it was a building of austere nobility, a fluid blend of styles, for it had gone on growing from the time the first Norman abbot designed the nave until the last Tudor abbot added the Lady Chapel.

"Thank God for the peace of great buildings!" exclaimed the Vicar as he saw the tall white tower chalked against the blue fenland sky.

He hoped that the Bishop would give him some guidance, some succour, and even suggest some work where the results of the miracle could be turned to good account. Perhaps as a missionary he might find his restless gift invaluable. He mourned for his pleasant home, but he was resolved to use for the benefit of his kind the strange power that he had unwittingly acquired. It would be difficult to put it to the Bishop.

During lunch at the Palace he found it impossible to contemplate putting it to the Bishop, whose thoughts displayed a grasp of the practical side of life that astonished the Vicar. Anxiety about the new butler, a personal antipathy to the Dean of the cathedral, and a dislike of the way his kitchen was run, were the dominating themes of the Bishop's mind, though naturally they left his conversation unaffected. The Vicar, inadequate and almost stricken dumb with embarrassment, could only stammer a few sentences about nerves, when he realised that he could convince the Bishop immediately about the nature and depth of his malady by some thought-reading. "But," reflected the Vicar, "it would be too unkind. I mustn't give him a shock—after all, he's an old man and a good man." Meanwhile, the Bishop was saying:

"Ah, Dallaway, you must pull yourself together. Er, I



appreciate your wisdom in, er, consulting me. But, don't let yourself go. The dangerous enthusiasms, you know, abrade the spiritual perceptions."

"The butler isn't really dishonest," said the Vicar abruptly; "not now, and he's worth a second chance and I'm glad you're going to give him one. But I agree with you about the cook—she doesn't deserve any more chances. As for the Dean——" He stopped. The Bishop had turned pale; and the Vicar knew that all trivial things had left the great man's mind, and that it was filled with the same blind fear that had poured from the minds of the hedge-sparrows when the owl hovered by their nest. Completely unnerved he left the Palace without explanation or apology and hurried into the cathedral.

In that great Norman nave he found peace. Some workmen were moving on a scaffolding between the clerestory and the painted beams of the roof. The *tap, tap, tap* of their tools came down to him, and their thoughts descended too; and he stood there uncomprehending for a few moments, until his mind was awakened and distressed by the icy malice of an idea that kept cutting through various innocent congestions about cricket and beer, the unsatisfactory edge of a certain chisel, and the approach of knocking-off time. There were three men up there, and one of them was full of hate and fury and jealousy, and was thinking that if he frayed the ropes at the end of the scaffolding, so that they were unsafe, then Albert would be done in quite naturally, and nobody would know. That 'ud teach the swine! Pinching his girl from under his nose, and thinking he could get away with it. And after Albert was out of the way, he'd marry Ada and lead her a Hell of a life—just to show her that Jack Munder was master. That's the sort of man he was—and nobody 'ud know.

The Vicar was pale with horror at the wickedness that was being planned high above his head by this man Munder. It was murder, no less, and it might happen at any moment. That flimsy scaffolding, floating above him, might partly collapse and shoot a screaming, terrified man to his death on

the tiled floor of the nave. The Vicar wished that he could broadcast thoughts as well as receive them; and then he remembered that he had a voice; but to use it in this place of deep, holy calm, to shatter the silence of the cathedral by shouting, was unthinkable. But the murderer up there was calculating the time it would take to get the ropes in proper condition, and then to get Albert over to the right end.

"There are two souls at stake," thought the Rev. Colin in an agony; and then he grew calm. He understood that it was for the prevention of this crime that the miracle had been wrought. He hesitated no more. He stood directly below the scaffold. Looking up, he shouted:

"God knows everything, Jack Munder!"

As the echoes of his voice shrilled and rumbled away on their travels there was a sudden movement on the scaffolding, and a chisel dropped between the planks and flashed downwards. The Vicar never knew what struck him until after he recovered consciousness in hospital.

Lying in bed with his head bandaged he found himself shedding tears of relief, for the effects of the miracle had departed, and again he could know only what his fellow-men wanted him to know. He did not need the comfort of scientific explanations: he did not really need the solicitude of the Bishop who called on him.

"You were overwrought," said the Bishop; "the, er, dangerous enthusiasms are apt to upset the spiritual balance."

And the Vicar, who was now unable to read the Bishop's thoughts, admitted that shouting in the cathedral like a street preacher could only be the result of a temporary derangement. He was very apologetic and impressed and felt that he had committed an enormity that would take a lot of living down.



“THESE PARTS ARE INTIRELY UNKNOWN”

WE were looking at some eighteenth-century maps of North America in Doctor Polder's library after dinner; and my mind picked on the magical sentence that stretched over the lands west of the Mississippi, right up to Alaska. “These parts are intirely unknown,” was the label; and what a challenge it must have been to adventurous people a hundred and fifty years ago.

“It's a pity the world has parted with its unknown patches of mystery,” I said to Merrow who was my fellow-guest.

“How do you know it has?” he asked.

“Superficially it has,” I claimed. “Nearly everything has been explored or flown over.”

He shook his head. “How about Brazil?” he said: “what do we know of the Matto Grosso, or the North-West Territories of Canada, or the interior of Greenland? Even in England there are queer patches.”

He stopped. He had a way of firing out provocative statements. Merrow had a good many queer patches in his own mind. He was an intense sort of man; about forty; dark, wiry, nervous; filled with a kind of tremulous energy, with a headful of odd knowledge. He was something of an antiquary, and he brought to his antiquarian enthusiasm a mystical quality which made you feel that he knew more about the past than he could possibly have reconstructed from the earthenware shards, coins, ornaments and bones that he dug up in different parts of the country. He had a flair for archæological research and an income that allowed him to indulge his taste; but he was not popular with academic historians: his imagination was too undisciplined; his methods too unconventional.

“Are you suggesting that there are some parts of England still unexplored?” I demanded.

“At least there may be some quite unknown,” he returned. And then our host came back to the library, for he had been

decanting a second bottle of his '68 port. Doctor Polder was the opposite of Merrow in most ways. Perhaps that was why they liked each other. They must have enjoyed the perpetual refreshment of surprise created by their differences. The doctor was sixty. Like Merrow he was a bachelor. He had retired, and lived very comfortably in his country house, surrounded by books and old furniture. He was a tall, big-boned man with flaxen hair, just turning grey. He enjoyed life enormously and lived every hour of it with zest, sometimes a little too heartily; but he was good company. He had a loud voice and a confident laugh: before his retirement he must have been a sort of human hypodermic for his patients, injecting vitality and optimism by his very presence.

"What's this about the unknown?" he boomed. Merrow treated us to a mysterious smile, but I wanted to bring him down to earth for once.

"Why not tell us what parts of England are entirely unknown?" I urged.

"Have some port," said the doctor. "I can answer that one. The unopened caves at Chislehurst. You can walk all of three miles in what's opened there—Lord knows how far you could go in the unexplored parts. Half-way under Kent I expect. Why? What's all this poff about?"

"That isn't what you meant, Merrow, is it?" I persisted.

"No," he agreed. "I meant that there are pieces of England—tracts of land that are as unknown as the jungles of central Brazil. They must be—obviously."

He had lowered his voice, and seemed to be talking to himself.

"Perhaps you'd better not have any more port," said the doctor. "You're mixing up South America with England already, and we've only had one bottle between us."

"You don't quite understand," said Merrow.

"Nobody's preventing an explanation," Doctor Polder answered.

"I'm not sure that I understand myself," Merrow continued.



"It only happened a couple of weeks ago; when I was over at Perrin St. Leger for the opening of that barrow they call Peter's Hump. There's a mediæval legend about it; but it's a Bronze Age monument all right, and I couldn't miss a piece of field work like that. I don't think the local archæological society were too pleased to see me; but really Peter's Hump has nothing to do with what I've got to tell you. The downs narrow a lot just there, and woods come right up into them, and they're dotted with those circular plantations. I was staying with Wellbridge, the artist, and his house was just at the edge of some woodland that stretched away from the foot of the downs. He'd got a large garden, and he was fond of it. Things would grow for him. You walked straight out of the garden gate into the woods, and then you could lose your way and be some time before you found it again."

He paused. Doctor Polder drank some port.

"Go on," he encouraged; "don't be dramatic. I suppose you lost your way."

"Yes," said Merrow; "I lost my way."

I suddenly realised that he was embarrassed, and that he wasn't just treating us to some mysterymongering. He was genuinely perplexed and troubled.

"This is quite serious," he went on, speaking slowly; "for I can't explain what happened. I know I'm imaginative; I know what tricks the mind can play with facts, and the way it has of transforming the most sober realities into fantastic dreams. I'd been soaked in this dig at the barrow, and I'd been talking with Wellbridge about the country as it was three or four thousand years ago—I think I'd done most of the talking. I was just thinking aloud. But what happened after was real; it belonged to *now*: it was the present. I didn't drop back into time through some chink. What I saw exists in England to-day, as thousands of strange things, unbelievable things, may exist in all parts of the world, just escaping observation. Why shouldn't some tract of English woodland have escaped human observation altogether?"

"Impossible," said Doctor Polder. "I admit that some parts of Wales and Scotland may have been missed—but it's unlikely."

"It's a fact, though," said Merrow. "I went into the woods after dinner. I was feeling tired but excited, and I'd hardly left the garden gate when I had the most extraordinary feeling of depression. I felt deflated. I pushed on into the wood, but although it was a warm August evening, and the sunlight was still strong in the tree-tops, I had the irrational idea that I was walking into a dank cave. I seemed to have passed into a chilled area, and I even felt a cold breath of air striking me on the body and sweeping upwards towards my neck; but there was no wind, no movement of leaf or grass. Suddenly that wood seemed horrible, and quite involuntarily I turned back to the garden gate. As I turned the sky through the tree-tops grew dark, and I knew I was lost."

"The garden gate wasn't there. The trees in the wood had changed. From a sedate mixture of oak and beech and arrowy silver birches, they had changed to something unfamiliar; something fierce and quite unearthly in character."

Merrow's face was pale and there was a little sweat glistening on his brow. He spoke urgently; spoke, I felt sure, under the influence of unforgettable fear. Doctor Polder was listening seriously: his jocular manner had retreated.

"The ground was harsh and stony," Merrow continued. "Reddish-green stems of monstrous trees shot up from it, and the trees were without bark. They had a smooth skin: they looked like muscular snakes, only they had thorns, huge spikes jutting out from them at intervals. Vast leaves grew higher up, where the trees branched. There were a few tufts of a plant that looked like bamboo. On one side of me a thicket of greenish-grey foliage was growing out of a mangrove-like tangle of rusty, scaly roots. The whole of this sinister forest was still, and at first I thought there was no life in it. But I was mistaken."

"Clinging to a grey rock a few yards away from me was



a thing like a sea-lion: a glistening monster with a body like a sack, limbless and apparently headless. It shone like wet leather. It was immobile; but for all I knew it might be in command of some swift and sudden means of locomotion. I wondered whether this strange place in the woods was a survival of some very remote epoch—like the carboniferous age. But I was too terrified to think clearly: I could only observe; and presently something happened which paralysed my ability to think at all.

"The silence of the place was suddenly broken by a thunderous grunting noise, and out of the grey-green thicket, tossing aside the writhing roots and heaving up the whole mass of blade-shaped foliage, came a gigantic creature. I have a smattering of knowledge about extinct forms of life; and this might have been the nightmare dinosaur that is called stegosaurus; but instead of a dorsal serration of plates, it had a sprouting bush of spines. It might well have been the gargantuan ancestor of the porcupine. It dashed across the ground immediately in front of me, a wicked humped shape; and it snapped at the slimy brute on the stone, and the slimy thing vanished, save for a few tatters of mildewed skin that clung to a damp patch on the stone. Everything got darker, and I think I must have fainted.

"When I came to myself I was sitting on the lawn at the far end of the garden, close to the gate. I must have staggered out of the wood, and collapsed. I felt exhausted and could hardly drag myself up to the house. Wellbridge was reading, and I said I was going to turn in if he didn't mind. He was an early bird, but it surprised me when he said he was going to bed too, for we'd only just had dinner. Then I looked at my watch, and saw that it was ten-fifteen. I must have spent over an hour in that ghastly wood."

Marrow stopped. Then he added, abruptly: "That's all. You needn't believe any of it if you don't want to."

It was difficult to know what to say; but the Doctor relieved my embarrassment.

"Did you go into the wood again?" he asked.

"Several times—but I couldn't find the place again, if that's what you're getting at."

Doctor Polder nodded and said:

"Ever had any other experience like that?"

Merrow thought for a moment, then replied:

"Not quite the same, and not since I was about nineteen. Then I found a queer place on the river one day, at home. We were living near Wroxeter in Shropshire and our garden came down to the Severn. I found a place where the river was immensely wide, and was fringed with unusual reeds—thick green reeds, not a bit like ordinary reeds. I only found it once, and I was never sure that I hadn't just dreamed the whole thing. I suppose you're trying to find out whether I suffer from recurrent delusions, or something like that, you unrepentant old materialist."

"Something like that," the doctor admitted.

"Well, this was material enough," Merrow asserted. "It was real—as real as this room."

"I'm prepared to believe that," said the doctor.

"There must be parts of England that are entirely unknown," Merrow mused; "bits of an older world that go on existing side by side with the world of to-day, and sometimes, if we're in the right mood, we can step into them and look about us and begin to understand something of the fear that haunted our ancestors."

I was surprised that there was no truculent scoffing from the doctor; but he filled our glasses, and changed the subject.

A few weeks later he was dining with me, and he returned to it, for Merrow was very much in our thoughts. The news of his death had been telegraphed to Doctor Polder that morning, and he was going to Cornwall the next day to attend the inquest. Merrow had fallen over a cliff on the north coast, and had been killed instantly.

"I suppose he did suffer from delusions," I said.

"If you're thinking of that story he told us about the



queer wood I can assure you that every word of it was true," the doctor said.

"But——" I began to protest.

"I'm not going to make a mystery out of the poor devil," said Doctor Polder; and there was a note of compassion in his voice that made it very different from its usual rollicking tone. "Something like it happened before, twenty years ago, as he told us. When he saw the wide place on the river with the strange reeds, and when he saw the uncanny wood and its monsters, he was looking at the world from a different level. It was the same river; but it looked different; and he was never in a wood—he was looking at a flower border in Wellbridge's garden with carnations, rose bushes and weeds in it, and he saw a hedgehog eat a slug, saw it with his eyes almost level with the ground. You see, he was recovering consciousness each time, after an epileptic fit."

## RESTORATION

**A**LTHOUGH the story ends with a speculative builder who erected cheap bungalows and went blind at the age of sixty, it really begins with Matthew the Mason who died a bewildered pauper four hundred years ago. Matthew could never understand why his world had gone so topsy-turvy, could never understand why he, a master mason, should be driven into vagabondage. His perplexity was darkened by misery, the more profound because he was a man articulate only with his hands; but his hands created songs and symphonies in stone, and his master-piece was the Lady Chapel at the Abbey Church of Leldon in the old lost county of Winchcombeshire. His misery was caused by the destruction of the church he had helped to complete, for he lived long

enough to see the roof stripped of its lead, the roof timbers hauled down and sawn up, and the nave empty and rain-sodden and filled with drifting leaves.

The despoiled church was used as a quarry by Lord Malvin, who was building a fine new Italianate house in the Abbey lands, which he had acquired from King Henry's Commissioners at the Dissolution. The new world grew into unfamiliar shapes in Winchcombeshire and all over England, and the wreckage of the old sank away out of sight, and with it Matthew the mason, and his patron, the last Abbot of Leldon, John of Menster. Matthew left two sons, and they followed their father's craft long after his death. Building was in their blood, and their gifts were transmitted, generation by generation, until they ended with Matthew Brand who built rather unpleasant bungalows in that part of the West Country where Worcestershire and Gloucestershire dovetail their boundaries, and the few remaining stones of Leldon Abbey still stand, though there is far less to be seen than at Glastonbury or Tintern.

Leldon is a disappointing ruin, and only in one antiquary had it aroused any serious enthusiasm, and he lived at Abbot's Leldon, which the activity of Matthew Brand had enriched with an encircling growth of flimsy stucco villas and imitation half-timbered bungalows. The old High Street of Abbot's Leldon was dignified with fine houses of yellow Cotswold stone, rivalled only in diversity of architecture by Chipping Campden, and ranging in date from the fifteenth century to the early nineteenth. The antiquary's name was Charles Molder, and he was an architect who, unlike Matthew Brand, believed that a fine tradition of building should be preserved, and who designed careful copies of old Cotswold houses, and put them down here and there in the West Country, and occasionally (and rather inappropriately) in the suburbs of some Midland city.

He only got to know Matthew Brand when the builder lost his sight. Blindness limited Matthew's activity, but he still



supervised contracts, adjusted specifications, squeezed savings on materials and labour, and upheld the traditions of cheap, slick jerry-building with his usual efficiency; but although he carried on his business with profit, he did so with increasing dissatisfaction. The business would end with him, for he was childless. He had no idea how old that business was. He knew it went back to his great-grandfather; that was all. After two years of blindness, just after his sixty-second birthday, he began, according to his wife, to "wander, like" in his mind. He began to talk of things he would like to have built; and he would regret by the hour the passing of his chance to leave a big building behind him. "None of this new architects' stuff," he would say, "but good, sound stone; something with a shape to it."

People would humour him about his regrets, and, until his wife stopped it, would question him about the character of the building he wanted to make—but he grew vague and angry and, at times, tearful.

"No," he would say, wearily; "it isn't a parish hall I've in mind, nor a super-cinema—it's a building with something to it: honest masonry, that looks up at you."

Honest masonry! Old Matthew Brand talking of honest masonry, when half the rubbish he had put up since the war was on its last legs! But the story of his obsession got about; and Charles Molder heard of it, and got to know the old man, and would sit with him sometimes in the evening, amazed at the fluency and vigour with which he described odd details of his dream building, although any attempt to describe it as a whole reduced him to stuttering impotence.

The blind builder was an impressive figure. He had a noble face, a fine head, a great bushy, silver beard, and heavy white eyebrows. But the upper part of his face had the sad, dead look that comes to the blind. His voice was full of life and subtlety; and his lips smiled. Mrs. Brand was worried about his condition, and once or twice she asked Molder not to encourage him to talk.

"But it obviously gives him such pleasure," objected Molder.

Mrs. Brand's lips grew taut. "Ah, but I have to pay for it," she said. "After he's been letting himself go to you, there's no doing with him. Always calling for paper and pencils and such, and then, poor dear, half crying because the things he scribbles down can't be seen and don't mean nothing to me."

"Have you got any of those scribbles?" asked Molder eagerly.

Mrs. Brand shook her head. "He always tells me to throw them away," she said. "And he talks about not being able to stand failure, and that it's best to keep his vision inside his head. And he'll wake up in the night, sir, and talk about his eyes having turned in on him and shown him, inside his mind, what he could never see when he had his sight. He thinks it's a judgment, like, for having built so many ugly houses. Not that I can see anything wrong with 'em," she hastened to add.

Molder was tactfully silent. But he continued to encourage old Brand's rambling talk about the building he had in his mind, whenever he called on him.

At Christmas, Molder had his nephew staying with him; a young and very modern architect who had only just qualified, and whose mind was concerned wholly with stark, airy castles of steel and glass and concrete, and who was as disrespectful about traditional building as he was about old Brand's bungalows. His uncle took him to see the blind man, and they chatted over a big, crackling wood fire on a chilly, damp, December night. Presently old Brand got on to his favourite subject, and young Molder, after listening to a lot of discursive description, suddenly said: "I say, Mr. Brand, if you had somebody to draw for you, couldn't you put down what you've got in mind?"

"Ah, sir," said old Brand, "could I not, but who'll draw for me? There's a couple of thick lads in the office who wouldn't understand what I was getting at, but it would need a real architect to make something of what I could give him."



"If it would amuse you," said young Molder, "I don't mind having a shot at it."

"Now, now," said Mrs. Brand, "you can't have your time wasted like that." But her husband said: "Would you now, sir? Wouldn't you really mind?" And his voice was quivering with excitement.

"Not a bit," said young Molder. "I'll start now, if you like."

It was ten o'clock at night, but a drawing-board was found and paper and a tee square, set squares and a scale, pencils and dividers; and that bright young modernist, whose sympathies were with the austere shapes and cells steel and reinforced concrete can create, stood by that drawing-board and began to put down, bit by bit, the plan that Matthew Brand dictated. The old man spoke and directed with precision and unhesitatingly, and at midnight Mrs. Brand protested and then went to bed. Molder went home leaving his nephew still at work. The young man did not return that night, but came to his uncle's house just before breakfast, weary and unshaven and half-ashamed of his enthusiasm.

"Old Brand's got under your skin all right, Dick," said his uncle, smiling. "I shouldn't have thought that anything except a big client would have made you work all night."

Dick Molder smiled. "I'm going to have a couple of hours' sleep," he announced, "and then I'm going back."

All that day he worked. The plans were finished and he began on the elevations.

"I'd like to have a look at it," said his uncle.

"Wait," said Dick Molder. "I'm trying not to look at it myself until it's finished."

Christmas was only four days off, and it was on the morning of Christmas Eve that the drawings were completed, and plans, elevations and perspective views were ready. Then, and not before, did young Dick Molder, the twentieth-century architect concerned with twentieth-century materials, realise that Matthew Brand, the jerry-builder, had dictated a masterpiece. Pinned up round the walls of the sitting-room the drawings

revealed a soaring, wonderful shape—a great church fresh and vivid and glorious, with a tower streaming up to end in four slender pinnacles, a lofty nave, and a west front that was like a resounding chant of praise in stone.

"If anybody," said young Molder, "said that I should commit anything like this to paper——" He left the sentence unfinished. Turning to Matthew Brand he said, "It's a marvellous composition."

His uncle examined the drawings carefully, and then said: "Ever had a look at Leldon Abbey, Mr. Brand?"

"Not for years," said the blind man; "there's only the old arch left. Might have brought a bit of money to the place if it had been more of a ruin."

"Yes, it's a poor ruin," agreed Molder, and when they had left old Matthew Brand smiling in his chair, surrounded by that strange collection of drawings which he could not see, Dick Molder said: "Why did you ask that about the Abbey?"

"I'm one of those things you bright young fellows despise," said his uncle; "a bit of an antiquary. Leldon Abbey's been my hobby. I've been digging out evidence about it for years. It was disestablished at the Reformation, and pulled to pieces and sold during the next hundred and fifty years. Hollar drew what was left of it about 1660; but I've only seen one copy of his engraving, and that's at Oxford."

"Yes—but what's all that to do with old Brand?"

"Just what I'd like to know. Through those drawings of yours he's produced an absolutely inspired restoration of Leldon Abbey as it must have looked four hundred years ago."



## JUNGLE\*

It's really awfully good of you to have arranged for this gentleman to come and hear my story. I've taken up so much of your time already that I hardly like to claim any more. But I felt I ought to put it before a journalist or somebody in the writing line connected with a newspaper, and now you've kindly made that possible.

You see, in a way it's—well, how can I put it, I suppose it's rather like some kind of an expedition. After all I've discovered something, haven't I?—if I can put it that way. Well, I won't take up too much of his time, and it's very kind of him to come. I'll go right on and tell just how it happened. Stop me if either of you want to ask a question, or I don't seem to be clear.

It was the strangest experience for me, because, you see, I'd only read about jungles; I'd never actually been in one; and that first experience—getting right in as it were . . . D'you know the first thing that struck me? I said to myself, Lord! it's just like the Palm House at Kew Gardens—you know, that sort of stuffy, ferny hot-water-pipe sort of smell that hangs about the Palm House. I'd often wondered as a kid if the tropics smelt like that, and I was really pleased to find that's exactly what the jungle smelt like. Only a passing whiff, though. It didn't go on smelling like that. Maybe it was so strong that my sense of smell got a bit deadened, or maybe I got interested in some of the other smells. I didn't notice any other smells at first. It was the whole wonderful and wild sort of dark beauty of the place that got me. I'm no hand at word-painting, gentlemen, but I just realised when I got into that jungle why Negroes were black. It was all part of a queer colour scheme that nature has worked out—the Negroes are black because, well, if they were any other

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colour they wouldn't *belong*, if you see what I mean. How did I get there? Well I'm coming to that—just a moment. I think I ought to give you my impressions, my first impressions, before I tackle the history of how I got there. They're important, you see.

I was surprised at the trees because they all began such a long way up. And they had very big roots, much *higher* roots than I'd ever seen in trees before. You had to climb right over them and go up and down a bit instead of just trampling them underfoot. And then the grass. I suppose it was jungle grass or bush or something. I don't know the exact terms—you understand, I'd never *lived* there before, although oddly enough I found myself used to the place. I don't remember looking up much; I was much more interested in things that were close to the ground—and the ground, if I can put it that way, seemed *close*—very close indeed. Perhaps it was the queerness of those big roots to the trees, or the tallness of the grasses—I'm not sure. Anyway I wandered in that jungle, and you know I'd always read that if you were turned loose in the jungle that you went round in circles; that you lost your head, and that you got a sort of jungle terror that gripped hold of your heart and twisted it up into a knot inside and got you all of a hopeless, helpless dither. Believe me, gentlemen, *nothing like that happened to me*. I enjoyed every minute of my time in that jungle—and the queer little noises: they were just fascinating.

There was something that kept on making a noise like *chicket!* It went on and on: *chicket, chicket, chicket, chicket, chicket*. And in the sort of dark grey light that was over everything—that reminds me, gentlemen, I don't quite recall having seen light like that anywhere else. It was exactly as if you were seeing things by night, but without the inky sort of blackness of night. Well, as I was saying, in that dark, greyish sort of light everything was very black and sharp and you could see the grass moving and quivering as you looked down the long, thin avenues of the jungle. They reminded me rather of the



pictures you see taken of the Underground Railway tunnels; quite round the tunnels seemed, and the trees and grasses curved round and looked rather like the inside of a tube railway—rows of ribs, going side by side into the black distance; only they were dark grey instead of that rusty sort of whitewash there seems to be on the inside of tube tunnels.

I hope I'm making myself clear. I hope I'm not muddling up descriptions because I happen to be a bit observant. Well, as I got into the jungle and walked on—but perhaps you'd like to know why I walked on. You see, I had a sense that it was a great adventure, and that it might be my only chance of ever having one. I seemed to know my way, and I wasn't a bit scared. It was marvellous walking softly, ever so softly, down those dark grey tunnels. I felt I was living every minute of my life with a terrific thrill—I suppose it's the sort of thrill a man gets when he breaks a speed record and feels that he's lived every second for a few minutes, as dangerously and excitingly as it's possible for a man to live. Well, gentlemen, creeping through that jungle I felt just like that; and I don't think I'm exaggerating when I say that I really felt as confident as a really keen racing motorist must feel. I was absolutely under control. And I kept on congratulating myself that the jungle couldn't get me rattled.

Then there were all the exciting smells and noises. At first there was only the Palm House smell that I told you about, and that *chicket, chicket, chicket* noise. Then other smells began to creep in and make themselves known. There was a scent of wet crushed leaves—a vinegary sort of smell, and I could smell the bark of the trees; a greenish, leathery kind of smell, that was. Gentlemen, you can't describe smells. It's not possible. The words aren't there. There's no language of the nose. As I went on I could hear very, very soft noises as if there were people round about me who were watching my approach and gradually creeping away from my path. You know, I took it well. I took it kindly. I felt that if there were people round there—natives and what not—that they were doing the right

thing, they were letting me enjoy the jungle alone. And it wasn't, oh, for quite a long time that I began to wonder whether perhaps they'd never seen anything quite like me before, or whether maybe they were afraid. I don't know. Perhaps I was an unusual experience for them. I didn't think that there were any parts of the world where natives hadn't come across white men. They say, don't they, that there are no parts of the world left unexplored, although I've always felt that that was rather a big claim.

However, these noises did suggest that men, and other things, were stealing away from my path—withdrawing, as it were, and leaving me a clear, free road to wander wherever I wished to wander. That's well mannered, I said to myself. And it *was* the essence of hospitality. They might have felt that I should have been, shall we say, embarrassed. It was their jungle, not mine. And then, gentlemen, I made an odd sort of discovery which puzzled me a bit. Very well, before I go on to that I'll explain how I got there.

You see, it wasn't a bit like an ordinary holiday. Not a bit. I had to have a change. I've been told in this very room often enough that I ought to make an effort to get right away from everything, and uproot myself, as it were. And everything was made very easy for me. I got Molly and the children down comfortably to Devonshire and settled them into that farm at the edge of Exmoor, and then I went off on my own, and I felt I wanted to get right away, right into the heart of nature. And I reckoned I'd have to go abroad for that; not one of these conventional ordinary sort of foreign holidays with a tourist agency holding one hand and a crowd of foreigners helping themselves to everything you've got in your pockets. I wanted to get right away to the—well to where I got. Back into the jungle. I don't know quite why I said *back* into the jungle because I'd never been there before. We'll skip over how I got there—that's the most sensible thing to do; you don't want to be bothered with details of travel. Really, it was quicker getting right away than I'd ever thought was



possible. From the time I put my car up at that place in the New Forest on the road to Southampton to the time I got there—well, there seemed to be hardly any interval. I suppose, come to think of it, most of England was jungle once. Perhaps not, though—I've heard of ice ages and that—there's nothing icy about my jungle—and that's another funny thing.

I knew it was hot; but the heat didn't mean anything to me at all. I just bathed in it and liked it. Stealing along between and over those great big tree roots, and being close to the ground, smelling all those warm earthy smells, and getting excited at the thought that something might presently flit across the tunnel I was walking down and give me a chance—there—no, no, of course I mustn't get too excited. You told me that last time I went over the story. Thanks for reminding me. But it was an odd situation for an Englishman to find himself in, anywhere. Funny that the jungle took me that way; but perhaps this particular jungle always affected white men like that.

It came upon me quite suddenly what I was doing. I don't know why I realised it; but—perhaps I can show you better if you put the light out. Do you mind? Are you sure your friend won't mind? It's essential you know, because—ah, thank you. I can explain better in the dark.

I realised quite suddenly that I was walking through that jungle at night. At *night*, gentlemen. And I was seeing everything as plainly as if it was day. Now why was that? Can you guess? It's because, gentlemen, I was walking like this. You see, although the light's out and it's quite dark in here, I'm not knocking anything over, am I? I'm not knocking my head against the legs of the chairs or the table. I can see everything in this room as I saw it then. I can see the legs of your friend over there just as I saw that little white flash of a succulent little animal, I don't know what it was, some sort of jungle hog I suppose, round and white. Gentlemen—it was just irresistible. There now! I do hope your friend won't mind! No, I didn't really mean to bite. Really, sir, I'm frightfully

sorry, and I expect only the skin is grazed, although I have torn the stuff rather badly. Still—it can be invisibly mended. Please forgive me—but I got carried away. I discovered, you see, gentlemen, that I was walking on four feet in that jungle, and that the eyes I was looking out of weren't my usual eyes. That's why I could see in the dark. That's why I've felt ever since that the only possible thing to be is what I was then. Unfortunately there are no facilities for that in England. Yes, I don't mind the light being on now, thank you.

It's a good story isn't it? But what am I to do about it? You've been wonderfully sympathetic—what's that? Your friend thinks that there *may* be facilities in this country? No, *not* in this country. I quite understand. He's heard of my jungle? In spite of the fact that I've forgotten where it is and can't even remember how I got there. You could actually arrange to send me back? It's only a question of a signature on a form? I'd no idea you were interested in any sort of travel agency—oh, perhaps it's your friend. Oh, you both sign it, do you? And there's a car waiting here ready and I can start now? I must say you're thoughtful. I'd no idea, no idea at all, that you could work so fast, doctor. Of course, I'd be delighted to go now. I shan't even bother about luggage. What's the use of luggage to a leopard?

## PUBLIC DINNER

“**Y**OUR excellencies, my lords, ladies and gentlemen, pray silence for grace.”

The toastmaster, splendid in his scarlet tailcoat, with a lapel crowded with miniature medals, had a rich, ringing voice. The six hundred guests at the dinner stood at their places with bowed heads, while a Dean said a short Latin



prayer. Then the clatter and tinkle of service began, and like musketry, conversation chirped and popped and rattled from every table in the vast banqueting-hall. But it was interrupted by the toastmaster who rapped on the wall behind the top table where he stood just behind the Chairman, and cried aloud once more in his beautiful, carrying voice: "Your excellencies, my lords, ladies and gentlemen, will you remain perfectly still for one moment please while a photograph is taken."

Everybody became aware of a large, black-draped object at the far end of the room, supported on stilts, with a ladder behind it, on which stood a gaunt, eager-eyed man in an ill-fitting dinner suit. This man raised his voice and said: "Still, just one moment, ladies and gentlemen, please." And there was a suppressed titter, for it was a shrill, reedy voice, in such startling contrast with the fruity, rounded tones of the toastmaster, that it came as a shock. It was a voice without dignity or authority, a voice that might easily be devoted to a lifetime of querulous complaining.

"What a deliciously old-fashioned-looking camera he's using," remarked the beautiful and famous woman who sat on the right of the principal guest. Somebody near her said: "Oh, they've done away with those awful flashlights now, you know, and they've gone back to those old, large cameras. Room used to be full of smoke for the whole evening after they'd taken a flashlight photograph."

The toastmaster bent down respectfully and whispered to the principal guest: "Would you be kind enough to stand, my lord?"

"Must I?" said the principal guest, who was a Cabinet Minister. And, with a reluctance which lasted for exactly three seconds, he rose to his feet.

"Still, everybody, please—still," came the reedy tones of the photographer.

He ducked his head beneath a velvet cloth, and in the darkness surveyed the vast, immobile throng, every face turned eagerly towards the camera, except at the Press table, where

the reporters ignored this inevitable prelude to a great public dinner. The photographer had got everything exactly as he wanted it, and he remembered, with pleasure and excitement, that this was the moment he had desired for many years. He realised now how profoundly and how passionately he had anticipated this instant of triumph. For half a lifetime he had been thwarted; condemned to ineffectiveness by a bleak self-knowledge, oppressed by a sense of personal defeat, and doomed by one crushing disappointment to a sequence of failures. Ever since that man, who now stood so proudly surveying the room and looking directly towards him at the lens of the camera, ever since that man had stolen the one thing in life that he wanted, he had been oppressed and baffled; condemned to observe the success of his rival, and to envy his triumphant competence, his opulent self-assurance. It was one of the oldest stories in the world; two men starting even, and one man by his superior glitter and dash winning the sort of girl who was a real partner.

The photographer, under the hot, black cloth, grinned to himself. Well, she'd made her choice; and she'd made her man what he was now; if she'd chosen another partner, she might have made him something different from an underpaid, not very skilful operator in a big firm of commercial photographers. The man at the camera knew that he had the knack of failure. After the War, when his rival started his career, he began to flit from job to job, from loss to loss, from one humiliation to another, never actually starving, but never knowing any period of prosperity, always just managing to keep his head above water, with nothing left over for the fun of things, without pride, without hope, and embittered always by the knowledge that the man who had beaten him in love was fulfilling his ambitions, plausible brute that he was! It would have been easier to bear if he had just been plausible, without being so efficient. He had *got* there.

Well, this evening, he was going to get somewhere else. He had, for a long time, planned just this occasion, but it had



always seemed hopeless to bring it off, for he was seldom entrusted with a really big and important job like this dinner. It was only because influenza had laid out two of the best operators in the firm that he had his chance this evening; and he was going to make the most of it. At least he could make plans; at least he had rehearsed this occasion; at least he had preserved one gift. During the War he had worn the crossed guns of a marksman on his sleeve. He spent a few shillings in a shooting-gallery every week practising. Although an expert would have wondered why such an enormously bulky camera had been introduced and set up in the banqueting-hall, none of the guests for a moment suspected that the camera masked a rifle, with an ex-sniper behind it. From the empty lens-chamber of the camera, the muzzle of that rifle projected, perhaps half an inch. That long coffin-shaped camera concealed the barrel; the stock was cuddled into the photographer's right shoulder, and he squinted along the sights, his finger on the trigger. He had bought the rifle long ago and had kept it in good condition. It had been easy enough to conceal it with the other apparatus he had brought to the banquet, and as the empty, make-believe camera was draped by a cloth and the rifle lay along the bottom of the long box, nobody could suspect anything.

He lingered on the aim for a couple of seconds. It was a wonderful moment. He revelled in it. This was worth living for; and worth dying for. The consequences did not worry him in the least. He was tired of his round of failure, and was quite agreeably excited by the prospect of the tragic finish he had arranged for himself and his rival.

He grinned as he thought of the shrieks of horror that would follow the spit of flame from the eye of the camera. The recoil would probably knock him backwards off the steps, and the whole apparatus would come crashing down. Twenty seconds had passed, and the guests would begin to fidget presently.

Now was the time.

It was impossible to miss that figure standing there. It was

the clearest mark in the room. His aim was certain, and he pressed the trigger.

There was a faint *click*! Nothing happened. He pressed the trigger again, and again, and then he realised that even in this supreme moment his inescapable inefficiency had shattered his triumph. He had omitted to load the rifle.

This was the last humiliation. He withdrew his head from the cloth, stood up, and everybody relaxed, and then came the incident of the evening, the incident that was *news*. In his reedy voice, he shouted: "It'll be a rotten photograph—just like all of you." And jerking the rifle from its hiding-place he hurled it to the ground and laughed a shrill, high-pitched laugh, not easily forgotten.

It could only be regarded as an attempt on the life of the principal guest, who as a Cabinet Minister expected publicity though not of this variety.

"I can't imagine what the fellow could have against me," he said to his wife that night.

The toastmaster and his wife were also puzzled. "I can't think what he could have had against his lordship," said the toastmaster. "Funny that we should meet again like that. Why, I haven't set eyes on him for the best part of twenty years, Sally. Not since you broke off your engagement with him."

THE END





# FIRST ONE AND TWENTY

An Omnibus containing the first novel and twenty selected short stories by

**JOHN GLOAG**

Mr. Gloag's first novel, *TOMORROW'S YESTERDAY*, was published in 1932, and it was about an adventure in the future, ending some 3,000,000 years hence. It was immediately recognised as an original work of an unusual kind. Frank Swinnerton said of it that "the book seems to me both original and powerful, and those qualities are so rare that it is bound to attract a lot of attention." Compton Mackenzie said: "I most strongly recommend reading it . . . those who fail to follow my advice will miss an unusual experience." Now it is reprinted, together with a selection of twenty of Mr. Gloag's short stories. Ten of these tales have been reprinted from his collection of short stories published under the title of *IT MAKES A NICE CHANGE*; many of them have been broadcast, and *Jungle* was included in *The Best Short Stories of 1937*, edited by E. J. O'Brien, and *The Cigar* in *Best Broadcast Stories* (1944), edited by Hilton Brown.

Of Mr. Gloag's short stories, the *Times Literary Supplement* has said: "Mr. John Gloag's short stories are carefully constructed to startle, surprise, or mystify a particular public, and each is skilful and highly successful in achieving its object. The variety of his topics, his range, his gusto, provide something for every reader."

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