CONFESSIONS AND IMPRESSIONS

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CONFESSIONS AND IMPRESSIONS

Ethel Mannin

"My candle burns at both ends;
It will not last the night;
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends,
It gives a lovely light!"

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

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MY DEDICATION

IS

AN EPITAPH

TO

one who died before this book was finished. The dedication was originally planned as " because he has a first-class mind," and, altered now to the past tense, so remains.

" For I in thy heart had dwelling,
And thou hast in mine forever "

" It is something to have wept as we have wept,
It is something to have done as we have done ;
It is something to have watched, when all men slept,
And seen the stars which never see the sun ;
It is something to have smelt the mystic rose,
Although it break and leave the thorny rods,
It is something to have hungered once as those
Must hunger who have ate the bread of gods."

G. K. CHESTERTON

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MY OWN STORY: SELF-PORTRAIT

"We are what we are by what we have experienced."

I

GENESIS

PORTRAIT OF MY PARENTS

THERE was a young Cockney with vivid blue eyes, a riot of fair curling hair, and a romantic imagination inherited from his Irish forefathers, who fell in love with a little dark-haired, brown-eyed country girl. His grandmother came from Limerick, but he was born and grew up within the sound of Bow Bells : the little country girl was born and grew up on a farm. These two were conveyed to and from the country church at which they were married in a farm waggon ; then they came home to the top half of a tall old house in Clapham, just off the Lavender Hill, and there, two years later, in the autumn of 1900, I was born.

I did not want to be born, and, like that unhappy heroine Susan Lennox, even when born had to be galvanized into some sign of life. My mother wanted me called " Stella," which I should have much preferred to their final choice, but my father objected to it because of Stella Maris—who was an incubator baby, I understand —and he found the association of ideas unpleasant. " Mannin " is an old Irish name—there is a Mannin Bay in Galway—and whilst there are a great many Mannings there are very few Mannins. As all Irish people are, as a matter of course, descended from kings and queens, the Mannins claim direct descent from Brian Boru, the first king of Munster . . . but as the family seems to have been desperately poor, for generations, it does not appear to have done them any good.

I inherited my father's fair hair and Celtic imagination, and my mother's practicality. My father knows all the lore and legend of the Little People. My mother has " no

patience with such nonsense." My father will sit out in the garden seeing the stars caught in the tree-tops, awaiting the rising of the moon, and listening for nightingales . . . until my mother puts her head out of a window and tells him for goodness' sake to come in or he will catch his death of cold. . . . Or my father may be sitting seeing pictures in the fire and day-dreaming of faery lands, but herself will come bustling in and want to dust the chair he is sitting in, and she cannot have him " sitting mooning there " when she wants to turn out the room. . . . Even as a child I remember my father sighing and saying : " If ever your mother goes to heaven, glory-be, the first thing she'll do will be to start polishing up the angels' harps, and the throne of God Almighty Himself. . . ."

Not until adolescence did I realize the deep affinity between my father and myself ; throughout my childhood I had what the psycho-analysts to-day call a " fixation " on my mother. She could not enter into the secret world of my imaginings, and I hid it away from her, yet I literally could not bear her out of my sight. I used to be very proud of her because she looked so young that other children at school sometimes mistook her for an older sister. She always seemed immeasurably superior to other people's mothers, who appeared to be always very " stodgy " and middle-aged. To-day, with her short hair and short skirts, her immense vitality, and her bubbling, schoolgirl sense of fun, she is younger than ever. Years younger than I, whom life caught up early and flung into a vortex of experience as much beyond her imaginative comprehension of such things as beyond her knowledge of it. Hers is not the pitiful, dieting, face-lifting, artificial " youth " of so many women to-day ; there is not a single artificial thing about either of my parents ; not a drop of pretence anywhere. My mother just *is* young ; her youth springs from some deep source within her ; she is young for no other reason than that she has never really grown up. When I look at her neat, vigorous, energetic little figure, and eager, youthful face, I am amused at the trouble which women on a higher social scale take to preserve their youth. For here is a woman who has worked hard all her life, brought up three children, never had time to fuss with her face or figure or take care of herself,

never done any of the fashionable things, lived all her life the " woman in the little house," and yet, turned fifty, she can without any effort look no more than forty, and sometimes not that, do a twenty-mile tramp in the country and enjoy it, and find an uneventful life the most amazing fun. I should say that she has a gift few people have—the gift of happy living. From her I think I inherited my own vitality and zest in life.

She brought me up to believe that if ever a man said " anything out-of-place " to me I must have nothing more to do with him . . . but she omitted to define what would be out-of-place, and when what was said might be in place, and somehow I never seemed to find out.

She also brought me up to say prayers at her knee. " Our Father," " God bless——" and " Gentle Jesus." My brother was let off with only the first two, but I had to go on to " Gentle Jesus " because I was three years older, so that I never disliked him quite so much as immediately after I had asked God to bless him. I always had difficulty with the " Gentle Jesus " prayer, and my mother would wax impatient, so that it would go somewhat like this:

" Gentle Jesus meekanmild, look upon—look upon," and then my mother impatiently, " Look upon a little child! Get on with it!" I would blunder on again, " Suffer me to come to Thee, pity my—my——" and then my mother, her irritation rising, " For goodness' *sake*! Pity my simplicity, you little idiot!" Then with tears streaming down my face I would struggle on, " In the kingdom *of* Thy grace give-a-little-child-a-place," and as likely as not would get my ears boxed at the end for saying it so badly. . . . She is always a little pained when I remind her of this, as though I were reproaching her. She is as sensitive as she is shy.

The curious part is that in spite of all the prayers and grace at meal-times, and insistence on regular attention at Sunday School, my mother is not, and never was, what is called " religious." Church-going is another of the things with which she has " no patience." But my brother and I had religion inculcated into us because it was " the proper thing " for properly-brought-up children, and her great pride in life was to bring her children

up correctly and "keep them nice." By the time she had another daughter, however, when I was fifteen, during the war, she had already shed a good many of her Victorianisms, and still more seemed to be shed with the shingling of her hair a few years ago. Most of her views and attitudes to life are still highly conventional, it is true, but they are positively "broad" compared with the principles upon which my brother and I were brought up. . . .

We are quite different kinds of people, my mother and I—our outward utter dissimilarity, herself a brunette, myself a blonde, is almost symbolic—but it is impossible not to love her for her honesty and simplicity and lack of pretence, or not to admire her for her unfaltering high spirits and her warm generosity in the matter of self-sacrifice and giving. . . . If my father would seem to be even more generous it is because he is less practical, with less sense of possession. If he likes you, whatever of his you may take a fancy to he will promptly give you, and he can never pass a beggar in the street. . . . He is fond of quoting, "Cast your bread upon the waters, for it shall return to you after many days." . . . I don't know that much has ever returned to him, but he has done a lot of casting. . . . He wrote me once, in his grandiloquent Celtic manner, that I might have the strings of his heart to tie my shoes with, an it please me, and because of that deep affinity between us I know that it is literally true. . . .

My father does not care how I achieve happiness so long as I achieve it. My mother always clings to a wistful hope that I will "manage" without doing anything too "queer." They are both, I think, rather surprised at having produced anyone so "odd." No one in the family before had ever written, so perhaps it *was* a little "uncalled for" . . . But I began writing when I was seven years old.

I am very glad indeed that my parents are exactly as they are. It would distress me considerably to have a father who read *The Morning Post* and *The Financial Times*, voted Conservative and was "something in the city," and a mother who wore artificial pearls, carried a lap-dog and played bridge to while away the time be-

tween luncheon and tea, or tea and dinner. Nor should I like them to have been of the semi-detached social strata, priding themselves on keeping a maid—twelve-and-six a week and all duties—and sweating their souls out to run a cheap car and keep up appearances. The middle-classes are tiresome enough with their snobbery, but the near-middle-classes who try so desperately hard to be what it isn't worth being, anyhow, are insufferable. One's pity gives out before their stupidity.

There are people who do not fit into any of the class distinctions ; they are the real people ; it does not matter whether they have five pounds a week, fifteen, or fifty ; it does not matter whether they are professionally poets or greengrocers, artists or artisans; their common denominator is their authenticity ; they are Philistines, and proud of it. They do not clutter up their lives with a lot of ideas about themselves ; they do not wallow in a muck of idealism ; they do not spell art with a capital A or beauty with a capital B. They do not make grand differentiations between love and lust, or talk in terms of higher and lower natures ; they do not insult the God who made them in His Own Image by being ashamed of their bodies ; they are not particularly concerned with the conventions, but neither are they painstakingly unconventional. They are neither God-fearing nor God-deriding ; they simply can't be bothered ; they are too busy living to have time to ponder life. They have the simple, unself-conscious decency and dignity of the animals. They do not care about pedigree, education, income ; they do not measure success in terms of money, breeding in terms of blood, or culture in terms of learning. They may be peers or they may be plumbers ; when they are plumbers they have no inferiority complex about it ; when they are peers they do their best to forget about it. They are not literary ; they strike no mental attitudes. They do not say, " This is good ; this is bad ; this is right ; this is wrong ; this is beautiful ; this is ugly." They say, " If you like that sort of thing, that's the sort of thing you like," and " that's all right for you ; this is all right for me." They do not attempt to establish criteria ; they are not concerned with accepted standards. They are Philistines, and do not care. . . . They are no respecters

of persons ; they like what and whom they like, and have no views on the matter. They do not go about the world being Broad-Minded about this and that, or, as Wells says, " seeing no Harm in It, and making you quite sick with the things in which they see no harm." They are neither Highbrows nor Lowbrows, for they know that a Lowbrow is merely a Highbrow gone wrong and become an intellectual pervert. It is as perverse to be shocked at the thought of patronizing Woolworths as it is to imagine that there is anything commendably democratic about doing so. . . . From all the conscientiously unconventional and broad-minded, Good Lord deliver us. . . .

What is there to choose between a man who boasts that his father was a peer, and the man who boasts that his father was a plumber ! The defiant snobbery of the plebeian is as stupid as the arrogant snobbery of the patrician ; the affectation of the Lowbrow as tiresome as the affectation of the Highbrow. . . . Therefore for the ranks of the Philistines who do not care one way or the other, recognizing neither class nor intellectual distinctions, praise Ye the Lord. . . .

So that, as a Philistine, when I state that I was born at Clapham, went to a board-school, and at fifteen got a job as shorthand typist, I am not boasting about it ; neither am I apologizing ; merely making a statement of fact as a point of interest. A certain set of conditions and circumstances produces a certain result, and that is all there is to it.

II

CLAPHAM COMMON

PORTRAIT OF A CHILD

1

ODD that I, with my particular set of circumstances, should have met my first celebrity when I was three years old, and that on Clapham Common. True, I had to wait a long time before meeting any more—unless one counts

the Queen of Portugal who, at the Crystal Palace in 1910, presented me with a prize given by the R.S.P.C.A. for an essay on cruelty to animals. . . .

Walking on Clapham Common with my father is my earliest memory. We could walk along the asphalt paths between the iron railings, and, where there were no notices about keeping off it, we walked on the grass, which afforded one access to gorse bushes, whose flowers it was good to pick off and drop into a small basket of coloured straw, squeezing out a pleasant, almondy scent in the process. There were also brown and white clover-heads one could pick, and fascinating paper kites with long tails to be watched, sailing high up to the blue patches of sky beyond which one firmly believed God sat on a golden throne surrounded by angels with wings more beautiful than any swan's. As for a long time I did not know that there was any more world beyond Clapham, I believed that Heaven was the place situated immediately above Clapham Common.

I find that all my early memories are associated with the smell of things, and I never smell the pungent green smell of mown grass without instantly seeing again Clapham Common with its iron railings and little scrubby gorse bushes, its asphalt paths and its broad stretches of grass shining like green fire in the sunshine. I always see it as a sunshine picture, I suppose because I was only taken there on fine days.

John Burns was the celebrity I met there. He came striding across the grass towards us, a short, thick-set figure with a beard, and a small boy at his side—the son who grew up to be killed in the Great War. He stopped and chatted with my father, whilst I stood clutching my basket full of the heads of flowers impatient of their talk. I was always impatient of the seemingly interminable talk of grown-ups. I would wait and wait for them to finish. I would think, despairingly, that soon they *must* finish, because there couldn't possibly be anything in the world left for them to say. Aunts would come to tea with my mother, and talk and talk and talk ; in the bedroom whilst they took off their hats and their fascinating feather boas ; in the kitchen whilst they helped Mother to get the tea ; at the table whilst they sat round the huge

japanned tray upon which the tea-things were set out—we had a special Doulton tea-pot which was always brought out on special occasions, and special little fluted cups with pink flowers; I had a special cup with an incrustation of purple and gilt flowers which hurt my mouth when I drank from it, but which I thought very beautiful—and in the " front room " afterwards, until it was time to go, which was never until long past my bedtime, so that I would lie in bed and hear the curious hum of their voices going on ceaselessly, and sometimes their silly, loud, grown-up laughter, and I would lie there in the dark, resentful and angry, with great dark tides of hatred sweeping me, and feeling terribly alone. All through my childhood, ever since I can remember, I had this feeling of loneliness.

But my father and John Burns did not talk long in the sunshine. We had to get back promptly for dinner, otherwise we should have been scolded. My father said, as we strode over the grass, " That was John Burns," and there was a great satisfaction in his voice. I did not know who John Burns might be, but I realized that he was an important person, for my father seemed so excited and pleased about having met him, and it was the first thing he told Mother when we got in. So far as I could gather the two important points about him were that my father and he had been in the same choir together in Westminster—the Socialist League choir—and that he was a Member of Parliament. I gathered also that my father admired him very much, because he was a socialist. From the time I was five years old I knew that a socialist was the proper thing to be. I went on believing this until I was eighteen, and then I did not care any more. By that time life had caught me up relentlessly and I had no time for abstractions.

2

It was on Clapham Common that I went to my first flower-show. It was a chrysanthemum show, and the first really lovely thing that had happened to me. I was three years old and wore a white dress, and a white

bonnet with an enormous starched white frill standing out all round. I was sulky when I was taken there, partly because that stiff starched bonnet was uncomfortable and I always hated wearing it, and partly because an aunt accompanied us and talked incessantly to my mother, so that I had that resentful feeling of being left out. And then we came into a long narrow hot-house stacked with enormous flowers, and a warm, sour-sweet scent pressed down about us.... They were incredible to me, those giant flowers with their petals like thick curling hair and their queer scent. . . . I remembered that chrysanthemum show for a long time afterwards. I would lie in bed at night and screw up my eyes at the low-turned gas-jet, and it would shower out into yellow and red flames like the flowers I had seen, and if I pressed my face into the pillow, with my eyes tight shut, I would see them again, yellow, red, and white sparks that somehow merged into shaggy chrysanthemums....

Linked up with my memories of Clapham Common is the memory of Lavender Hill on a Saturday night, myself in a little wooden " push-cart," the string shopping-bag hanging over the handles. Saturday nights had a peculiar quality of their own, because of the flares on the street-stalls, red as fire against the night-dark sky. The crowds were more dense, too, which was an added excitement. This fascination of street-stalls, and the flavour of a marketing street on a Saturday night, have remained with me. Now, as then, I find a curious excitement in the dark tide of humanity, the yellow glare of lights from the shop-fronts, the warm smell of people pressed close together, the dark fire of the market, bunches of wallflowers stacked on barrows, the earthy, country scent of them, the pungent smell of oranges, and the great glowing blaze of their colour, the bunches of grapes, white and black, suspended like Japanese lanterns from the awnings, the white nakedness of scrubbed celery heads gleaming wantonly in the flicker and shadow, the rhythmic rows of shining apples, and the subtle, acid aroma of them.... And the black-shawled gipsy-looking women who sold these things, they and their rough men-folk with the scarves about their necks instead of collars and ties, and

brass ear-rings to their ears, gipsy people, infinitely romantic. . . .

All along Lavender Hill they would be ranged, and between them and the pavement stalls put out by the shops themselves, and dark press of people intent on their marketing, hands clutching string-bags and baskets, eyes searching, hands picking over a piece of meat here, a pair of kippers there, pinching the hard green cheeks of cooking apples, delving ruthlessly into green vegetable interiors for their hearts, shopkeepers and costers shouting prices, a din of traffic and shouting, a confusion of movement, colour, shadow, flares . . . and myself of it yet safe from the crush of it, excitingly, being pushed through it all, like a small, dexterously manipulated ship on a dark sea, in my little chair on wheels. Something deliciously dangerous to my child-mind, too, about the wind-blown flares forever threatening the awnings, dipping towards them and then away again, tantalizingly . . . and with it all a great busyness, expertly slick twisting of brown paper bags, cabbages and beetroots wrapped in newspaper, potatoes shot briskly into whatever receptacle was handy, as often as not into the well at the bottom of a perambulator. . . . Fascination of the string-bag which reveals all our purchases growing fuller and fuller like a fishing net heavy with a big catch, and then a bunch of wallflowers, perhaps, stuck in at the top, and then going home, turning our backs on the lights and the busyness and the excitement, turning into dark empty streets, and the scent of wet wallflowers going with us under the starriness. . . . And then coming in at last to the tall old house with its musty smell of closed rooms never adequately aired, and of all the meals ever cooked in it, and a little of the piddled prams left always in the hall . . . and mounting the steep dark stairs, blundering a little as we go, for my mother clings to the heavy bag, and I cling to her skirts . . . and coming finally into our own part of the house, and the little room with the green cloth on the table, and the canary covered up for the night, and the kitchen range shining . . . a room mysterious with the blue-grey dimness of the turned-down gas, somehow removed from everydayness in this strange hard twilight, and a little frightening. . . .

But one night there was an even greater excitement than Saturday night on Lavender Hill. A timber-yard opposite the house caught fire and blazed all night, so that all the sky turned crimson and the windows of the houses opposite grew hot. . . . One was allowed to watch, wrapped in a shawl, long after one should have been in bed and asleep, and next day instead of walking on the Common one was taken to see the black desolation of the remains of that gigantic bonfire.

That fire entered into my imagination as the chrysanthemum show had done. I could not get it out of my mind. It was no longer the shaggy heads of great white and yellow and red flowers I saw when I pressed my face into the pillow at nights, but great sheets of flame, and the horror of the charred remains. After that any mention of a fire was tremendously exciting, in a frightening sort of way. I had a book in which there was a picture of a fire-engine dashing to a fire, and somehow that picture became imbued with a peculiar horror. So, too, did a picture of a runaway steam-engine, charging along with sparks flying in all directions. The title of the story it illustrated was "The Runaway Train." That picture had for me all the fascination of horror, so that I must turn to it again and again. The thing preyed upon my sweating imagination to such an extent that finally, in a very crisis of unendurable terror, I stuffed the book into the kitchen grate. I suppose I was about four years old at the time—certainly not more, for my brother, born three months after my third birthday, was lying in a wicker cradle on the floor at the time and crying incessantly. I suppose that I was in a state of childish hysteria, for suddenly I could not endure the crying, and snatching up his comforter I dipped it into the coal scuttle and stuck it into his mouth, then placed a heavy book open in the middle down upon his face. He cried more loudly than ever at that, and I ran out of the room. . . . Fear had thoroughly got into me. Why aren't parents more careful of the books they put into the hands of very young children? Why do they tell them frightening stories—stories which, if they pause to think about it, *must* be terrifying to a child? I had a picture book in which wolves were pursuing two men in a sleigh—the nostrils of the

horses were distended with fear, and the two men were brandishing their whips at the oncoming pack.... This, too, got into my imagination, so that when I went into a dark room I would break out into a sweat, and the darkness would be thick with horror. I ended up by tearing the picture out of this book and destroying it, too, by stuffing it into the kitchen grate. But I could not tear the stalking fear out of my imagination.

Grimm's Fairy Tales, when I was five years old, kept fear alive for me. The story of the " boy who could not shudder," in spite of dangling corpses and nightmare horrors in the turret of a castle, stories of robbers who cut off the fingers of a dead woman in order to get her rings. . . . The brothers Grimm committed a crime against children when they wrote those grisly stories, and the reading of them to young children or allowing children to read them for themselves, should be made a criminal offence.

Fear played a great part in my childhood, and one fear, the horror of machinery, I have carried over with me into adult life. It first came to me when I was about six years old, when I looked in at the door of an electric light works. I had an impression of a nightmare mass of machinery going up to the very roof, piston-rods shooting, vast cylinders revolving, furnaces glowing, everything in action, I felt that if I went near I would be drawn into it and consumed. I thought, " The men who have started all this machinery going—supposing they can't stop it," and hysterically I would want them to stop it.... It was dreadful, and yet so profound is what Anatole France calls " the fascination of danger at the bottom of all great mysteries " that I could never pass the electric light works without looking in; it drew me to it, magnetically, and I would even extract a kind of morbid pleasure from the sensation of horror and fear it aroused in me, a curious voluptuous excitement.

Machinery of any kind, but particularly revolving machinery, still fills me with an hysterical panic, but without the excitement of my childhood. My horror of it has intensified rather than diminished with the years, but there is no longer any fascination in the horror, or any sensation of sensual enjoyment to be derived from

the emotion of fear. I have tried to overcome this obsession by resolutely going into the engine-rooms of ships, telling myself that once and for all I will conquer these absurd reactions, rid myself of this infantile neurosis, but upon each occasion the same frantic, unreasoning panic has got hold of me, and I have been literally unable to bear it. A few years ago I went up into the Belfry of Bruges ; I had not realized the vastness of the bells at close quarters, or the nature of their mechanism, and the old nightmare terror swept down on me, so that I was reduced to a state of shuddering, sobbing hysteria. The thing is so intense that I cannot even look at machinery as shown in film pictures—involuntarily I find myself flinching and turning away, and no amount of calm reasoning beforehand, no attempts at analysing myself, can overcome the horror. One cannot reason about an emotional reaction. In that remarkable peasant film " Finis Terrae," the great lamp of the lighthouse was shown revolving; I tried very hard to steel myself to look at it, but I felt the familiar nightmare, hysterical horror welling up in me, sweeping me with the irresistible compulsion of an orgasm ; reason snapped before that compelling force and I was again defeated and had to turn away, shuddering. A French film depicting the mechanism of the Eiffel-Tower did the same thing to me ; it was shown as part of the rhythm of a plastic poem, an extraordinarily interesting film idea, but the *motif* was always that mass of revolving wheels taking the elevators up and down the tower, so that I had to miss the greater part of what, from what I did see of it, would appear to have been one of the most interesting experiments in expressionist films done since the " Ballet Mécanique."

It is the only " complex " I have, but it is evident that it goes back to the fears of those early years—the horror of the fire-engine and the runaway train.

III

THE FARM

PORTRAIT OF A CHILD (*continued*)

I

A POSITIVELY orgiastic fear would seize me sometimes as a child. My mother, as I have said, came of farming stock, and the farm figures largely in my childhood. There were there always a great number of dogs of whom I was actively afraid, but I would like to ride on my father's shoulders high above their level, and a very ecstasy of fear and delight would come upon me when they leaped up at me, barking, and I safely out of their reach. . . . There was all the thrill of danger without the risk. Very vividly that impression stays with me —looking down as from a great height, the eyes of the leaping dogs red and fierce—excitingly, exhilaratingly fierce.

That quality of excited fears seems to have got into most of my childish reactions and impressions. It was a curiously psychological fear—that is to say, I was not afraid of anything specific going to happen to me; it was a subjective fear in the feeling of things. It was of the feel of life that I was afraid and which drove me in upon myself from the time I was three years old. In the case of the farm dogs I had very little tangible fear of their attacking; my predominant fear was of the tingle of excitement their semblance of savagery could create—not the savagery itself.

Beyond the farm orchard there was a railway line, and hearing the approach of a train I would be seized by the compulsion to run like mad to get to the fence at the bottom of the orchard before the train; a sort of panic would get into me, a horror of my not getting there in time, and the gradual approach of the train would be a steady crescendo in keeping with the frantic racing of my heart; they would race together, my heart and the train. There was no joy in this train business; some-

thing wept dreadfully in me if I did not arrive at the same time as the train ; it was somehow dreadful, so that one sat there beside the fence, among the long grass full of tender wild flowers, feeling one's life ebbing away on a tide of fears. . . . Always this terrible, consuming orgiastic excitement in things. But if one arrived at the same time as the train, then one triumphantly bestrode the fence, feeling that all was well with the world, screwing up one's face and laughing at the sun through a rosy haze of apple-blossom or a green trellis of leaves from which the fruit hung like little shining lamps. . . .

There was a brickfield adjoining the orchard, and a little truck would go to and from the building to the bottom of the deep clay-pit on a railway. The passing up and down of this truck was another source of excitement. It was somehow intensely important to be in readiness to see the truck before it finally disappeared into the hatch at the top of the building ; its descent back into the pit was less important, but to catch the truck going up was in the nature of a driving, urgent necessity ; there was no sense of enjoyment or fun about it, any more than there was about the train ; there was too much compulsion about the thing for that, and if one ran to the hedge too late to see that final engulfment, one had that exhausting sense of deprivation and defeat, just as, catching it, one had that sense of satisfaction.

As a good Freudian I have no doubt that all these things analyse out as a substitute for masturbation. The more conscious substitutes came later. I was at this time not more than six years old.

The brickfield was a rather frightening place, with its great ovens and furnaces, its sinister buildings and sheds, and the deep yellow pit with the clay-coloured water at the bottom. This pool was given a macabre quality because of its alleged depths. It looked very evil, somehow, lying there so deep down, so still, and the colour of a toad. One would set out to walk a little way along the road that led up to the ovens, but one always turned back before having gone far, as though horror oozed out of the clay itself, and leered from the gloom of the ramshackle sheds. Yet because of that quality of dread about the place one had to walk there, irresistibly

savouring fear as a vast luxury. . . . The orchard itself would have been a happy place, but for the nightmare quality of the brickfield and the distressing distraction of the infrequent trains. One resented the proximity of those things ; they came between one and one's happiness in the blossom and the long flower-dappled grass. Always they would tear themselves between one and contentment. But this orchard was the first one I ever saw, and it has remained in my memory as the loveliest. I never see an apple-tree in blossom but what I think of it. It entered so intensely into my childish imagination that it came to represent for me the epitome of all the beauty in the world, so that on sunny days something in me would ache for it when I was not there ; one felt that one would be happy if only one could get back and look up at the blue of the summer sky again through the sweet foam of blossom or the green sea of leaves, with the birds picketing amongst the slender traceries of the branches.

There was a rickety gate to the orchard, and beside the gate an old grindstone, and rough stepping stones going down to a pond, across which a willow tree had fallen and grown mossy lying there. One could cross by this pontoon to a little bank on the far side, and squeeze through a green façade of soft leaves and bead-like pink berries, to follow a little path that led nowhere. It led nowhere, but yellow irises flanked it, and in the soft mud immediately below grew all manner of lush and lovely water-flowers ; moor-hens would scutter out unexpectedly from the sedge, and one could sit at the end of the cul-de-sac and feel infinitely removed from everydayness.

It was a very solitary child who walked there. There was, somehow, no one one could take with one into the secret land. One became less solitary as the young brother grew older, but at that time he was only three years old, so there was no one. The real world became absorbed into a world of fantasy. One took such things as the little secret path that led nowhere and made a secret of it, wove it into the fabric of one's introversion, so that in one's fantasy nobody knew about it save oneself. One was always discovering secret places that

one could have to oneself like this. One was solitary without any sense of loneliness.

2

At the farm one suffered very much from the callousness of grown-ups. One was constantly bringing in bunches of bluebells, buttercups, cowslips, arranging them lovingly in stone jam-jars and ranging them along the wide window ledge of the kitchen, or, if there was no room there because of all the scented geraniums and fuchsias which filled the place, on the less cluttered ledges of the back kitchen, but wherever one put them, next day one would find them thrown out into the ditch by the vegetable garden, where all the refuse was flung prior to being dug into the earth. When one made one's indignant protest, one was told that they were " dead," or that they were " rubbish." It is curious how little imagination adults bring to bear where children are concerned.

One suffered very much, too, from the disposal of kittens. One day one would see the little mother-cat purring contentedly with her litter, and next day would meet her wandering all over the place mewing piteously. One learned that her babies had been drowned, and one broke one's childish heart in secret. It was not so much the kittens one mourned for, as the grief of the bereaved mother. Fear had got into life long ago, but it was at the farm that pain got into it, too. . . . And realization of death. One found dead things. Soft brown moles that one buried sorrowfully in cardboard boxes in the rick-yard, under the elm-hedge behind the stacks ; and sometimes one found dead birds—shot for thieving in the orchard. Nobody seemed to care, " A dead bird," they would say callously, " throw it away, it'll have maggots or ants in it." As often as not it had, but one laid it tenderly in a grave of leaves and wild flowers watered with bitter tears.

Strapping young uncles in corduroy breeches and leather leggings would bring in rabbits and hares shot in the fields ; they would be hung up in the dairy, with a

pan below them to catch the blood dripping from the gun-shot. One was invited to stroke them. "Still warm," they'd say, smiling at me, and never guessing at the awful pain of it tightening one's throat and burning at the back of one's eyes, at the touch of the soft warm bodies of the dead furry things that had been so recently *alive. One felt that one could not bear it . . .* and *retired into one's* secret world where wild creatures did not come to violent ends from gun-shots, or snares, and where calves were never taken from their mothers, so that sad-eyed cows thrust their heads over the flowering hedges and lowed pitifully for their little ones. . . .

People would say: "What a quiet little thing she is!" and never guess at the unbearable pain and ache going on in one. . . .

The farm had its frightening aspects, too, as well as its fascination and its pain. There was an uninhabited part of the house given over to the storing of grain and cider-apples, dusty little rooms approached by narrow stone passages, with barrels of cider resting on trestles in odd corners. There was something eerie about this part of the house, it was so cold, so untenanted, so secret, and smelt of dust and apples, and a little like a barn. Sometimes field-mice made their nests there, only to be discovered and ruthlessly flung out on to the stones outside, where the little ones would lie with their pitiful broken bodies, heartbreakingly, and a child would creep away to weep in secret, at enmity with the unpitying world of adult people

The attics of the house were eerie, too. One glimpsed them at the top of steep sharply twisting stairs. The walls were washed with a ghostly blue distemper, and smelt strongly of stored apples. One had a fugitive feeling that Something lived there, a disembodied, nameless something, the incarnation of stalking fear itself. I was taken up there once and found bare rooms with cobwebs in the corners of the low, down-sloping ceiling, and apples in piles on the floor, and stored in barrels. Bunches of dried herbs hung from the beams of the ceiling. There were cobwebs across the windows. There seemed a great mournful loneliness up there, so that one was glad to come down again into the warm

familiar friendliness of the kitchen and see the huge fire blazing in the inglenook.

Whole branches of trees would be laid across that great fireplace, and would smoulder there, oozing sap, and giving out their gipsy smell. . . . Is there any sweeter or kindlier scent in the world than the smell of a wood-fire? The love of that good smell is carried over from the memory of those childhood days, when one crouched there in the great chimney corner, gazing up the vastly wide chimney and seeing the sky at the top. A massive chain, thick with soot, suspended from a giant hook in the wall of the chimney, and at the end of the chain hung a huge black kettle. If one pushed a burning branch with one's foot a great shower of sparks would be sent flying away up the chimney; some of the sparks would catch on the soot and settle there a moment before extinction, like snowflakes that linger before melting. There were benches in the inglenook, and at the back of the benches a sort of shallow trench used for storing newspapers. It was here that the cats usually had their kittens. But one did not then know where the kittens came from; one had a vague idea that the cats went out into the meadows and somehow found their kittens, or scratched them up from the earth, and bringing them into the farm kitchen deposited them there in the chimney-corner.

Always the day before we were to return home I would be plunged deep in the chronic melancholy of childhood. Why do people refer to childhood as the golden age of happiness, and the happiest time of life? There is no sadness so profound, no suffering so intense, as the sadness and suffering of a child. I would drown in so deep a sea of sorrow that the gates of my self-created secret world would not open to me. I would forget all the hurting aspects of farm life, and remember only the lovelinesses . . . the sweetness of the orchard, the lure of the little path that led nowhere, the buttercup field like a golden sea, the barn with its soft deep hay and mysterious twilight even at high noon, the kitchen garden, with the plank across the ditch, and the sharp green smell of nettles and the blue bird's-eyes in the rough grass of the narrow paths, and the currant bushes,

white and red and black, with the old lace curtains over them to protect them from the birds, and the sweet-briar roses that grew where they were least wanted so that it didn't matter if you picked them, and the jungle of trees outside the back kitchen door where the chickens ran loose, and which was thick as a wood, the water-closet at the end of a path of rough stepping-stones, ivy growing over its tiled roof, romantic as a summer-house, the great, syringa tree in the middle of the jungle with its shower of waxen sweet-smelling blossom that the young uncles wore for button-holes on Sundays, when they wore their best blue suits and went walking with their young ladies in the green lanes . . . romantic water-closet, nettle-grown kitchen garden, shining white tree of orange-blossom, bay-trees whose leaves were plucked and used for flavouring milk-puddings . . . one mourned them all, intolerably, with the deep, inconsolable sorrow of a child. . . . One mourns them still in a mist of dream-bound memories.

IV

PRIVATE SCHOOL

PICTURE OF A SYSTEM

Soon after I was six years old I was sent to a private school in a small private house. It was run by an elderly widow and her two undoubtedly maiden daughters. The memory of it comes back to me with the warm smell of privet flowers on sultry summer afternoons, for there was a high privet hedge in the garden, and its hot scent would come into the schoolroom with the school odour of children's bodies and india-rubber and exercise-books and ink.

The school called itself a preparatory school, but for what it could possibly prepare anyone it would be impossible to say. The children were divided into two groups, " The Big Class," and " The Little Class " ; it

was all very indiscriminate. We learned history by committing to memory prose passages from history books. In this way I acquired the valuable piece of knowledge that William the Conqueror flew to Normandy, and I always pictured him flying up in the air in a magic trunk, like an illustration in my Hans Andersen fairy-tale book. I was given lists of words to learn to spell, and I learned them backwards, so that I would sit repeating to myself such things as " t-u-n spells nut," and " t-o-n spells not," and so on. I was given sums to add up. We used slates, which we used to clean with saliva, wiped off with sponges; we used each other's slates, and it did not occur to anyone that our cleaning process was highly unhygienic. I learned multiplication tables parrot-wise, without ever understanding them. I tried to learn to read, but without any marked success. I learned that the world is round like an orange, and that there are five continents and a North and South Pole, which I, of course, thought of as poles sticking up at the top and bottom of the world.

I was dreadfully unhappy and tormented here. I would feel dazed with all that I was told and required to commit to memory. Various small boys would create a diversion in the midst of this welter of tediousness by exposing their little genital organs under the desks for the amusement of the little girls. The habit spread, until the older boys used to follow suit. The little girls would giggle, but I would be frightened, because I had been brought up to be full of shame about bodies in general and genital organs in particular. I never used to tell my mother. I have often wondered since if the other little girls confided in their mothers. I don't think so, or they would have been removed from the school. We of that generation were all brought up on the same appalling hush-hush principle of shame and silence. Very few children of that generation, I think, made confidantes of their parents.

I was so agonisingly shy and timid that I was fair game for the older children's teasing. A group of the older girls would amuse themselves by tormenting me until I would say a funny little obscene word. But I would think of God listening, and of Jesus who had

died for sinners, and keep silent, and then they would twist my wrists and goad me, " Go on, say it ! Say it ! " until at last, unable to bear the torment any longer I would sob out the required word, trusting that God would understand how it had been forced out of me, and hoping He would not see it as a sin. . . . And then I would remember that Jesus had had nails driven through His Hands, and I could not stand a little pinching and wrist-twisting, and would be terribly ashamed. . . .

It was an incredible school. A child would be refused permission to " leave the room " until the little over-strained bladder began to relieve itself and the poor child suffer agonies of shame by being sent home for the offence. This occurred not once but several times—I don't know whether those disappointed spinsters derived any sexual sadistic satisfaction out of it. I can think of no other way of accounting for this monstrous cruelty to children.

Sometimes we were taken out into the garden at the back of the house and rather ineffectively drilled or made to play round games. In the afternoons we were all assembled in what was referred to as " the morning room," and spent the afternoon at a long ink-stained table with the widow herself at the head of it, in a curious reading lesson, or we would be read to—and through a window at the far end of the room I would see my mother waiting outside with my young brother in the perambulator, and my heart would yearn for her, and the dear freedom of the outer world . . . but the voices would drone on, and the close room be drenched with the pungency of the privet flowers, suffocatingly. One would seem to smother in the smell of the place and the consuming ennui.

I made no friends at that dreadful little school, but I fell in love with a boy about two years older than myself who had wetted himself standing on the " dunce's stool," and burst into tears when he was finally released to go and do what he had already done. I felt his suffering terribly and loved him from that day on. I wanted to tell him not to cry, that it wasn't his fault, that I understood, that he needn't be ashamed. Actu-

ally I never spoke to him all the time I was there, but I would lie in bed at night and think of him, and a warm new sensation, exciting and a little frightening, yet pleasurable, would sweep me. He got so much into my imagination that for weeks I would look forward to going to bed so that I could snuggle down into the warmth and dark and secrecy of the bed and indulge the voluptuous pleasure which invariably came with the thought of him. I was six years old and affected by a personality for the first time. I remember that the boy's name was Maurice, that I thought him beautiful with his riot of waving brown hair, and loved him with an aching compassionate love.

There was also a girl of about twelve whom I thought both grown-up and beautiful, immeasurably beyond me, but she had nothing but contempt for me. She wore petticoats with wide lace to them, and knickers with coloured ribbons run through. She was fond of doing high kicks—presumably to show off this seductive lingerie. I knew a curious quickening of the senses at the sight of her; she was a dashing and lovely being infinitely removed from me. But I have forgotten her name. I suppose that it is because I unconsciously shrink from the memory of her. She was one of my sadistic persecutors.

V

BOARD SCHOOL

PICTURE OF ANOTHER SYSTEM

AFTER a year at the private school my parents decided that they were not getting results for their money, and my mother thought that now that I was seven years old, even if the board school was "rough," as report had it, I should be able to fend for myself. A friend of hers had just sent her child there without any noticeable harm coming of it, so that perhaps it wasn't so bad after all. There would be at least a few "nice" children there, and birds of a feather, etc.

The council school was an enormous barracks of a building attended by some six hundred children. There were never less than twenty children in a class at a time, and sometimes over thirty, but the inspectors were against this, and desperate efforts were made to keep the maximum figure to thirty, though it was not always easy. Sometimes, in order to give an overworked teacher a chance to get exercise books or examination papers corrected, two classes would be formed into one and we would sit six on a form instead of four, the rest standing at the back of the room and flanking the walls. These double-class lessons had the attraction of novelty and helped to relieve the infinite tediousness of the days.

Not that the curriculum lacked variety. We were switched exhaustingly from subject to subject throughout the day. We began with hymns and prayers, followed by a Scripture lesson ; then in rapid succession would follow dictation, arithmetic—an hour of this dreaded and painful subject—geography, grammar ; an hour for lunch, then back for drawing or painting, reading, history, drill. We had ten minutes' break in the morning and five minutes' in the afternoon. I believe that very much the same system still prevails in council schools to-day ; there is a time-table and a set syllabus, through which the children are rushed by tired and overworked and underpaid teachers for whom teaching is a job rather than a vocation. There is no room for the intelligent man or woman in the orthodox educational system, and increasingly thinking men and women are coming out of it and going over to the ranks of radicals like A. S. Neill and Bertrand Russell. Many of these radicals are themselves recruited from the ranks of orthodoxy. They are the pioneers of the new education ; they educate by not educating ; they know that all education is futile. Ultimately there will be no more schools just as there will be no more marriages, but we shall have centres where young people may learn a trade so that they may find a place in the social order. Apart from this kind of technical training, there are probably only two subjects worth knowing anything about, physiology and psychology. All the other subjects, history, science, literature, are matters of personal taste

and interest and to be studied or disregarded accordingly. Russia and Germany are gradually adopting the saner educational outlook, and the " free " school idea is taking hold in this country. It is undoubtedly the education of the future, but it has terrific forces of conservatism, prejudice, and bigotry to combat, and in the meantime children suffer and are literally ruined, left in that state which H. G. Wells describes so admirably in dealing with Mr. Polly after education had done with him ; " the same state that you would be in, dear reader, if you were operated on for appendicitis by a well-meaning boldly enterprising, but rather overworked and underpaid butcher-boy, who was superseded towards the climax of the operation by a left-handed clerk of high principles but intemperate habits—that is to say . . . a thorough mess. The nice little curiosities and willingness of a child in a jumbled and thwarted condition, hacked and cut about. . . ."

Even in these enlightened [*sic*] days the board-school child is still slapped if its mind wanders—but why should a child care about the points of Magna Charta or the Repeal of the Corn Laws . . . all around is life with its limitless interests, but the unfortunate child must sit by the hour till its little buttocks ache, listening to a dreary spinster droning on interminably about things which adult persons did long ago and which no normal child can be expected to care about. Like similarly educated children to-day, at this particular school we were required to learn by heart the manufactures of Lancashire and Yorkshire, the tributaries of the Tyne and the Clyde ; we shaded maps to indicate rainfall and mountains ; we learned about prevailing winds ; one place manufactured " rolling-stock," and another stood on a " rocky eminence " ; the romance of the atlas was destroyed for us by our having to draw maps . . . we were bullied through the intricacies of algebra, cubic measure, and decimal fractions. . . . I often see various of the girls I was at school with ; I see them pushing prams and gazing thoughtfully at grocery displays, and I wonder how much they remember of decimal fractions, and what good it has done them as human beings to know that one place stands on a rocky eminence and another

manufactures rolling stock. . . . It has all fallen away from them, of course, as it falls away from all of us; we retain only that which interests us, and only that which interests us is ever of any practical use. Yet as children we were subjected to the dreary system from six to fourteen . . . those of us who were lucky escaped then; others must go on for another three or four years, cluttering up their minds with knowledge so that their intelligence and its natural function is clogged and cramped forever.

Fortunately for myself I lived too much shut up in my fantasy world for much harm to be done me from outside, and at fourteen I left school and began getting educated in the real sense. But that board-school had its shocks. A nurse came once a week and examined our hair for lice. The girls who were verminous had to be segregated and sat at benches together, shamed outcasts. They were generally known as " the dirty girls." The teachers themselves used to refer to them as such. No, this is not back in the dark ages of history; it was in 1908. In 1914 when I left the school the expression was still in use.

The children who came from very poor homes—and there was a number of them—were provided with a free midday meal, but the scheme was conducted in so condescending a way that the snobbery of the other children was invoked, and the recipients of the charity were made to feel their social lowliness. Those of the poor children who came to school dirty and ragged were given print pinafores with which to cover themselves, and they were seated apart from the others. Collections of pennies and ha'pence were made in class for the fund for the provision of these pinafores, without regard for the humiliation of the unfortunate children concerned. With the dreadful snobbery of the lower-middle-classes a parent of one of the better off children would occasionally write and request that her precious darling be not sat next to some poor child whose hair smelled of the solution of quassia chips advised by the nurse, and whose pitiful squalor was concealed under the print pinafore of respectability.

The inspection for vermin, the annual medical inspec-

tion for both eyes and teeth, and the free meals, were all commendable measures made offensive by the clumsiness and stupidity with which they were administered. The amount of stupidity current in orthodox education is colossal. I have seen a head mistress cane a child who was already hysterical; the girl was caned as a point of discipline; she had refused to submit to the corporal punishment, kicked and screamed, and the thing had developed into a tussle between the child and the head mistress. The child was finally expelled as being unmanageable and for gross insubordination, the head mistress took three aspirin, had a cup of tea, and went to lie down in " the teachers' room " feeling herself a martyr.

Occasionally an outraged mother would come up to see the head mistress to protest against her child being submitted to corporal punishment, or to protest against the charge of the child being verminous; head mistress and nurse jointly or separately, as the case might be, would invariably treat her with sarcastic contempt. The mother would generally come of rough working-class stock, and in her indignation would become abusive and violent, but the head mistress and the nurse invariably won; they had law and order on their side, and simple people have a superstitious awe of law and order and those in authority. It would be pitiful to see these simple forthright women who knew more of life and its realities than those withered virgins would ever know, subdued by the cheap sarcasm which a little " education " makes possible. Even at twelve years old something in one protested violently, so that one wanted to cry out: " Don't let them bully you! Being school-ma'ams doesn't make them God's chosen people! " One was somehow ashamed to be there looking on at the humiliation of those tired, bedraggled women. . . . One knew the kind of homes they came from; one passed them on the way to school; one knew that they had large families and very little money, and that rents were high and food dear, and one knew, somehow, in the blind intuitive way that children do know profound things, that when you are tired and hopeless and poor keeping half a dozen kids clean and tidy isn't as easy as

it sounds. . . . One felt so pharisaical, somehow, on those days when one had to assist the nurse by showing the unclean children and their outraged mothers into her austere, unsympathetic presence. It was typical of the lack of imagination of the whole system that children should have been put into that intolerable position of assisting authority with its bungling stupidity.

There was at this school, as at many other council schools, I believe, a department for mentally deficient children. It was known as "the silly school." The teachers themselves referred to it as such. "Take this note over to Miss X in the silly school," they would say. A child who had a club-foot or a deformed back would be sent to this department, irrespective of its mental condition. The preposterousness of this did not seem to occur to anyone.

The children in this section of the school had their playtime at a different hour from the rest of the school. They were in all respects completely segregated, and as such were of intense interest to the rest of us, and with the terrible cruelty of children we had no compunction whatever about taunting a child with having to go to "the silly school." For myself I was always terrified of these abnormal children. To have to take a note over to the school was at once exciting and terrifying. I never knew quite what I was afraid of, but the same blind fear recurred to me a few years ago when I had to go to a mental hospital to see a patient whom I had undertaken to transfer to an institution over here. The sleep-walking scene in the *Caligari* film filled me with the same curiously indefinable horror. Always this stalking shadow of fear, inescapable. . . .

At the board-school I lost a little of my painful shyness and became inordinately vain about my long hair. The fact that I had the longest plaits in the school compensated a little for my sense of ugliness. Sometimes I would look at myself in the mirror and decide that I was really not so dreadfully ugly if only I did not have to have my hair dragged back off my forehead in that unprepossessing manner. I was very self-conscious about my high forehead, and for many years wore my hair drawn over it to hide it. This sense of ugliness was

another factor which tended to turn the key in the padlock on the door of that fortress into which I had retired from the time I was about five years old.

Part of the general stupidity of the educational system to which I was submitted was the monitor system, which did its best to make a prig of every child who kept on the right side of the teachers—and the child who is not popular with other children must necessarily resort to ingratiation with the teachers. I was too much of an introvert to be very popular with my contemporaries at school, and became, therefore, one of those offensive, unnaturally well-behaved little prigs who are the darlings of the teachers. When I got slapped it was for stupidity, never for bad conduct. I did not mind these slappings very much, and had a contempt for the girls who would burst into tears—there were those who wept hysterically, overcome with shame and humiliation, and those who wept because they were physical cowards. The slappings would make one's arm sting and the red mark would stay for a long time, but one had a contempt for the teachers who slapped—they would look so silly, with their hair flopping up and down with the force of administering the punishment, and their faces going as red as the smacked arms, and they would look foolish and sheepish, somehow, afterwards. No, slappings didn't amount to much, it was "the cane" which was the ultimate disgrace. The shame attached to it was so unbearable. One could get "the cane" for very bad conduct in class, talking, laughing, or writing notes, or eating sweets, or for very bad work. If one did a series of bad examination papers one was liable to get the cane, though just how being struck on the palms of the hands with a cane was likely to give one a better understanding of the intricacies of decimal fractions, cubic measure, and compound interest, was never made clear to us. But then fear was the keynote of the educational system, and to a very great extent still is the dominating factor, fear of being kept in, of being bullied, held up to ridicule, sarcasm still being the last refuge of the schoolteacher brand of stupidity. The child has no defence against the cheap, petty malice of sarcasm flung like poisoned barbs into the sensitive naked flesh of its

natural honesty, and the more honest and natural the child the more it is in the wrong with adults in general and schoolteachers in particular. I once in my childhood's simplicity told a teacher that I did not understand the sums I had been set; she shook me and sent me back to my place and told me to stop there until I did understand them. I was dazed beyond speech. I had not understood, I had told her so, and yet she was angry. . . . It was all bewildering. I thought: "If I sit here for ever I shan't understand, and she can't make me sit here for ever because she will want her dinner, and they will have to shut the school sometime. . . ." Childhood develops early a sort of philosophic despair, a despairing philosophy, regarding the stupidity of adults.

Corporal punishment is dying out in schools, but it still exists, or the threat of it exists, and so long as that is so, so long as there is the liability of invoking it, however slight, fear must be the controlling force. Fear was at the back of all education of my generation—to a very large extent it still remains at the back of orthodox education to-day, but there is an incipient sanity, the small cloud on the horizon as yet no bigger than a man's hand. Our children stand a better chance of happiness to-day, and their children will stand a still better chance. But the monster Fear still stalks the earth. Fear was at the back of one's religious training, fear of the God who saw everything, and who finally separated people, some for everlasting joy and some for the horror of everlasting hell-fire. Fear was at the back of such sex education as one was able to evolve for oneself out of the scraps of half-knowledge which came one's way via experiments in school lavatories, and whisperings among groups of girls in corners of the school playground during recess and after school—and on the way home from Sunday School.

VI

SEX AND RELIGION

PORTRAIT OF AN ADOLESCENT

At the board-school all the girls were morbidly interested in parturition, menstruation, and procreation. The older girls talked of little else. We raked the Bible for information, and those of us who came from homes in which there were books made endless research, looking up in encyclopædias and home medical works, such words as "confinement," "miscarriage," "after-birth," "puberty," "menses," "life, change of." We were both fascinated and horrified. At the age of twelve I ploughed through a long and difficult book on embryology. My brother did likewise at the same age. God knows what either of us got as a result of our search for knowledge. We had no one to guide our footsteps stumbling in the dark. Apart from the purely scientific aspect, which was beyond our comprehension, everything was "all along a dirtiness, all along a mess . . . all along of finding out, rather more or less." We had a number of obscene little rhymes which were passed by word of mouth to each other, and were written up in the lavatories by the more enterprising. Periodically there would be a campaign organized by the head mistress against these lavatory scribblings. Anyone found out was expelled, but it never occurred to anyone to clean up the mess by a little simple explanation, so it all went on, and as fast as the indecent words and rhymes were whitewashed over new ones would be written up, and along the walls and pavements and on the fences of the alleyways near the school, and nobody did anything.

Once we had a lesson on catkins, and the teacher boldly referred to the pollen from the male hazel catkin falling on to the pistils of the female catkin and fertilising it so that the ovaries swelled and developed into the nut. There was a good deal of sniggering over this; adolescence, with all its sexual instincts quickening, is not to be

educated by delicate references to the pollination of flowers. As my friend Douglas Goldring once remarked to me, " I always did suspect those darn catkins." . . . I am reminded of the lovely—and illuminating—story told of a little girl who had been so " enlightened " ; she had been a bridesmaid at a wedding, and coming out of church asked her mother: " Will he give her his pollen now, or wait till they get home ? " It should be a lesson to " nice "-minded mothers who make the whole thing indecent by references to flowers and butterflies, instead of keeping to the simple biological facts.

I was about eleven when I was informed by a girl of my own age coming home from Sunday School that she had found out where babies came from.

Breathlessly I asked, " Where ? " for the great mystery was about to be unfolded at last. She nudged her sister who was with us, and they giggled. " Go on, you tell her."

" Oo—I can't—it's awful—you tell her ! "

At last nudging and whispering and giggling they opened their Bible and pointed to the line which held the supreme truth. I read: " Esau came forth from his mother's belly."

It seemed unspeakably dreadful, conjured up visions of sanguinary major operations. I was very miserable. I blurted out my discovery to the family at tea. I remember queerly that there was watercress for tea, and the best Doulton tea-pot was in use. A terrible anger was working in me as I gazed at my mother and father. All their stories of currant bushes, storks, and doctors' bags. . . . I burst out: " I know where babies come from. Mary told me."

My mother said drily: " Well, where *do* they come from ! "

I said: " From their mothers' stomachs," and burst into tears.

My mother said: " Well, now you know. Get on with your tea. There's nothing to grizzle about. You've no business to be talking about such things."

After that Mary and I looked at every woman who passed us in the street to see if she was going to have a baby. Mary would be amused, and I would be grieved. I was unhappy for a long time about the whole thing,

and not until I was fifteen did I know how parturition took place, and horror was heaped on horror's head. Menstruation was another shock. It all seemed dreadful. One took refuge more and more in one's secret self. How different it has all been, thank God, for my own child, who has never been solemnly told anything, or had to pick up scraps of half-knowledge from here and there, but has grown up with the knowledge since she was three years old and thinks nothing of it, has seen animals mate and witnessed the births of their young, and herself at eight years old most scientifically removed a too persistent placenta from a recently accouched pet-goat, as dispassionately as a trained mid-wife. . . .

For a long time I refused to believe that the father had anything to do with the creation of a baby—in spite of all the funny little indecent rhymes and the assertions of the girls who had it on good authority from home medical books and older brothers and sisters. But the fact that mating did go on in the world was forced upon me by—silk-worms. The moths got united. There was no denying the dreadful fact, and it bore out the truth of the distressing things one had been told by the other girls concerning fathers and mothers. It was unspeakably shocking. I had a friend who also bred silk-worms and had been similarly shocked into realization by the conduct of the moths which hatched out of the cocoons.

"Then it's true about mothers and fathers," we whispered, and horror shook us. We swore great oaths that we would never, never marry. My friend thought she would become a nun; I thought I would go to Africa and be a missionary—it being taken for granted that missionaries were holy and therefore did not coalesce. I got a box from Sunday School and began collecting for a fund to buy Bibles for the unenlightened heathen. It was tiring and dreary walking the streets and going from door to door, but I was glad about that. One needed to suffer to make up for the wickedness of the world. Jesus Christ had died for the sins of the world, therefore it wasn't much to grow tired tramping the streets in the same cause. . . .

I used to hold religious services in the back garden. I would spread a clean pocket-handkerchief on a kitchen

chair, lay upon this altar cloth my Bible, my New Testament, my Hymns Ancient and Modern, and the Sankey and Moody hymn book my mother had bequeathed me, a relic of her own childhood, and I would prop up against the rail of the chair a little silver cardboard cross I had got from Sunday School one Easter, and my brother and I would sing hymns and say prayers —under my direction. But my brother never "got religion," as I did, and as he grew older he refused to be dominated, and rebelled, and went his own ways. going long lonely walks, and cycling, and we quarrelled, then, bitterly, and hated each other heartily until we were both out of our adolescence, when quite suddenly we rediscovered each other and found that we liked each other, in a casual, dispassionate sort of way, as though there were no blood relationship at all.

I used to make my peace with God under cover of the bedclothes at night. I would hold long and passionate converse with God. I loved Jesus Christ and a china doll called Jessie more than anything living at that time, more even than my parents or my young brother. I loved the doll because she was ugly, and I bestowed a veritable agony of aching love on her, because I thought myself so ugly, and that just as nobody could love me because I was so ugly, so nobody could love her, and I must love her and in a queer twisted way make up for the love which I felt could never come to me.

I was confirmed at fourteen, and wore a new white dress and a borrowed white veil, and white shoes and stockings, and was intoxicated by the scent of the lilies on the altar and the beauty of the vestments of the officiating bishop. After that I would get up early on Sunday mornings and go to Holy Communion before breakfast with an empty stomach and a great feeling of holiness. A slight feeling of dizziness and sickness would assail me after kneeling a long time in church, and on the way back one felt too hungry for religious ecstasy. During one year I attended an evening service for every saint's day in the year and all through Lent, but this was less love of God than love of a dark-haired, dark-eyed young clergyman whom I thought the most beautiful person in the world. To take the bread and wine at his

hands was ecstasy; a smile from him would illuminate all the day. I was walking alone one day in the silver-birch woods of Wimbledon Common, weaving my fancies as I walked, in the fashion which was my custom for years, when like a miracle he came walking up a narrow path which converged at the grassy plot I had reached. He smiled and passed on, and I went on walking through the green cascades of leaves like one who on honeydew had fed and drunk the milk of Paradise. My friend also adored him, and we were quite happy to share this consuming passion together; we would keep our eyes open as we knelt in prayer so that we might see him. The blood in our veins sang sacred music whenever he came near. One went on loving Christ, but it was a dark-eyed Christ striding up a narrow path between dipping silver-birch trees in spring morning sunlight. . . . When I won a prize for a poem on the Nativity I asked for a copy of *The Imitation of Christ*. I read this book avidly. I had already read *Pilgrim's Progress* several times and yearned to live in the imitation of Christ, and here in this little volume, it seemed, were the full directions. I would take this book on to the Common and sit among the woods and read it, striving passionately to model myself according to the rules set forth for the spiritual life. But it all seemed desperately difficult, and I did not see how I could ever persuade my mother to allow me to conform to all the simplicities of life that were admonished. But perhaps, I thought, God would make allowances for the things I would not be allowed to do in His service. There was a Roman Catholic church which I discovered, and a seat under a lime-tree outside, and I would sit there of a summer evening reading the admonitions for the spiritual life until it was too dark to read any more. Then I would go home full of uplift, yearning, oh so passionately, to live in the imitation of Christ.

I was deeply religious until I was sixteen, and then the artist who appears later in this story, and who was my real education, put into my hands the essays of Robert Green Ingersoll and Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*, together with a Rational Press Association Annual, and I became an agnostic. It was a compromise with God—

and a clinging to my childhood's faith. I would not say that I did not believe, although in my heart I think I did not, but that " I did not know."

VII

SOCIALISM AND POETRY

PORTRAIT OF AN ADOLESCENT (*continued*)

1

THREE things of importance happened to me at the board-school, three important contributions to my education, though none of them was down on the syllabus drawn up by the local board of education. My socialism was fostered in secret by a communist teacher; I discovered poetry by accident, and I fell in love.

The falling in love and the fostering of my socialism came through the same source—the communist school-teacher's interest in an essay I had written on Patriotism. It was the subject set us—sometimes we were allowed to choose our own subjects—and all the girls wrote ardently of loyalty to one's King and Country—it was 1914—and spoke in glowingly insincere terms of the Union Jack. I wrote quoting Dr. Johnson's words: " Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel." It was something I had heard my father quote at home.

For this piece of flagrant subversiveness, and at a time, too, when we were all making paper rosettes in the Belgian colours, and singing the French, Russian, and Belgian national anthems, I was called up before the head mistress, lectured on the wickedness and stupidity of my attitude, and caused to kneel for a whole morning in the school hall, a punishment popular in this school. The idea was that one would be ashamed, for every class marched through the hall on its way to the class-rooms, and the ignominy of one's position was revealed to all. Actually one experienced no such humbling emotion; one felt rather heroic, and when there was no one in the hall to observe one would sit on the floor and examine

the " housemaid's knees " one had developed, or get up and stroll round looking in at the museum cases—until footsteps advancing along the stone corridors would send one scuttling back to one's kneeling position in the centre of the floor, hanging one's head and looking very abject and remorseful and getting ready to say that one was sorry in the hope that the " governess " would spare the rod and appeal to one's better nature, when as likely as not one would cry in a luxurious orgy of facile repentance.

The severity of the lecture, and the long kneel in the hall, plucked no brand from the burning where one's politics were concerned, however. On Empire Day, when the whole school, Boys, Girls, and Infants, were required to turn out in the school yard and salute the flag as they marched past, the revolutionary in me emerged once more. I would not salute the Flag. My Flag was the Red Flag, according to the creed set forth by my father, and the communist teacher who had admired my essay deriding patriotism. I made this declaration with my little frightened heart beating like mad, but all the time hammering in my head the memory of my talks with my father, and with my adored Miss X. I think I would have died then and there rather than salute any flag but the Red Flag. I was threatened with expulsion. But I was prepared to face all the fearful odds for the ashes of my fathers and the temple of my gods. So whilst the rest of the school marched through the playground and saluted the Flag—the girls' salute a ladylike waving of handkerchiefs—I knelt in the hall with my beating heart and my hurting knees and my terrific sense of martyrdom for a splendid cause. I freely forgave my Miss X. that she must march past with her class and salute like any capitalist or " jingoist." She dared not risk getting " the sack." My young heart bled for her. She looked at me as she passed through the hall with her class. I saw that she was wearing the red rose I had given her that morning when I arrived at school. The red rose of love, the red flower of liberty. My little frightened yet unfaltering heart sang.

Through this Miss X. I learned about George Bernard Shaw, the Fabians, Jingoism, and the Independent

Labour Party. After my essay on patriotism, which my own class teacher must have shown to her as a piece of childish precociousness, she had asked me one day if I would come to her room after twelve. I had done so, and she told me she had read my essay and asked me where I got my ideas. I had replied that my father was a socialist, and that I didn't see how anybody who believed in Jesus Christ could be anything else. She had applauded this sentiment, and after that I went to her room every day after her class had gone, and standing by her desk I would listen to her reading extracts from the *Labour Leader*. If we heard anyone coming she would thrust the paper back quickly inside her desk and pretend to concentrate on a pile of exercise books, and my heart would beat high with an exciting and romantic sense of conspiracy. I would feel like an early Christian meeting in secret in a Roman catacomb.

On Saturday afternoons in summer we used to go out to Richmond, she talking earnestly of Junkerism and Capitalism and the sins thereof, and the red dawn for which the Labour Party worked and hoped, her eyes like two blue flames. In the winter she would take me to St. Margaret's Church, Westminster, where Goss-Custard gave organ recitals. And I loved her, dear heavens, how I loved her! Once when she kissed me at the end of one of our precious lovely Saturday afternoons I walked home in a trance of ecstasy. I loved her literally so much that it hurt, and she was for me the meaning of all things that are. I wrote her the most passionate of love-poems. In every lovely thing I saw or read I came near to her.

I wrote a great deal of " sad and beautiful poetry " at this time, and it got sadder and sadder as I drew towards puberty, when I got to the stage when I used to think with Shelley that " I fain would on this very midnight cease, and the world's gaudy ensigns see in shreds." I believed with him that " verse, fame and beauty are intense indeed, but death intenser. Death is life's high meed." At twelve or thirteen I wrote a long poem in blank verse entitled " A Song of Death." Miss X., to whom I showed all my secret writings, said that it " showed ability," but was " unnaturally morbid for a

child." This hurt a little, but there was ecstasy even in the pain of loving her. There was a persistent masochism in all my loving at that time, but a curious streak of sadism would sometimes be imposed upon that morbidity. In the stories which I wove incessantly in my mind all the time I was alone, from the time I was seven years old, there was always a beautiful girl whom I loved, and who suffered very much for no other reason than that it gave me an excuse to make her burst into tears, when I would comfort her in a sort of agonized passion of love. Until my adored Miss X. opened new worlds of thought and emotion to me, every term I fell in love anew, and always in my mind's interminable stories the girl I loved would be worked into a situation involving tears which only I could dry. The girls themselves never knew anything about my passion; I was much too shy to do more than worship from afar and ache with love in secret. But in my fantasy life my hidden love found ardent expression. Miss X. was the culmination of those adolescent loves, and she was educating me, though in a way that would have horrified the Board of Education had it known anything about it.

2

This Miss X. was the cause of my writing a good deal of poetry, but poetry itself I discovered by accident during one of the dull reading lessons. Orthodox education does its best to kill poetry for children; officially my knowledge of poetry was confined to the deadlier parts of Shakespeare—heavens, how they spoil Shakespeare for one at school—excerpts from "Hiawatha" and "Evangeline," "Sir Ralph the Rover walked his Deck," the ghastly sentimentalities of Wordsworth's "We are Seven," and that tiresome affair about the host of golden daffodils. We were required to memorize the verses and chant them aloud, in unison, "with expression." Browning was spoilt for me for years by learning "Oh to be in England now that April's there" in this fashion. We were taught to chant it, "Oh, to be in *Eng*land, now that *A*-pril's there" in a sing-song which I hear in my mind to this day whenever the words

are quoted . . . " and the *brush*-wood sheath round the *elm*-tree's bole, are in *tiny* leaf." Oh, the coquetry and girlishness of that " tiny leaf " crescendo . . . and how we all hated it, and how self-conscious all this " expression " made us, a sort of undressing in public. It was always the nastiest little girls who put the most " expression " into their recitations and their readings aloud. " The Death of the Duke of Wellington " was a great trial to us for a whole term. " *Bury* the great duke," said very slowly and pompously, and then, *con expressimo*, " with an *Em*-pire's *la-a-am-entation*." And there was a dreadful little poem, " There are *faeries* at the bot-tom of my garden," and another about " The silver birch is a *dainty* lady." And Kipling's, " Where are you *go*-ing to, all-you-big-steamers." . . . If one acquires a taste for poetry at school it is invariably by accident.

I discovered poetry one dull reading lesson when looking through the school reader I chanced upon "Kubla Khan." I lost myself in it, so that when it came to my turn to read the set piece I did not know the place, and was sharply reproved. But it did not matter. There came a lesson when we were allowed to choose what we liked to read aloud, and I read that. I thought it the most beautiful thing that anyone could ever dream or write. The teacher who had shaken me because I could not understand cubic measure was impressed by my choice of this poem, and gave me a volume of Tennyson's poems. She said that anyone who loved poetry as I apparently did should know Tennyson. Another new world opened up to me with possession of that volume. I lived in a lotus-land where it was always afternoon, and I forgave her all the slappings and shakings and hectorings because of " Ulysses." At fourteen I used to get drunk on Coleridge's " Kubla Khan " and Tennyson's " Ulysses." I would walk about whispering the words to myself:

> " And all should cry, ' Beware ! Beware !
> His flashing eyes, his floating hair,
> Weave a circle round him thrice,
> And close your eyes with holy dread,
> For he on honeydew hath fed,
> And drunk the milk of Paradise.' "

Well, I drank the milk of Paradise anew when I discovered that poem, and "Ulysses";

> "When through the scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
> Vext the dim sea . . ."

And after that Shelley and Keats. Heavens, if one could recapture the excitement of those discoveries! "Swiftly walk over the western wave, Spirit of Night," and "I stood tiptoe upon a little hill, the air was cooling and so very still. . ." Dear God, one was quick then with the very spirit of poetry! Until then one had known only Longfellow, the *Ingoldsby Legends*, and *The Biglow Papers*—relic of the socialist father— "Ez fur war I call it murder, There you hev it, plain and flat, I don't need to go no furder Than my Testyment for that!" The first book I ever bought with my own money was the poems of Longfellow. I liked his earlier poems, "When thou art worn and hard beset With sorrows that thou wouldst forget, Go to the woods and hills." But with Longfellow it was the sentiments which appealed to the solitary romantic in me. When I discovered "Kubla Khan," then Shelley and Keats and Tennyson, I put away Longfellow with childish things.

From the time I was twelve years old I kept a little note-book of quotations which had appealed to me. I still have this little suède-bound book, and it is a record of my development where poetry was concerned. It begins with Robert Burns and ends, in my fifteenth year, with Oscar Wilde! It runs the whole gamut, from "Gie fools their silks and knaves their wine," to an epigram from *Dorian Gray*, "Cure the soul by means of the senses, and the senses by means of the soul."

At the end of the little book we get to J. C. Squire, S. P. B. Mais, and Gerald Gould, having taken in *en route* Longfellow, Dr. Johnson, Francis Bacon, the Song of Songs, Olive Schreiner, Shakespeare, Keats, Shelley, Milton, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Omar Khayyám, Anatole France, Richard Jefferies, Emily Brontë, Bernard Shaw, Hazlitt, R. L. Stevenson, Walter Scott, W. E. Henley, Schopenhauer ("We move across the stage of life stung by appetite, goaded by desire, in pain unceasing . . ."), Robert Service, Elbert Hubbard.

The first real poem I ever read was " Kubla Khan," and the first real book *The Story of an African Farm.* I had great sympathy with the boy who offered up a sacrifice to God and awaited a miracle—and nothing happened. I had so often asked God for things myself and trusted implicitly that He would grant my request, and been " let down." But, unlike the boy in the book, I did not grow angry with God ; I made excuses for Him, telling my disappointed child-soul that after all He probably knew best . . . though it was a little hard to tell oneself that with conviction, when it said so distinctly in the Bible that Jesus had said : " Whatsoever ye ask in My name that will I do." I would ask everything in Jesus Christ's name—" Please God make Mother be home when I get home from school, for Jesus Christ's sake, Amen," and " Please God make Winnie be allowed to come out to play, for Jesus Christ's sake, Amen," but as often as not mother was not home, and Winnie was not allowed to come out to play. . . .

I was brought up on Omar Khayyám as much as on the *Just-so Stories.* My father would tell me the latter, myself seated on his knee, delightful stories of " The Cat that Walked Alone in the Wild Wet Woods," and " Why the Crab Walked Sideways " ; and The Rubá'iyát was inescapable, my father quoted it endlessly. My father's library was small but varied ; the Nelson Classics published at sevenpence before the war were a boon to poor people, and in that admirable series I read Richard Whiteing's *No.* 5 *John Street,* and *Odd Women,* before I was fourteen, and a great deal of the early Wells, *First Men in the Moon, The Invisible Man, Kipps,* a little later. In my father's little library, too, I found *Adam Bede,* and *The Cloister and the Hearth,* both of which fired my young imagination. I read anything and everything. Then, as now, my taste was eclectic.

And all the time I was writing, writing. At school I could do nothing but write. When it came to a matter of essays I knew that I could write better than anyone, even in the forms above me. I knew this quite simply and certainly, as simply and certainly as I knew that God saw everything I did and knew every thought I thought. My heart would beat with excitement when

we had essays to write, a terrific emotional excitement. I had a kind of ache in me, a kind of hunger. Words came tumbling out of me—the shy solitary child with her secret communings with God and her passionate fantasy love-life. I loved the music of words as Lafcadio Hearn loved them. I loved finding words new to me. I discovered the words " soliloquy," " oblivious," and " iridescent " at school, and for a while dragged them in wherever I could, until the class-teacher—lacking imagination—would write, reprovingly, the word " repetition " in red ink in the margin. But she knew nothing about the lovely adventure of finding words, like shining coloured shells picked up on a beach of drab stones.

I would feel, even then, before I was fourteen, that I had something to say, and everyone must hear, hear, and know that I was *different*—ah yes, *different*, with something in me, in spite of my shyness and my ugliness and my stupidity at other things. Shy and dull, and agonizingly self-conscious, so that I thought even strangers in the streets stared at me because of my ugliness . . . but when I was writing I became someone, I was transformed, power was in me, the power of words, and being shy and ugly and stupid did not matter. . . . To-morrow I would be slapped again because I could not do decimal fractions or understand cubic measure, and I would as likely as not break down and weep during the ordeal of mental arithmetic ; I would not know the manufactures of Yorkshire and Lancashire, or anything about the Wars of the Roses ; I would make a fool of myself at " games," which I hated and loathed and which were a torment to me—I would miss all the goals at netball, and I could not skip, and I would be conscious of my awkward lanky arms and legs and my high forehead, and the girls would laugh, and the teachers scold . . . but for an hour I would be something, someone. . . . This would be my little hour . . . and next essay time my essay would be read out as a model for the class, and I would be allowed to choose a postcard or a reproduction of a picture which I wanted, as a prize, and I would get that picture of Dante's meeting with Beatrice which I loved and wanted so much, or that picture of the old Dutch Bridge. . . . I would have the pick, because

my essay would be the best, and that would be my precious lovely moment when nothing else mattered, mine would be the kingdom, the power and the glory, for my words, my lovely shining coloured words, would be read out, and I, the stupid, ugly one, would be someone just for a little while, before I was caught up again by stupidities which tormented me and drove me in upon myself. . . .

A little girl assistant in a local shoe shop told me the other day that my essays are still read out at my old school, so the ghost of that queer unhappy child still has her moments.

I lived in a secret world until I was fifteen. All the time I was walking anywhere, as a child of seven, as an adolescent of thirteen, I would be mentally writing a story. If I had to break off to come out for a moment into the real world, I would always pick up the story where I last left it off in my mind. It was a sort of endless serial, I would not visualize it in a sort of dream, but be actually writing it in my mind, so that my mind would be working like this, " And then, she said, I will run away. Oh, no, I said. . . ." My mind was not merely day-dreaming, it was *writing* all the time. All the time. Whenever possible I would be writing on paper. I wrote endlessly, foolscap sheets, exercise books, on the backs of circulars. And reading too, with increasing avidity, with an appetite that throve with what it fed on. It was a flame that burned in me, to read and to write, always this preoccupation with the written word, since I was seven years old.

VIII

COMMERCIAL COURSE

ANOTHER ASPECT OF EDUCATION

FROM the time I was seven years old I had always asserted that when I grew up I wanted to be what I then called " an authoress," but my parents, though they

thought that I wrote " nice little pieces," were anxious that I should earn my living in a recognized way. Obviously one couldn't earn one's living by writing, and the fact that at ten I had had a story on the children's page of the *Lady's Companion*, and that at thirteen I had had one on the children's page of *Reynolds's Newspaper*, must not be allowed to give me " ideas " about myself. My father wanted me to follow his example and enter the Civil Service, as a post office clerk, or a letter-sorter like himself. I reminded him how bad I was at geography and urged that I would never be any good at that sort of thing ; I would put all the letters into the wrong bags, so my parents said that I must try for a scholarship and then we should see. I tried for a scholarship for a secondary school. I failed dismally in arithmetic, as usual, but scraped through on the strength of high marks for grammar, and with a passionate essay on the horrors of war—plentifully besprinkled with quotations from *The Biglow Papers*, of course. But on the *viva voce* I collapsed completely. I was told certain figures and asked in what connection I had heard them before. I didn't know. They were the amount of the War Loan. Questioned as to my " general knowledge " of literature, I said that Scott wrote *Hereward the Wake*, and the moment I came out of the examination room, freed from those staring eyes and unsympathetic faces at the long examiner's table, I knew that it was Kingsley. I knew, even before the result was announced, that I had failed, and that they thought me stupid, but I knew that I was not stupid, only that I hadn't got their kind of non-stupidness. Could any of them write of war as I had written of it ? I was convinced that they couldn't, and that none of the girls who would be granted scholarships could, nor upon any other subject, either, but because I did not know the War Loan figures, or who wrote that dull book about Hereward the Wake, they thought me too stupid to be admitted to their precious school—where I would learn French and algebra, and to play hockey, and wear a hat with the school colours round, and generally " get educated."

Well, but I didn't really want to get educated. I wanted to avoid having to go into the Civil Service. I

entered for another scholarship, because something had to be done about me, and it was clear that I wasn't equipped to earn any kind of livelihood as I was. This scholarship was for a commercial school which like most establishments of the kind calls itself a college, because, one presumes, it sounds better. Here one had the choice of entering on either the commercial or the Civil Service side. I entered on the commercial side, and scraped through with a half-fee scholarship. My future was now all mapped out. I was to "go into an office," and there was a vague idea that with my ability to "put words together" I might eventually "work up" to "a good secretarial post." So far as anyone—my school-teachers, my parents, and myself—could see, there was no other practical use to which that ability could be put.

I was quite happy about the idea, and accordingly a lot of rather terrifying new books were bought for me, on book-keeping, shorthand, commercial French, the art of touch-typing, and I went every day by train a short distance away from home, grown-up with the dignity of a season ticket, and a little attaché case containing my books and my luncheon sandwiches, and learned these things fairly easily—though I never could make a "trial balance" come out right, or add up "tots." By virtue of the good conduct for which shyness was responsible, I became a prefect, and wound up by getting a second-class diploma for business training, on the strength of which I twisted my long plaits up round my head, and spent six weeks in an alleged model office in the city, where I learned about duplicating machines and filing systems, and where I suffered as I had not suffered since my private school days.

I dreaded waking up to each new day. It was a nightmare of travelling in crowded trains, of ringing bells, and card-index systems: of typing on blank keyboards and of struggling with double-entry book-keeping. But I became a touch-typist of sorts, and achieved a dubious hundred-and-twenty words a minute shorthand, and was thus equipped to make my entry into the commercial world.

I had a great deal of homework to do during my six

months commercial course, so that I had very little time for my precious writing. But accidentally I had discovered Oscar Wilde—by seeing a copy of *Dorian Gray* on a stand outside a bookseller's, opening it casually and getting interested—and *Dorian Gray* led to the poems of Wilde, and were a light to lighten my darkness. That exotic imagery, words like jewels, kept my soul alive during that black phase.

I was fifteen when the school's employment bureau sent me as stenographer to Charles F. Higham, Ltd., Charles Higham's advertising organization.

I was given twenty-three shillings a week and was tremendously excited and happy. I gave my mother five shillings a week, saved for my season ticket, spent sixpence a day on "lunches" at an A.B.C. or Express Dairy, continued to go to Church on Sundays and Saints' Days, to read Oscar Wilde:

> "O Singer of Persephone,
> In the dim meadows desolate,
> Dost thou remember Sicily,"

sang the heart and brain of the child who had never been further afield than an English south coast watering-place and:

> "Out of the mid-wood's twilight
> Into the meadow's dawn,
> Ivory-limbed and brown-eyed
> Flashes my Faun.
>
> O Hunter snare me his shadow!
> O Nightingale, catch me his strain!
> Else moonstruck with music and madness
> I track him in vain!"

And still, for all the pagan poetry and my voyage into commercialism, I lived in the love and fear of God, and to write, endlessly, endlessly, without any objective whatever, certainly no encouragement, showing no one what I wrote. There was no one. My adored Miss X. had got married and faded out of my life. I was as solitary as I had been as a child.

IX

EDUCATION IN EARNEST

PORTRAIT OF A REVOLUTIONARY

If I were superstitious I should aver that I was born under a lucky star, for all my life I have been most remarkably lucky. Which is amusing to reflect upon, because according to all the rules I should have come to rack and ruin years ago. Coming down the St. Lawrence on the way home from Quebec one foggy night with an iceberg atmosphere in the sinister freezing darkness, a man told me that I should come to Carmen's end. I'm not quite sure what that was, but it sounds spectacular enough for Isadora herself, though no star danced when she was born, I think. Mine, I think, cut all kinds of capers. . . .

It was the greatest good luck in the world that I should have been sent to the Charles Higham organization, not merely because of the educative value of the personality of Higham himself, but because with his organization I had the chance to write all I wanted to. At sixteen I was writing advertisements, running two house-organs—business magazines—and when I was seventeen was publishing my own stories, articles, verses, in a monthly magazine which Higham bought and left to me to produce.

It happened in this way. A colonial artist in the studio of the firm found me one day in the lift with *Dorian Gray*—which was a sort of Bible to me at fifteen—under my arm. He was interested—one readily perceives that it was a surprising book to find a prim-looking little person such as I was at that time carrying about with her—it did not go with my sedate home-made green tartan dress and the brown-button boots, or the plaits twisted unattractively round my head, or my painful shyness. We walked down the Strand together and talked about books—that is to say he asked me questions which I answered. I confessed that I wrote a little. We had tea together in an A.B.C. Drawn upon

the subject I said that I was a socialist; he retorted that he was an anarchist; he was also a conscientious objector. My heart went out to him. Had I not copied into my little book of quotations long ago, "War is a game which, were their subjects wise, kings would not play at"? Did I not know *The Biglow Papers* by heart? Instantly, in that first contact, this New Zealander became the substitute for my lost Miss X.

I have been astoundingly lucky in the people I have met, inasmuch as I have always met precisely the right personality at the right time. Miss X. happened to me when I needed just such a person to whom to show my childish writings, then when she had faded out of my life, this artist came into it to continue the education she had begun.

Every evening after the Office J. S. and I would have tea together and talk. Presently we found an oak tea-room over a cinema, more congenial for talking in than the noisy A.B.C. He did most of the talking. I could not talk. I listened and my young mind sucked up knowledge like a sponge absorbing water. When he took a furnished house at Finsbury Park with another man we would go there on Saturday afternoons and talk and read, endlessly, for hours at a stretch, all the afternoon and far into the night, and my mind was insatiable. Hitherto I had always felt things, but now I was thinking—the engines of thought raced like mad. J. S. gave me the Robert Green Ingersoll volume, and I became an ardent agnostic and rationalist. We worshipped at the Shavian shrine, and I read *Socialism and Superior Brains, Man and Super-Man*, and *John Bull's Other Island*. We went to vegetarian places to eat, and I became a vegetarian as readily as I became an agnostic. On Sunday afternoons we went to Finsbury Park and heard Tom Mann speak. We went to the Albert Hall at the inauguration of the *Daily Herald* and sang the Red Flag together. I learned the meanings of *sabotage*, of the activities of the I.W.W. and Eugene V. Debs. I learned about William Morris and the Kelmscott Press, and about Upton Sinclair. I read *The Brass Check*, and a good deal of Graham Wallas and Cunningham Graham on social economy. I read Prince Kropotkin's *Mutual*

Aid as a sort of text-book, along with Ingersoll's *Essays*. At the week-ends when we were not at the house at Finsbury Park we would walk through Richmond Park or Bushey Park talking about strikes and lock-outs, and something which we referred to vaguely as " the revolution." We were very " red." We sat under the trees or amongst the bracken, surrounded by lovers, and J. S. would read to me from John Stuart Mill or Morris's *News from Nowhere*. I loved him in the perfervid way in which I had loved my Miss X., but at fifteen I was completely sexually unawakened, and even at sixteen, towards the end of our year's association, any manifestation of love-making from him completely bewildered me. I was sixteen and he was twenty-six. I became sufficiently awakened towards the end of the friendship to want to kiss and to be kissed by him, but any caressive intimacy from him merely troubled me. It seemed queer, and I resented it a little and wished he wouldn't.

In that most important year of my life I abandoned the exoticism of Wilde for the simplicities of Morris—*The Earthly Paradise* became as well-thumbed as my *Imitation of Christ*, and Ingersoll's *Essays* were my Bible. J. S. introduced me to *The Light of Asia* and *The Hound of Heaven*, both of which were in the nature of profound experiences for me. There was enough adolescent melancholy in me to love, " We are the voices of the wandering wind, which moan for rest and rest can never find," and enough affection for my childhood's lost faith to delight in the religious imagery of Francis Thompson. *The Light of Asia* was a never-ending source of delight to me, and we would read it together by the hour, sitting over the fire at the house, or striding along the streets, across commons or through parks. People stared at us, the little untidy man in the sagging tweeds, hatless, and with his shabby old rain-coat flapping in the wind, and the young girl in her prim clothes and button boots.

J. S. did not care what people thought ; he loved shocking the pharisees. In the presence of refined virgins he liked to talk about sweating arm-pits. In the presence of sedate matrons he would refer to marriage as legalised prostitution. When we went to the pictures or to a

theatre, and an attendant would approach with chocolates asking him if he wanted any for me, he would yell out a hearty: "Yah, no, take 'em away, I've too much respect for the girl's belly to fill it up with muck." I would be acutely embarrassed sometimes by his flagrant contempt for the conventions. He would crow like a cock in the middle of the Strand if the spirit seized him, or, dodging the traffic, make a Fairbanks leap for the nearest lamp-post and shin up it. He kept the pockets of his disgraceful old coat full of nuts from Eustace Miles, and as we strode along, I doing my best to keep pace with him, and he reading aloud from some political economist or other, he would drag out a handful of nuts and munch them, giving me a handful with which to do likewise, but I was always too self-conscious, and surreptitiously stowed them away in my little handbag.

He was a great disciple of the open road. His contempt for civilization was terrific. His principle of life was to make enough money in the cities to get out of them for a few months; then he would come back and earn some more money and go off again. "Hiking," and "humping the bluey," he called it. He had wandered all over the world in this way, building himself a shack in the Blue Mountains and living there for months, painting, getting enough pictures together for a show. California, Australia, Honolulu, New Mexico, it was all one to him. And it still is. The last I heard of him he had left his studio in New York and was studying the crafts and customs of the Mexican Indians. I have a collection of snapshots of himself and Charmian London taken on Jack London's ranch in California, and a collection of snaps taken when J. S. built himself a shack on the shores of Lake Suzie in the Sierra Nevada Mountains and lived there for months with another artist. He is a remarkable personality judged by a sophisticated standard, but for the child who was myself at fifteen and sixteen he was amazing beyond belief, and I hero-worshipped him to a degree which he was always trying without success to convince me was quite unwarranted.

I learned more from this artist in our year's association

and my books, and the iron bedstead and the striped wallpaper did not matter; they were shut out in the shadows, whereas I sat writing in a golden aura, happy with my coloured shining words, and all that I wrote I would show to J. S. just as at school I had shown my writings to Miss X.

I was buying books at that time, too, more books than I could afford. I would spend my lunch-hours prowling round the second-hand book-stalls in Holborn, in Southampton Row—the Sicilian avenue enchanted me—in Charing Cross Road. J. S. took me to Henderson's "Bomb-shop," and we dipped into Maxim Gorki and Strindberg and fingered lovely books we could neither of us afford to buy. I would leave a shilling or two on a book and pay off the price by instalments, week by week, because when you have twenty-three shillings a week, and are contributing five shillings a week to the home, and have your season ticket, your bits of food, and your clothes to buy, you cannot afford to pay five or six shillings straight off for a book. I never read novels at that time; I was too busy acquiring knowledge. The first novels I ever read were translations from the French done in the exotic little Lotus Library. Through those little purple-covered books I reached Gautier, de Maupassant, de Musset, Pierre Loti, Anatole France, Balzac. I also read the Russians—Tolstoy was one of my early discoveries from my home-library.

I was very lonely after J. S. had gone, and still on summer evenings sat in the woods on the Common reading, but this solitariness did not last long. I was restless. It was as though the beloved friend had breathed the breath of life in me—that and probably the unconscious effect of much erotic French novel-reading. J. S. had continually nagged at me to dress my hair differently; he pointed out that I had very lovely hair, but that twisted up into those tight plaits bound so unbecomingly round my head, neither my hair nor my head was seen to advantage. I found a less severe way to dress my hair, and to please him I began to take an interest in clothes—as much interest, that is, as one can take on a few shillings a week. After he had gone, of my restlessness, I began to open out. I adopted the powder

and lipstick which I had hitherto despised. I was going to the theatre, too, a great deal at that time, because of *The Pelican* first or second night tickets which Higham, if he thought the show was not likely to be much good, handed over to me. Otherwise he saw the play, and I, as likely as not, would write the review from what he told me. The first play I ever reviewed from actual observation was *Out of Hell*, a war play with only four persons in the cast. I took a notebook with me to the theatre. I thought it was the thing to do. I was surprised to see nobody else there with notebooks, and wondered if I could be the only "Press" representative there. I was very excited and earnest about my rôle as dramatic critic. I had never been to a theatre before, except to the pantomimes of my childhood. I had no judgment whatever. But it was all tremendously exciting. I was beginning to see "the world." And I wanted something to happen. "All my blood was stirred to follow and to find. . . ." But I did not know what it was I wanted of life. Only there was this great hole J. S. had left in my days and I was quick with a new life.

I was writing articles for a few business magazines outside of those Higham was handling, and, as a result of a little series I ran for one magazine, the editor sent for me. He was astounded when a child of sixteen was shown into his office. He was forty-five and his interest in this oddly exotic painted child of sixteen was, I suppose, natural. He christened me "Pagan," and finally, when I had hysterically refused to surrender to him my virginity, wrote me a letter in which he referred to me as "swinging ever between a passionate paganism and the pallid proprieties." He took me to luncheon after that first meeting at his office, and afterwards to his rooms in Covent Garden. He showed me a folio of drawings from the *Arabian Nights*, and I was bewildered rather than shocked. He had all the stock items of the usual pornographic library, but the things merely puzzled me. He educated me a little regarding dress, and I admired and respected him for his culture and his literary tastes that fitted in well with mine, and there was a pleasant excitement about going to his rooms. It

was all rather like something in a French novel, but when it came to the point of seduction I grew frightened. . . . I liked to play with the thought of surrendering to this man. I confided in an artist friend of J. S.'s, a syphilitic and dissipated young man whom I had always disliked instinctively, but J. S. had said that I ought to be more tolerant, and that Y. had his points. He and J. S. had lived together at one time, and I felt that any friend of J. S. must have some sort of quality. Y., I suppose, was amused by me. Anyhow he let me talk about my middle-aged would-be seducer, and waxed exceeding fatherly. He took me to his dreary studio in the Fulham Road and gave me " a high tea " and said that I mustn't be a silly little girl, and then attempted to seduce me himself. . . .

I left that studio *virgo intacta*, but very much wider awake to the force I was up against in this sex business. I was getting educated—rapidly.

X

DIFFICULT YEARS

APPRENTICESHIP

THESE experiences, trivial in themselves, yet important psychologically—from the point of view of increased sexual awareness—were followed by a series of definitely experimental affairs, some of them stupid, some sordid, one or two youthfully idyllic. I was avid for experience, restless with adolescence and its sexual quickening, yet passionately on the defensive, albeit I had no complexes then any more than I have now about this sex business; the young experimenter's fierce preservation of her virginity at that time had nothing to do with any " principles " or any feeling of physical shame; I always knew that when I fell physically in love there would be no question of any withholding on principle or from those motives of fear which so often pass as chastity and virtue. I had then, as now, a terrible contempt for

those women who from fear dabble on the brink of experience when their desire is to plunge into the flood. There was no such fear-motive in my own dabbling ; the more I dabbled the less inclination I had to plunge, yet all the time I was restless. . . . If J. S. had come back then our association I knew would have been very different from its former phase ; but he was away at the other side of the world, and in the long intervals of waiting for his letters I went on experimenting with my newly awakened emotions.

They culminated in a blue-eyed, blond, wavy-haired provincial bank clerk in the uniform of an O.T.C. cadet. He was nineteen and I was eighteen. It was the most extraordinarily naïve affair, as clumsy and disappointing as our joint inexperience could possibly make it, but when the boy's Primitive Methodist family discovered the pathetic little intrigue they wrote a violent letter in which they declared that I was " leading their son to the devil," disposed of the wild throbbings of our young hearts as Lust—spelt like that, with a capital L—and demanded that the sinful and degrading and abominable iniquity cease forthwith, and God save both our scarlet souls. . . . Youth, half asphyxiated by so much hell-fire and brimstone, wept bitterly, broke its heart as only youth can, went without food for a week, then healthily recovered its appetite, and, remembering its Swinburne and Ernest Dowson, its Richard Middleton and Robert Service, became passionately bitter . . . flinging its spirit all a-whirl into the bosom of—further experimentation. Since one might as well burn in hell-fire for a sheep as a poor little insignificant and so very unsatisfactory lamb, the next affair was rather more sophisticated . . . one had passed from alfresco spontaneity to centrally heated, champagne-accompanied seduction . . . and took a morbid, youthfully bitter, delight in reflecting upon one's scarlet sins, and read a lot more Swinburne, and had a bad attack of Laurence Hope and asked of one's " desolate ship-wrecked soul would'st thou rather never have met the one whom thou lovedst beyond control and whom thou adorest yet " . . . and told oneself, passionately dramatically that " back from the senses, the heart, the brain, came the answer quickly thrown, if we

had the chance we would do it again, we have had, we have loved, we have known." . . . Heavens, the muck of that Laurence-Hope-Ella-Wheeler-Wilcox School, and how youth, with its irresistible tendency to sentimentalize and to dramatize itself and its emotions, can be —and generally is—taken in by it!

I was saved from further folly by falling in love again —more ardently than ever—with a Scotchman thirteen years my senior, and I still believe that the year of " a friendship lit by passion " we had together before our marriage was the happiest I have ever known, or am ever likely to know. In the real sense of the term I loved for the first time—hitherto, I then realized, I had merely been " in love " ; then I both loved and was in love. We were married at a registry office shortly after my nineteenth birthday.

I was a very young nineteen, in spite of the experimental adventurings—too young, and too much in love, to be depressed by the dreary registry office, the cold foggy day, and the fact that we had no money and no home. Also, alas, I quite overlooked the fact that in the passionate teens one is still in the course of mental and emotional evolution, and that—regrettably from the point of view of love, but nevertheless inevitably—in even a few years' time I should be a quite different person.

We had a week's honeymoon in a cheap boarding-house at Hastings, and a thunderstorm was melodramatically in progress as we emerged from the station. The days that followed were discouragingly cold and wet and cheerless, but we stayed in our ugly bed-sitting room and roasted chestnuts before a huge fire, and made love, and wrote advertisements, and an article or two for *Higham's Magazine*, of which I was then Associate-Editor—and were rapturously happy.

We came back to furnished rooms at Strawberry Hill and for a few months I continued at the office. We had less than five hundred a year with our joint earnings. I was still only nineteen when a child was born. I called her Jean because I was writing a book and that being the heroine's name it was in my imagination. The book never saw the light in volume form, and was finally

sold for thirty-five pounds as a serial to a company who publish yellow-back novelettes at twopence a time. This was my second attempt at a novel. Soon after my artist friend had sailed for New Zealand I had set to work on a very erotic affair called *Wine of Life*. I was under the literary influence of the early Gilbert Frankau at the time, so it was full of adjectives and amours, and my friend Herbert Jenkins patiently explained to me what was wrong with it, whilst at the same time giving me a contract to give him the offer of my first novel which should be publishable. This one he counselled I should tear up and forget about. I tore it up—outwardly very courageously, inwardly bitter disappointed and very miserable. Then I made that second effort, which I called *Road to Romance*. It was all about a girl who walked out of the suburbs " into the sun "—I was by then very much under the influence of the Herbert Jenkins who wrote *The Rain Girl*. (The same and yet not the same Herbert Jenkins who wrote the *Bindle* books—he was a Jekyll and Hyde sort of person, and when he would sit in his deep arm-chair in his pleasant office with a purple cushion behind his head talking poetry and æsthetics it was preposterous to remember that he was the author of the *Bindle* books.) I had also just read Richard Le Gallienne's *Quest of the Golden Girl*. Herbert Jenkins declared this second attempt to be better, but said that it wanted a lot of altering before it could be published as a book. I felt that I couldn't alter it—and hawked it around until it came to rest to be published as a novelette serial.

During my pregnancy I wrote a great number of these novelettes at a guinea a thousand; they were fifteen, twenty and twenty-five thousand words in length, and when the cheques came in they seemed vast sums—the biggest sums I had ever earned by writing. I liked doing these things—they took my mind off the worrying business of having a baby that one did not want.

I still have these novelettes of which I was then so proud, but I cannot bear to look at them now. Not because I am ashamed of them—they are competently done and more literary than most novelettes, I think—but that period of my life is too painful to make me want

to invoke its memory very often. I wanted to do tremendous things and I was so pitifully eager to do something, be something . . . but I was writing novelettes at a guinea a thousand, I was nineteen and pregnant, and I worked most of the time feeling desperately sick and ill. I was miserable and worried about the coming child, and the fact that I had no home of my own. It was my first experience of living in furnished rooms, and I loathed it—my landlady told me depressing stories of her own and her friends' ghastly confinements—and could see no prospect of having a real home anywhere in the near future. Life was desperately unsatisfactory—but curiously none of the unhappiness of that time got into my work. Work, I suppose, was my salvation. From the financial point of view, alone, it was important, anyhow, that I should go on writing.

When they laid my baby beside me I was a little surprised at myself to find that my only reaction was to regret the shape of her nose and to know a sense of bewilderment at the smallness of her. She was brown, too, and I had always imagined that new-born babies were pink. The nurse suggested that I might like to have her beside me for a little while, but I said no, take her away; I was not interested, and I felt that in any case I would not know what to do with her.

I brought her home from the nursing home before a fortnight and knew less than ever what to do with her. So far as I could see there was nothing to be done but wash and feed her. I did this and then put her back in her perambulator in the garden and went back to my typewriter. My back ached tiresomely, and I felt rather weak and depressed, but I desperately determined that nothing should stop me writing, and somehow, between bathing and feeding the baby and getting her to sleep, and washing napkins, and trying not to be worried by the depressing good advice of my landlady, I went on writing. People said I must do this and that, but I went on in my own way. I never weighed my baby or fussed with her in any way. For a few months I nursed her myself and then experimented with patent foods until I found one which suited her. Somehow she grew up, like a wild thing, or a flower. She worried and

tormented me and I cried endless despairing, helpless tears over her, but gradually I discovered deep wells of motherhood in myself. In a tormented sort of way I began to love her. I was always terribly conscious of her as a part of myself, and of my terrific responsibility regarding her. As a child, in my loneliness, I had always wanted a baby sister. If only my mother would have another baby, I would think, how I would love it ! Well, when I was fifteen, she provided me with a baby sister, but by then I had left my childhood behind, and it was too late. But now I had a baby of my own, and sometimes she nearly drove me crazy, because always I was in the grip of that urgent, compelling desire to get back to my typewriter, but she grew upon me—and somehow in spite of everything I managed to keep on writing.

The Pelican died a natural death in 1919. During the three years I had been with Higham I had written hundreds of articles, short stories, and advertisements. I had published a few articles and stories and poems in various newspapers and magazines, and written hundreds of thousands of words on every subject, from commercial vehicles to gramophone records ; I had written articles on oil-power, the Better Spirit in Business, the Future of British Trade, Window-Dressing, The Art of Salesmanship, Advertising, the Secrets of Success, and personalities. I wrote business articles on business personalities I had never met ; I wrote critiques of plays I had never seen. I ran correspondence columns answering letters I had never received. When *The Pelican* died I increased my journalistic free-lance output, and wrote extensively in the provincial press—on everything, from How to Manage Baby, What is Wrong with Marriage, Ways with Rice, and What to do With last Winter's Coat. I had for two years a retainer fee from Higham to go on writing advertisements and running house-organs which I had run at the office. All the time sick with pregnancy, and later sick with fear lest the sleeping baby in the next room, or just outside in the garden, should waken before I had finished the work I was on, I went on working. My output was tremendous ; the payment was small as it always is for a beginner,

but I was making a little income writing, and all the time I was dreaming of the books I would write, the fame I would have, the money I might finally succeed in making, so that life could be richer and nearer my heart's desire, if only I could keep on. Well, somehow, between getting the baby to sleep and washing the napkins, I managed to keep on.

When the baby was a few months old the landlady made it plain that she did not want to " let " to anyone with a child, and we took a furnished cottage up the river at Sunbury. It was a dreary little place, but it was more of a home than furnished rooms ; I had an inefficient little maid who took the baby out in the afternoons so that I had a little peace ; all through one winter I worked in a cold little room ineffectually heated by an oil-stove. By the following spring we got a little home together, my husband and I ; it took all our joint savings, and we were not so very happy when we had achieved it. There wasn't much fun. We still had very little money. By the time I was twenty-two I still had never had an evening dress.

I was frequently servantless in the five years we lived together in that little semi-detached villa, and for weeks on end I would have to do the work of the little house, whilst the baby ran wild in the garden along with the weeds. She slept there in all weathers, rain, snow, frost, and the neighbours, good surburbanites, thought I was quite mad, but she grew up brown as a nut, and as strong. My mother had always prided herself on keeping her children " nice." I did not keep my little one " nice." I never worked on the principle of " here's a child, let's bring it up," but, " here's a child, for God's sake let's leave it alone."

During those five difficult years I wrote four books, *Martha*, my first published book, which Leonard Parsons published, *Hunger of the Sea*, which Ethel Colburn Mayne recommended for the Femina Prize, *Sounding Brass*, which was the story of my advertising experiences and which set people talking and speculating as to whether my James Rickard had any relationship with Charles Higham, and *Pilgrims*, which I wrote in the first flush of my enthusiasm for Van Gogh's pictures, which opened

a door for me upon a new world. *Sounding Brass* made it financially possible for me to begin to satisfy my hunger to travel. I began to realize the luxury of stretching one's wings and soaring into the wider blue.

In 1926 the woman editor of a magazine for which I had done a good deal of work invited me to accompany her to America. I did not go to America either to lecture or to complete my education, but entirely in the spirit of " eventually-why-not-now."

XI

AMERICAN MEDLEY

SOME INDISCRETIONS AND IMPRESSIONS

I

To my everlasting regret I was immersed in a hot bath at the time I should have been viewing my first iceberg. It was careless of me, but the charming person who had been my companion of the boat-deck and the cocktail bar from the first day out, said that it was probably just as well, for we were, he said, causing a mild scandal, and were liable to be " asked off the ship," in which event there would be no place to go but the iceberg, and that would be the end of the iceberg. . . . Charming Person, I salute your memory though I have forgotten your name. Before you knew who I was it was nice of you to tell me that *Sounding Brass* was a book I really ought not to miss reading. . . . And it was dear of you to send mauve sweet-peas to my hotel on my first day in New York . . . and red roses after that discussion we had concerning black lingerie. . . . Very English you were, with occasional pangs of conscience about " the wife," so anxious that I should understand that in spite of those star-lit nights on the boat deck it was she you loved. You sent me black silk stockings from a shop in Fifth Avenue at a time when light stockings were the vogue ; she always wore dark stockings, you said, but not black lingerie, she wasn't that sort of woman . . . but you

didn't need to tell me that ; I knew . . . you talked a lot about your " kiddie." and you went fishing in Scotland, and played golf. . . . You had never read Ernest Dowson, of course, but whenever you thought of your wife you felt, " I have been true to thee, Cynara, in my fashion " and were a little sad . . . but not so sad that you would not telephone me in New York at three o'clock in the morning merely to say " Good night." . . . Charming Person ! But it is such a mistake to take a conscience with one on an Atlantic crossing. . . .

Oh, those Atlantic crossings, long enough to be amusing, yet not long enough to become monotonous ; long enough for adventure, yet not long enough for complications. . . . Those sparkling Atlantic afternoons on deck, those sparkling champagne parties in the smoking-room after dinner. . . . Cherbourg in the twilight, and the tender leaving . . . the life-and-soul of the ship strumming a ukelele, being the life-and-soul to the very end. . . . Good-bye to the Gay Companion with whom one has made romantic excursions to the bows, seeing the great hulk of the ship heaving like a tower of lights to the reeling stars, that sense of having escaped from a first-class world of starched shirt fronts and bare shoulders, into a world where the social artificialities do not exist, and there is only the dark sea slipping by and the white wake of the ship. . . . Crawling down the St. Lawrence from Quebec when the air is cold and foggy with icebergs, and the ship's syren mourns persistently, eerily. . . . It is in these things that the romance of Atlantic crossings lie, not in the first glimpse of the moon behind the Château Frontenac, or the approach to the Statue of Liberty. . . .

I am well aware that it is the fashion to wax lyrical about one's first impression of the sky-line of Manhattan, but I experienced no such lyric ecstasy. We hung about for so long waiting for the immigration authorities to come aboard, that by the time we steamed in under the shadow of the skyscrapers one's only desire was to reach one's hotel and have a bath and a meal. The officials to whom the ship's passengers had had to account for themselves before being allowed to proceed into harbour had been pleased to be brusque, and facetious at our expense.

I was asked, " Well, young woman, what are you coming to the States for ? "

I replied truthfully, " For fun." I really could not think of any other reason.

The official scowled. " You mean a vacation ? "

I said he could put it like that if he preferred.

He regarded me searchingly. " Know anyone in the States ? "

I owned up to two American publishers and one agent. They took down names and addresses, presumably lest I should get lost, stolen, or strayed.

" So you write books, eh ? " He winked at his companion. " You see, my lad, she'll be so struck by your fatal beauty she'll be putting you in her next book."

They both laughed uproariously over this, as though it were immensely funny. The rest of the long queue of passengers lined up in the dining saloon and awaiting their own interrogation waited patiently. . . . The time between our examination and our landing seemed interminable.

The harbour was black with people when we finally came alongside, and there was a great waving of handkerchiefs. Even after we had berthed we waited an age. . . . But the gangways were down at last, and I seemed not to have been on American soil for more than about three minutes before a messenger boy demanded, " Miss Mannin," and shoved a telegram into my hand. I had barely recovered from that shock when a tall dark stranger approached me and said, " Miss Mannin, I think ? " I again owned up, and he introduced himself as the president of the publishing house who then published me in America. Proceeding from the Customs shed to the escalator upon which baggage is dumped for conveyance to the street below, I found the artist to whom I had said good-bye nine years ago in London, on Fenchurch Street Station after an air-raid. . . .

America began to seem a country in which anything might happen—and does.

The next startling thing which happened to us was the Pennsylvania Hotel. Entering this hotel—as is the case with many big American hotels—is like entering a crowded street of shops. It becomes almost impossible

to think of it as the entrance to an hotel. It swarms with people and blazes with lighted show-cases. It is a common rendezvous, vast and crowded and noisy and bewildering. We had to queue up for our room "reservation," and were finally accommodated on the sixteenth floor. We discovered that it doesn't do to get into just any elevator, either; if you get into the wrong one you have to "change" several floors up. Or you may get an elevator to the tenth floor, and change for all floors beyond; or you may get into a non-stop to a floor you don't want.

There is something starkly incredible about New York City when one visits it for the first time. One has heard of skyscrapers, seen pictures of them; intellectually one knows all about them, but the reality is so much beyond one's imaginings that one is bewildered; one simply "doesn't believe it." . . .

New York City by night is unreal as a dream; it is as though the highest heavens had suddenly burgeoned with lights, tier upon tier of lights, with no visible means of support, for the façades of the buildings themselves are merged into the darkness of the sky, and only the lights remain. To cross Brooklyn Bridge at night and look back at Manhattan is to feel something in one protest violently, "It isn't true! It *can't* be true!" So many thousand lighted windows mounting to the sky, phalanxes and towers of lights; blocks and columns and pinnacles of lights; lights piled on lights, climbing crazily to the forlorn, forgotten stars. . . . One grows dazed and dizzy in the contemplation, and the intricate, nightmare tracery of Brooklyn Bridge, which seems in the darkness to swing from the sky, does not help to make the fantastic, incredible thing more real. . . .

And besides the incredibility of New York City there is its still more terrifying heartlessness, a kind of steel and concrete hardness and relentlessness. Not the gay heartlessness of Paris, or the easy-going unconcern of London, but something remorseless; one feels in its streets that one has somehow arrived at the very heart of the Machine Age. One hears the roar of the machinery, frighteningly. It is there in the thunder of the overhead railway, in the din of the building and demo-

lition going on all the time, in the clangour of those chasms of streets, where humanity surges black in its density, like swarming ants. There is no peace or friendliness anywhere in those streets, nothing but noise and the press of the crowds which seem to move in mass formation at the base of those monstrous buildings which go towering away like sheer vast cliffs above them.

A sort of hysterical panic would come upon me sometimes when I found myself in one of those chasms, a feeling that at all costs I must get out of this. Perhaps there is such a thing as "skyscraper sickness," just as there is mountain sickness and air sickness. And yet in spite of this on a bright summer morning I find myself thinking of Fifth Avenue in the sunshine, forgetting the nightmare quality which inhabits lower Broadway, and remembering with a glow of exhilaration the green and white Palisades of the Hudson, and the broad opulence of Riverside Drive. . . . My own reaction to New York City was that so long as one kept to the broad highways of the fashionable avenues one was all right, imbued with a sense of well-being, self-importance, and a place in the scheme of things; but to diverge into the side streets was somehow dreadful. for life, which in the avenues appeared to run according to Kropotkin's principle of mutual aid, in the side streets seemed to fall back again to Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest. But everywhere one heard the roar of the machine monster ominously close . . . and in the deep crevasse of Wall Street to feel oneself in the engine-room itself.

There was a hot afternoon when I stood on the corner of Fifth Avenue at Forty-Second Street, wondering how on earth one got to West Twenty-Third Street, and why people insist that New York is an easy city in which to find one's way about, deciding that perhaps it would be if one knew instinctively which was East and which was West, and whether one was really as stupid as in one's dazed and bewildered state one felt. . . . I felt that I simply could not bear it. I wanted to get out of that monstrous city . . . and that night I went to Harlem, and New York was no longer strident with realism, but like something in an opium-eater's dream. . . . I had that

feeling once before, when I was taken to Limehouse, and familiar London fell away and merged into a foreign land.

It was strange to see no white faces in the thronged streets. A group of youths Charlestoned madly in a dark doorway, singing with a kind of excited recklessness. The streets seemed dark, in spite of the flickering sky-signs and the glare of light from shops and cafés, and there was something sinister in the yellow glow of a lamp on a street-corner. There seemed to be a preponderance of eating-houses and clothes stores, with the goods displayed in stalls on the pavements. I don't know what there is about Harlem, but it is as though there is a dark, subtle, sensual undercurrent that one cannot get hold of, as though life beat and throbbed there just below the surface of consciousness, frighteningly, excitingly. Perhaps it is all in the imagination ; that may be, the fact remains that it affects the imagination powerfully ; it gets into the imagination—and the tantalising part is that one doesn't know quite why. . . . But just as in Wall Street one feels oneself perilously close to some monstrous machine, so in Harlem one feels oneself close to the dark, unknowable stream of life itself. . . . Perhaps it is the mystery and tragedy of the great, old, negro race itself which gets into one's imagination. I repeat—I don't know. I only know that Harlem affected me powerfully, emotionally. I was both mysteriously excited, and mysteriously afraid. It was a relief to get back to the mad glare of the Great White Way. . . .

2

I dined several times in Greenwich Village and on each occasion there was no difficulty whatever about securing drinks ; no mysterious formula or password, no serving of cocktails in soup-cups, as I had them served elsewhere in New York City, but everything as open and simple as though Prohibition had never been heard of. But Prohibition alcohol is a mistake.

I freely confess that for me New York was an adventure in freedom. I did none of the usual things, and a great many that were highly unusual. How sad and

mad and bad it was, but oh, how it was gay! Most of the geography of New York I saw through taxi windows on my way to this, that, or the other rendezvous, yet I have the feeling of the streets and squares which I think I could not have got by solemnly doing the round of "sights." You have to "live" in a city before you can get the "feel" of it, and in New York I lived so intensely that I begrudged time for what little sleep I managed to fit in between one thing and the next. American hospitality to English visitors is quite simply terrific. It is curious, this, when you come to reflect upon the quite bitter jealousy which exists between England and America as nations. We may dislike each other as nations, but the blood relationship is thicker than the waters of the Atlantic; fundamentally we are very much the same people. One may dislike Americanism and still like Americans. I do not pretend to have made any serious sociological survey of the American national character—America being a vast continent made up of so many different nationalities, I am not sure that such a thing is possible, anyhow—I only know that I have a general impression of ready friendliness and an overwhelming hospitality.

My general impression of the women is that they are perfectly lovely to look at, but less exciting to talk to. Their attractiveness is as much all outside as the attractiveness of the men is all inside. American women have lovely figures and a sense of chic; American men have lovely teeth and a sense of hygiene. It takes an American woman to wear a Paris model as its creator meant it to be worn. American women know so much about dress that the men have never had a chance to learn—they have been too busy making the money so that their women can demonstrate their dress-sense.

American women talk about art as though it were something you could spread on buttered toast. They are "crazy" on child-psychology, and not one in a hundred knows anything at all about it. There is a good deal more homo-sexuality amongst women in America than in England. The men are too busy, and too tired, to have much time for either. A slow, insidious increase in impotence and sterility is the price America is paying

for Americanism. The result is that the women run to a chronic sentimentalizing over sex, and the men run to gifts—the unconscious sexual substitute.

Anita Loos makes Lorelei, the blonde whom gentlemen preferred, say of London that it was a place where "gentlemen have the quaint custom of not giving a girl many presents," and that she was glad to get back to the country "where men are Americans." The American male has no self-consciousness about "saying *it with flowers*"; *he has been, as the women say,* "trained up that way." The American woman has set a price upon herself, and the road to romance is strewn with orchids and dollar-bills.

In New York City there are no husbands; only married men. In the great heat of the summer all the wives go out of town, the houses are draped with dust-sheets and every scrap of stuff is put away as though the house were to be left uninhabited not for a few months but for a few years; the men usually have a bachelor apartment somewhere, though the wives don't generally know this. Charles Higham once said to me that the American business-man's "sweetie" was the salvation of American home-life. . . . The American male carries on with his job all through the summer, and it is, as a matter of fact, as cool as anywhere in an office at the top of a skyscraper. In the deep canyons of the streets the heat is terrific, and the noise and the crowds seem somehow to add to the heat. New York never sleeps; the roar never ceases; at any hour of the night or early morning the cafés and eating-houses are crowded with people eating; there is every kind and grade of café and restaurant devised; every nationality is catered for; there are cafés where you get everything out of machines by putting coins in slots; there are quick-lunch counters, help-yourself counters, sandwich counters. The majority of these popular eating places are incredibly garish and dreary and crowded with men who eat with their hats on and sitting in their shirt-sleeves; and these places are as crowded at three o'clock in the morning as at three o'clock in the afternoon. Sometimes I would think of New York as a city of eating-houses and newspapers; in this country most of us read a morning

paper and an evening paper: but there are at least half a dozen newspapers to the American day.

In New York one gets the feeling of layers upon layers of life all going on simultaneously, the feeling of mystery, excitement, adventure, drama, sordidness, that impregnates the big Southern seaports—Marseilles, Barcelona, Toulon; a feeling of hardness and relentlessness and thinly veiled hostility. It is easy to grow a little mentally hysterical in the streets of New York, particularly on a hot day. If only the roar and shriek of the traffic would stop, just for a single minute; if only there might come a breath of cooling air; it would be easy to scream, but, with a nightmare dreadfulness, the scream would be lost in the general cacophony. There is so much demolition and rebuilding going on all the time in New York City, and the drilling and hammering and the rattle of the cranes imposed upon the unceasing roar and scream of the traffic and the tearing racket of the elevated railway, is enough to drive one mad. . . . It is incredible that millions of people can live all their lives in the midst of it and yet remain sane.

Yet for all that there is a quality about the air of New York on a summer morning, before the heat of the day has set in and the racket has got hold of your nerves, which is not to be had in any other city, so that one can understand American briskness and energy; it exists in the exhilarating sparkling air, like electricity. It is the city of dreadful noise, and a life-destroying slavery to the machine, yet, if one has not to live there, a city in which to amuse oneself, and not so many miles out of the city there are lovely places, long quiet sounds where white-sailed yachts skim like great butterflies over the sparkling blue water, beautiful low-built houses set in green, shady gardens, stretches of wild park land, and the thickly wooded hills of the Storm King's Highway.

3

We made the journey to Quebec by road in four and a half days, taking in Buffalo and the Niagara Falls, and going up through Montreal, where all the men are good-

looking, even to the taxi-drivers. I was terribly tired when I left New York, yet I did not leave it without a pang. I felt like a child being dragged away from a fair that would still go on, tantalizingly, after I had left. Never again, I felt, would my path be so strewn with orchids, and a flattery no less charming because it was quite insincere. A few days before I left the city one of my publishers gave a luncheon for me, to which various newspaper people and writers and editors were invited; my newly published book was hidden in a huge cake which its author had to cut, like a bride, at the conclusion of the luncheon. When everyone had been given a piece of the cake the book was revealed, coyly tied up with ribbon to match its jacket. Cocktails, wine, and liqueurs flowed freely at that luncheon, everyone made a speech, and I have a dim recollection of clasping a huge bouquet and shaking hands with everyone, and everyone saying charming things . . . and afterwards a number of us drove over to the Coffee House, which is a sort of literary club where English authors always go to sign their names in the visitors' book, and I remember wondering whether one could possibly lean out of a taxi window on Fifth Avenue and be sick all in the afternoon sunlight; I thought that one couldn't, so I went on clasping my bouquet and my ribbon-bound book, and seeing Fifth Avenue reeling through the heat. I drove out that night to a road-house on Long Island with my other publisher; it was gay with faery-lights festooned amongst the trees of the garden, and there was dancing, and a great popping of champagne corks. . . . A dry martini was set before me, but I turned away with a shudder; I had had enough of Prohibition alcohol for that day.

When I got back to the hotel I found that the remains of the huge luncheon cake had been sent round, with a box of roses. The bedroom which my friend and I shared was already looking like the dressing-room of a theatrical star on a first night. The cake reposed on a chair, and it stayed there getting dustier and dustier until the day we left New York, when we gave it to the chambermaid.

When I told George Doran about the cake he laughed

and said that when he published a book of mine he would give it a champagne bath instead of a cake, because although he was affectionate he was not confectionate. . . .

As something on account, the day I left New York he presented me with a bottle of pre-Prohibition gin. We stowed it in the back of the car with a number of ginger-beers, but as the other two members of the party drank more ginger-beer than gin, by the time we arrived at the Canadian frontier only about a third of the gin had been consumed. We had a picnic by the roadside and drank gin-and-gingers, but there was still half a bottle of gin left. It seemed a sad waste of good alcohol; but there was nothing for it but to abandon "the baby," as we had nicknamed it. We stood it on a rock beside a bush and took a snapshot of it in its lonely abandoned state; we also left a note saying that it was not wood-alcohol, boot-leg hooch, or methylated spirit, but honest-to-God, pre-Prohibition gin . . . and then passed over the Canadian frontier in suspiciously high spirits.

Besides the Custom-house there are huge notices announcing that "all vehicles leaving U.S.A. must report here." Whilst the car was being searched I found a very lovely butterfly; a Customs official sauntered up and picked it up and put it on the back of my hand. It took us a long time to get through the Customs and into Canada. He was young, and a giant, and had blue eyes. He came from Montreal—which is what one might have expected. The butterfly flew away—symbolically on into Canada. New York already seemed part of another life time. I have seen many dawns break on Manhattan, but none more lit with laughter than that last dawn. . . . I had been to a dinner-party, gone from thence to keep a supper appointment at midnight, and gone on from there to a cocktail party *à deux* at three o'clock in the morning. . . . "You will always remember," said the Good Companion of that crazy farewell "party," "how we two kept the dawn together. . . ." I have remembered. One does not soon forget the times when one was happy, and it was a lovely laughing night, and quite mad. . . . Afterwards he wrote to me, "Ethel, get on a boat and come over

again. You will make much more money in this country, but the cost of living is so high that you will have less left. . . . It is all bright and sunny over here. The peaches are blooming on Broadway, the robins are singing in Times Square, and women are murdering their husbands on Long Island. Nothing is wanted to complete the beautiful picture except your presence. . . . Wanamakers have put a gold frame around the place on the stairs where you sat waiting for me, and a tablet inscribed, 'Here sat Ethel Mannin. Will she ever come back?' There is no news over here. Prohibition continues to be broken. The traffic congestion is getting worse, and too many books are being published."

For the most part my American diary reads like an excerpt from *Gentlemen Prefers Blondes*, but here, disentangled from the roses and cocktails and wanton dawns, are some impressions of Manhattan nights:

Coloured Revue at the Columbia. Wild step-dances as only negroes know how. A yelling, excited audience carried away by the excitement of enthusiasm, and the artistes in turn affected by the excitement of the audience. Yells of "Beat it up Baby," "Step on it, Buddy," and "Attaboy." Grinning, excited negroes beating it up like mad. . . .

Earl Carroll Vanities with tables laid for champagne suppers immediately below the stage. A great deal of tentative daring, like a timid *Folies Bergères*. . . . The little more and the little less and how much it isn't. . . .

Dinner at the Russian Bear on Second Avenue. Seductive plaintive music; a completely deoxygenated atmosphere; tables so close together that one's elbows touch those of the people at the next table. It might be one of the show places at Montmartre or Montparnasse. Strange foods with unpronounceable names. . . .

Chez Henri on Long Island. One of the most chic "road-houses." Champagne corks popping gaily. Festoons of fairy-lights strung from the garden gate to the front door. Dancing and an atmosphere of gaiety-at-all-costs. One gazes thoughtfully at the cherry in the dry martini and reflects—So this is Prohibition. . . .

Beaux Arts Club at 2 a.m. Dancing. Cabaret. But nearly everyone has gone home. A dollar for a bottle

of mineral water, because it has been ordered merely as an accessory for a hip-flask of rye-whisky. This, too, is Prohibition. . . .

Greenwich Village : little bookshops open to the street ; stately old houses ; conscientiously artistic studios in mews ; Italian restaurants, and an extraordinarily frank disregard of Prohibition.

The *Ritz-Carlton*—a deafening din, and lovely, superbly *soignée* women.

New York is an exciting city to go to for the first time. It is so much beyond anything one has ever imagined. It is terrific. In New York you can see the machine of civilization getting out of hand, racing ahead of little puny man that created it. It is monstrous, yet it has a beauty of its own—the angular, futuristic, iron and steel and concrete beauty of modernity. It mocks man and challenges God. It is dreadful, and it is magnificent. It is overwhelming, yet exhilarating, terrifying, yet irresistible. It is an experience, a spectacle, a nightmare adventure with an uncanny fascination *sui generis*.

Everyone who has only seen New York comes home and generalizes about " America," but America is probably the one country in the world about which it is safe to generalize. It is the country of iced water, orange juice, cereal breakfasts, steam-heat, mouth washes, beauty-parlours, soda-water fountains, spoilt women, mass-production ideas, women's clubs, cults, straw hats, and men's rational underwear. It produces wood-alcohol, canned goods, chewing-gum, waffles, gold-diggers, sugar-daddies, red-hot-mommas, Babbitts, hot-dogs, bootleggers, sweeties, and most of what is bad in modern civilization. It is the home of advertising, petting-parties, revivalism, methodism, purity leagues, rotary clubs, quick-change-marriages, speak-easies, cocktails in soup-cups, systems, and the Better Spirit in Business. It is the only country in the world which could have produced Aimée McPherson, Henry Ford, Woodrow Wilson, a squabble in the second decade of the twentieth century over Darwinism-versus-Genesis, and a book setting forth Jesus Christ as the first advertising man.

It is the only country in the world which lives up to the specification of legend and tradition. You may fail

to realize the classic tradition of Greece, the romantic tradition of Spain, the historic tradition of England; but everything you have ever heard about America is true.

It is the country where machines think like human beings and human beings like machines. Time can but increase, and custom emphasize, its infinite vulgarity.

XII

ALL THESE THINGS

SOME REALIZATIONS

I

OCCASIONALLY one's scepticism is apt to be shaken, and life assume the proportions of a geometric pattern, rather than the strictly mathematical proposition which it actually is. Intellectually one knows that life is an endless series of causes and effects and that there can be no deviation from the scientific formula, but an innate superstition will sometimes impinge upon the rigidity of rationality. It is much easier to believe in something called Fate, or Destiny, or a "Divinity that shapes our ends rough-hew them how we will," than not to do so. But the whole discipline of straight-thinking lies in resisting the seductive comfort of superstition and the teasing coquetry of coincidence.

So many strange things have happened to me that I might be excused a little fatalism. Trees, for instance, have always played a curiously significant part in my life. I seem unable to escape them. For five years I worked in a little brown room looking into a giant plane tree which held out its branches like arms to my window. Four books I wrote whilst the seasons dressed and stripped the plane tree into which I looked every time I glanced up from my typewriter. And when, during that phase, I came to the house of someone disturbingly in my imagination at that time, lo, a plane tree looked in at the windows and is thus woven into the tapestry of associations.

The next tree was the weeping willow of " the house of the willow tree," where I lived for three years. My feeling of the irresistible dominance of the willow tree over the house caused me to write *Green Willow*. I loved that house so much that everything I did in it, the arranging of flowers, the smoothing of its curtains, all my care for its well-being, was in the nature of a service. I thought of that house that there inevitably would I live and there would die and there would I be buried. All of that love I put into the book. In the book I finally destroyed the tree which dominated the house like a guardian spirit. When I finally decided that I was temperamentally incapable of making a success of marriage, and left the house where I had thought to live forever, the tree most melodramatically died, as though in spectacular demonstration of the fact that life is infinitely stranger than fiction.

I attach no superstitious significance to this incident ; the tree had been slowly dying for some time ; it merely happened that my decision to reorganize my house coincided with its decease. But so much that has happened in my queer life has been like that, things which, read as fiction, would sound far-fetched and incredible.

When I was a young girl going solitary walks to Wimbledon Common I would pass a little whitewashed cottage, with a water-butt beside the front door, and a great oak tree spreading its arm out protectively over the irregularly tiled roof—a queer, lovely little place with its windows all up in the roof, like the rabbit's house in *Alice in Wonderland*. In the summer there would be coloured flames of massed rhododendrons blazing on the sloping lawns, and bunches of wisteria hanging like Japanese lanterns against the whitewashed walls, and honeysuckle creeping up round the windows. In the Spring daffodils danced in a lyric loveliness under the tall trees of a patch of wooded garden left to grow wild, with bluebells and primroses, and peering in through the chestnut palings of the fence I would wonder who lived there, and envy them passionately, whoever they might be. For years I went on admiring this cottage. " If only it might ever be for sale ! " I would think, but would remind myself that when people had acquired

such a house they did not sell it, and it was never likely to come into the market. Who should want to sell anything so utterly perfect! . . . Even when I was living in the house of the willow tree I would still look wistfully at the whitewashed cottage. Sometimes coming home from a theatre or party in town I would pass it late at night, or in the early morning, looking ghostly and enchanted, with its white walls gleaming in the moonlight, or in the wan dawnlight, and the giant oak tree sentinel, towering away high above the little crazy eaves. . . .

And then, incredibly, the day I go house-hunting for a house of my own the estate agent brings me to this very house—he had shown me everything else on his list, and this was but an afterthought. "It might just do," he said. "It's very small, of course." I imagined that he wanted to show me some wretched little villa, but I replied that since we have to pass the end of the road I supposed I might just as well glance at the place—and then with a sudden shock of realization found myself being conducted to the whitewashed cottage with the water-butt outside.

Like one in a dream I find myself approaching the massive oaken door; I am standing under the oak tree at the top of the crazy path; I am being shown into a little oak-panelled hall with a red tile floor—through tiny leaded casements I can see the blaze of rhododendrons; I go to a window, and there is the sweet upward rush of the scent of honeysuckle. . . . Faintly, I ask the price of this house of dreams. The agent tells me—a little apologetically; he explains that of course it is "a show-place." The price was more than I am prepared to pay, by a thousand pounds . . . but I knew that were it twice the price I must have this house. It was mine, I felt, by right of love and the long years of dreaming and waiting. I touched the oaken walls and looked up at the beamed ceiling—beautiful old seasoned oak, not stained deal—and waves of love welled up in me and overflowed. This was my house, this and none other. All these years it had waited for a day in high summer when I should walk up the crazy path and pass in under the oak tree . . . enter into possession.

And now I am living here, and the giant oak dips its branches to my study window, as the plane tree did, and the tragic green willow, and I have planted apple trees and taken root with them, and every Spring will be an ecstasy of wild daffodils, and every Summer a drenching sweetness of honeysuckle and jasmine stars, and sometimes still I can scarcely believe that it is true. . . . Strangers live now in the house of the willow tree, and maybe they have cut down the dead tree and callously grown roses over the stump, but it can never matter now. . . . Incredibly I have come home.

Incredibly—but it has always been so with me. I have always in the end got what I set out to get. Though keeping it may be another matter. But I have always believed profoundly in the magnetism of desire. There is no superstition about it—if one wants a thing intensely enough one must finally achieve it, for the simple reason that all one's thoughts and actions are directed towards that end, both consciously and unconsciously, and there is tremendous power in that unconscious propulsion towards the objective. The trouble with the majority of people is that they do not know what they want from life, and even when they have some idea, there is no passion in their wanting.

Few people understand passion apart from sexuality, or know anything of living " ready to be anything in the ecstasy of being ever "—which is the essence of the passionate life. Few people savour life as what poor Gerald Cumberland used to call " the vast luxury of living." The lives of the majority of people are fundamentally wrong ; wrong at the core ; nothing but a series of recurrent appetites, the gratification of which fulfils no profound organic satisfaction. In all this fussing with a myriad things there is a missing of fundamental satisfaction all along the line. One observes it in the faces of men and women in the streets, hears it in their voices, observes it in their taboo-ridden, convention-bound conduct. They are the slaves of fear and superstition and fetish.

Most people are dead, for all they move about the face of the earth. The women for the most part are not merely dead like the men, but buried as well. See them

rushing to buy the banned book, to get hold of it by hook or crook, to see the *risqué* play, the substitute for the sexual satisfaction they have never known. Pitiful. Women talk very freely of their intimate lives, and I have talked with a great many women of all classes and temperaments, and not one in ten has ever had full sexual satisfaction, those who have been married for years and borne children, even those who have had several lovers. The ignorance of civilized people concerning physiology and its significance in this business of living fully is as astounding as it is pitiful. How can people live life as a pure flame when there is this fundamental dissatisfaction at the whole root of living. This sexual frustration and disappointment and incompleteness has a deadening effect; it accounts for the apathy and dullness of the English people as positively as their sexual awareness accounts for the vivacity and aliveness of the Latin peoples. We have made sex a smutty story; but for them it is life, and in their acceptance of it as such they have laid hold of the art of living. At the back of all our shame about sex is the puritanical hatred of life, and its fear of happiness. In this country if a man and woman go into an hotel and ask for a room they must have baggage and pretend to be married before the English puritanical conscience will give it to them. The assumption is that they might go to bed together—which is a dreadful thing because it would be pleasurable; in this country you must have a licence for love, just as for a dog, or a wireless set, or a car. The English conscience works on the principle of, "There are some people trying to be happy—go and stop them; better, don't let them begin." Yet all English people know that even in this country people do go to bed together without the licence of a marriage certificate authorizing such conduct, and the people who will not countenance it in others—"on principle"—do it themselves. There is no limit to our national humbug. Our code of morality is exclusively concerned with sex; when we talk of "immorality" we mean a deviation from the sex code; with the larger immoralities of hypocrisy and pretence and spiritual dishonesty we are not concerned. We have reduced morality as we have reduced passion to a question of

sexual ethics. We are rotten all through with the artificialities of civilization, which gives us everything, every device the ingenuity of science can devise—wireless, movies, aeroplanes, motor-cars, central heating, television, everything that is inessential to human happiness, and nothing that is!

What have we got out of our so dearly bought and so fiercely fought-for civilization? A few immaterial comforts, such as electric light, geysers, tap-water, and weighed against these things, syphilis, prostitution, machine-guns, slums, factories, nervous disorders, fear, the tyranny of church and school. Civilization has corrupted us from a natural intelligence and simple enjoyment of life to an artificially fostered intellectuality and its blind stupidities and cruelties. For spontaneous happiness we have substituted organized pleasure. As Aldous Huxley says, "Good times are chronic nowadays. There is dancing every afternoon, a continuous performance at all the picture-palaces, a radio-concert on tap, like gas or water, at any hour of the day or night. . . . The better the time (in the modern sense) the greater the boredom. . . . A few more triumphs in the style of the radio and the talkies, and the boredom which is now a mere discomfort will become an intolerable agony." He quotes the case of the Melanesians who "literally and physically died of ennui when they were brought too suddenly in contact with modern amusements. We have grown gradually accustomed to the disease, and we therefore find it less lethal than do the South Sea Islanders. We do not die outright of it; it is only gradually that we approach the fatal conclusion of the malady. It will come, that fatal conclusion, when men have entirely lost the art of amusing themselves; they will then simply perish of ennui. Modern creation-saving machinery has already begun to deprive them of this art. The progress of invention may confidently be expected to quicken the process."

With every fresh device of our intellectuality we get farther away from fundamental satisfaction, still further clutter up our lives with inessentials, which consume our time and energies and give us precisely nothing; issues become blurred; we lose that singleness of purpose which

is the first principle of happiness ; we fritter life away on superficialities ; lose the clear outline of intelligence in the intricacies and excrescences of intellectuality. We have intellectualized our emotions and made them either impotent or sterile. We have no choice between the nullity of intellect divorced from the body, and the sordidness of a shame-ridden sensuality, no choice between a barren asceticism, and an equally barren hedonism. The philosophy of St. Francis was as stupid as that of Baudelaire, and as life-destroying. In order to recover the Hellenic ideal we need to turn our back on the civilization of the machine, which is civilization as we know it. The farther you get away from civilization the closer you revert to Hellenism, its belief in life, and its un-self-conscious delight in and acceptance of physical things. In the remoter islands off Scotland and Ireland, removed from civilization, men and women are still alive in their bodies, still capable of spontaneous, as opposed to organized, happiness.

Synge writes of the Aran Islanders: " The absence of the heavy boots of Europe has preserved to these people the agile walk of the wild animals, while the general simplicity of their lives has given them many other points of physical perfection. Their way of life has never been acted on by anything much more artificial than the nests and burrows of the creatures that live round them, and they seem, in a certain sense, to approach more nearly to the finer types of our aristocracies—who are bred artificially to a natural ideal—than to the labourer or citizen, as the wild horse resembles the thoroughbred rather than the hack or cart-horse. Tribes of the same natural development are, perhaps, frequent in half-civilized countries ; but here a touch of the refinement of old societies is blended, with singular effect, among the qualities of the wild animal."

That was twenty years ago ; the Aran Islanders now probably have their wireless sets and have been educated away from their natural sanity.

D. H. Lawrence turned his back in disgust on civilization as we know it and attempted to find uncorrupted life in the Mexican wildernesses. Since his death various little people have written patronizing little articles about

him pointing to his limitations, regardless of the fact that in his limitations he was infinitely greater than any of them in their fulfilments. His preoccupation with sex was a preoccupation with life. Much has been made of the fact that he was a sick man for a great part of his short life, and that sickness poisoned his outlook—they dare to say that of him, who amongst the last things he ever wrote, cried out that if only we were educated to *live*, instead of earn and spend, we could all manage very happily on twenty-five shillings a week. "If the men wore scarlet trousers they wouldn't think so much of money; if they could dance and hop and skip, and sing and swagger and be handsome, they could do with very little cash. And amuse the women themselves, and be amused by the women. They ought to learn to be naked and handsome, and to sing in a mass and dance the old group dances, and carve the stools they sit on, and embroider their own emblems. They wouldn't need money. And that's the only way to solve the industrial problem; train the people to be able to live and live in handsomeness, without needing to spend. But you can't do it. They're all one-track minds nowadays. Whereas the mass of people oughtn't even to try to think because they *can't*. They should be alive and frisky and acknowledge the great god Pan. He's the only god for the masses, forever. The few can go in for higher cults if they like. But let the mass be forever pagan."

Huxley makes the same point. "If men are ever to rise again from the depths into which they are now descending, it will only be with the aid of a new religion of life. And since life is diverse the new religion will have to have many Gods. Many; but since the individual man is a unity in his various multiplicity, also one. It will have to be Dionysian and Punic as well as Appolonian; Orphic as well as rational; not only Christian, but Martial and Venerean too; Phallic as well as Minervan or Jehovahistic. It will have to be all, in a word, that human life actually is, not merely the symbolical expression of one of its aspects. Meanwhile, however, the Gadarene descent continues."

But as Lawrence says, you can't do it. Orthodoxy has us too much in its grip. Orthodox education, orthodox

religion, organized pleasure, these three; they are the prime curses of civilization, the three prime sources of that muddled thinking which is the root of all evil and all humanity's lack of satisfaction in life. The tyranny of the church and school, with their gospel of fear, the press with its mass-production ideas and ideals, together form a dark, relentless triumvirate which blinds poor bewildered humanity to the only living godhead, the light which is in themselves, in their own life-force, their protoplasmic consciousness in the cosmic scheme; but, blind and deaf, they must put their faith instead in a personal deity, in the Pope, in the peers of the press; in anything but the living light in themselves.

We are driven by that blind shepherd intellectuality into the wilderness of civilisation, where the church, the press, and the school doth corrupt, and the wolves of Big Business seek whom they may devour. We have made of civilisation a wilderness inhabited by lost souls, where poverty is an offence, happiness beyond the circumscribed limits of the carefully drawn-up moral code a crime, and honesty forbidden altogether—for the really honest man is a Philistine in the camp of civilisation. The wonder is not that there is so much suffering and lack of satisfaction in life, but that there is any form of happiness at all. The decay of civilisation as we at present know it is humanity's only hope of saving its degraded soul alive.

For civilisation on its present terms, in its present form, involves altogether too much contentment with a makeshift half-life, too much acceptance of second-bests and substitutes, too much resignation and fobbing oneself off with "compensations." It is so dishonest; how can there ever be any compensations for lack of complete satisfaction in life and fulfilment of one's essential self? It isn't enough merely to warm both hands at the fire of life—though not so very many people seem to succeed in doing even that in these days—the art of living lies in warming one's whole body and to be able to complete each new day with the thought that if one died on this day or the next, one would have had, as we say, a pretty good run for the money—and the pains.

2

It has always seemed to me that the only intelligent and satisfactory principle of life is that of determining both to have one's cake and eat it. People say that it can't be done, and for those people it obviously can't. In order to make it a practical working philosophy, two things are needful, and those the very things which the vast majority of people lack—immense vitality and a flair for living. I have both. I have always known what I wanted and never been afraid to go after it. Nor had any superstitious fear about taking what life offered and being glad of it, and not stopping to wonder whether it were "wise." It is all this business of being sensible and discreet which drains all the colour and gaiety and spontaneous joy out of living.

I have had a full crowded life, like Ulysses, "all times I have enjoyed greatly, have suffered greatly. . . ." Heavens, how one has wept, but heavens how one has laughed and loved and delighted, too. "Sensible" people call it living on one's emotions, but how else can one live? Living on one's intellect is a sterile and barren business. Not to feel is not to live. "We who love are those who suffer; we who suffer most are those who most do love." (Why is Fiona Macleod so sadly neglected a poet in these days? His poetry has wisdom and profundity as well as imagination and lyric beauty.)

It has always struck me as a little droll that people should have been so thrilled by the confessions of Isadora Duncan. I do not mean that I do not regard her as a vivid and interesting and spectacular personality; she was very much what few people are, "a Person," with a great zest for living. But I am so bored with her favourite pronunciamento that she was "the female Casanova of America." I have been called "a modern Georges Sand" ("but *so* much better looking, my dear") but I have never gone about making a sort of slogan of it. Isadora was by no means as unique as respectable people—and the mass of people are that—suppose her to be. I admire immensely Isadora's courage in her desperate difficulties, and her splendid indiscretion and complete

indifference to what people thought of her, but are one's *affaires* worth writing about? Not, anyhow, as such, I think; a dozen lovers or a score, the actual statistics make no difference; it is the sum total of experience which is of interest and value. "We are what we are by what we have experienced," said Voltaire, "granted that all experiences are good, and the bitter ones the best of all." The result, the net effect upon the personality, must always be more interesting than the story of the experiences themselves. Copulative details are too monotonous to be interesting. Isadora's story of her desire for a child by the beautiful young Italian who rose like Aphrodite from the waves, is amusing; the physical details of how she lost her virginity merely dull; the Italian adventure was original, an expression of personality; whereas the physical processes of the deflowering of virginity are much the same for the Isadora Duncans of the world as the brides of Methodist ministers.

One or few or many lovers, the number is so unimportant; it is the attitude to life which counts, not the statistics; not the number of *affaires*, but the amount of living.

Englishwomen in Italy grow indignant about the manner in which amorous Italians "pester" them in the streets. When an Italian sees a woman whom he thinks attractive he follows her, murmuring, softly, enticingly, "*Bella! Bella bambina!*" The Englishwoman repays the compliment with a virtuous frown. The Latin woman acknowledges it with a smile, whether she is interested or not. The Englishwoman regards as an impertinence or an insult what the Latin woman—with her greater sexual awareness and love of life and love, perceives to be the greatest compliment a man can pay a woman. Once in a *piazza* in Rome a long, low Italian car dashed up and stopped, with the engine still running, an officer leaned out of the window and laughed into my face, "*Bella!*" he said, and emphasised it, "*Molto bella!*" A group of young Italians standing by laughed; the fountain laughed; the sunshine laughed. I laughed. But the couple of provincial spinsters to whom I recounted the episode at the dinner at the *pensione* that night, bridled, "What cheek these Italians have got!" they said.

I replied that on the contrary I thought it was charming, and that the custom generally was one of the most charming characteristics of a charming race. I added wickedly that in Venice young men pursued and accosted one with flowers in their mouths, and that Neapolitans all had strictly dishonest intentions regarding every woman whose face was not positively like a wall. . . .

There is a great deal too much fuss made about sexual relations. When I was seventeen Herbert Jenkins reminded me that, " the sum of human experience is not to be found in a bed." That is true, but all the same a little more going to bed with the right person would be of great value to the majority of women in this country.

There is something very pitiful about all this present-day dieting and massage and beauty treatment, for the beauty that lies like a bloom on a woman never yet came out of any beauty-parlour. I once in a moment of illumination wrote the phrase, " beautiful as a woman going to her lover," but loving is not enough, being loved is not enough ; there must be what Havelock Ellis aptly defines as a close clinging to " that which satisfies the deepest cravings of the organism," that complete organic satisfaction, physically and mentally and emotionally, without which everything else is rendered futile. When our inmost nature is satisfied and at peace it does not matter much what else life does to us or fails to do. Gloria Swanson was right when she declared that half the women of America were sex-starved, and that that accounted for their numerous women's clubs, their cliques, and crusades, in which they all huddled together as it were for warmth—the warmth denied them by their men. I should have made the percentage higher, and caused it to include this country equally.

It is invariably the people whose lives lack this essential warmth who try to divide the human organism up into separate compartments labelled " body " and " soul," and talk in terms of " physical " and " spiritual," " sacred " and " profane," love. It all sounds a little bleak to me—and terribly unscientific, since in the light of the latest biological investigations and discoveries the existence of mind is a highly debatable matter. We

have already discovered that fear is a matter of endocrine secretions into the blood stream. Science may yet reveal to us that genius is all a matter of thyroid, and mind pure chemistry. Believing in life I see no logical necessity to believe in an abstract thing called a soul. All our perceptions—of beauty, love, pain, delight—are made through the physical senses of sight, touch, scent, hearing, and all our reaction to the numerous facets of experience which life turns to us are controlled by these things; the processes of reasoning are the deductions of sense-reactions; it is difficult to see where an abstract unit called a soul, or mind, or spirit comes into it. The body is biological fact; the soul pure hypothesis. Man invented angels out of a puritanical disgust of his body. Yet the people who believe in angels and souls are the very people who believe that God made man in His own Image. . . . All this shame of the body, therefore, would seem to be a little inconsistent. And as D. H. Lawrence causes one of his characters to remark, " Me and God seems a bit uppish."

A philosophy of life, it seems to me, is of so much more practical value than a religion. Religion is for the defeated, or those who lack courage. I believe in life—which is to say in myself as part of the physical world we know, the world of flesh and blood, sap and spermatozoa, cells and atoms and chemical elements. The atom may be the scientific explanation of God. Or it may be another name for God. It doesn't seem to me to matter. The important thing is to be able to say not " I was " or " I will be," but " I am " to *be*; to savour life as a vast luxury, none the less precious because it is leavened by pain, or because it is finite. To live in the limits of one's being—that would seem to be the supreme and only necessity; therein lies the sole purpose and meaning in life—*being*. Blessed are they who realize it, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven—which is another name for happiness on earth.

XIII

TRAGEDY

SOME ASPECTS OF FUTILITY

I

HAD I given heed to all the people who bade me be discreet and reticent in the writing of this book, it would never have got written. As it is, in consideration for other people's feelings, I have omitted a good deal. For myself my attitude is entirely "People say, what they say, let them say." But unless the people of whom one writes have also that complete disregard for public opinion—which few people have—one is not justified in revealing them stark naked. And even though one has no compunction for oneself regarding stripping oneself for the public gaze, one has nevertheless to consider possible embarrassment for the people intimately associated with one. If one is not to be callous about other people's feelings one is reduced simply to telling as much of the truth as possible. In a world cluttered up with false values and snobbery it is very hard to clear a space in which to tell the whole truth about almost anything.

When I told Gerald Gould the kind of book my *Confessions and Impressions* was to be, he said, "But how *can* you write such a book and say anything worth while without tearing the hearts out of people? And there is too much of that sort of thing done nowadays!" Ralph Straus had previously expressed a similar opinion regarding the fashionable practice of betraying personalities in print, and I am in entire agreement with these critics. It is "outrageous" and "unpardonable"—save where one has a contempt for people; the degree of one's *respect* for people—irrespective of personal like or dislike—seems to me the only possible criterion by which one's conduct regarding them can be judged. I deplore the practice of accepting a man's hospitality and then going away and writing of him as a doddering old fool; if that be one's estimation of him, it would seem to me

more decent and honest not to write of him; and I deplore equally the practice of betraying the foibles and failings of public persons merely in order to make "amusing" anecdotes or racy reading, and of betraying remarks and opinions expressed in trust—the sort of thing which is all very well said in an intimate circle, but which becomes embarrassing when made public. One goes to literary parties nowadays with the dread feeling that anything one says is liable to be taken down and used in evidence against one in some subsequent book of sketches or memoirs. It is becoming unsafe to say anything in a mixed gathering which one would object to seeing in print. I do not mean that one should get permission from anyone who has ever said anything interesting or amusing or pertinent before quoting him or her in print, but I do endorse entirely the opinion which I have heard expressed in various quarters that in much of what is published to-day there is altogether too casual and free a use made of incidents and conversations without regard to the feelings of, or possible consequences to, the people concerned.

Had I told all that I know in some instances I could have written a much more amusing book, but then I did not set out to write an amusing book, and even otherwise such betrayals could not have seemed to me justified. Because one has no compunction about undressing in public oneself is no reason for not respecting other people's prejudices and reticences in the matter. And even in writing of oneself due consideration for the feelings of people intimately associated with one seems to me, as I have said, essential. If I were completely alone in the world, that is to say if I could with truth say "I care for nobody, no, not I, and nobody cares for me," I should not have had the slightest hesitancy about telling everything, but I am not alone, and for that reason much of the original draft of this book was scrapped. Even so I am well aware that what remains is going to incur a good deal of displeasure, criticism, irritation, resentment, contempt, and reproach in various quarters . . . but not, I hope, very much embarrassment, and certainly no pain for anyone I respect. That seems to me the important thing.

When I began this book and was resolved to tell the

story of my life to date, omitting such details as it seemed to me might possibly hurt or embarrass anyone else in the telling, I had not intended writing in detail of that passage in my life between leaving the house of the willow tree and coming to the cottage. To write in detail of past things is easy ; it is all over ; but the present, I felt must always be necessarily too intimate and personal to write about in detail. To convey by general impression that I had achieved happiness and fulfilment and fundamental satisfaction in life after much seeking and disappointment and struggle—that, I felt, should suffice. Because the person to whom this book is dedicated was then alive. Before the book was half finished the dedication so happily determined upon resolved itself into a tragic epitaph.

There will be those, I know, who will say that I should not write of this disaster ; who will accuse me of the novelist's trick of dramatizing one's own emotions, of using a tragic experience as " copy." But I doubt very much whether one is capable of dramatizing the sort of experience which literally shakes life to its foundations ; I think that it is only the lightly felt things of one's life which one can dramatize—one does it then, if one does it at all, with an unconscious desire to give them greater depth and importance.

But supposing that in your house you have an outgoing telephone only, so that the telephone bell never rings ; and that then one afternoon the silence is suddenly shattered by its ringing ; and because all that torturing morning, and all that tormenting night before you have been trying to discover the whereabouts of someone you loved—someone who is for you " the meaning of all things that are "—fear leaps up in you, together with a wild frantic hope that here at last is some anxiety-relieving explanation . . . something has happened out of the ordinary run of daily life. . . . The Exchange asks if you will accept a call, and it is as though the whole house, still quivering from the ringing of the bell, listens. You are not a reasoning human being any more ; you are merely a turmoil of apprehension and hope. And a voice says, " There's bad news. Have you heard ? He's dead. . . . Last night . . . suicide. . . ."

2

Pictures involuntarily projected upon the screen of memory . . . Leaving the house of the willow tree and living for a while in an hotel near the Queen's Hall . . . " all very county " . . . making a joke of its pompous respectability. " Living amongst the governing classes " —retired colonels, county families spending a week in town for a little shopping and a few theatres and concerts —healthy girls who didn't use lipstick, wore expensive dowdy clothes and played all sports but one—" I'm sure they don't think you're quite nice, my dear." The wide Regency emptiness of Portland place . . . yellow columns and two steps up, arid, interminable, wildernesses of yellow stone. . . .

Then high summer, and a baroque flat in Lyall Street, all red brocades and gilt mirrors and Florentine antiques ; a mews, outside, full of children and gramophones and heat. . . . Despairingly closing the windows to shut out the everlasting wail of " Sonny Boy." . . . Struggling to get a book done, waiting impatiently for the cottage to be ready. . . . Walking in the cool of evening, grateful for the green shade of Eaton Square. . . . Chelsea and the river glimmering with a sunset sheen of light and shadow. . . . The bridge over the Serpentine, reeds and irises, yellow and blue, and an amber glow in the evening sky . . . passing a soldier in a scarlet coat kissing a girl on a seat on the side-walk. . . . " And why shouldn't they ? Why be ashamed of loving ? They're happy, which is what people were meant to be. . . ." Talking of what the Labour Government might do towards making the parks fit for lovers to love in, talking of Bertrand Russell, of Robert Bridges, of an American poem about ducks, " beautiful comical things " . . . that complete sense of communion, of flowing in to each other, of being part of the peace and beauty of the gleaming water and the light in the sky. . . .

Summer-time in London, and the trees heavy and dusty in the heat ; the sultriness of Lyall Street, the weariness of the hot red flat. Being happy and being sad. . . . Life going on inexorably, with little spurts of

laughter, and little spurts of pain . . . but all the time living intensely. . . .

And then the cottage ready at last, and the garden still ablaze with summer flowers, and my own Lares and Penates about me once more, and that sense of having come home. . . . *Children of the Earth* finished in tranquillity, and this book begun . . . the lovely summer dipping down into an Indian summer; the oak tree shedding its leaves, the last of the roses braving the Autumn frosts. . . . Dreaming of days unborn . . . of the Channel Islands with the gorse flaring in the sun, and the lovely colour of the sea, purple and blue and jade, in the little rocky bays . . . and that little place in Spain which the world has not yet discovered . . . " for there are good things yet to do, and good things to be seen, before we go to Paradise by way of Kensal Green . . ." dreaming, making plans, all the to-morrows, beckoning, glamorous with dreams. . . . " Next Spring will be our first—we never noticed the last." . . . A memory within a memory, " there are buds and things going on in the world outside," and an answering, " There is no world but here." . . . Planting apple trees in the cottage garden, " Apple blossom is such a good thing." . . .

But even with the planting of the apple trees a dark note of pain throbbing now under all the laughter and peace and ecstasy and happiness, a dark crescendo of pain and despair, a rising tide . . . until at last, before the Spring has come or there is more than the first light promise of it on the air, that dark crescendo has reached its tragic climax. . . .

All my life the blinding horror of that sunlit afternoon when the telephone bell rent the silence, " making everything afraid," must remain with me. What is it that happens to one in such moments of shock—like a physical tearing at one's heart ? One has no conscious emotion but that of panic, of life having stopped. It is as though one's entire organism resists acceptance of the monstrous thing, becomes a shouting No, a wild frantic negation that would shout God himself down. It isn't true, it can't be true, these things don't happen . . . and one is so utterly defenceless when they do.

Why it should be regarded as less decent to write of

one's pain than of one's happiness, or one's political views, or literary tastes. I have never been able to understand. Human emotions are surely more interesting and important. There is a greater need, too, to write of one's suffering, for suffering is a lonely business, and we all have need of a confessional. What the world says is unimportant. The important thing is the preservation to oneself of one's own inner integrity.

I set out to write the story of my life, because I felt that it was interesting, both in its colourfulness and its struggle. I might have written a lurid, sensational story of many strange emotional encounters and queer adventurings amongst human beings such as do not happen to everyone. I have had things happen in my life which anyone who had not similarly lived, reading as fiction, would declare " far-fetched " and impossible in real life. But it was not my idea to write the " startling confessions " type of book, for the supplying of second-hand thrills to people who have never had the courage, or sufficient of the flame of life in them, to live for themselves—though heaven knows such a book would have been easy enough to write. It was not dishonesty or shame or lack of courage which has made me refrain from writing of some things that have happened to me, and even in much of what I have written to withhold the intimate details which it is the current literary fashion to set down minutely, but merely a nice appreciation of what is and is not important. I wanted to deal mainly in essentials, to tell only of the things which had been emotionally or philosophically important to me, or of interest, and in any case, vital or ephemeral, in recounting any intimate experience it has always seemed to me artistically bad, and quite unnecessary, to take one's readers right into the bedroom . . . I have also, rightly or wrongly in this respect, a sensitiveness regarding other people's feelings. It is impossible to be honest and altogether avoid hurting or embarrassing other people a little, but one can at least avoid sacrificing their feelings for the sake of trivialities, and this is what I have tried to do.

In the real sense of that poor word, for all my adventurings I have loved only a few people. It is ironic that the

one person In whom I found full and complete realization, and who revealed love to me as what Leonhard Frank calls " the miracle that happens to one in thousands," should bring tragedy into my life. It is just one more of the many queer things which have made up my life that our association should have begun with his appreciation of my novel *Crescendo*, and should have ended as the novel ends, in suicide.

A great many other people have loved me, some lightly, some deeply and sincerely and lastingly. For all the fun and laughter and happiness one is grateful ; one has no regrets ; how could one have regrets for having been alive ? But in writing the story of one's life the purely episodic falls back into its proper place, part of the mosaic background of the essential design, and the outlines of the real pattern emerge. I should be guilty of gross dishonesty were I to write what purported to be the story of my life and omit the most profound experience both of happiness and suffering I ever had—it would be like omitting to deal with my marriage and motherhood. But even those experiences could have been left out with less dishonesty than this, for it would be the sheerest humbug to pretend that these things were more important, or even as important ; neither the experience of marriage nor of motherhood revolutionized me as did this chapter of my life, or were in themselves, as emotional experiences, as vital. There is nothing very remarkable either about getting married or having a child ; bearing children is not a soul-shattering experience, nor is it the only form of creating life, nor the most important. I refuse to subscribe to sentimental cant on the subject. But when a human being who has always lived shut up in himself can emerge and love another human being, a miracle has happened ; one has created life itself. I gave to the man to whom this book is dedicated all the happiness he had ever had in his thirty odd years of introversion and narcissism. I gave him life. I do not say this out of any egotistical vanity ; there are others who knew him years before I did, and they, too, know that this is quite simply true.

For myself, I had always lived intensely, vibrantly, burning by an invisible sun within, knowing life as a

pure flame, a vast luxury, but in one person at last all my passion of living was sublimated, all my capacity for giving and loving hitherto dammed up for want of adequate outlet, released. From its conception this book was planned for dedication to him—" because he has a first-class mind "—the Bertrand Russell class of mind. I had always known that I would not love fully, as I knew it was in me to love, until I found someone I could utterly respect and admire intellectually, someone in whom was no slightest trace of the pseudo or third-rate, no taint of muddled thinking. This intellectual purity I found in him, allied with an almost inhuman unselfishness. To this day I do not know whether he was super-human or sub-human. There was certainly no place for him in life as we know it.

Together we discovered love as " this final union of two persons beneath which glows the buried meaning of all life." He would assert that when we loved something happened in the world for the first time. Perhaps all lovers think that. Perhaps it is equally true of all lovers. As Aldous Huxley insists, the only truths are psychological truths, and one psychological fact is not more of a fact than another. I only know that I have loved considerably before, but never with this sense of miracle, and I cannot imagine that it will happen twice, since it is only to one in thousands that it happens once. But then, I did not know that it could happen at all outside of poetry and romantic fiction, and it is true that " the miracle of miracles is that they happen." After all my years of seeking and adventuring, and my hedonist philosophy of taking my fun where I found it, the incredible lovely thing happened, proving not merely that all that the poets of all time had ever written about love was right, but that they didn't go far enough. It is a psychological truth to say that we loved with a love that was more than love. But it was too much for him ; it overwhelmed him ; he could not fit it into life, nor could he live without it. For a while there was this strange fusion of two lives, narcissist and extravert, and great peace, and a sense of fulfilment in which life and time stood still. But he emerged from his narcissism into a world he had not seen when shut up in himself.

He could not adapt himself to it and its bewildering accepted standards; there was no place for him in its artificiality. When Narcissus leaves the pool wherein he broods on his own reflection, life becomes too much for him; already before his death he was returning gradually to that pool. . . . But I did not know; I could not see; we never can see clearly those we love; we are too close to them, too much part of them. He was too rational to accept civilization's confusingly irrational code, and with his innate straight thinking he could not compromise; he could only go back into himself. His suicide was the final act of narcissism.

3

Only one does not try to explain introversion, narcissism, and psychological conflict to a coroner. That "the deceased" was suffering from "mental trouble" and "depression" is as good a definition as any. Besides, coroners have their own views about things, their own little stock of clichés and preconceived ideas. So the coroner in this case decided that the deceased was "brilliant but over-strung." Who would want to do a harmless necessary coroner out of his simple pleasures—the airing of his views on this and that, handing out a little praise here, a little censure there, is "coroner's perks," and the greater the tragedy the more scope for views for the papers to print, and journalists to fasten on for texts for snappy Sunday paper articles. . . .

This coroner was very suave and gentlemanly and pseudo-cultured. He wore an eyeglass and looked like Woodrow Wilson, and one felt that it was quite possible he might even have heard of Freud. He was, he said, afterwards, getting "quite a curve on these suicide cases." He had observed that there were comparatively few before Christmas, and then early in the New Year the curve went up again. . . . I don't know whether he deduced from this that potential suicides postponed their deaths so as not to miss Christmas. But perhaps he had more subtle theories.

The inquest was a brisk and cheerful affair altogether. A policeman reeled off his evidence precisely as a guide

reels off his patter. One realized how many times he had repeated the same piece with a few minor alterations as to detail. There was the gabbled oath with the Testament held aloft, and then " on-the-nth-instant-I-was-called-the-house-of . . . *there* I found . . ." The coroner interrupted the flow for a moment whilst he checked a note, then the witness rattled on, taking up the point of his narrative where he had dropped it, " *there* I found . . ." He concluded his piece, answered a few questions, all but saluted, then stepped briskly into the background like a good boy who has said a nice recitation and earned a smile and is glad it's all over. . . . It was all over in a few minutes, and everyone got tipped. The coroner's assistant was a stout, hearty little man, smiling and cheerful. At the conclusion of the proceedings he shook hands with us all, and because I was weeping felt impelled to say, beamingly, that he was so sorry that we met on such an occasion . . . *so* painful these occasions. . . . *Good*-day. . . . I thought how much all this would amuse *him*. Kind policeman administered sal volatile, and patted my hands and called me " missy," and said, " there, there," and smiled encouragingly. . . . That would have amused him, too. Life, too, has its grim jokes, even in the mortuary, as in the coroner's court. I had turned back the dirty sheet in order to touch his hands, and the helmetless young policeman, eyes kept tactfully lowered in deference to grief and the dead, came to life suddenly, shocked into animation by the threat to the proprieties represented by the turning back of the sheet, laying hold of the sheet lest it slip back lower than decency permitted. In the eyes of civilization nakedness is improper even in death.

An ironic jest on life's part, too, that it should take me to a mortuary to look on death for the first time, and that my first experience of death should be in connection with someone I loved more than life—someone who was my life. There is nothing beautiful about death. It is ugly —and stupid. I knew, when I got there, that those who had counselled me not to go to the mortuary were right. The dead bear no resemblance to the living. They do not look " peaceful " and " as though they were asleep," as I was told when a child. That is all part of the muck of

sentimentality with which civilization seeks to endow its dead. But the dead are beyond the reach of civilization; they are starkly naked and alone and remote. It was foolish to have made a train journey to look at a dead body; *he* was not there. The dead have nothing to do with the living. Life and death are completely disparate. An unlit lamp bears no resemblance to a lighted one. To the rational mind the contemplation of a dead body makes the hypothesis of a soul seem still more absurd.

A sudden death is a considerable shock to one's complacency. One is shocked into an involuntary honesty. One is left astounded at the extent to which one had been accustomed to fritter away one's time and squander one's nervous and emotional energy on futilities; one is left bewildered that one could ever have found interesting or amusing, or in any way worth while, so many of the things one used to do, and which used to clutter up one's days; it reveals to one how much superficiality one overlooked in one's life, and how little so many of the people one had imagined one was fond of really matter to one—a discovery in itself a little shocking. In an agony of futile regret one realizes how blind one had been to what was really going on all the time in the person who was so close that it was like being one body. "If only one had realized," one thinks and is torn by that pitiless, unabating remorse which persists in spite of the fact that one knows how futile it is. One is overwhelmed by what seems to one one's own blindness and insensitiveness and stupidity. That one should have cared so much and yet been so blind and blundering. One is shocked by one's preposterous certainty that there will always be a to-morrow, that one had ever dared to assume that there was all life ahead—the arrogance of it! To have had the audacity to assume that there was no need to meet to-day because one was busy or had something else to do. That complacent belief in the inevitableness of a to-morrow. . . . And then the shock of horror to find that there is no to-morrow, that for once we have miscalculated. . . .

"Don't let us meet to-day," I had said, in my complacency about life, "we shall be meeting to-morrow. I will telephone you again this evening." But by the evening the life of the one to whom I had said that was

flowing out on that dark sea whence there is no returning and no to-morrow.

We never take seriously the people who talk of suicide —that, too, is part of our complacency. As the husband of Hedda Gabler said, "But people don't *do* these things...." The tragedy and the irony of it is that they do.

4

At the nursing home to which I was removed the day after the inquest, I incurred the disapproval of the matron. Had I been in a state of collapse because of grief for a dead husband it would have been another matter, and she would have been overflowing with womanly sympathy; I was cheating her of an orgy of sentimental pity, for our indecent moral code makes it "immoral" to suffer for "illicit" love. It is a wonder that in this country we do not try to insist on the sun having a licence before it shines. It would be just as reasonable. One day when I was weeping in an agony of despair this woman brought me an account and required me to sign a register. I in turn required her for God's sake to go away.... Her mouth was tight, and her eyes hard; she was mentally and physically rigid with puritanical disapproval. When will the puritans learn that people cannot love to order—not with the best intentions in the world? That one cannot say, "this person is my lawful wedded husband or wife, and therefore I will love him or her and none other all my days," any more than one can say, "this person is not my lawful wedded husband or wife, and therefore I will not permit myself to love him or her."

All this business of trying to make human emotions conform to order, or trying to make life fit into a code, instead of adapting the code to life. All these puritans lying to themselves because they have been cheated by life, or been afraid to venture in it, afraid of their impulses, ashamed of their bodies and the very act of loving—without a licence. Afraid most of all of the truth; wallowing in a mass of half-truths, endorsing dishonesty in the name of tactfulness. Self-sacrifice and tactfulness are disgusting vices, not virtues; they are anti-life, and it is time they were realized as such; they

are a perversion of selfishness, and cause infinite misery in human life. Truth can wound like a sword, but it is a clean wound, for truth is shining and clean as a sword, and its wounding is antiseptic. But humanity prefers to poison itself with the little tainted barbs of half-truths, which are merely whitewashed lies, with the result that everything is "all along a dirtiness, all along a mess"—of platitude and cliché, and much sound signifying nothing.

I wanted very much to die after this disaster. It simply did not seem to me possible that one could go on. I could not visualize myself going on. Life had become literally null and void. My life had swept magnificently and miraculously up to a climax of satisfaction I had scarcely believed it possible for a human being to achieve, and then at the very peak of fulfilment that miraculous edifice toppled over and the bottom dropped out of the world. "Life and time stood still in this union of profoundest happiness, which is not granted to mankind, because hard by stands the pain of life, and, before ten breaths can be taken, resumes its great blind progress." I had always known that. Even in the midst of my happiness I had always been conscious of that pain of life standing hard by, but I had not known how ruthless it could be in its great blind progress. One had thought that although a miracle had happened one would somehow contrive to fit life into it if one could not fit it into life. If only one had courage, one felt, ultimately all the complications and difficulties of life would yield before one, and one would be free to live fully in the midst of the wonder. All the time one sought in externals for this hard-pressing pain of life, and for all one's vaunted psychological insight could not see that it came essentially from within, part of that dark pain, untouchable.

So that unseen the tragic crescendo swept on in a dark tide that finally engulfed life itself, and there came that afternoon when the incoming telephone call shattered the silence and life heeled over like a derelict ship. It seemed quite unlikely after that that one would remain to face the Spring, the daffodils and the apple-blossom, and the long light summer evenings and their melancholy beauty. Everything seemed to have stopped. One was dead although one's body still lived.

But, as Bertrand Russell said to me the day I visited him in his tower, life becomes a habit. One goes on in spite of oneself, and therein lies salvation. The mere fact of going on is proof of an innate belief in life. Or perhaps it after all only bears out Bertrand Russell's theory of life as a habit. It is a curious thing that all my books with the exception of *Crescendo* have ended on that note of "carrying on," keeping some sort of banner flying, however ragged. One goes on in a sort of pathetic faith that somehow is good. . . . Humanity's capacity for dragging itself through dark tunnels and emerging again into the light at the other end, alive if not whole, appears to be infinite. Only one doesn't realize it until one has been in the dark tunnel oneself.

Dr. Eder, the psycho-analyst about whom I have written in this book, and whom I believe knows all that it is possible to know about the human mind, wrote to me at the time, "I do not see how you can escape being. Life with you will storm on, like the mighty rivers I have seen in their torrents, the Amazon, the Magdalêne. At times all the country is flooded—it is one empty mass of water, then it recedes, and we have a river again, with a proper course, and boundaries. So shall it be with you." I wanted desperately to believe that; I *had* to believe it. . . . That belief was the glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel.

From which tunnel I have emerged more than ever convinced that we live fully and completely only as we love fully and completely; failing this, life and "all the little dreams men break their lives upon" become a chaos of futilities. It is merely the fear of being thought sentimental which induces this diffidence about acknowledging the importance of love in human life; but why should it be regarded as sentimental? We do not think it sentimental to freely acknowledge the importance of fresh air and good food, or to accept as truth that man does not live by bread alone. Some months ago I watched with amused interest a newspaper discussion by eminent people as to the secret of happiness in life. All sorts of things were trotted out—work, fun, beauty, adventure, and not one of these celebrities had the courage and the honesty to tell the simple truth and

admit that when you get down to rock-bottom love is the secret of all human happiness because it is the only source of lasting, fundamental satisfaction : that there can't be any lasting delight in beauty, work, travel, adventure, or anything else, unless one's life is right at the core, and that it can't be right at the core unless one's love-life is right. That, surely is very simple and elemental psychology and physiology ? Yet comparatively few people seem to recognize it. I rather suspect that secretly, deep down in them, they do realize it, but lack the courage to admit it because their own love-lives are so unsatisfactory ; it is too humiliating to have to admit the inner emptiness of their lives, and so they will rather pitifully assert that they are " perfectly happy " in their interest in their work, or in collecting etchings, or looking after their children, or tending their gardens.

A lot of them, too, are disappointed spinsters and bachelors, disillusioned matrons, religious neurotics, under-sexed anæmics, or the greatest of all that tiresome tribe of puritans, reformed rakes—of both sexes. There is a great deal of fox-and-the-sour-grapes business in this scoffing at the importance of love in life. When, for instance, " mother of a family " writes indignantly to me pointing out that " there are other things in life besides all this love business," I know at once that she has been cheated by life, just as I know that the people who are cynical about love are the people who have wanted it desperately and yet never known it, or have been bitterly hurt by it—though I am not sure that if one has ever really known love, even when one has lost it, either by death or the falling in love on the part of oneself or the other person, that one can be bitter about it. Sorrowful, certainly, but not bitter, for it is " something to have smelt the mystic rose, Although it break and leave the thorny rods. . . . It is something to have been." To have loved is to have lived—and to have lived even for a little while is more than most people realize in a world in which tragically few people ever know what it is to live in the full sense of the term.

There would be a good deal less neurosis and dissatisfaction and unhappiness in the world if people

would face the fact of humanity's need for a satisfactory love-life. It is all so superficial to assert this and that as the secret of life's happiness without ensuring that one has that profound organic satisfaction which is the All's Well of one's emotional life—that inner life which is our real life. I, for instance, have all that I had before the disaster, enough money to buy myself such of the world's pleasures as appeal to me, the house I always wanted, my beautiful garden, my beloved child, my work, my friends, my appreciation of all forms of beauty . . . but because he is dead who was to me " the meaning of all things that are," I am desolated by a sense of emptiness and futility. People have said to me, " But you have your work, your child," but I am much too honest to be able to deceive myself that either work or parenthood can fill life completely. If one has never known fulfilment, one can perhaps deceive oneself, fob oneself off with a half-life, make-believe, and the-next-best-thing, but not if one has known . . . when one on honeydew hath fed and drunk the milk of Paradise, one cannot go back and get much satisfaction out of an ordinary bread-and-butter diet. Self-deception can be a very comforting thing, but the more one lives and suffers the more impossible it becomes for one. In some ways one can envy the people who can " take to " God, or reincarnation or spiritualism when the cataract of the flood of heaven has come tumbling off the brink ; it must be a great comfort—but one denied to an intelligent scepticism. Being an intelligent person can be a bleak business at times. But I would much rather think of someone I had loved simply ceasing to be, except as a handful of dust scattered loosely somewhere about the universe, than as reincarnated in some other body, or mooning about as a disembodied spirit. Either of those alternatives strikes me as indecent. " Contemptible " was the word Bertrand Russell used to me when we were discussing it.

It is not until one is *in extremis* that people are revealed to one as they fundamentally are ; one sees then how much selfishness or unselfishness is in them, how much imaginative insight or how much lack of imagination, how much superstition and fear, and how much

essential sanity and wisdom. There is, one realizes, a little handful of intelligence functioning in an arid wilderness of superstition and preconceived ideas. And how in that desert can it be expected to blossom like the rose? The world is riddled by superstitious fear which infects not merely its cliché-ridden speech but its habit of thought, so that it even thinks in clichés—when it thinks at all, though usually it accepts all the ready-made ideas which school and church and press pump into it from the time it can accept ideas at all.

5

Sometime ago I wrote in praise of that exquisite little masterpiece *Carl and Anna*, translated from the German of Leonhard Frank. A great many people wrote to me deploring that I should have praised a book which "glorified adultery." All these expressions people use—'Committing adultery," "guilty party," "illicit love" . . . all this legal phraseology applied to human emotions. Carl and Anna loved each other so profoundly that "by their willingness to die they won the white seconds from life. . . . Their hearts streamed together." But because their author had omitted to make them husband and wife this, in the language of the puritans, was "adultery." Of course love is illicit. How legalize it? It is as illicit as the winds and tides and the ebb and flow of the seasons.

I was more recently invited by a newspaper to reply to Dean Inge's diatribe on "dirty novels and adultery in fiction." But the editor refused to publish my reply—after having specially asked for it—because I used the word "adultery"—in newspapers only deans, evidently, are allowed that privilege. This is what I wrote, "Dean Inge has apparently joined the ranks of the self-appointed, would-be literary dictators, when he deplores 'dirty novels based on adultery,' and what he regards as the modern tendency to exaggerate the part sex plays in life. What does he mean by the word 'dirty' as applied to novels? Dirt, like beauty, is surely in the eye of the beholder. Why this persistent, puritanical shame about sex? Sex is life. To refer to adultery 'as a disgusting

vice, and unsuited to novels,' is ridiculous. The number of people who 'commit adultery'—quaint phrase—out of sheer viciousness is infinitely small; people commit adultery because they are unhappy, disappointed, cheated of their dreams, hungry for the love that has died or that never happened. In an ideal state people would never be unfaithful to each other because they would love perfectly—that human nature is imperfect is pitiful, but how can it be 'disgusting'? The serious novelist's job is to show life as it is, not as our puritans would like it to be. I would remind the Dean that one of the greatest and most beautiful pieces of literature we have ever had was a study of adultery—*Madame Bovary*."

There is, in this country, at any rate, no room for straight thinking, everywhere one turns one finds this welter of superstition, prejudice, romanticism, idealism, sentimentality, preconceived ideas, and fear. We use a language of clichés and think in platitudes. Any little tenth-rate mind can come along with some amusing remarks or some sensational diatribe and become a celebrity, but our scientists and thinkers work away unrecognized. They can't be celebrities . . . they are never seen lunching in the Savoy Grill, or airing themselves at first-nights; they never get their pictures in the illustrated papers, or paragraphs from the gossip writers. . . . Straight thinking, like unapplied science, has no commercial or publicity value, and therefore no popular esteem. Sanity is esoteric. I see no hope for civilization. It is anti-life, and will ultimately destroy humanity. It will go on until it blows itself up, like the frog in Æsop's fables, and then, perhaps, a simpler and more decent life will teem upon this planet, and because there will be no more church, schools, factories, morality councils, newspapers, organized amusements, there will be no more prisons, hospitals, lunatic asylums; no more wars, no more disease, no more slums; and if anyone wants to express the naked truth, touching first and last things, as D. H. Lawrence did in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, one of the truest and most beautiful and moving books the age has produced, there will be no more taking truth's name in vain, for truth will no longer be regarded

as an indecency, and men and women will live and work and love and beget each other in the sun and wind and rain, cleanly and decently and simply as the animals do . . . who do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins, nor make one sick discussing their duty to God, nor are demented with the mania of owning things. . . .

When the other day I saw R. 100 roaring against the pale blue silk of an early springtide sky, I thought how in its brutal hideousness and terrifying monstrosity it was a symbol of what we have made of civilization, and how civilization would go on evolving more and more of such things until the heavens are thick with them and their kind, and the everlasting blue be shut out altogether, and that will be the end ; the machine will destroy its creator, and humanity will be wiped off the face of the earth like so much vermin.

But life will go on when machines and poison gas have died with civilization, for life is greater than civilization, the old green springing life of the earth, the life of the cell and the atom, that has been since the beginning and cannot be destroyed. Humanity is of pitifully little importance in the vast cosmic scheme, yet life has such potentialities, and here we all are, suffering and struggling and squandering our little precious spell of life upon futilities, frightened of the only two things worth having, love and truth, and missing satisfaction all along the line. Poor little humanity caught in the maw of the machine.

> " What will there be to remember
> Of us in the days to be ?
> Whose faith was a trodden ember,
> And even our doubt not free ? "

Nothing that I can see but a story of life-destroying futility. The more highly civilized we become the harder it is to achieve happiness, because the farther away we get from first and last things. General Smuts declared recently that the only really happy people he had ever met were the African natives. They work as much as is necessary for their sustenance on the face of the earth, and for the rest lie about in the sun, love and beget and are happy. In this country we are too civilized to have the courage to do that—and even our climate is in the

conspiracy against us. And so we go on, very few of us really alive, most of us, " bored, so horribly bored nearly all the time. . . . Now and again one gets scraps of happiness, but they only last a few minutes. And those moments get rarer as you grow older. I mean real happiness, not just new sensations. . . . Life ought to be wonderful. People ought to be happy. If only we could understand how to get into harmony with things ! " We can't ; not completely, I think, so long as we have this " civilization complex " which falsifies all values.

So unimportant my own tragedy in the whirling cosmic chaos, yet somehow symbolic of the heart-breaking futility of the whole sorry scheme of things. Life that can be so vast a luxury, and so lovely, broken every day upon the wheel of that vast machine which we have created for ourselves and which has got beyond our control, and which is hurtling us to destruction, its speed accelerating with every new generation that comes along and adds to its power. Here and there a few voices are crying in the wilderness warning us of our danger, crying the way to salvation, pointing the way to Paradise on earth; but we cannot hear them for the roar of the machine.

Presently the machine of civilization will run down or, explode with the unchecked force of its own velocity. Then will peace and beauty and sanity creep back into life. But not in our time. Not for us peace in our time. It has been written in the wisdom of old, " The great winding sheets that bury all things in oblivion are two ; Love that makes oblivious of Life ; and Death that obliterates Love."

But man was not meant to live wrapped in a winding sheet of oblivion ; he was meant to feel the throb and rhythm of life and fulfil himself in being, realizing life as a pure flame. Life should spell fulfilment, not futility, but the way to fulfilment does not lie in the tortuous maze of civilization, but somewhere in the quiet and lonely places it has not yet invaded.

Our need is for a new philosophy, a new social order, a new religion—a religion not of God, but of Man ; not of Fear, but of Freedom ; not of Heaven, but of Earth. Man in his diversity has need of many gods, but though " one god debateth this, and another answereth this," man alone knoweth, and with him lies the issue.

Part II

PEOPLE WHO HAVE INTERESTED ME: SOME SKETCHES AND PORTRAITS

"I tell the truth as much as I aare, and I dare a little more as I grow older."

ELBERT HUBBARD.

I

MÉLANGE

SOME PORTRAITS IN MINIATURE: NOEL COWARD, SHEILA KAYE-SMITH, REBECCA WEST, G. B. STERN

In the August of 1914 I had three months to go before I would be fourteen, so that the war years touched me very lightly. I, with my generation, was too young to feel the war very deeply, particularly if, as in my own case, we had no one dear to us involved in it. We were too young to realize what it meant, and it was never made real to us unless some member of our families was caught up in its toils. For myself, there was a nightly fear of air-raids, and there were difficulties about food, but not serious ones—merely a matter of coupons, and margarine instead of butter, and saccharine instead of sugar. But our world went on much the same. One dined and went to theatres and got used to the sight of khaki so that we took it as a matter of course. The young men of my generation only became of military age in the year in which the Armistice was declared. We represent a lost generation, neither pre-war nor post-war, not old enough for the one, but too old for the other; too old to be completely without a consciousness of the ghastly mess going on all round us, yet too young to feel any sense of personal responsibility. Sometimes one thought there had been a war ever since one could remember; sometimes one would think, "If only one could wake up one morning and say: 'There is no war; men are not being killed in their thousands out there all the time.'" But it was like trying to think of one's own death; one somehow could not make it come true; we had been adolescent children when it began, and now we were young adults,

but there had always been a war. It was a sort of nightmare background to our consciousness. But a background. It wasn't our fault that we felt it as a background, that for us it was in the background of consciousness. It could not have been otherwise.

I was still at the board-school when war was declared. For us it meant making rosettes in the Belgian colours for sale for the series of " flag-days " which sprang up to assist the Belgian refugees who were swarming over here ; it meant taking old clothes to school for the refugee funds ; it meant learning the various national anthems—including the Russian, for Russia was not yet in disgrace. A little later it meant a rather sharper realization ; one was at an office, and every now and then a girl would have the day off because her " boy " was " home on leave." The war crept closer, then, somehow. There was a girl who cried all day because her boy had been killed ; there were letters from a German prison-camp which would wring one with pity . . . it was that man who wrote those heartrending letters from a prison-camp within a prisoners' camp—he had refused to work so was sent on to an unregistered camp, a prison within prison—whom I was to marry, though when those letters came to the office, to be read there with such horror and pity, I had never seen him and could not dream that this unknown soldier's destiny was linked with mine.

During those war-years I was having my queer career on *The Pelican* and piling up experiences. They were my years of apprenticeship. The sight of the Armistice crowds with their flares and their dancing and their wild, hysterical excitement in Trafalgar Square, fired my imagination and was responsible for my first poem published outside of the pages of *The Pelican*—I called it " Carnival " and it was published by *Nash's Magazine* —for me, at that age, it was inevitably a bigger thrill than the Armistice itself.

It is amusing to recall that Gilbert Frankau sold *The Pelican* a story for five guineas. We had originally offered him two, to which he replied saying that he could not afford to write for less than five guineas a thousand. The story was about two thousand words, but Charles Higham was his friend, and we got the story for five

guineas. Gilbert has "got on," as Hannen Swaffer would say. He had at that time written only one novel, an erotic affair called *Woman of the Horizon*, in addition to a number of slim volumes of war-verses, *The Judgment of Valhalla*, a Kiplingesque affair called *Tid-apa* (What *does* it matter ?), *One of us*, etc. Frankau had the germ of poetry in him before he gave himself up to the worship of what William James called "the bitch goddess."

A young woman, Esmé Wynne-Tyson, who had written a number of pleasant poems for *The Pelican*—and has since written two or three novels and become immersed in Christian Science—came in to see me in my rôle as Associate-Editor of *The Pelican*. She brought with her a tall pale young man whom I took to be her husband. They were both immensely amused when they discovered this, and she repeated his name to me, more clearly this time, to correct my error. It was Noel Coward. But she addressed him as Poj, and he called her Stoj. They had been on the stage together as children. All Noel's friends gushed and raved about his "genius," but nobody outside of that inner circle knew or cared about him at that time. He had written *The Young Idea*, which was just about to be produced, and *The Rat Trap*, which was lying fallow.

With these two, Sheila Kaye-Smith, and a dark exotic-looking young woman who had divorce complications and a luscious manner, I went a little later to see Epstein's "Christ" at the Leicester Galleries. Noel lined us up and we marched in single file across Leicester Square. Noel was very vivacious and gay and amusing. He appeared to be determined not to take the exhibition seriously. Sheila was womanly about the babies' heads. Esmé and the young divorcée appeared to take their cue from Noel.

My impression of Sheila Kaye-Smith was that of a little woman of small build and no particular age. She was very quiet in manner and speech and wore tweeds and brogues. I thought that I should probably like her if I knew her better, but that she would be difficult to get to know. There was something of the witch or leprechaun about her.

I thought Noel Coward the most electric person I had

ever met, and after an interval of ten years I still think so. One can only describe him like that. He has the near-genius that Ivor Novello and Beverley Nichols also have —a capacity for being able to do a number of things in a rather above-the-average manner. I hear that in addition to writing plays, acting, composing music, he also paints. I shouldn't be surprised ; one would never be surprised at anything Noel Coward did.

Meeting him several years after these first encounters he appeared quite unchanged, the same gushing manner ; everyone is " darling," and he used it a great deal years before it became fashionable ; the same droll way of saying " My deah ! " when he is amused or pained ; the same impression that he only stays still by force of will, and if he let himself go he would be doing a step-dance over the room the whole time, chanting amusing couplets, rhyming flagellation with adulation, and things like that. When he is being droll, or maliciously amusing, he looks like a satyr, one of the early Roman satyrs who suggest mischievousness rather than wickedness, uncontrollable high spirits rather than viciousness.

I shall always carry in my mind a picture of Noel Coward in George Doran's sitting-room at the Savoy one night after a party. " The distinguished American publisher " had just made a remark about being 'ware of women with loose hips, because it generally went with loose lips. Noel leapt up and did a *pas seul* round the room, with his coat-tails flying, chanting like a revue catch number—

" Loose about the hips,
Loose about the lips."

He said what " marvellous " words they would make for a fox-trot song or a revue number.

Rebecca West was there, vivid and vivacious as always. She is a brilliant mimic, but with her one can never feel quite comfortable ; there is always the feeling that when one has left the room she will be as amusing about oneself. She radiates light like a diamond, but not warmth.

In appearance she is small and provocative, rather like

a lovely naughty child, with her flashing gipsy eyes and her shining black hair. There is always a sort of mockery in her eyes and about her mouth. In spite of my positive reactions to people I have never been able to make up my mind what sort of person she really is. Admiring her in so many ways, her looks, her wit, her intellect, her vivacity, I wish I knew her really well—but she is not easy to know, and she appears to dislike more people than she likes. She has a mind like a sword-blade, and a tongue like a whip. I feel that she would have to like and admire and respect one very much indeed before one could ever hope to get close to her.

G. B. Stern seems to me a similar type, and I have always found myself bracketing and comparing her and Rebecca West just as I bracket and compare Noel Coward and Beverley Nichols. When I first thought of including in this book some portraits of people who in one way or another had interested me, I thought I would like to include a portrait of the creator of *The Matriarch* . . . though I do not know whether it was really the play or the magnificence that is Mrs. Patrick Campbell which excited me so much. When I met G. B. Stern I was impressed chiefly by her long grey fringe reminding me of a Skye terrier, and by the fact that she referred to Sheriff as a genius—" a large empty room into which the sunlight pours; he has a light in him; he can't go wrong."

I was interested to know whether the magnificent figure of the Matriarch as created by Mrs. Pat was the figure she, the author, had in mind, but she seemed to think that in her performance there was " just a little too much low comedy "—though I gathered that in any case the erratic Mrs. Pat's performance was apt to vary from night to night—and that Constance Collier would be " more dignified " in the rôle.

After meeting some people merely once one carries away an impression in the nature of a full-length portrait; but not so with G. B Stern; she is too inscrutable and enigmatic for that, and then after that one encounter I did not feel that she was sufficiently " my kind of person "—or I hers—to make me want to persevere with the subtleties and obscurities of her particular ego.

Having after several encounters failed to know—in the real sense—Rebecca West, I did not imagine I would be likely to be more successful with anyone else of so similar a type.

II

LITERARY LIONS AT PLAY

SOME PORTRAITS IN DISGUISE

YOU have metaphorically eaten kippers with me in Clapham, and followed this literary pilgrim's progress thus far; before you finally take leave of me to run through my collection of full-length portraits of people who in various ways and at various times have interested me, come and eat a little caviare with me in company with the clayfoot gods of Parnassus. Some portraits in miniature here for you, too, but in disguise, and that not from cowardice but for kindness. . . .

It has taken us ten years of struggle and hard work and crowded living to get here, and furnished rooms and the days of apprenticeship are behind us, and here's no wistful rosemary for remembrance, only orchids for elegance. . . . Time, three years ago. Place—the Endymion Room—since one name's as good as another —smelling of cedar-wood and mellow with modernity. Indirect lighting from opaque fans of glass spreading from the walls at mathematical intervals; alabaster bowls pressed close to the ceiling like preposterous post-impressionist limpets clinging to a flat-painted rock. At the far end of the room, coyly half-hidden, half-revealed, by a tall screen, the circular table with its centre-piece of lilies-of-the-valley and red roses, trails of creeper extending to each place, and on each lady's plate a spray of green orchids. . . . It is said of the American millionaire publisher whose dinner party to his authors this is, that the next best thing to being kept is being published by him. . . .

It is one's very first literary party, and one has arrived perhaps a little earlier than is fashionable, and taken

refuge on the rug before the Venetian mantelpiece and the electric fire that so admirably imitates burning coals. The problem is to sustain a pose which will suggest being at complete ease without looking fatuous, a cocktail glass in the hand and a bright expression on the face. Occasionally one catches oneself humming, desultorily, a little tuneless tune, infinitely dreary, and then remembers one's pose, and stoops and gathers up a few salted almonds from a little dish on a glass-topped table near by, reflecting that salted almonds are 'a great help' and that manufacturers might advertise them, "Parties without tears; try our salted almonds and avoid that sinking feeling. Have a dish in every home and avoid that awkward silence."

British literary lions at play. The animals come in two by two, the poet and best-seller too. One more author, one more author for boredom. . . . A flashing young man swoops down upon one standing so inoffensively by the fire. "My *dear*," he gushes. "Such *ages* since we met! And isn't it perfectly *splendid* the success you've made? *Such* fun!" He has come and gone, like a shooting star, swallowed up in a firmament of greater stars.

Our host looks, in the language of the younger generation of his guests, "too perfectly mar'v'lous." Very tall, and distinguished, with white hair and small pointed white beard he looks more like a diplomat than a publisher. He, too, is sustaining a pose, but he does it with the ease of years of practice, the pose of concealing an inner anxiety under an outward satisfaction. He is very busy greeting his guests, effecting introductions, very busy, very gracious, but his eye never ceases to rake the new-comers at the door . . . and then he is striding forward, beaming, glowing, effulgent, hand-outstretched; you feel that his world has lit up, at last, at last. . . .

"My *dear* Lady Beryl—how *do* you do?"

His relief washes in almost tangible waves over the rest of the company as he pilots her ladyship across the room and deposits her with a sort of flourish at the feet of England's leading man of letters (see blurb on inside of jacket of latest work).

Involuntarily one turns to the figure at one's side and asks, " Who is that ? " One is told, " That's Lady Beryl Crosby—they've all put her into their books and plays, but they all go on going to her parties. It's a sort of hall-mark of literary achievement to have been invited, do you see, and so they daren't stay away for fear anyone should think they were never asked."

The speaker is small and dark and dapper, with eyes like veiled fires, and a mouth that would be cruel were it not so sensitive. He, too, somehow suggests the diplomatic service, rather than a writer of dark stories of human passion and suffering, and plays of high life and low morals, satire burning with a gem-like flame. . . .

Someone hails him by an absurdly inadequate little Christian name, and once again one is left high and dry upon a reef of loneliness. One has been formally introduced to the fellow-creature on one's other side, but he has a morose and forbidding eye. He is a spare little man with a sallow face and rather long, rather thick, black hair ; there is something not quite happy about his white tie, and his white waistcoat is doing duty a second time. One smiles encouragingly and murmurs that at introductions one somehow never gets hold of names. . . .

He repeats his name, morosely, and a great light breaks in on one. Of course. One should have known. The poet. *The poet whose poetry pays ;* that is why he is here. *You want the best stars, we have them.*

He says, " I saw your picture in a paper last week. I said to my wife, ' There is a beautiful woman.' Where did you get that drink ? "

One thanks him prettily for the compliment and says that one didn't get the drink anywhere ; it was thrust upon one as one came in, since when one has had none other. . . .

" I ought to have one." His tone is peevish. He has come up from the country for this party, and no one has handed him a drink. He lays a restraining hand upon the arm of a waiter hurrying past with a laden tray.

He demands of the waiter as to why he has no drink. But the waiter is on his way to other planets, and is not to be waylaid. The poet turns from right to left, nor knows not which is which, like an old lady lost in a

crowd on a railway station. "Waiter," he beseeches, "waiter," and at last a very young waiter approaches him and offers him a napkin on a plate.

The poet takes it, blankly, and turns to one, pathetically holding out the napkin. "Look," he says, tearfully. "What *do* you think they mean?"

One cannot bear it any longer. One seizes a waiter who is temporarily inactive. One says firmly, "Waiter, this gentleman has not had a cocktail yet, and he has a napkin and no sandwich. Can a man make bricks without straw, or crumbs without a sandwich?"

"Such bad management, I think," complains the poet. "Fancy handing anyone a napkin." Then the waiter is at his elbow with a tray with glasses at one end and sandwiches at the other.

The poet takes a glass from the tray and one relieves him of his napkin so that he might also take a sandwich. With a cocktail in one hand and a sandwich in the other he seems much happier. He reminds one vaguely of the Mad Hatter who had a piece of bread and butter in each hand and took a bite first from one piece and then the other. Some of the crumbs from the sandwich came to rest in the creases of his waistcoat, and a suspicion of anchovy lingers at the corners of his mouth. He is the little boy who wouldn't be happy till he got it. . . .

Someone comes up to him and says, "Hullo, Rumbold," familiarly. One turns away. If one could only catch a friendly eye. One is a little resentful. One ought not to be flung to the lions like this. One would like to know all their names, and the reasons why, and how they got that way. . . . Particularly how they got that way, so self-contained and semi-detached, with room for garage—the so-handy garage of the divorce courts for the matrimonial car that love guarantees will not break down whatever may happen to other makes, and which invariably does. . . . Ah well, here they all are, anyhow, the cream or salt or whatever it is, of the English literary world. Here they all are, so many marvellous souls housed in bodies of different degrees of oddness, but all, one supposes, fitted with sex-appeal, complexes, and all the other modern conveniences. . . . And heavens, how they chatter . . . it's like being in a

bird-house at the Zoo. . . . The eminent man of letters is standing near-by and saying in a high-pitched squeaky voice, " There must be something radically wrong with that man—they say he can only write when his wife is in the room playing the piano . . ."

" It don't seem right to me ! " agrees the flashing young man with electric eyes and the face of Satiro. He turns to the lady novelist at his side. " Darling, I loathe your new novel. Why did you do it ? Mmm-yah ! *So* bad ! "

" Almost as bad as your new play, isn't it ? " she retorts smiling, but her eyes are golden spear-points.

Someone says, " I agree. That last act was as bad as anything I've ever seen. I said so in the *Evening Banner*."

The young man looks rueful. " Of course you only saw it on the first night ; Pongo, poor darling, had had too many whiskies and sodas before she came on and felt sick in the middle of the big scene."

" Are you sure it was the whiskies and sodas made her feel sick, darling ? " This from a black-haired, mocking-eyed young woman peeping over the shoulder of the man-of-letters.

The young man sees her for the first time. " Don't be catty, dearest," he returns, good-humouredly. She sticks out her tongue at him and her eye lights upon oneself. She inquires, the while her eye takes in each detail of one's dress, and one begins to wonder if artificial shoulder-flowers are a mistake, " Did you have a good time in the States ? But everybody does, don't they ? Dinner's served. Oh, thank God ! I wonder who's next me at table ? There's your place, Oh, Lord, look who you've struck ! I hope you're well up in the Middle Ages ! Joan Sothran opposite. You *are* in clover, aren't you ? " Her eyes are malicious. One asks who Joan Sothran is.

" Sheik of the desert and night of love. Purple passion in public and domesticity in private. There's Jane Fray, author of *Frantic Straw*. Terribly clever. See you later."

Joan Sothran has a deep rich voice which makes even such trifles, as " Would you please pass the salt ? " sound

dramatic. Her "Hasn't it been a lovely day?" is somehow endowed with all the importance of a leading question. She removes the orchid from her plate and booms to her neighbour about its loveliness; with a womanly gesture she pins it to the bodice of her dress. Jane Fray flicks hers off her plate as she would have brushed away a crumb.

The scholarly gentleman on one's right demands of one if they are not *perfectly marvhelous flahrs*. One agrees that they are, and, warding off the Middle Ages, racks one's brains for light talk. . . .

Immediately opposite sits one's host, very erect and dignified and distinguished, but vaguely anxious, as though a little bewildered by the brilliance he has collected about him.

On his right sits Lady Beryl, a little haggard, upon her face the strained look of one who is terrified that she may miss something. She, the lion-hunter, is more hunted than any of them, hunted by the fear that a star will flash in and out of the constellation before she has had time to seize it. . . . Someone, one recalls, wrote a story about a lion-hunter who thought she had at last got Christ to dinner. . . .

Lady Beryl is handsome, in a furtively forty manner, and her black dress somehow enhances the hard black beadiness of her eyes. She talks animatedly to the eminent man of letters on her right.

On our host's left sits a luscious florid lady whose claims to distinction and our host's left hand are that she is the newest wife of a successful dramatist whose muse had in its youth been inspired by a poetic fire, but which is now a little middle-aged and the worse for wear. She, his wife, is musical—oh, so musical. She wears a sort of tiara in her hair, and gives recitals at those discreet halls where people with nothing to do between lunch and dinner sit on gilt chairs and listen to Good Music. On her left sits the dapper little man whose heroines always suffer so distressingly and generally come to violent ends. . . . He is more interested in Rachel than in the musical lady, but Rachel is enjoying herself with the young man whose last act had been so execrable, and whom she calls "Angel." The bitter

little dramatist concentrates with a kind of passionate bitterness upon his dinner.

On Angel's other side is a plump little woman who addresses the poet in a loud voice and with the kind of American accent which some Americans assume the moment they arrive in Europe, and the moment they get back abandon in favour of a European one. She tells him that she intends to get his latest volume of poems to take back with her to read on the boat, and she gives him to understand that as head of one of the biggest book-stores in New York City she could, an it please her, do him a world of good. The poet replies stiffly that it is very kind of her, and takes refuge in his champagne glass.

But she is unsnubbable and looks about seeking whom ~~next~~ she may devour. Her bird-bright eyes light upon oneself and the good-looking young author of *Cranky Paths* and *American Portraits* on one's left.

She demands of the company in general—whatever of it happens to be listening, that is—if we are not "a beautiful pair of children."

The young man laughs confusedly and changing the subject asks her if he ought to go to America and lecture. He wants to know if America would stand for him after his book of portraits.

Before she can reply, the dramatist whose muse has grown a little tired, shoots across the table, "Don't encourage him. I have seen what happens to unknown writers in America."

The young man flushes and his eyes glitter. "You speak from personal experience, I presume?"

"I'm telling you for your own good. One's reputation here doesn't count. The leckchah agencies . . ."

One hears the luscious lady novelist murmuring to the scholarly gentleman who sits between us, "You know, I don't call that kind. It's only because he was so amusing about him in that series he ran in the *Tittle-Tattle*, 'Some People I have Met,' and everybody knows that Charles' last play about William the Conqueror fell flat—well, they say it wasn't even historically accurate. . . . I thought *Cranky Paths* terribly clever, didn't you. . . ."

Her voice drones away until in the resurgence of

conversation it is like the far-away break of waves on the seashore.

In an ebb one hears Jane Fray remark to the young man they call Angel, "Fruity fornication—I think that's good, don't you?"

"Oh, rather," Angel agrees, rather uncertainly.

"He would—wouldn't he?"

"I don't know. I expect so. Have an olive!"

"No thanks. I don't like them, and I'm like the man in the story, I'm so glad that I don't like them, because if I liked them I should have to eat them, and I hate them. Do you know any stories?"

"Nothing newer than Arnold Bennett's truncheon limerick. *Tell me about fruity fornication. It sounds amusing.*"

"Oh it is. It's what my friend on my left has just said about *Frantic Straw*—full of fruity fornication, and gratuitous indecencies, and decadent depravity. 'Luv-er-ly,' I says. 'You ought to be a publisher's reader, but when the hay is antic you can't wonder at the straw being frantic, can you?' But he said the whole thing was an apodictic absurdity, compost of pornographic puerility. Tut! The great thing nowadays, of course, is to dedicate your book to someone influential in society or in the press; one needs a patron, as in the old days, and as in the old days, a lord is best, particularly if he owns a few newspapers. Makes it all so much easier.... Or failing that an eminent man of letters will do...."

Whenever there is the slightest lull in the conversation someone rushes violently into the breach; English literature must not be let down in the eyes of foreign waiters, but there is a vague atmosphere of relief when our host arises, and beams upon us with, "Well, children——" Round table conversation, particularly when you have two or three people hating each other heartily, is not very easy, and whenever two or three literary lions are gathered together subtly poisoned darts sing sinisterly through the air....

Coffee is served at the other end of the room. The florid musical lady sinks luxuriously on to a settee, her Spanish shawl draped artily about her, her head thrown back, as though at any moment she will burst into song.

An aloof young woman who writes rather precious books, and has a penchant for barbaric jewellery, sits a little haughtily and sulkily on the window seat, gazing raptly at the blue night outside. She wears a blue-green brocade dress and long, heavy blue-green ear-rings and beads. Her books have exotic titles, and she is difficult to talk to. Rachel and Angel continue to amuse each other; Lady Beryl cleaves relentlessly to the man-of-letters; Joan Sothran sits on a settee with our host and Jane Fray and gazes at them yearningly, trying to be drawn into, or work her way into, their conversation. The American woman bookseller is tormenting a large blond man who sits in misery between her and a motherly looking woman. He has a heavy face with pale eyes and light lashes and he is so bored that he looks like to die of it.

The bright little American asks him why he called his last book a novel; it was, she says, a clinical study of elderly virgins. Quite terribly clever, but not a novel, and what did Pendetherel think of it?

He turns watery eyes on her, looking down at her as from a great height.

"We know, my brother and I, that we are the salt of the literary earth," he announces, and turns his back on her. To the motherly looking woman whom he now faces he says, heavily, "Did you go to the German concert this afternoon?"

She replies crossly, "You're the fourth person that has asked me that. No, I did not go. I have something better to do with my time."

He raises fair eyebrows. "Indeed? Such as?"

But she can be as outrageous as he can. "Tending my poultry farm," she retorts, and gloats, "I have ten thousand chickens." Her tone suggests that he make what he like of that and be damned to him.

One saw the mind of this brother of Pendetherel dart to and fro like a startled animal; it had run out thrustingly to meet the mind of this woman, and instead of the hand extended to pat it, had received a rebuff; almost one saw the startled thing recoil back into its corner, huddle there, watching, furtive, on the offensive as well as the defensive, biding its moment to leap out and bury its little

pointed teeth. . . . She had snubbed him, him the brother of Pendetherel; she has reduced his interests to the level of a poultry farm; but the brother of Pendetherel who had written, had he not, the clinical study of the collective mind of elderly virgins, would win; she might have the courage of her contempt for the Pendetherel brotherhood, but courage is apt to blunder clumsily upon the very point of wit's rapier. . . . She had written a play of intrinsic loveliness . . . but it does not matter to the brother of Pendetherel what she has written; it is very clear that before the evening is over she is going to regret very bitterly ever having mentioned that poultry farm, or pitted her passionate dislike against this barrage of cold contempt. Her courage would be butchered to make a sadist's holiday. But one reflects that she has asked for whatever is coming to her. . . .

One hears the bland voice of Pendetherel's brother hunting down its quarry, ruthlessly. "So you breed—cultivate—rear—whatever is the word, chickens, eh?" He looks over his shoulder, insolently, at the marooned American.

"This lady has chickens. This is very interesting. You must attend. We will talk of chickens and the pulchritude of poultry." He turns again to his victim. "Tell me now, there are Buff Orpingtons, are there not, and White Wyandottes——"

The American giggles uncertainly. Obviously she does not want to be drawn into this business of being rude to the English lady writer, yet at the same time is highly flattered at being called upon to act as ally to the brother of Pendetherel.

One is not in at the kill. One is borne off to talk to someone . . . to sit in a window-seat and talk of life, to wonder what the time is, and how one manages to leave this sort of party. . . . The long night wears on until at last a wave of movement runs through the room. People are shaking hands; arranging luncheon and dinner appointments, telling our host what a lovely, lovely party it has been. . . . Weariness has called out the shadows under the eyes of the older women. They seem suddenly like flowers from whom the heat of the room has sapped the bloom. There is the singer like an over-blown rose,

and the tall young woman like an exotic bud that has stayed closed too long and now, will never open. . . . There is a brown stain under the birdlike eyes of the little American, gallantly vivacious to the last ; a sagginess under the champagne-glazed eyes of the luscious lady of the booming voice ; circles of violet under the hard grey eyes of the brittle hermaphrodite ; blue smears below the haggard eyes of Lady Beryl ; crows' feet under the eyes of the lady poultry farmer, or is it the feet of unhatched chickens ? . . . All these women of brains and personality, is there one of them with the living flame of life in her—one that a man might find bed-worthy, or a comforting companion when his soul had need ? The girl in the blue-green gown with red hair is remotely beautiful, but cold ; Rachel is vivid and animated, but there is no warmth in her. . . . They write the things that go on deep down in human nature, and then they get together and tear each other to pieces and pretend until it makes you sick. . . But Rachel is clinging to our host's arm and leaving powder-marks on his sleeve and shoulder, and crying, " It was a lovely party, darling, though I did my best to wreck it for you ! "

He pats her arm affectionately, beaming paternally down at her, " Nonsense, dear ; the way you put your little foot in it over Lady Beryl and Oswald's play was delightful—delightful."

Angel flashes up to them and demands, " What did you do, Rachel darling ? Wot ever 'ave you done ? "

" Only made some bright remarks about it being perfectly legitimate to put people into plays if they lend themselves to caricature. I forgot Oswald had shoved Lady Beryl into his last, until I caught her glinting eyes fixed on me, and Oswald glaring balefully. But," she turns to our host again, " did you forget, too, dearest ? Whatever made you put them both into the same party ? "

" Of course, I didn't forget. Not on your life ! But if one was to start and think who ' mixed ' in the literary world one would never get a party together."

" But it was daring," Angel coos, admiringly.

Our host beams. " I was telling Lord Buckram only yesterday—we're doing his reminiscences, you know—

that I proposed bringing Lady Beryl and Oswald together, and he said no one but I would dare to do it. I said that no one but I *could* do it ! "

There was a cataclysm of laughter. When it subsided, Rachel coaxed, " Talking of people, do tell me—did Lady X. really write that book herself ? "

Angel replied for her, " Of course, darling, who else do you think could have written it as badly ? . . ."

Our host laughs heartily. He is beginning to enjoy his own party at last, after drowning in a vast ocean of boredom all the evening. . . .

The playwright of the tired muse is saying to the young woman in blue-green, " We shall love you to come—if you don't mind children ; my wife has quantities of children."

He twists his wife's long amber necklaces in his fingers as he says this, and smiles at her, faintly patronizingly.

" Only three," she explains to the young woman.

" Is that all there is ? They seem a lot more."

Dear God, must they go on being so exhaustingly cynical and amusing at this time of the night ? One's mind shouts at one a little hysterically, " Literary people are a nice little lot . . . a nice little lot. . . ."

How does one get away, back into the cool night air of the world of simplicities ? There is the ritual and the formula . . . the hand laid affectionately on the immaculate coat-sleeve, the little piece to say, " Darling, it was a lovely, lovely party. . . ."

There is a chaste kiss upon one's forehead. It is a distinguished kiss. One feels that it is included in the royalties of all the younger and better looking of the female authors on this distinguished list. . . .

One leaves the mellow modernity of the Endymion Room reflecting that if the green carnation was the symbol of the decadence of the eighteen-nineties, the symbol of the nineteen-twenties should be a black narcissus.

III

SIR CHARLES HIGHAM

PORTRAIT OF A PUBLICIST

CHARLES HIGHAM comes first in my gallery of full-length portraits of people who have interested me, for two reasons; one, because he represents the first striking personality I ever met, and two, because for force of personality I have never met anyone to equal him; for sheer individuality he stands head and shoulders above all the others. He has a dynamic quality which I have never found in the same degree of intensity in anyone else. When the first of my novels to attract attention, *Sounding Brass*, appeared, Fleet Street and the advertising world immediately fastened on it as a portrait of Higham. Higham himself used to go about saying, "Of course everyone knows it's me." Well, in some respects the personality of James Rickard and Charles Higham are one; Rickard forcing his way to success in life is Higham; and the Rickard storming up and down the office in the process of getting things done, but the analogy goes no farther.

Some aspects of the advertising world amused me, and in that book I deliberately satirized it; for the hot-air in the advertising world I have an amused contempt, but for the most outstanding figure in the advertising world I have nothing but the most sincere respect and admiration and affection. In many ways I think I admire Higham more than anyone I know. We are in some respects very much the same kind of people. I do not mean that we share the same æsthetic tastes, or that I believe in all this Better Spirit in Business and Hands-Across-the-Sea stuff which is the breath of life to him, but we are alike in that we both know what we want of life and set out to get it by the most direct route and with unfaltering determination. We are alike in our singleness of purpose, in the lowliness of our beginnings, and in our pride in being self-made. We both began at zero and had to work our way to where we each stand to-day in our respective professions.

SIR CHARLES HIGHAM

Fifteen years ago Charles Higham made out a list of the things he wanted in life. There were five of them. A Rolls-Royce, a title, a seat in the House of Commons, a flat in Albany, and enough money to buy the comforts of life. In less than ten years he made all these dreams come true. To-day he is left with nothing more to want. I think he was happier before he had everything. To-day he gets what he wants without wanting it very much.

I know of nobody who has had a more remarkable career. He has done "everything," from standing on street-corners without money, food, or lodgings, to serving in the American Army during the Spanish-American war, despite the fact that he was British born. His whole life-story has been one of violent contrasts. When he was eleven he wore a little velvet suit and presented a bouquet to royalty at Euston; when he was thirteen he was cleaning the windows of a chemist's shop in America. The first time he went to America he went steerage, and the second time he travelled in a suite-de-luxe on the fastest ocean liner afloat.

He was born in London within sound of Bow Bells, left school at eleven, and went with his parents to America when he was thirteen. He wanted to be an actor—and became a book-keeper. It is typical of Higham's audacity that he once accepted a job which involved touring America on a bicycle without being able to ride a bicycle. At twenty-four he was a salesman earning three pounds a week; within two months he was earning ten pounds a week writing advertisements; within two years he was earning a thousand pounds a year as manager of one of America's largest department stores. By the time he was thirty he had had twenty-nine jobs. His own explanation of this was that he could never endure to stay long enough in one job to risk getting into a rut. He was, as he himself terms it, "sacked into success."

At the age of thirty the vicissitudes of his life—a story in itself—found him back in London with precisely twelve pounds between himself and the next twist of circumstance. Characteristically he put up at one of the best hotels in town. He had to do it, he says, lest he lose faith in himself. It is part of his psychology that he

thinks in terms of success. He did not in the least know what his next move was to be. He had no influence, no capital beyond his twelve pounds, a magnetic personality, a brain quick with ideas, and a terrific belief in himself and his potentialities. He had the germ of power within him, and he knew it, but it had to find an outlet. He believed then as now that the world is run by ideas; then as now he saw the press as the most potent power in civilization. He had this knowledge, this realization, and twelve pounds. . . .

In the Strand that day, wandering, wondering what to do, looking for work—any kind of a job that would tide him over—he encountered the late James Murray Allison, who invited him to dinner with a few other young men who were later to become forces in Fleet Street. The party was a late one—so late that it wound up, at Higham's suggestion, with a breakfast party at his expensive hotel. This breakfast party cost the host eleven pounds, four shillings and sixpence—so that out of his precious twelve pounds he had fifteen shillings and sixpence left.

As a result of this party he had an introduction to the manager of an advertising agency. He went along and applied for a job; he asked for ten pounds a week—and was refused. At parting he told the manager that in a year's time he would offer him, Higham, not ten pounds a week, but twenty. And one year later he did.

It all sounds incredible, but then the whole of Higham's amazing career is incredible. The day after that breakfast party and that " turn-down " he applied for another job, with another advertising agency, and this time he was taken on—at five pounds a week. At the end of six weeks he was discharged. His chief said he was " no salesman." Two days later he applied to the same chief for a job as manager—and got it.

The secret of Higham's success, of course, lies in the fact that he has always known what he wanted and gone straight for it; never been afraid of taking a risk, never minded starting over and over again at the bottom, and never lost courage or faith in himself when things have gone badly.

He was knighted for his services to the Government

during the war—after having been twice rejected for the Army—raising men, money, and munitions by advertising. At the end of the war he became the Unionist Member of Parliament for Islington. He is one of the most fluent and dynamic speakers I have ever heard, yet during the whole four years he was in the House he only spoke altogether for about fourteen minutes. A business client of Higham's told me recently that "Higham talks more quickly and uses more words to the minute than any man I have ever met, and yet is always interesting." Which statement I heartily endorse. I have often thought of Higham that it is literally and truly not wot 'e ses but 'ow 'e ses it. People who are jealous of him—they are his only enemies—call him a "spell-binder," well, inasmuch as he can make you believe that black is white if he really sets out to do it, I suppose he is. It is his business in life to convince people, but he is always convinced himself; he convinces out of the depths of his own impassioned beliefs. At fifty he has all the vitality and forcefulness and enthusiasm of twenty years ago. His personality is simply terrific. It is always a miracle to me that he doesn't give off electric sparks! His enemies call him "the great I-am." But without that dynamic personality, that consuming egotism, that colossal faith in himself, he could not have risen from literally nothing to his present position as probably the most famous advertising man in the world. He has certainly written the three best books on advertising that have even been written.

There was, in his youth, some talk of his entering the church. But his mission in life was Ideas rather than Ideals, his ideals were implicit in his ideas—which is how it should be, of course. Yet still he has that persistent sense of leadership. He was saying years ago, before anyone else had thought of anything so daring, that the Church should use the power of press advertising to induce people to come to church. He has always seen in this power of the press, which he has called "the scientific distribution of ideas," the greatest educative power in civilization. In the pulpit he would have had as tremendous power as a Dick Sheppard. He is a born leader, and though it is by the force of his ideas—the germ of

power within him—that he has climbed out of the gutter, he is in many ways an incorrigible idealist.

There are people who laugh at the suggestion that Higham is an idealist; they will assert that he is a humbug; but if ever a man was passionately sincere Higham is. It is true that publicity is the breath of life to him, but this is the thing in which he passionately believes—as some believe in God, or love, or beauty. He is impatient of how little the civilized world as yet realizes the tremendous power of advertisement. It is his mission in life to "tell the world," and he will go on telling it until he dies.

He believes that press advertising has a scope as yet not entirely exploited, and slowly civilisation *is* adopting Higham's ideas in this connection. During the great strike that followed the end of the war both the Government and the railway men used paid publicity in the press to state their case. Higham conducted the Government's campaign. Mine-owners and miners have since stated their claims in the advertising columns of the press. The Church is beginning to advertise—a "come to church" campaign in the evening papers. Higham would have us go even further; he would have local authorities advertise to impress the urgency of the housing problem; he would have publicity methods employed to teach practical science to farmers and save the thirty millions a year which it is estimated are lost through the ravages of insects, fungi, and agricultural diseases; he asks, "why not use paid publicity to teach mother-craft to working-class mothers, and so lower the death-rate of both mothers and babies"; he would have the Government, the Church, the schools, advertise to teach the community the inner meaning of religion, history, state-craft. . . . An "ideas-merchant" if you like, but undeniably an idealist, too.

It is easy to sneer at Higham and call him "vulgar," but how many people have had a career as useful both to themselves and the country? His office cost hundreds of pounds to furnish—and looks every penny of it. What of that? It is the outward and visible sign of the man's inward and spiritual success. He had enough hardship and deprivation in his youth to make him love

luxury. He has earned his right to have his life centrally heated and luxuriously furnished throughout. He owes his success to no man's gifts and no man's influence. He is magnificently self-made. Perhaps he is flamboyant in his success; but in a world in which there are so many drab and flabby failures there is room for a flaming success and a personality as spectacular as Higham's.

And there is not much wrong, anyhow, with a man whose staff send him flowers when he is ill and write him "sweet" little notes. Nor with a man who can be touched by such tribute, as Higham is. He is a rabid sentimentalist, of course. His office is simply overflowing with the better spirit in business, flowers, and Christian names.

When Higham is not talking advertising he is talking love. He knows all the most *risqué* stories that were ever circulated, and yet I have never met anyone simpler at heart, nor one whose emotions are more easily played upon. Where women are concerned he is quixotic beyond belief; in this connection he has told me stories which I know to be true, yet which if I wrote them up into magazine fiction people would say were "far-fetched." . . . Incredible stories of "life in the raw"; incredible stories of an incredible life. . . .

When he had a house in the country, Higham—the flamboyant publicist, the spectacular success—used to spend his week-ends making bon-fires and fishing in the ornamental lake. He has a young daughter to whom he is passionately devoted. To-day, after two marriages, he is living a bachelor life again at Savoy Court, with a week-end cottage in Surrey. He could say with Wagner, "I who adore women," and yet he has never been able to manage one. It wounds his vanity, that. He does not realize how terrific is his own egotism, and that even warm-hearted egotists like himself are hard to live with. He has a tendency to spoil women, and to idealize them. He would give the woman he loved the stars for a necklace and the moon for a finger-ring—and then would sit up in bed and recite poetry to her. . . . He has a queer sort of ache in him for beauty, under all the blatancy; he loves all kinds of beauty—flowers, women, clothes, the country, sunsets. . . . It is hard to pin this amazing

personality down to the limited canvas of a brief essay; one needs an entire three-reel "movie" in order to convey him adequately.

For a true portrait one needs to see him storming up and down his office when there is a "rush-job" on, reducing his staff to a state bordering on nervous breakdown; Higham dynamic and self-confident, the super-salesman and supreme egotist and optimist in excelsis teaching Americans to drink tea—himself surrounded by a battery of press photographers and journalists and acquiring a bigger "press" than any other British visitor to the States. Higham keeping a dinner-table in roars of laughter with his naughty stories and swift amusing repartee and infinite capacity for saying the wrong thing in the right place—he has mastered to the full the art of being "shocking" without giving offence. . . . He is marvellous on nigger-stories. . . . Higham alone in his over-heated, lushly flowered suite at Savoy Court, staring broodingly at the plans of a bungalow he is building on his country estate, and wondering if it is all worth while. . . . Charles Higham, who began with nothing, face to face with the realization of the futility of possessions. . . . Charles Higham who knows "everyone," and yet is perhaps the loneliest man in London . . . the great I-am, of whom we have probably not heard the last in the Arabian Night's tale of his successes, and yet for whom success is probably his life's tragedy, since it has brought him face to face with an emptiness and a loneliness of the spirit which the young man who stood on a street corner and tossed up a coin to see whether he should go to London or Hollywood, knew nothing about. . . .

IV

GILBERT FRANKAU

PORTRAIT OF A BEST-SELLER

WHEN I was very young, and flooding the unresisting pages of *The Pelican* with my adolescent outpourings, as I have described, and before I had written even that

abortive first novel, Charles Higham handed me the page-proofs of his friend Gilbert Frankau's first novel, *Woman of the Horizon*. I had already drugged my literary sensibilities with the poems and prose of Oscar Wilde, and it only needed the double-barrelled "dawn-pale," "lotus-white" adjectives of the early Frankau to complete my literary corruption. To follow up the exotic with the erotic was abandon heaped on affectation. Frankau's luscious description of the Taj Mahal fevered my young imagination so acutely that it took a stiff dose of Walter Pater's crystal-clear prose, and the simplicities of Robert Louis Stevenson, administered by the late Herbert Jenkins after reading that extraordinary production I had entitled *Wine of Life*, to rid my system of the inflammation set up by the poison. I was completely purged of the trouble by the time I came to write my first published novel *Martha*, but, even so, I was still sufficiently under the influence of Frankau-ism to cherish a letter from him in which he complimented me on my literary *première* and told me to keep on writing, the implication being that if I kept on trying like a good girl—I was twenty then—one day I would write quite nicely.

Meeting an author who had had such an influence over my literary style, and whose sales ran into best-seller dimensions, was for me at that time in the nature of a literary event. Herbert Jenkins might have his thousands, but Frankau his ten thousands. I first met Frankau at a luncheon party at Higham's house in the country. It was a bitterly cold day, and snowing a little, but Higham insisted on showing us round the grounds. I was cold and shy and wind-blown, and suffering from a pronounced inferiority-complex in the presence of the author of *Peter Jackson* and his chic and worldly wife. With the ingenuousness of the very young and unsophisticated I made an attempt to acquire dignity by being consciously literary. Walking through a frozen copse in the wake of the rest of the party, I explained to Frankau at great length, and with great earnestness, why I must write *Sounding Brass* in terms of a satire on the advertising world as I knew it. I felt strongly about this thing and had to get it off my chest, I said. Frankau replied in his slow drawl that he was not sure that one

had any right to intrude oneself into one's work, and that personally he was primarily concerned with telling a good story. I gathered that he was all for the esteem of success as opposed to a *succès d'estime.* This seemed to me stark heterodoxy, and very disappointing from the author of that passionate, heart's blood piece of lyric emotionalism, *Woman of the Horizon.* It was a case of Another Fallen Idol.

Next time I saw Frankau was at a public meeting when he was debating something—I forget what—with Hannen Swaffer. I recall that Swaffer saw fit to draw public attention to the fact that royalty never patronized Lillian Baylis's Shakespearean efforts at the Old Vic, and that Frankau remarked, " I never had any education ; I went to Eton. . . ."

And then I did not see any more of the author of *The Love-Story of Aliette Brunton* and that remarkable affair about an English gentleman of the once-a-gentleman-always-a-gentleman school, until about two years ago, and then again it was at Mansfield House. Upon that occasion the author of *Men, Maids and Mustard-Pot* evidently found the mature young woman with the sleek centre parting more amusing than the self-conscious young girl with the unruly hair and the earnest outlook, for he volunteered the information that in his opinion I was a first-class vamp, upon the strength of which we danced together. I had " got on." I had become the intellectual and social equal of the creator of *Erica.*

Of such is the kingdom of equality.

Our next encounter was when the author of *So Much Good* was embarking upon the editorship of *Britannia.* We lunched together at Ciro's to discuss what I should write for the first number. Frankau was very busy " lunching " authors in those days. I had recently returned from my first visit to Florence and had a chronic attack of that unpleasant complaint—æsthetic idealism. I wanted to write—God help me—on the Need for a New Renaissance. Frankau, attacking the cold lamb he had made such a fuss about ordering, said, " Call it, ' Unless Ye have Faith.' " At the price *Britannia* was paying at that time I would have called it anything.

The general public probably does not know what is

known to everyone in the journalistic and literary world —the wonderful stories that were going around at that time regarding the prices Frankau was paying for contributions. Typical of them all is the story of the man who applied for a job on the staff of the paper determined not to give his services for less than five hundred a year. His qualifications were found acceptable, but when it came to a question of terms Frankau is reported to have said that he was afraid the job did not carry a very high salary. The applicant, badly needing the job, braced himself to consider perhaps a little less than the five hundred he had in mind. . . . Frankau said he was sorry, but he could not possibly pay more than two thousand a year. . . .

I have never seen a man so much "on edge" as Frankau was at that time. My former impressions had been those of an amused cynicism and gaiety—Frankau has the most amused and alive eyes I have ever seen. Clever young Pamela Frankau has the same eyes and gives the same impression of an inner amusement. But during his brief editorship Frankau gave no such impression. In place of that pre-editorial amusement he gave an impression of an inner anxiety. It was as though responsibility had quenched a light in him. His easy careless manner had changed to that of the abruptly businesslike, and he was irritable. He arrived late for his appointment with me, and then bullied the porter for not having told me he had been detained; he found fault with the food and service; he addressed me as "young woman." The meal had to be as brief as possible because he had to get back to the office to write several thousand words of a semi-political article. It is true that over coffee we talked a little of love—the inevitable theme whenever a man and woman are gathered together. But it had its significance that he remarked that women seldom appreciated that a man could be tired. He talked of love impatiently, as a man does who has more important matters on hand. For himself he was vastly more interested in his paper. He was passionately in earnest about that. He explained that he did not want articles of the Do Women, Should Women, Have Women, variety; patriotism was to be the keynote of the paper

because, he said, "I believe we Britishers are the best thing going at present."

A great many people were sarcastic about Frankau's editorial venture. I was one of the few who went about championing him. Higham was another. I liked Frankau, and where his sincerity in the matter of his paper was concerned it was impossible not to believe in him. I met editors who sneered and said that just because a man wrote popular novels was no reason why he should imagine that he could take over a job which it had taken them years of steady, grinding apprenticeship in Fleet Street to learn. I insisted that they must concede that anyhow Frankau had pluck. They did not concede it. The general feeling was that it was sheer swelled-headedness on Frankau's part. I became quite passionate in my defence of Frankau. I believe I even used to quote something about high failure over-leaping the bounds of low success. . . . Than which could one say fairer?

Since then Frankau has faded out of editorship and written *Dance, Little Gentleman* in which I understand—for I gave up reading my Frankau years ago—that he refers to his erstwhile champion as being "like a passion-flower only more so." He seems to have gone in—for derivative titles, too,—witness, *Martin Make-Believe*—which seems a pity.

Judging by a Sunday paper outburst about the international Sex Reform Congress held in London in the autumn of 1929, in which he talked a great deal of retrogressive nonsense about sex freedom "rotting the foundations of civilisation," I gather that his latest stunt is to go over to the ranks of the puritans. It is a pity.

V

DOUGLAS GOLDRING

PORTRAIT OF A MAN OF LETTERS

I ALWAYS think of Douglas Goldring as the first "real writer" that I ever met. It is true that in the days of my youth I had met the famous Gilbert Frankau, but it is somehow impossible to think of him as other than a professional best-seller. Not that Douglas wouldn't like to be a best-seller too. I can hear him saying with that boyish grin of his, "Should simply love it, duckie." He would be among the first to assert that writing is a trade like any other, but a persistent streak of what Horace Thorogood of *The Evening Standard* would undoubtedly call "subversiveness" in him makes him go on saying what he thinks and believes regardless of the more profitable rules of the trade. His is the mixed blessing of being "a born writer," and when one is born that way there is nothing for it but to express what is in one, whether it is one's material gain to express it or not. It is only when you just have "a gift" for writing that you can go ahead and turn out the popular thing of the moment, and become a successful literary grocer. Douglas could not become that however hard he tried, because he suffers from the awkward disability of not being able to say something he doesn't believe; he is too innately literary for it to be possible for him to write tripe unwittingly, and too honest to write it consciously.

The best book he ever wrote, *The Fortune*, is his least known, in this country, although at the time of its publication it won the esteem of some of the most distinguished critics in Europe, George Brandès, Romain Rolland, and our own T. S. Eliot, who hailed it as "unquestionably a brilliant novel." But it was so "subversive" that it couldn't be published in this country; it was a pacifist novel written during the war, when nobody else had the courage to write that sort of thing. It was published in Ireland, since no English publisher would sponsor it, but it is extraordinary that no publisher since

the war has had the courage and business insight to republish it now that pacifism is so strongly in the air, and it is no longer considered " outrageous " to suggest that war is a disgrace to civilization.

I first met Douglas Goldring eight years ago, when he was reading for a firm of literary agents who were handling the first-novel competition for which my novel *Martha* was entered. He was highly enthusiastic about it, and I was very flattered that anyone who had written so many books should think well of my own first effort, and he very amused to find that the author of the lurid slice of life which was *Martha* should be a demure young girl who dressed in grey and was shy in manner. He had just written his novel *Nobody Knows*, the first of his " years of chaos " trilogy, of which *Cuckoo* and *The Façade* are the other two. *Nobody Knows* excited me and made me want to know its author, because in it I seemed to find for the first time someone who spoke my own language. So after a good deal of preliminary letter-writing and getting to know each other by post, we finally met—that first encounter at the literary agent's could not really count as a meeting. He was living in a communal house in Taviton Street, Bloomsbury, at the time, and we had a picnic luncheon in a little room looking out into a plane tree. We talked life and letters and read *The Shropshire Lad* and Andrew Marvell—both new to me at that time—and decided that we were the same kind of people, and I fell in love again. It may not have been a very profound passion, it was probably mostly a falling in love with the idea of being in love with someone of my own kind—for I had been starved of my own kind for a good many years, but the friendship which has emerged is certainly of the kind that lasts a life time. I regard Douglas Goldring as an integral part of my essential education as much as the New Zealand artist and the socialist school teacher were. I have taken from him more caustic criticism than from anyone, not always unflinchingly, but always with an unfaltering sense of its justice. For many years he was the only person whose literary criticisms I respected, and to-day, as strongly as ever, I respect his judgments, and feel that he *knows*, because he is so much more than a novelist and

poet and writer of belles-lettres and travel books—he is so essentially a man of letters.

At the time when my *Crescendo* was being so bitterly attacked in all quarters I felt that if Douglas Goldring also joined in the general chorus of abuse then I must decide that the book merited all it was getting, but I felt that I could not give in to my attackers until I had heard what he had to say. I wrote to him at the time, " If you also think this is a bad book then I will accept the verdict." I didn't want to have to accept the verdict of the critics but I knew I would have to if Douglas joined them. I waited agitatedly for his opinion, and when the letter came dreaded to open it, fearful lest my last shred of belief in that book into which I had put so much of myself and life as I had seen it and lived it, be torn from me, for I knew that if he considered the book bad he would say so in his usual uncompromisingly caustic manner. . . . But he wrote enthusiastically, and I could have wept for joy . . . just as I wept with shame when I received from him a letter attacking what I now freely concede to be a very regrettable newspaper article of mine on Beauty in an " I Believe " series. The letter is typical of his utter authenticity and gives a true portrait of what he himself would call " the inner rectitude " of the man. I am not sure but that this letter is not one of the best things he ever wrote—it certainly came pouring white-hot from the crater of truth in himself.

" Oh Ethel, Ethel, Ethyl, *dearest!* Alas and Alack! How *could* you? And will you ever speak to me again if I confess how your article tortured me? Shades of Plotinus! Oh, help, oh help! One can justifiably expose one's life and loves to the public gaze, exhibit one's person, turn the limelight on one's father or mother or husband or wife; but surely the artist must have *some* reserves and reticences? 'Oh, I du like bew-tee'! S'ever ser nice. *Yew* know . . . Shakespeare and Christ and Michael Valentino and what all. Makes yer feel so goopy-like insides, dearie.' Wow, oh super-wow! Ethel, *what* cheque could they have paid you sufficiently colossal to induce you to put the name of the author of *Pilgrims* and *Hunger of the Sea* to such bilge?

" ' I believe that the life of the spirit is more important than the life of the flesh.' You *don't* say, not really! Ever heard of Jesus, dearie? If not, Mrs. Aimée McPherson will tell you all about him.

" I reflect that there must have been many times when Michael Angelo looked up wearily from the block of marble, and da Vinci from the tender curve of a madonna's breast, and wondered whether it was all worth while. . . . You bet they did. Says Leonardo (' looking up wearily ') ' Look here, Michael, if that God-damned son of a bitch, Abbot Francisco of Siena, thinks I'm going to finish his madonna for him by Tuesday morning for fifty ducats, he's bloody well mistaken. My price is a hundred, and I won't work for a penny less. . . . Oh well, blast it, I promised to take young Sandro out to dinner on Tuesday night, and there isn't a farthing in the house. I suppose I shall have to lump it this time. Here goes.' (Resumed attention to madonna's breast.) That's the way it's done, my dear, so far as the *conscious* mind of the creator is concerned. Blasphemously; and for no higher immediate surface motive than that which animates you in writing your articles and me trying unsuccessfully to write mine. Only . . . well . . . only. Yes, *the inner rectitude* and purity of the man of genius is what does the trick, perhaps by putting him in touch (if you like to use jargon) with the ' overmind,' the collective mind and soul of the great dead. The artist is the ' conductor ' and the communicator. All advances in technique, all real innovations, come from the artist having something new to communicate. In literature a new style is forged by someone who has something new to say. Then come the imitators, and that's why art for art's sake is such rot. A great picture or a great book must have a beyond to it. And as for this ' beauty ' isn't it very much in the eye of the beholder? ' Beauty that answers wistfully ' may be beauty to you; it's just —— to me. Beauty burning like fire I can understand. This poor word! Don't you see, Ethel dear, it's the only one we have, which is why those who know something of its meaning so rarely make use of it, and go hot all over with discomfort when it is loosely bandied about. ' Selling ' beauty is on a par with selling Jesus. A true patriot may

die for his country or at his country's hands ; he doesn't ' sell patriotism ' in the daily press or get upon a platform and wave a flag.

" I feel in an earnest, violent and prophetic mood, as though I should like to hurl my last insult at a world besotted with false values, poisoned by the commercial, the superficial, the sentimental, the vulgar ; corroded by cheap journalism (another splendid article next week) and reeking of Hollywood hysteria. . . .

" I ought to have been a poet and died young, or else a monk in a Tibetan monastery. I like the world and enjoy life, but its practical problems are beyond me. . . .

" ' Another great letter next week, dear,' if you can stand any more from me. (Isn't he *awful*, Liz ?) Forgive me for my wicked pleasantries ; I don't believe in some of your beliefs, but I *do* believe in Ethel Mannin."

There you have a more adequate picture than could ever be obtained from such statements as that in appearance he is tall and fair and incorrigibly youthful, in manner shy, sensitive, unassuming ; that he was one of the earliest supporters of the " subversive " 1917 Club, that leaving Oxford he joined the editorial staff of *Country Life*, that he was sub-editor of the *English Review* under Ford Madox Hueffer in 1908, and as literary adviser to Max Goschen Ltd. was responsible for the publication of *The Golden Journey to Samarkand*, and of other works of James Elroy Flecker, who was his friend, and whom he admired tremendously and ultimately wrote a book about ; that he loves the Sardinian peasants and travel in unspoiled places, and has a passion for cats only equalled by my own and Michael Joseph's. Anyone else might have done these things, had these appreciations, but only a uniquely " authentic " person could have written that letter. But that is Douglas Goldring's supreme quality, that he has the truth in him and the courage to express it without compromise, both in his own work and in his attitude to literature in general. There is an essential sanity in his attitude to life—it is fearlessly set forth in his trilogy of novels, particularly, I think, in *Nobody Knows*. The book is riotous with anti-humbug, " the artist's contempt for all forms and kinds of ' furniture '—furniture of conventions, of ready-made

political opinions, of 'thought' chawed up, vomited and reassimilated a thousand times, furniture of family life, furniture of soul-aspiration, furniture of 'home.'" There is a sort of savagery and violence in these books of the Trilogy in their relentless honesty and stark refusal to compromise—therein, I suppose, lies the reason why Douglas Goldring will never be a popular success. Almost one can hear the offended lady subscribers to the libraries twittering, "My dear, the things he *does* say!" He can and does write as amusingly of cocktail parties and Bloomsbury Bohemianism as anyone, but into the lightest things he writes sooner or later there creeps, inevitably, something of himself—that note of "subversiveness," that refusal to accept accepted standards and values which "right-minded" people find so unforgivable. But because he writes with apparent lightness of things about which he is dead serious, the highbrows will not have him, either. He is both too passionate about life, and not passionate enough—that is to say, not in terms in which his passion can be comprehended by the mass-production mind.

I used to be very bitter that a man who has turned out so much good work should have so comparatively little recognition in this country, but I am beginning to see in that comparative neglect a tribute to his integrity not merely concerning literature but life. Civilization with its "tyranny of shams, its shoddy ideals, and ready-made ideas," hasn't much time for fundamental authenticity. Douglas Goldring is one more of the right people I met at the right time. I have always remembered something he said to me one day when we were crossing Gordon Square—I had just asked him what he was going to write next, and he said he didn't know; for myself as a young writer bursting with ideas and the feeling that one would never live long enough to write all one wanted to write, this, coming from an established author, was a little shocking. "Doesn't that worry you?" I asked. "Not knowing what you're going to write?"

He replied, "Why should it worry me? If there's anything more in me to come out it will come out and drag me after it."

I have always remembered that it was one of those

rare moments of perception. I saw suddenly how this expression business worked, not as self-conscious " Art," but as an accidental thing working unconsciously. . . . But the moment of perception passed . . . perhaps I was too young to hold it ; anyhow it needed the violence of that letter which I have quoted to revive its memory years later and to cure me for ever—thank Heaven—of that mental chlorosis which spells art and truth and beauty with capital letters. . . . Almost, as I write, I see *Douglas looking down at me with that half shy, half droll* smile of his, and hear him murmur, " I wouldn't, if I were you, ducky, I really wouldn't. . . ."

VI

JACOB EPSTEIN

PORTRAIT IN BRONZE

FROM the time I was taken, in company with Noel Coward and Sheila Kaye-Smith, as I have already described, to see Epstein's " Christ," I have been interested in Epstein's work. He has always seemed to me the only sculptor working to-day with anything of importance to say. Both as a public personality and as an artist he stands out very prominently in my mind's gallery of the people who have interested me, though until quite recently it did not occur to me that I might ever have the privilege of meeting him. Then one day I was having tea in Doris Leslie's very beautiful forget-me-not blue workroom in Hampstead and she told me she was expecting Mrs. Godfrey Phillips ; she said she thought I would find her beautiful. " I expect you know Epstein's head of her," she said. That I was to meet someone who knew the great Epstein seemed to me the most incredible good fortune.

The moment Mrs. Godfrey Phillips came into the room I remembered Epstein's head of her—those immense eyes, those high cheekbones, that expressive provocative mouth, the queer indefinable " quality " of her—a bronze bust come to life. I asked her about Epstein. She

thought that I might go along with Doris Leslie and herself on one of Epstein's informal Sunday afternoon " at homes," but, she said, I must not talk to him about his work, or let him know that I intended writing about him, because journalists and people who conscientiously take an Intelligent Interest in his work, are his *bêtes noires*. That, of course, is readily understood. When Mother-of-Ten writes from Walham Green criticizing Rima on the grounds that it is " unnatural," and every new piece of work invokes a storm of enraged public opinion, an artist naturally grows a little tired both of the British public and the British press. Not, I think, that Epstein would have the Mothers-of-Ten, and Indignant Ratepayers, and Pro Bona Publicos, understand him. Being understood by the wrong people is most distressing. The applause of the unenlightened is an insult. Art is esoteric, for the enlightened few; it has its own chosen people. The people who have " no patience with this Epstein stuff " are no worse than those who See No Harm in It, or pretend to admire something which obviously has no meaning for them. It is better to be a fool than dishonest.

Epstein has been more insulted than any artist living, yet amongst sculptors to-day he is the only one with anything to say worth saying. He has something to say, and he says it with all the vigour and honesty and forcefulness of a vital personality. That is why people find it shocking. That is why *Lady Chatterley's Lover* could not be published in this country. Such work is real, strikes at the roots of living matter, and is therefore a menace to that artificiality which is the essence of civilization. The more civilized we become—in the sense in which we have grown to understand civilization—the more we shall persecute our Epsteins and D. H. Lawrences, because they are real in a world ruled by a tyranny of shams; they are the living flesh and blood of humanity, and civilization an insensate mess of pulp and water.

Epstein in his sculpture, like Lawrence in his writing, gets down to essentials. He does not ask to be understood. He asks nothing but to be allowed to get on with this work in his own way. He has the supreme lack of self-consciousness of the natural artist. He is a craftsman with a job of work to do, not a little puppycock

artist bleating about his precious Work or his piddling little Art all spelled in majuscules. Epstein is magnificently free of any ideas about his work. If you are unwise enough to say to him, "I take it you mean to express so-and-so," he will mutter, "Yes, yes, that's it," and then if you say quite the opposite thing he will say again, "Yes, yes, that's it." He simply does not care what you or anyone else reads into his work. He hasn't any "mission," he is not consciously setting out to "express" anything; he is simply being himself, and knocking up masterpieces by accident—which is the way masterpieces always happen. The fact that he is an artist in the fullest sense of that poor much-abused word is incidental. He cannot help it any more than most people can help being fools. It is high time the world realized that when a man produces a masterpiece of any kind he does so by accident, not as a result of any conscientious, self-conscious striving. The reason why we have so little great art of any kind to-day is primarily because of our chronic self-consciousness. Therein lies the secret of the greatness of *Journey's End*. Sherriff wrote quite simply and un-self-consciously about something which he knew, something he had observed and felt. The title has nothing to do with Shakespeare so far as he is concerned—it was the name of a trench he was in. He had no literary ideas to air when he wrote the play, no tiresome little ideals to postulate. Neither has Epstein. That is why he is so tremendous and vital a figure—a portrait in bronze as surely as most of our alleged artists are portraits in plaster.

He lives in a big, gloomy, cheerless, shabby, neglected house off the Park. A little girl of ten with a pale, stolid face and long flaxen hair confined under a coloured net, opens the door every time the bell goes. She is Epstein's daughter, Peggy-Jean. She looks at you with pale blue eyes at once sharply questioning and yet disinterested. If you smile, and she likes the look of you, she admits you. If she doesn't she says there is no one at home, and it does not matter that you can see a lighted room full of people, and the short, thick-set figure of the master himself in the window-seat; the child is the keeper-of-the-gate, and there is no getting past her if you

are, in her arbitrary estimation, the wrong kind of person. She has to the full a child's uncanny knack of recognizing the right and the wrong people at a glance. When she has admitted you she returns to her corner by the fire and goes on with her book, taking no more notice of you or anyone else, until the front-door bell goes again, when she jumps up once more.

On Sunday afternoons the bell rings pretty frequently at the door of this strange house, for on that day the Master is "at home," although the formality of the expression sounds curious in connection with anyone as informal as Epstein. Admitted to the dark hall one comes into a big shabby room with a garish light like that from an incandescent gas-burner, and the dust of ages black upon the picture-rail. In the centre of the room, at a big table covered with a green cloth, Mrs. Epstein presides over the cheapest kind of tea-things. There is nothing art-and-crafty about the Epstein *ménage*. She says, "How do you do," mechanically, and with one hand hands you a cup of weak tea and with the other shoves the sugar at you. If she likes the look of you she will usually after a few minutes of mentally sizing you up, give you a flickering smile and pass you the cake. She reminds one of Mrs. Pat Campbell in *The Matriarch*. There is something terrific about her. She is Scotch and massive, with a pale skin, and a mass of red hair and a thin beautiful mouth. She must have been lovely in her youth. She has a kind of beauty still. There is something matriarchal about her. Something which compels respect, and sets one wondering about what is going on behind all that sphinx-like placidity. When she smiles it is like a warm light streaming out of a window. She is so quiet, so composed; you feel that there is stored up in her all the world's wisdom concerning first and last things. You feel, somehow, that if you had anything vita' to say to her you would be able to say it with need for only a very few words, and that if you knew her very well you need hardly say it at all. She gives one the impression of a woman who would understand all the unsaid, inexpressible things of life. A woman who has lived considerably.

And when you meet Epstein's gentle dark eyes, kindly

and yet penetrating and shrewd, you have a similar feeling. You feel that he sees right through the outward trappings of civilization to the living flesh and blood. He does not see women as they see themselves in their mirrors, with their lipstick, powder, rouge, their furs and their smart clothes ; he sees them more nakedly than they ever see themselves. It is the essential quality of his work—this stark honesty, this faculty for seeing things naked, right through to the hidden core.

Epstein has the simplicity and lack of affectation of all authentic artists. His manner is shy, retiring, diffident. In appearance he looks like the man who has come to see about the burst pipe. He is not concerned with outward appearances. He was paid a big sum for his work on the new St. James's Park Underground station, but there is no sign of financial success in his home. If one did not know one would imagine that Epstein was still the struggling unknown artist.

During those weird Sunday afternoon tea-parties all kinds of people came to the house, but all of them interesting—long-haired poets, self-conscious young artists complete with beards, interestingly beautiful girls with straight hair, long dresses, and the high cheek-bones which seem to characterize Epstein's models. Mark Gertler, with his strangely-young clean-shaven face and his light brown hair worn straight all round like a pudding basin, and reminding one of the " Three Ivans " of the Russian Ballet, is an habitué. Epstein holds court in a window seat, with a circle of privileged intimates grouped round him in an exclusive circle. Mark Gertler sits clasping his knee, his body strained forward eagerly ; the tall strange girls sit sedately, and their eyes never leave Epstein's face. All those seated in a ring round Epstein have their backs to the rest of the room. It is a sacred circle which may not be broken into. A Harold Moore drawing of a nude is propped up against the foot of a pedestal which supports Epstein's head of a negress, a recent piece of work. There are Matthew Smith paintings on the walls. In the middle of a small room opening out of the big room stand two huge carved wooden idols from the Marquesas ; they are male and female, though at first glance oddly epicene. They are so immense that

there is room for very little else in the room. Peggy-Jean has laid an offering of autumn leaves at their feet. They stare with their curious blind yet all-seeing eyes at the crowd in the adjoining room. From a corner a painting of an ex-model smiles furtively. People continue to pour into the room, and Mrs. Epstein, massive at the head of the table, continues to dispense tea in her detached manner. A shabby man-servant comes in and brushes a few crumbs off the grubby green table-cloth and flings them casually on to the fire, where they sizzle fatly for a moment. He draws white blinds over the windows. There is a kind of gas-lit dreariness about the room, and outside the open door a black and white tiled hall and passage, with a gloomy staircase reaching up into a chill darkness. Peggy-Jean, chin on hand, remains immersed in her book beside the fire. Each fresh cup of tea is weaker than the last. . . .

Yet behind all this apparent casualness and disinterest there is a curious suggestion of hospitality and warmth. When this red-haired matriarch presses your hand and smiles like a Titian portrait, and with her musical Scotch accent bids you come again, you know that she means it. She is genuine. The atmosphere is curiously free of pretence.

I asked one artist why he grew a beard. He replied that it was partly laziness and partly so that he shouldn't look like an artist. "You can always tell an artist," he said, "because he looks like a stockbroker," or, he glanced at Epstein, "a plumber." Epstein laughed. Perhaps when he is really sickened of the British public he will grow a beard and write dull letters to the papers. But one doubts if he is sufficiently interested in what people think about him or his work to be irritated by it. Occasionally he is provoked into retort, but not often. Perhaps he realizes that a nation of puritans must have something to be shocked about in order to sustain its puritanism. You cannot be puritan when there is nothing to be puritan about. And everything Epstein has ever done has shocked the great British public into fits. There were the nude figures on the British Medical building in the Strand some years ago. Respectable paterfamilias and mothers-of-ten went for rides on tops

of 'buses for weeks especially to enjoy the sensation of being shocked. The national emblem of this country ought to be a fig-leaf rampant. There was the figure on the tomb of Oscar Wilde which had to be supplied with a fig-leaf before it could be unveiled. There was Rima to which people flocked in their thousands to be derisive about " modernity." It is a great pity that they could not have been transported to Rome or Athens and seen the work done two thousand years ago—they would probably have declared then that Epstein was positively " derivative." There was this Christ—the Christ of Epstein the Jew—which filled the Leicester Gallery with people who had gone there specially to be " horrified." . . . And now there are his great figures on the new underground station which have been assaulted by tar-and-feather " bombs," and subjected to the usual vapourings about modern ugliness. . . . But Epstein goes on, magnificently heedless. He is the most vital artist we have in our midst to-day, and future generations will look back and marvel that we did not acclaim him.

But this country will have to know a spiritual climacteric before it *can* find room for its Epsteins and its D. H. Lawrences ; at present, intelligence and decency are overwhelmed in a welter of stupidity , stupidity concerning sex, education, marriage, morals, religion. Puritanism is begotten of stupidity ; stupidity begets puritanism ; the thing works in a vicious circle. And puritanism is rapidly making this country no fit place for a decent, intelligent person to live in.

The forbidden D. H. Lawrence book was the test of the English people ; what emerged from that test was nauseating, prurient curiosity on the one hand, and an exhausting, life-sucking puritanism on the other. Similarly at the exhibition of the D. H. Lawrence pictures the gallery was packed by people whom wild horses would not ordinarily drag to an art exhibition. But having gone there from prurient curiosity they had not the decency to be frankly salacious in their interest ; no, they must puritanically preserve a solemn face and nudge each other and whisper and try to take it all very seriously, or at any rate pretend they found only an æsthetic interest or curiosity. The same people insult

Epstein by being Broad-Minded or Modern-Minded about his work, trying to See Something in It—something which will fit into their dreadful little categories of Art and Beauty.

But what are we to do with a country that bans serious books written by intelligent people, yet lets all the muck of the salacious, sensational purple-passion school through? A country that derides its artists, rejects its intellectuals, and gives heed to the charlatans and their capitalized puritanism. It has been written that it shall go ill with a country when the people forget the poets and the poets forget the people. We have Jacob Epstein and D. H. Lawrence and we persecute them both. Truly there is no health in us.

VII

PAUL ROBESON

PORTRAIT OF A GREAT ARTIST

I CHANCED to be seated behind G. B. Stern and John Van Druten at Paul Robeson's concert at the Albert Hall. G. B. Stern said to me that Rebecca West had described Robeson's voice as "black velvet," but that Van Druten defined the shade as "mulberry"—which did I think the better adjective? I thought "mulberry," and she agreed. . . . But when Robeson sings some of the more melancholy spirituals, I am not sure that Rebecca isn't right; his voice then has all the rich sombreness of black velvet. It is the quality of warmth and colour in his voice, even in melancholy, which gives it so intense an emotional appeal. Ponsella has a voice like a violin, Melchior like a flute; Robeson's is like an organ. It is a voice which somehow vibrates with the very pulse of life.

That, too, is the quality of Paul Robeson's personality; he is a great artist not because he happens to have a beautiful voice, but because of his sense of life. I talked to him about the *Hallelulah* film and commented upon the fact of how comparatively few people appreciated it.

He said that it was because so few people had that feeling for life—they couldn't understand that kind of intense emotional living. It is, of course, that feeling for life which is the secret of the art of the Negro people, as surely as it is the lack of it, the slow atrophy of the capacity to live emotionally, which will be the ultimate decadence of the white civilized peoples. Civilization, as we know it, is the enemy of art because it is the enemy of life. Gauguin knew that when he went to the Marquesas. The great pagan civilizations produced great art because theirs was a civilization which embodied a love of life. There was a resurgence of this feeling for life in the Elizabethan era in this country, with a corresponding resurgence of artistic activity, then came the puritans, when the whole nation became a church ; the sun of the Renaissance set and there was the long ecclesiastical gloom of the tyranny from which there has been no emergence. America has become so acutely civilized that whenever it produces a great artist—Whistler, Sargent, Epstein—the artist escapes to England in order to save his artistic soul alive. To consider the case of American civilization is actually to hear the roar of the machine at work. The greatest art comes out of the people whom civilization has never fundamentally touched, or the people who have succeeded in shaking off its manacles. That is why there is no American art ; and why we had the Russian Ballet, the Chauve-Souris, the Russian Blue Bird Theatre—and the art of Paul Robeson. The machine of civilization has not yet devoured the soul of Russia, or of the Negro. Americanization may ultimately get the one, and Marxism the other, but it may be that in the soul of a people which has grown up in bondage there is " the little spark that lives and does not die."

Paul Robeson is a natural artist, completely lacking in self-consciousness or affectation. He had been acting in amateur theatricals for years without ever considering it as a possible career, and then Eugene O'Neil saw him and wanted him for the *Emperor Jones*. In that play he was required to whistle—in the scene in which he lies resting in the forest—but, he told me, " I couldn't whistle, so I sang." He had always liked singing, to

please himself, but it was then that others—not he himself—discovered that he had " a voice." Hannen Swaffer gives a different version of that discovery, I know, but this is what Robeson told me. Incidentally it is amusing to note that all that Hannen Swaffer can find to say about that glorious melting voice is that Robeson can earn as much as seven hundred pounds a week by it. The best description I ever heard of Robeson's voice was from Norman Haire—but, unfortunately, it is unprintable, since sexual imagery in this country is *verboten*, in spite of the fact that sex is life, and all art sexual. It is in the rich, frank sensuousness so close to and yet so much greater than sensuality, that subtle, exciting, rich-coloured emotional response to life what Claude McKay calls, " the rough rhythm of darkly carnal life," that the art of the Negro triumphs, making the art of white civilization seem so pallid and anæmic a thing by comparison. It is all there in Paul Robeson's voice, and in his personality, a vibrant, living flame-like quality. When he comes into a room something happens, as positively as when a blind is pulled up and sunlight pours in, or a fire is lighted in a cold room. Irresistibly people look at him ; he radiates the intense vivid life in himself as a fire radiates its warmth.

Yet his manner is utterly simple. He must be heartily sick of white people wanting to discuss various aspects of the colour question with him, but there is no resentment or impatience in his quiet, courteous, intelligent replies. A relentless interviewer would find him the most docile prey, though he is moved to protest at the consistency with which his replies get wrongly reported. " Whatever I tell them they get it all wrong," he sighed, but smiled good-humouredly as he said it, as though the stupidity of interviewers has to be accepted along with the rest of the ills that flesh, whether white or brown, is heir to.

When he is not speaking there is a kind of brooding melancholy about him, rather like a shy child ; but when he laughs it is as though a great fountain of spontaneous happiness is suddenly released in him—the eager spontaneous happiness of a child. His personality is a study in light and shade. One moment he is talking earnestly

of the good job he hopes to make of his playing of *Othello*,[1] but with a charming modesty, " I don't say it will be the masterpiece of all time, but it will be as good as I can make it "—and the next moment he is inquiring eagerly about a football match, with boyish enthusiasm. There is a quality of utter sincerity about him, and it is in that, and his complete lack of affectation and self-consciousness, that the tremendous charm of his personality lies. He is completely unassuming. At his concerts he is lavish with encores. When I spoke to him of his generosity in this respect and said that I thought his audiences were a little selfish, he laughed happily; he admitted that, yes, he was tired at the end of that Albert Hall concert when he gave encore after encore simply because the audience would not let him go. " But then everyone was so nice," he said ; his generosity in the matter of encores is simply a friendly response to the friendliness extended towards him, and his English audiences are the most warmly friendly of all. The echo at the Albert Hall worried him, and when I asked him if he did not think it a dreadful, dreary place, he laughed and agreed. He is full of enthusiasm for English audiences, and the work he wants to do in this country in revivals of Eugene O'Neill plays. He expressed admiration for the way in which the Gate Theatre company played *All God's Chillun*, but did not like the Court Theatre production so well. He played " Crown " in *Porgy* in America and laughingly told me that a lot of people thought that the actor who played it over here was better, and he agreed. He would like to have played the title-rôle, but it was generally considered that he was too big to play as a cripple. He is extraordinarily docile in his acceptance of other people's judgments and opinions. He would have been a lawyer if he had not gone into the theatre, but it is doubtful whether he would have made as good a success in law as on the stage, for he appears to have an inherent reluctance to argue any point.

His wife, Essie, declares him hopelessly impractical.

[1] *This was written some time before the production. My impression of Robeson's " Othello " was one of disappointment. I could not feel that he was happy in the part, and the costumes he was required to wear made him—to my mind—irresistibly ludicrous. But I could not bear Sybil Thorndike as " Joan of Arc," or Edith Evans as " The Lady with the Lamp."* . . .

She deals with his mail and looks after his business affairs; she is as brisk and capable as he is quiet and unassuming; he is a giant and she is a little thing, but as alive and alert as a bird; she gives the impression of managing him as she might a big child who cannot look after himself; and he gives the impression of complete child-like submission to her management. When she declared briskly that if she didn't attend to his mail it would never get answered, I had a sudden picture of the brisk, capable little wife at her desk with piles of correspondence before her, and a telephone at her elbow, whilst the shy, unassuming young giant, dreaming songs as yet unsung, and parts as yet unplayed, goes out on to Hampstead Heath with the small son who is so ridiculously a miniature of himself, to come back, to find himself booked up for a tour of England to be followed by one of the Continent, winding up with an Atlantic crossing.... I am sure that Essie Robeson would be quite capable of arranging a world tour for her husband as easily as writing out her shopping list. I feel that she would come to a decision whilst Paul was still brooding over the idea. They are quite unlike each other; she has animation, he has repose; she is voluble, he is quiet; she is brisk, he is retiring. She is a brilliantly clever woman, with a university education like Paul himself, and a degree in science, and she is very lovely to look at; she is lighter-skinned than her husband, and her expression animated and cheerful, whereas his face in repose is a little melancholy.

A great many Negro people, Paul Robeson told me, think that because the spirituals were conceived in slavery and suffering they should not be sung any more, and the coloured people be allowed to forget their years of bondage; but he himself is of the opinion that whatever its source, a thing of artistic value must be regarded solely from that standpoint; for him it is no question of commercializing the sufferings of his people—"they know that," he said—but of expressing himself through a natural medium, the songs of his race. But that they happen to be the songs of his race is accidental and incidental; he is too much of an artist not to be dispassionate where æsthetic values are concerned. He has

sung the Negro spirituals to Italian audiences who could not understand a word of them, or realize the tradition behind them, and met with appreciative response. Art is international, independent of geographic boundaries and of race. Art is esoteric, and when Paul Robeson sings Negro spirituals in Milan, it is not a Negro singing the songs of his people to Italians, but a great artist expressing himself in a medium peculiarly his own. He intends singing European songs, and that, I think, is a good thing, just as it is a good thing that he should be allowed to act a part other than a Negro part, because that he happens to be a Negro is of considerably less importance than the fact that he is a great artist; his voice is more beautiful than any song he will ever sing, and his personality more vital and interesting than any rôle he will ever play. There is, I think, too great a tendency to accept him as an interesting spectacle because of his race; that he is a Negro is an accident of birth; the supremely important thing is that he is a magnificent artist. It is there that I quarrel with the title of Mrs. Robeson's book. It should be not *Paul Robeson, Negro,* but *Paul Robeson, Artist.*

VIII

GEORGE LANSBURY, M.P.

PORTRAIT OF A SOCIALIST

APPROACHING the Office of Works by way of St. James's Park the eye encounters smooth sweeps of lawn where neither rail nor fence doth corrupt. By which token may ye know that the Right Honourable George Lansbury is First Commissioner of Works. He should go down to history as The Man Who Took the Railings Down and Made the Parks Fit for Children to Play in.

I had always wanted to meet George Lansbury, for the reason that he belongs to the days of my ardent youthful socialism and rabid readings of the then *Weekly Herald,* and the *Labour Weekly,* and then one evening when I was the guest of honour at the Whitefriars Club, which meets

at Dr. Johnson's house in Fleet Street, I had the fortune to sit next to Mr. Hamilton Fyfe, but recently returned from accompanying Ramsay Macdonald's party in Canada. I told him I wanted to meet Lansbury, because he was very much in the public eye just then with his park schemes and so forth, and he gave me a note of introduction.

I was received promptly at the appointed time, but the young man who ushered me into Mr. Lansbury's office had such a brusqueness and urgency in his manner, as though a moment's delay on my part would give the Gravest Offence and be a Source of Profound Disrespect, that I began to wonder at my temerity in daring to present myself to the First Commissioner of Works.

That temerity vanished, however, at the first sight of Lansbury rising from his imposing desk and coming forward to meet me, smiling, welcoming, his hand outstretched.

" I've forgotten what you want to see me about," he says, " I get so many letters."

I sit down in a deep leather arm-chair opposite a cheerfully blazing fire and tell him that I am writing my Confessions and Impressions. He roars with laughter at that, rocking on the rug before the fire. " Good God ! " he says.

I reply with dignity that before one is thirty is the time to do that if one wants to be interesting and have a freshness of point of view.

He chuckles and demands, " And where do I come into it ? "

I tell him that he comes into it as an interesting public person, and one of the personalities of my evolution. He regards me quizzically, and I recall the days of the *Weekly Herald* and tell him that I was at the Albert Hall on that great occasion during the war when it was decided to make the weekly paper into a labour daily. I tell him that I wanted to find out what sort of person he is, and come straight to the point in a leading question about parks. I have never " interviewed " anybody in my life before, and having within a few minutes got him launched on his pet theme I begin to congratulate myself that for a first attempt I am not doing so badly . . . .

I asked him why he didn't make the parks fit for lovers to love in. He chuckled and said that that was the police department, and "they've no imagination," he sighed. "Takin' these railin's down 'ere caused a rumpus." He jerked his grey head towards the park and the lawns that form the boundary of King Charles Street. "They said tramps would come and sleep 'ere in the daytime, though God knows why the poor devils shouldn't. Well, they'll be down all the time *I'm* in office."

He is the champion of the poor and the protector of the down-and-outers. "In this country," he told me, bitterly, "being homeless is a crime." He is the Compleat Socialist—the sort of honest-to-God down-with-the-rich-and-up-with-the-poor sort of socialism that one had imagined had gone out with the war. He believes passionately in the working-classes. He believes that they, and not the middle classes, are the backbone of the country. He has lived amongst them all his life, more than sixty years, and never moved away when he went into office. He asked me if I knew Bow . . . there was something curiously wistful in his voice and eyes as he said it. A brooding look invariably comes into his eyes when he is contemplating the working-classes. It is as though he is saying inwardly, "You don't know. . . If you haven't lived amongst them you *can't* know. . . ."

He despises the middle classes as intensely as he admires the working-classes. "We get 'em coming in 'ere," he said contemptuously, "but we know how to deal with 'em, Daisy and Me." Daisy is his secretary. One got the impression that any member of the middle classes was liable to be flung out without ceremony. I was glad that as a writer I could be held free of any class distinction.

We talked a good deal about parks. He confided his dream of all the railings down and a great boulevard running through Hyde Park from Park Lane. "But it all comes down to a matter of money," he sighed, staring wistfully at the trees of St. James's. "Before you can move an inch you've got to go to the Chancellor of the Exchequer." One felt, from the inflection of his voice, that if he had his way, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer would give him the requisite money, there

wouldn't be a railing left in any London park, and swings and see-saws and sand-pits for the children galore. For he cares passionately about London's children and their right to God's green grass, whether it be London County-Council-planted or not. That is why the children have been allowed to run over the sacred grass of the gardens by the House of Lords. Yea, even there. "It didn't 'urt the grass," he protested, "and I like the kids to be 'appy."

There you have the heart and soul of the man, the essence of a fundamental sincerity that years of office cannot spoil. He wants the kids to be happy. He went to prison in the Battle of Poplar, and you feel that he would cheerfully go to prison again if it came to a Battle of the Palings. "By rights," he chuckled, "all of us that was in that Poplar business ought to be in prison now, for we never gave in." It is evident that in any battle for the working-classes he would never give in.

We talked, inevitably, of unemployment. His economics are a little primitive. "If everyone to-day would spend a pound more," he said, "there wouldn't be enough goods in the shops. We've got to increase the demand for goods, and we can't do it by saving. It isn't saving that makes trade prosperous, but spending. The reason for unemployment is that there isn't sufficient demand for British goods—well, then, it's up to us to create a demand by spending more money."

A curious attitude for a socialist, surely, but apparently the child-like simplicity of his socialism doesn't run to the intricacies of economics. Yet he was not always a socialist. He told me that he began as a Nationalist, "believing in Home Rule and the Rights of Small Nations." As a boy he was interested in the Franco-German War, and followed with avid interest every step of it, though he was only about ten at the time.

He now has the sort of job most suited to one whose chief interest has always been Bigger and Better Working-Classes. He does not want to abolish the working-classes and convert them into one large middle-class community; there is nothing he would detest more, but, in his simple way, he wants a happier and more comfortable working-class community. He would level-

down rather than level-up, have a democracy of wage-earners rather than a democracy of salary-earners. He is, for example, of the opinion that the Labour Government ought never to have started wearing dress-clothes. He himself never had until he went to a Mansion House banquet. " If people want to dress up, let 'em," he said. " But we never ought to have done it." He laughed, then, reminiscently. " Well, anyhow," he said, " I'd worn a topper before—when I was married. It was the fashion, in those days, for weddin's and funerals." But apart from such domestic occasions he has worn a bowler as consistently as he has worn his simple forth-right socialism, and always will.

And though his secretaries treat him with the deference due to a Cabinet Minister, one feels that he will always call them by their Christian names, and always be a little bewildered by their deference. His manner to them is confiding and friendly, as though being a Cabinet Minister is a surprising thing to have happened to him, George Lansbury. His manner is benign. One quite understands, having met him, why, when he leaves the stateliness and official austerity of the Office of Works, he goes back to the working-class home he has always known in Bow. One simply cannot imagine him doing anything else, in spite of his imposing offices, his deferential secretaries.

He is easy prey for an interviewer. He is too essentially kind to be either " up-stage " or subtle. He is as essentially kind as he is essentially simple and sincere. Not the stuff that clever statesmen are made of—men like Clynes, Snowden, Ramsay Macdonald—but a man who has spent all his life tirelessly and unwaveringly in the cause of The People. In that cause I am quite certain he would willingly die if need be, and there is something rather fine, I think, about that simple sincerity.

Physically, too, he gives an impression of fineness. There is something leonine about the grey head, and a suggestion of strength, in the rugged, kindly face. He reminds one of an English farmer. One sees his type at cattle-markets in country-towns. Very well one could imagine that broad, thick-set figure, complete with bowler hat, gazing benevolently at a pen of sheep or

lowing cattle, legs encased in stout leather gaiters, hands clasped upon a nobbly hazel-wood stick, a shaggy dog at his heels.

At the end of the interview we left the Office of Works together, coming out of the side-entrance. "It saves the stairs," he explained, "I always believe in saving time and energy."

A "crocodile" of the boys of Westminster College was passing on the park side as we emerged. "Look at all those nice little boys," he remarked, and looking up, quickly, questioning the inflection in his voice, I caught a droll, half-pitying, half-contemptuous smile. . . .

"I'm sorry the Labour Government is raising the age of children leaving school," I said, as we crossed the pavement to his waiting taxi, "I'm all for abolishing schools."

He laughed. "Some people are all for abolishing books," he shot at me as he dived into the taxi.

"We're all of us for abolishing something," I retorted, "schools, or books—or palings."

Someone more bright than kind suggested that I should write of George Lansbury as Portrait of a Nice Old Thing. . . .

But I liked him—and admired and respected him for his kindness and simplicity and sincerity. I do not believe that he is more well-meaning than effectual, as it is fashionable to assert. I don't believe that anyone with his heart so much in his job and years of service behind him *could* be ineffectual. He is up against all those bourgeois pseudo-ideals of which palings and keep-off-the-grass notices are the symbols. He is up against middle-class snobbery, lack of imagination, and puritanism. He is The Socialist who Kept the Faith, and as such I salute him. I hope he gets his boulevard and his people's casino, and 'appy kids and green grass everywhere, and never a keeper or paling in view. . . .

IX

ELLEN WILKINSON, M.P.

PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN WITH RED HAIR

EVER since I met Ellen Wilkinson I have been wondering why Beverley Nichols described her as having a " mild " face, for the adjective suggests everything that she most emphatically is not. As she herself said to me, laughingly, " If he had said that I had an ugly face, or a hateful face, or a spiteful face, I wouldn't have minded—but *mild!* Do *you* think I have a mild face ? " She looked at me with a droll, half-wistful, half-amused expression, and seemed relieved when I replied with a vehement, " Good heavens, no ! " Animated is the word I should use—animated, alive, eager—and shrewd ; a thin, determined mouth, keen eyes, and a gorgeous whirl of red hair through which she occasionally runs a tiny hand with a gesture irresistibly reminiscent of—Tallulah Bankhead. She is as charged with energy as a battery of electricity—and a newly charged battery at that.

I will admit that I was a little nervous about meeting her. I had heard her described as " fiery " and a " spitfire," and I think I rather expected a sort of super-schoolma'am, aggressive, unsexed, and as bristling with politics as a porcupine with quills. Looking her up in *Who's Who* beforehand I found that she had had, to my great disappointment, a distressingly good education. When I told her about this she laughed and said that it had been all acquired by scholarships, and hastened to reassure me that she had come of sound working-class stock, and we agreed that it is quite possible to preserve one's intelligence and make good in life in spite of a good education. I told her that I had just read a newspaper article of hers on co-education and the value thereof, and we talked education for a little. I asked her if she didn't find that any talk of co-education roused a great deal of controversy, to which she replied that in her experience she had found that one could talk of anything except Russia without upsetting the apple-cart, but that any

mention of Russia . . . . . She laughed and left the rest unsaid, and reverting to journalism added that where I had the " pull " over her when it came to any matter of discussing a problem of marriage or child-education was that I was a Wife and Mother.

" I've never had time to be either," she said, " but I've often thought that one of these days I really must find time to be a Wife and Mother just once—if I am to go on with journalism."

She added seriously that she had always " worked too much with men " to think about them as matrimonial partners. She appeared to ponder the thought, objectively. It is quite evident, even before she openly announces it, of course, that her predominant interest in life is, always has been, and always will be, politics.

She has written a novel, and wants to write others—but mainly as a vehicle for her political views. She told me, " You see, it's no use my pretending that I am more interested in A's falling in love with B and the possible reactions of C, than in politics, because I'm not. There isn't really anything I care as much about as politics, and there's no use in pretending there is ! "

I should say that Ellen Wilkinson cares about politics as most women care about clothes and love, that for her those things will always be unimportant incidentals in the business of living ; but in spite of that she is not the de-humanized mass of politics, devoid of natural feeling, which that statement suggests. She remains, curiously, paradoxically, in spite of this preoccupation with politics, intensely human. This is not merely a psychological deduction on my part—we talked personally for a little while, and she revealed an unexpected capacity for feeling. I have never witnessed in anyone as sensitive a reaction to another person's tragedy. She shuddered, physically, and said, revealingly, " As you said that, for a moment I visualized it happening to me—and how it would be. How everything would stop, as you say. I know what you mean." And it was quite obvious that she did know what I meant. It was as though for a moment she had looked out of the house of politics and in at the window of human life, and seen there the pain and the tears—and felt it in her own being. I am glad

to have had that revealing moment with her ; it told me more about her as a human being than I should ever have learned through any cross-examination as to her views on life and love ; it disposed of any necessity for such a cross-examination. I do not mean to suggest that her political enthusiasms and preoccupation with politics are merely a mask ; I should say that she is as definitely ninety per cent politics as I am ninety per cent emotionalism, but one had to see that ten per cent in order to comprehend the complete person.

I had invited her to lunch with me in the Ritz Grill because it was the quietest place I could think of in London ; she drew my attention to a man sitting at a table near by ; he was a living caricature of a " bloated plutocrat," the sort of thing one never expects to see in real life ; he appeared to regard us disapprovingly, and she said that she thought it was probably because we had both removed our hats, which " ladies " never do at luncheon or in the best restaurants . . . and then, inevitably, we talked of " ladies," their cause and cure, and what ought to be done about the woman who has a servant or servants to do her house work, a nurse to look after her one-only child, and who has no career ; we reached a conclusion which we both regretted we should not be allowed to say in public or in print.

We talked, too, of the long road we had both travelled in our different spheres before we could reach the stage where we could spend upon one meal as much as once we had earned in a week. She, too, has known what it is to go into a Lyons' tea-shop or an A.B.C. or Express Dairy and order a cup of coffee and eat surreptitiously a packet of sandwiches kept hidden under the table, and to regard an expenditure of more than fourpence or sixpence on a single meal as an extravagance. She regards the war-years of her trade union days as a period compared with which life as a member of the House is child's play. Those were her days of struggle and sheer drudgery. " When people talk to me of hard work," she said, " I tell them that they ought to know what it is to work for a trade-union organization ! "

Nevertheless it is the work to which she would return if she lost her seat in the House—that and the writing of

propaganda novels as a medium for saying what she has to say. It was a relief not to find in her any flamboyant feminist attitudes; she does not spell woman with a capital W, and is not " all out " for any feminist cause; she has too much practical trade-union experience not to know that the most vital work goes on behind the scenes, quietly and unspectacularly, and that getting anything of practical working value done is all a matter of organization and ploughing patiently through a mass of detail. It is precisely because she is not out to do anything spectacular that one feels that in Ellen Wilkinson is a personality who really will achieve something of importance. Her appreciation of Susan Lawrence is tremendous; " she has a mind like a razor," she said; she regards her as the most vital woman in the House. Her views on the other women in the House would make amusing reading, for Ellen Wilkinson has a sense of humour and a shrewd observation, but they are " not for publication," but that she can like people, and even admire them, for their personalities as human beings, whilst being diametrically opposed to their politics, affords another glimpse of her own personality.

In view of the fact that I had set out to meet her fearing that she might be a sort of super-school ma'am, it was interesting to learn that it was as a school teacher that she did actually start out on her career, until between the war and her growing interest in trade unionism she was drawn into politics. I had expected that coming from a working-class family she would have been reared on socialism, as I was, but it appears that young Ellen had to think things out for herself, because her father—a mill operative and later an insurance agent—cherished conservative ideals for many years until the trade-union movement finally brought about his conversion. But even brought up in a radical atmosphere, one feels that Ellen would still have thought things out, independently, for herself; she complains, bitterly, of the common acceptance of ready-made ideas on every subject under the sun, and it is obvious that she herself would never accept any idea without analysing it for herself first in the light of her own reasoning.

There are just a few " real " people in the world, and

she is one of them. She is what I would call an " authentic " person. There are very few of them, and they are mostly men. I have always contended that running the world is a man's job, but it wouldn't be if women of Ellen Wilkinson's calibre were the rule instead of the exception. Her energy is astounding ; no wonder she is exasperated by the suburban woman who can " never find time " to do anything useful, when she herself can find time to put in full time at the House, to address meetings, establish herself as a journalist, to read novels as well as write them, and attend to all manner of domestic details at her flat. Nor is it merely physical energy ; she has a diversity of interests, and a mental alertness, which does not necessarily go with physical energy—a great many people abounding in physical energy and a capacity for getting things done have singularly one-track minds, but Ellen Wilkinson's mind is as seethingly alive and as devious as an ant-hill ; one of those provocative minds which make it possible to talk of every subject under the sun ; in an hour and a half we discussed subjects ranging from the keeping of tuberculosis germs out of the national milk supply—but she said that if I pressed that button she would flow on indefinitely—so we switched on to journalism, and somehow by way of trade unionism, parasite women, love, marriage, education, prostitution, modern novels, Aldous Huxley, got through to D. H. Lawrence, and one of the last things she said to me—and for me another indication of her authenticity—was, " I'm glad you're a D. H. Lawrence enthusiast, too."

Beverley Nichols wrote of her as " a study in pink." I don't know whether he meant the colour to apply to her personality or her politics. There is certainly nothing wildly revolutionary about the latter, but all is not pallid that's practical, and her personality is of the kind that makes red hair seem as right for her as ash-blonde would be all wrong.

She describes herself as " small," but tiny is the better word ; I am small myself, but beside her I felt as big and clumsy as a Viola-Tree hoyden. Perhaps it is because she is so tiny that one gets the impression of concentrated energy stored up in her like an electrically charged battery ; it is almost as though one can see the flame of

life burning in her. With her tiny, eager face and that mass of waving shining hair, she is rather lovely, and she looks ridiculously young, not more than thirty—it is the youthfulness of her flame-like vitality.

I might have written of her under several titles, as Portrait of an Authentic Person, or Portrait of a Politician—for she is essentially that—or Portrait of a Modern Woman—she is essentially that, too—yet irresistibly she presents herself to me as Portrait of a Woman with Red Hair, with all that that suggests of vigorous and vivid personality.

X

HOLBROOK JACKSON

PORTRAIT OF AN INTELLECTUAL

FOR years I had been wanting to meet Holbrook Jackson, and was always on the verge of doing so. When I was writing advertisements in Charles Higham's office he used to come in canvassing space in a trade paper. He didn't look like most of the canvassers who came in from Fleet Street; it was somehow difficult to connect him with the advertising world, certainly not with a trade paper. He had a quality of personality which interested me. I knew that he was a friend of Charles Higham and asked Higham about him. He said, "Nice chap, Jackson. Wrote *The Eighteen Nineties*. You know his little paper, *To-day*. Why don't you write for it?" So I read *The Eighteen Nineties*, which was knocking about Higham's room, and as I felt that my own appreciation of the book was so much greater than Higham's could ever be, I never returned it to him. I don't think he knows, and it is the only theft of which I have ever been guilty. I felt somehow that it was justified. I could not at that time afford to buy the book, my admiration for it was terrific, and I knew that the eighteen-nineties were of no interest to Higham, because advertising at that period was—as he would say, "in its infancy." . . .

But I took his advice and sent Holbrook Jackson

something for his paper—the sort of thing to which one can only refer as " a little thing " ; it was called " Candlelight " and was very lyrical . . . so lyrical that before Holbrook Jackson published it in *To-day* he deleted every other adjective, and after that it really read quite well, with just the right *fin de siècle* note of decadence about it. . . . A copy of the issue containing it was shown in the window of the *To-day* offices open at the page, and against a black velvet background. . . . Someone read it, standing there in Bedford Street, looking in at the window. He said, nudging the woman who was with him, " You know, the little —— *can* write." I, too, stood there, raptly reading my own words, " an unseen player in the candlelight, calling the birds of thought from the dark forest of the brain." I was eighteen, you see, and so desperately tired of writing on " The High Cost of Inefficiency," " Successful Window Display," " The Science of Salesmanship," with newspaper variations in the provinces on Ways with Rice, and What to do With Last Winter's Coat, and an occasional outbreak of How to Hold a Husband and The Stay-at-Home Woman. . . . Here in the pages of *To-day* my literary aspiration bloomed like a rose. It seemed a pity to confine the blossom to *To-day*, so I reprinted it, with due acknowledgment, in *Higham's Magazine*, and also in *The Pelican*. . . .

Soon after that *To-day* ceased to be, and I never met Holbrook Jackson, though when he came into the office I would play with the idea of going up to him and saying breathlessly, " I loved your book, and I wrote ' Candlelight.' " But, of course, I never did for I was desperately shy for one thing, and for another Holbrook Jackson for me at that time soared somewhere high amongst the literary stars—in spite of his terrestrial connections with advertising. His joint editorship of *The New Age*, his acting editorship of *T.P.'s Magazine*, and his editorship of *T.P.'s Weekly*, were, as they say, " before my time." I knew him only as the author of *The Eighteen Nineties* and the editor of *To-day*. I had not then read his studies of Bernard Shaw, William Morris, Edward Fitzgerald ; I did not know him as a poet, or as the author of *Great English Novelists*. I did not meet

him until 1929, and by then he had written *Essays of To-day and Yesterday* and—*A Brief History of Printing.*

I asked him something I had long wanted to know—what a person so essentially literary as himself was doing on *The Draper's Organizer.* He replied that years ago he realized that for him it had to be a choice between commerce and literary prostitution. " And I regard business as more honest than cheap journalism as a means of making money. I had a family and responsibilities, and it was quite clear to me that I could not make enough money by my literary interests, so it had to be either commerce or the kind of literary prostitution I should hate. As it is, I am a business man all the week, and spend my week-ends in the seventeenth century."

He belongs as essentially to the English seventeenth century as Bertrand Russell to the French eighteenth century. His scholarship and bibliophilism belong to the age of the Renaissance. He has about him a literary quality which few professionally literary people have—a quality which is not confined to his authorship, but which imbues his personality and colours his outlook. I do not mean that he lives in a sort of literary asceticism ; his contacts with the world are real and vital enough—he is an ardent socialist—but it is as though he has looked through " all the little dramas men break their lives upon," and turned back to the seventeenth century when literature was woven into the flame of life itself, and life a pure flame in literature.

I have heard people refer to Holbrook Jackson as a " failure." Perhaps inasmuch as he is not an outstandingly successful business man like Sir Charles Higham or Mr. Gordon Selfridge, nor an outstanding literary figure like G. K. Chesterton or the late Edmund Gosse, he is. Had he but served literature as he has served the *Draper's Organizer* he might not in his middle years have been left unrecognized by the Neo-Georgians. It seems a pity apart from intellectual considerations, because he has the pronounced personality and physical attributes which go to the making of a public figure ; Arnold Bennett has his tuft of hair, and his curious mouth ; Chesterton his figure; Shaw his beard, Baldwin his pipe, J. B. Priestley his *Good-Companions* manner—Chesterton-with-a-dash-of-

Hilaire-Belloc ; Holbrook Jackson has his shock of black hair, his scholarly stoop, his alive Jewish eyes, with a background of literary intellectual Bohemianism, *The New Age*, socialism, and a Max Beerbohm sense of satire. He could have had the sort of reputation J. B. Priestley is establishing for himself—but with superior qualifications. It seems a pity ; he could have been an extremely interesting figure had he liked—although the exploiting of his personality is one of the last things one could imagine him doing.

He has the immense tolerance of all authentic minds—a tolerance for everything except intolerance. He is not so much contemptuous of the puritans as amused by them. His weariness of civilization does not make him bitter ; he sees it for the mess it is, but as a man who spends five days a week in a business office, and the remaining two in the seventeenth century, it does not much affect him. When he is not working he is reading ; all his most vital life is lived in his library.

There is a great simplicity and gentleness about him ; to know him is to understand very well why he should have written verses for children amongst his other more exacting literary activities. I feel that he knows so much, not merely in the sense of scholarship, but in terms of life itself, that he has grown humble with the realization of how little of all that remains to be known humanity will ever know. There is nothing aggressive about his rationalism—he is so rational that he can be tolerant. He is the sort of person to whom one can go on talking, and his fundamental sanity is as exhilarating as walking on a hill-top in the wind and rain. He has the complete intellectual authenticity of Bertrand Russell ; his intellectuality is not as far-reaching, but there is that same exciting mathematical precision of thought ; it is not merely that he expresses himself explicitly, but that one feels talking to him that there are no loose ends lying about untidily in his mind, no confusion of emotion without reasoning. Yet, like the author of *Principia Mathematica*, he remains human and lovable. He is one of the few people with whom conversation is an intellectual adventure. Perhaps after all he has the right kind of success, for all the people to

whom his name means anything are themselves "authentic"; he has that *succès d'estime* which is the only tribute of any value to a first-class mind. It is in what the world calls his "failure" that Holbrook Jackson is most interesting both as a man of letters and a personality; it is the outward and visible sign of his unassailable inner rectitude as an intellectual.

XI

LEON M. LION; GODFREY TEARLE

STUDY IN OPPOSITES

It would not have occurred to me to write of these two together had I not met them together, for any two people more unlike each other it would be hard to imagine. I had arrived at Wyndham's Theatre to meet Leon M. Lion. The rehearsal of *Bandits* was in progress. As we were leaving the theatre the tall, broad-shouldered "lead" called to the producer from a corner of the stage. Interested in finding out about the play I asked Leon who was "the handsome hero." He said, "Oh, that's Godfrey Tearle."

I said, "Oh!" breathlessly, like that.

Leon laughed. "Let's ask him to lunch with us."

Godfrey was bashful and diffident for a moment, murmuring something about his club. Leon waved an imperious cane and said "nonsense."

In the foyer he introduced us. He said, "I want you to meet Miss Ethel Mannin!"

The handsome hero also said, "Oh!" and grasped my hand like a long-lost friend. Leon said that he had never in his life heard such an "all-embracing 'Oh!'"

We lunched—inevitably—at the Ivy. Leon, having stage-managed the trio, and produced the whole thing to his satisfaction, then took the stage.

He is the compleat actor-manager. In this particular comedy—a comedy of ideas—he produced the play and took the lead, and chose the audience as well as the rest of the cast. Godfrey Tearle and I were allotted our rôles,

but we were to be the audience as well—his audience. But who could possibly mind acting as audience to Leon M. Lion? He is one of those people born to take the centre of the stage. Among all the entertaining personalities I have met I have never encountered such a persistent torrent of vivacity and wit. The words pour out of him; one presents him with the cold stone of an idea, and his alert mind swings down upon it and strikes sparks out of it. But all the time, under all that sparkle and gaiety and wit, he is deadly in earnest. For him an epigram is not wit without truth, but truth in terms of wit. If one sat beside him for half an hour with a pencil and paper one would have enough epigrams for a Lonsdale comedy of manners or a Noel Coward revue—but with rather more pungency, perhaps, than would ensure a Lonsdale or Coward popularity.

Leon M. Lion tried giving English audiences wit allied to truth in *This Way to Paradise*. It involved him in a loss of four thousand pounds, because English audiences do not understand that sort of thing. They do not want to have to think in the theatre. That is why Leon M. Lion's next production after the Huxley play was *Bandits*.

"The public wants either pap or paprika," he explained. "Giving them intelligent plays is too expensive a luxury; I am learning to think auditorially in the theatre," and he laughed his sardonic "Spandrell" laugh.

It is impossible for me not to make the Spandrell comparison, because I met him immediately after the Huxley play, and it was startling to find how closely his off-stage mannerisms and tricks of speech synchronized with those of his interpretation of Spandrell. His conversational flow is pure Spandrellism. The more I see of actors and actresses the more I am convinced that they do not act so much as colour any rôle given to them with their own egos, exhibit on the stage one or several facets of their actual personalities. Leon suggested that it raised an interesting psychological problem as to what extent the rôle an actor is playing colours his personality, but I don't think it works like that. Godfrey Tearle collects all the strong silent parts not because he has a capacity for

acting them, but because he *is* that sort of person. He does not have to act sincerity and rugged simplicity ; he has simply to go on to the stage and be himself. He has the most engaging honesty and simplicity and complete lack of artistic self-consciousness or pretentiousness I have ever met. His intelligence derives directly from the simplicity of his attitude towards life. Leon, with a touch of Spandrellism, declared that " Bordeaux and poetry " were his two pursuits ; Tearle replied that gin-and-French and virginian cigarettes would do for him. He will listen with respectful attention to one of Leon's sparkling poetic flights, and then remark " of course my trouble is that I never understand anything," from which, of course, one deduces that he understands a great deal. Simplicity and naïveté are not necessarily the same thing.

He recounted the story of the American film producer of a play with a Biblical setting who is said to have inquired who were the twelve people grouped together in the cast ; and, when told that they were the Twelve Apostles, to have said, " Aw, let's make it forty."

Even better is the story of the American producer who thought he would like to make a film of *The Well of Loneliness*. He was told that he couldn't do that because it was all about Lesbians, and English people didn't like that sort of thing ; it wasn't allowed ; to which he replied, " All right ; let's make 'em Austrians."

Leon told a Galsworthy story. There had been a discussion about his assisting with some films of Galsworthy plays in America. He said that he would do so on the understanding that he should keep to his undertaking to Galsworthy that the films should keep strictly to the spirit of the plays. But at this the American producer was aghast ; he explained to Mr. Lion that this was not possible. " You tell Mr. Galsworthy to give us a little less labour troubles, and more divorces—that's what our boys over there want."

Leon does not love America. He says that " when America finds time to say ' Amen ' she will begin to understand what Europe means by amenities." He is an incorrigible punster.

He took *Many Waters* to America. " But if many

waters cannot quench love," he said, " the dollar can." He says that when he was filling in his aliens form on leaving America, against " race " he wrote " human—not American." He returned from America convinced that he was the best-hated man in America. " But Nevinson says I can't be, because he is." But Leon M. Lion is amused about it, whereas C. R. W. Nevinson is inclined to be bitter. I should say that Leon has too much sense of humour to be bitter about anything. I think there is a good deal of " The gospel according to St. Spandrell " in his mental make-up, a philosophy of doing what one wants and laughing at the cost, a Spandrell sense of the satirical and the ridiculous in human life. He " followed his fancy," as he says, when he produced *This Way to Paradise*, and it cost him four thousand pounds, but he is not bitter about it. One has to pay for the luxury of pleasing oneself, he says, and when he has recuperated his losses—by serving out " pap or paprika " instead of Huxley wit and wisdom—he will probably indulge his æsthetic principles again—and risk another failure . . . you cannot remember the box-office when finding new ways to Paradise. " All the right people liked *This Way to Paradise*, but unfortunately there aren't enough of them from the box-office point of view," he said, and one felt the mental shrug.

I asked him what he would like to do in the theatre if there were no necessity to consider the box-office and " think auditorially." He replied that he would like to produce plays which were " provocative statements of ideas." But the problem then would be to find the writers of such plays. At present, as he sees the situation, we have only Shaw—and Aldous Huxley " if he would give his mind to the theatre, consider its carpentry, clothe its essentially bony structure with the living flesh of his intellect. . . . I see now that *This Way to Paradise* was hopelessly before its time. In another twenty-five years or so the public will probably be lapping it up like honey, and rediscovering the marvels of Huxley, just as to-day they lap up and rediscover the wonders of Shaw and Tchekov."

But the irony of this does not make him bitter; it amuses him. His attitude is that " some of us must be

pioneers, and a pioneer's job would be heartbreaking if one were not satisfied to say, 'I've done what I wanted to, and I'm glad I've done it.'" But in this material world it costs money to be a pioneer—hence *The Calendar* and *Bandits* between the ways to Paradise. He would like to be able to produce a play at the beginning of the week, he said, and not invite the press until Saturday, because "the dramatic critic goes to the theatre like a coroner to an inquest—for him the play is already dead and all he does is pronounce the verdict as the causes of death." The present first-night gatherings do not represent a normal audience at all; the press goes along bored and jaded, in the spirit of "another beastly first-night." The press killed *This Way to Paradise* before the public at large had a chance to return a verdict, though it was probably doomed to failure anyhow, for it takes the public of this country about twenty years to discover genius in a man of ideas. It has only within the last few years accepted Shaw. Godfrey Tearle said that English audiences regard the theatre as they regard a football match or dirt-track racing. . . .

Of Huxley, Leon said that he was "like some delicate sensitive wild creature—like a deer; almost you can feel him projecting invisible antennæ."

We talked of Huxley's beautiful dispassionate mind. Leon said that Huxley was one of the few people one could see in profile; mostly, he said, one saw people full-face, or three-quarter face, but never the beautiful clear outline of profile. One would never see Leon M. Lion in profile; he never stays still long enough; his mind darts and leaps about like a wild thing in a thicket, flashing in and out of sunlight and shadow, stirring up all manner of poetic leaves and purple patches and lyric flights of wings in the process. His mind has the gleam and dazzle and alertness of a humming-bird; it flashes past in a shimmer of green and blue—like satire imposed on truth—and is returned again in a sudden glow of wine and gold—"Bordeaux and poetry."

Talking of the press and the theatre I asked him if he regarded Hannen Swaffer as a dangerous person. He laughed and said that anyone who had a pen in his hand was dangerous, and as everyone had nowadays, the world

was a very dangerous place. He added more seriously that the power of the press would ultimately sweep civilization back into the dark ages. . . . Yet he himself loves words. Heavens, how that man loves words—as Lafcadio Hearn loves them, as living, shining, sentient things, cascades of jewels, all colour and fire and sparkle. He loves them so much that sometimes, he says, he almost regrets not having had an orthodox education—it might have enabled him to use them still more fluently and appreciatively . . . though I do not think that is possible; orthodox education for him would have cramped his bubbling spontaneity into an academic tight-lacing. He left school as a child in order to become "a public reciter." He first appeared as an actor when he was sixteen. He has toured with Forbes-Robertson, Martin Harvey, Georges Edwards, Fred Terry. He regards Forbes-Robertson's *Othello* as supreme: he does not see Paul Robeson in the rôle; a Negro and a Moor are not at all the same proposition, so that Robeson's colour is rendered valueless, and "Not what Shakespeare meant. I can see enough into Bill's mind to know that," he declared, with conviction.

In management Leon M. Lion has produced some of the most interesting things in the theatre. He was responsible for the first performances in this country of *Ghosts*, *Monna Vanna*, and *The Three Daughters of M. Dupont*. He is producer, actor, playwright, novelist. He is also, I think, innately, poet and philosopher—with a philosophy of scepticism. He does not think in terms of "I have been" or "I will be," but "I am." That, for him, is the essence of the art of living. But always after such a flash or revelation the irrepressible imp in him bobs out again with a satyr's grin.

"God said in the beginning, 'I am,'" he said, "and thus by gradual stages of evolution we come to—Higham. One climbs not so much little by little, or higher and higher, but Higham by Higham."

The humming-bird flashed by with a shimmer of satiric green and blue, and returned with a flash of the wider blue upon its wings. . . . "One needs to go down into a deep pit before one can see the stars," he said. "That is both a scientific fact and a psychological truth."

I asked Godfrey Tearle whether Lion was always as full of epigrams and gaiety, or whether it was merely an attack of " Spandrellism," but he assured me that he was always the same " extraordinary person," whether he had just been playing Shakespeare, or *The Chinese Puzzle.* I wish one might capture that extraordinary personality as one might catch a butterfly and stick a pin through it and present it complete and intact—but that is as impossible as producing a chameleon complete with all the colours it can turn. There is a liquid quality about the mind and personality of Leon M. Lion which makes one feel that the only adequate way of presenting it would be if it could be poured out like a fluid rainbow. The mere physical description of the man conveys so little of his essential quality of personality. Small and dark and vivacious, he is alive as an electric wire, restless, animated, gay, mocking, amusing, laughing, flowing with words, always talking, till you can almost see the wild flashing coloured thing that is his mind leaping from point to point, reflecting ideas, moods, emotions, like light reflected from a prismatic glass. . . .

And then, as the perfect foil you have Godfrey Tearle, big and " strong and silent," nothing subversive or decadent or " Spandrellish " about him, but what the writers of some magazine stories like to refer to as " clean English manhood " . . . women catch their breath over his name as they used to over Owen Nares when he was more the matinée idol than he is now. He is what a woman novelist friend of mine would undoubtedly call, " so male." He misses a lot of fun in life, he told me, ruefully, because of this handsome-hero-clean-English-manhood appearance of his. " Everyone thinks I'm so 'nice,' " he sighed. . . . It is true ; every time one mentions the name of Godfrey Tearle there is that reverent intake of the breath, and, " Oh, he's *very* nice, isn't he ? " Women say, " Oh, Godfrey Tearle—a *lovely* person ! " It's simply no use ; Godfrey would never get away with an outbreak of viciousness, no matter how much he might yearn after Spandrellism and purple patches, poetic flights and a lyric ecstasy ; not for him any " talking learnedly of the amorous mysteries," not for him the psychological subtleties, or the half-lights and

nuances of the art of living. . . . He will have to go on being clean-English-manhood and " a lovely person " and " very nice." But I don't think he has to understand much of metaphysical intricacies; he is a first-rate actor—and a happy person; and to be an authentic artist and a happy human being as well is a very considerable and rare achievement. He is another of the people who are glad to have escaped an orthodox education, and whom such an education would have spoiled; he, too, sees it as a futility, of futilities. I like his directness and simplicity and honesty—and his complete lack of pretentiousness. For him a pseudo-intellectuality, particularly in respect of plays, is infinitely worse than sheer stupidity. I like, too, his complete acceptance that all genius is a matter of accident, and not the outcome of any conscious effort. He is in his line a great artist simply because he happens to be able to act; it is the one thing he can do supremely well; as he sees it, any kind of art is " a gift which you've either got or you haven't," and it is precisely that attitude which makes him first-rate.

Leon more or less agreed, but suggested that upon occasions, " One is perhaps conscious that one is moving a little clumsily, that one could have made such and such a gesture a little more effectively. . . ." That was Spandrell speaking. Godfrey Tearle said that he didn't know; perhaps afterwards one realized where one could have made a better job of it. . . .

" Nothing is ever achieved by hard work—except sweat," that was Spandrell too. . . . We came out laughing into the warm sunlight of an early Spring afternoon. When the dark portals of Wyndham's Theatre had finally engulfed them—I had an impression of them borne away on a tide of laughter—there was a sudden yawning emptiness in the day that a moment before had been so crowded and alive. . . . Back in the shrouded theatre I knew that " Spandrell " would become Leon M. Lion again, producer, critical and exacting, and Godfrey Tearle once more the handsome hero, the actor studying a new part and making a job of it in the instinctive, unself-conscious manner of the authentic artist. . . . Here you have them, then, Portrait of a Handsome Hero, and Portrait of—a Humming Bird, the vibration of whose

wings may produce an intellectual feast of " point counter-point " or —" pap and paprika." And that not in order to make a box-office holiday, but because the indulgence of one's æsthetic principles in a country in which there are not enough intellectuals to go round, is an expensive business, and there is that necessity to make up on the popular roundabouts what is lost on the esoteric swings. . . .

XII

DR. NORMAN HAIRE

PORTRAIT OF A RATIONALIST

I HAD heard a good deal about Norman Haire long before I met him. People were always saying to me, " Don't you know Norman Haire? Oh, you must know Norman Haire. *Most* amusing person! All contraception and rejuvenation and sex-reform." There seemed to be something inevitable about this business of meeting Norman Haire; I felt about him as I used to feel about going to America before I went, " eventually why not now? "

What ultimately happened was that he wrote to me after reading *Crescendo* asking me if I would read a paper at the World League for Sexual Reform of which he was the secretary. *Crescendo* had " deeply moved and interested " the eminent surgeon. We corresponded a little and I was finally invited to dinner at his Chinese house in Harley Street, and to take the chair afterwards at a Rationalist Press Association Meeting at which he was speaking on sex and religion, or sexual symbolism, or sex and shame, or something. It was an extraordinary meeting. In introducing Dr. Haire I said that he was one of our most radical thinkers and fearlessly outspoken. I don't think, though, that I really knew the meaning of the word outspoken until that night. He had told me during dinner some of the things he was going to say, and I said that it would be fun if he could, but that of course he wouldn't dare. Well, he did, and

his address was what Evelyn Waugh would describe as "too, too shy-making." One was conscious of first of little waves of shock shuddering through the ranks of the rationalists, but by the time Haire had finished and the audience were invited to ask questions and say their little pieces, everyone had become infected with frankness to the most remarkable degree. I said to him afterwards that he seemed to have had a most "loosening" effect upon his audience. He replied that he was glad of that because most people were so dreadfully mentally constipated, weren't they? He had thoroughly enjoyed himself, and so had his audience,—and so had I.

With the possible exception of Louis Marlow I should say that he is the most infallibly amusing person I have ever met or ever hope to meet. He has what he himself once amusedly referred to as "a pretty wit." It is difficult to be with him and not be in a perpetual state of girlish giggles. At that black period of my life when I was in the middle of that dark tunnel from which it seemed I could never emerge, some drollery of his would make me laugh in spite of myself. He was the only person who could make me laugh at that time, and for his friendship then I shall be grateful all my life. He has the real kindness of the really intelligent person. He does not just sit around and say how sorry he is; he does something about it. Perhaps that is why whenever there is a crisis in my queer life I may be observed indulging in an orgy of theatre-going with Norman Haire. Not, I hasten to add, that the next time we may be seen together giving added lustre to the brilliance of "those present" it may be assumed that another cataclysm has occurred, but I know that any time he should ring up and I should tell him that I was "depressed to death," he would instantly suggest my postponing any suicide I was contemplating as he had two tickets for some interesting show or other. . . .

If Norman Haire hadn't become a doctor he would have gone on the stage. Whenever he sees a play which he enjoys he experiences a pang of regret that he isn't playing in it himself. But to know anything about his work is to be everlastingly grateful that he resisted the lure of the footlights. I feel about Norman Haire as I

feel about A. S. Neill, that if he should cease to practise —just as if Neill should cease to run his school—the loss would be quite irreparable. Whenever Haire plays with the idea of retiring from Harley Street and going to live in Germany, which is his " spiritual home," I have that sensation of panic which I knew when Neill was so desperately ill, and when in disheartening moments he has talked about " chucking " education and running a hotel and " making some money for a change," I want to protest, passionately, " No, no, you mustn't do that ! What will everyone do ! You can't be spared ! There's no one to take your place." Neill spends his life cleaning up the mess parents have made of their children ; Haire spends an enormous amount of his time without any financial profit to himself cleaning up the mess people make of their sexual lives. He knows that there is more unhappiness in human life caused by sexual problems than by anything else, not excluding money troubles, and he must have helped thousands of people, both men and women, to readjust their lives and find happiness. The duchesses who come to him in Harley Street are as grateful to him, and owe him as unpayable a debt, as the working-class women who consult him at his East End clinic. He has had all manner of difficulties in keeping that clinic going, because in this strange world people will give money for almost every purpose—the support of cats' homes and societies for the assistance of decayed gentlewomen, and the distribution of Bibles and trousers to the heathen—except such unspectacular and essential things as advising the very poor on the intelligent use of contraceptives, and helping them to find in their sexual relationships the satisfaction necessary to their health and happiness and well-being in general as human beings. But Norman Haire like A. S. Neill has, thank heaven, the courage of his convictions. He, too, is a pioneer ; the pioneer of intelligent, rational sex-reform.

I have chosen to write of Norman Haire as " portrait of a rationalist " because he is the one completely rational person I have ever met. I said this to Bertrand Russell and he smiled and said that he had always thought that he also was one. But I am not sure about Bertrand Russell's complete rationality, and I am, completely,

sure of Norman Haire's. I do not merely mean inasmuch as he cheerfully sacrifices his figure for the sake of his enjoyment of food, or that in the summer he will go about in "dress reform" attire quite impervious of comment and criticisms; these are merely two outward expressions of that all-embracing inner rationality which colours his entire attitude towards life. He believes in the right to be happy, not merely as a theory, but as a practical working philosophy of life. He is a hedonist with the courage of his convictions—and being a gourmand is part of his hedonism, just as his hedonism is part of his rationality. Seeing Norman Haire eat is to be irresistibly reminded of the fairy stories of giants—Haire is a giant in physique—who could devour an ox as easily as other men devoured a cutlet. But he must be very tired of people being shocked or amused about his appetite. He said to me once, rather wearily, "You know if I drank excessively nobody would say anything, and nearly everybody who drinks at all does drink too much, or anyhow more than is good for them; I don't drink at all, as you know, but because I eat excessively people pass remarks, regardless of the fact that it is a pleasure which doesn't do me any harm." Truly the path of the rationalist is a hard and lonely one in this highly irrational civilization. . . .

I often wonder what conventional people coming to Norman Haire's house for the first time, without having been previously warned, must think, when they are shown into a consulting-room with a silver ceiling and walls hung with exquisite Chinese embroideries on silk. An unappreciative friend once suggested that it looked "more like an Oriental lupanar than a Harley Street consulting-room." Hugh Walpole is one of the people always inclined to be rude about Haire's Chinese taste in decoration and furnishing. But Hugh, in his flat, I understand, runs to Victorian "knick-knacks" and little "occasional tables," and Chinese tapestries and rugs and idols and lacquered furniture have at least the virtue of being beautiful. The dining-room is even more exotic, with highly coloured dragons writhing like vorticism-gone-mad all over the ceiling. More silken tapestries here, too, and in the drawing-room, where an

almond tree blossoms in paint on the ceiling. People say, " But how could one live with all this sort of thing ? " Personally I don't see why not ; if one likes this sort of thing this is very much the sort of thing one likes. If it were badly done it would be appalling, admittedly, but here it is all done superlatively well, with nothing whatever of the pseudo about it. Anyhow, whether one likes it or not the only room in the house in which one can escape it is the bathroom.

For a description of Norman Haire's appearance I don't think I can do better than refer you to a novel by Berta Ruck entitled *The Unkissed Bride*—you will find it all there, complete with Norman's perfect teeth and controversial Chinese furnishing and decorative effects, although there is something ludicrous about the idea of a picture of Norman Haire in a book with such a title. I am not particularly concerned with how people look—if I like them and find them interesting I don't much care how their features are arranged, though it is true I share with Norman Haire a passion for beautiful teeth, and, like him, couldn't have a love-affair with anyone failing in this respect, whatever their qualities in other directions. We would both infinitely prefer a squint to bad teeth. . . .

I find, too, in this matter of describing people physically that I am scarcely conscious of what they are like ; I find it much easier to describe them in this respect when I don't like them ; when I like them I am much more interested in writing of their personalities and their " settings," which are an integral part of their personalities. Trying to describe the physical appearance of someone one likes always seems to me a little artificial, and highly unimportant, a pointless concentration on the trivial. And so, too, does a biographical account of their lives and work. That seems to me to be the function of *Who's Who*, and in any case contributes nothing towards a picture of a personality except in the case of " careerists " like Charles Higham. Higham is remarkable as a personality by reason of what he has done ; Norman Haire would be as remarkable a personality without all that long story of his activities as set forth in *Who's Who*. But there is one very definite aspect of his

career which stands out as worthy of comment, even though it is in the prosaic nature of biography ; he came to England from Australia only ten years ago. Nobody in England knew anything at all about him ; in spite of a remarkably brilliant medical career in Australia, so far as England was concerned he had done nothing and was nobody ; he took a single room in Harley Street and sat down and waited—and hoped. A great many medical men have done that—and finally packed up and gone away. But as a result of Norman Haire's waiting and hoping it is almost impossible to move about anywhere to-day without his name sooner or later cropping up. Whenever two or three people are gathered together in any circle of our varied society, it seems almost inevitable that presently somehow the name of Norman Haire will come under discussion. " Everyone," it would seem, either knows Norman Haire—or is hoping to. It is always simpler, I am beginning to find, to assume from the outset that whoever one is talking to, knows Norman Haire. The correct answer to " Do you know Norman Haire ? " is, " Oh, good Lord, who doesn't ? " But to have become that sort of celebrity in ten years is a big achievement. It is not so much an Eric story of Little by Little, I think, as Brilliance, or Personality will Out.

XIII

ELSA LANCHESTER AND CHARLES LAUGHTON

PORTRAIT OF A STRANGE PAIR

FROM the time I first saw Elsa Lanchester, in *Riverside Nights*, I wanted to meet her. Here, I thought, was Personality with a capital P. I wrote about her in a newspaper article as the embodiment of " sex-appeal," and that is why we were so long in meeting each other although we have a good many mutual friends. . . . Elsa seems to have had an idea that if I met her in person I might change my mind, whereas my impression of her

when at last we did meet was merely an endorsement of all that I had previously felt about her.

"Gamin," of course, is the word which instantly occurs to one in connection with her, and I do not see how she could possibly resent it, because it is just precisely that street-urchin quality about her which makes her so irresistible. That and her extraordinary naïveté. I have an idea that she likes to be considered rather a "dangerous" woman, but it can't be done—not with that incredibly childlike face and artless manner. The thing she likes doing best, and which she does better than anything, is imitating children. I don't mean in the Gracie-Fields–Ruth-Draper manner, but in the droll, burlesque manner of *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room*. As the gauche, thin-legged little girl who is begging the bad barman to "sell no more drink to my father," and as the tiresomely saintly child who hears the angels calling her and bids dear mamma "put my little shoes away," she is quite simply inimitable. She told me that although the thing was intentionally burlesque, and although the audience rocked with laughter, when she was the dying child in *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room*, she "really felt" that death-bed scene, not as the bathos it was, but as the pathos which was intended in that kind of provincial stock company play of the period. This, I think, is the key to her whole personality and her artistry; she has the essential, fundamental naïveté of a child, and she simply goes on to the stage and gives that naïveté full play—just as Jean Forbes-Robertson goes on to the stage and allows herself to be the Barriesque, Mary-Rose-ish introvert; I felt that Jean Forbes-Robertson in *The Red Umbrella* was simply being herself, that it wasn't acting at all, and I was interested to find that some of the critics were of the same opinion. In the same way Elsa Lanchester as the twelve-year-old little girl of *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room* was merely expressing her essential self.

She has the reputation of saying shocking things; she does, of course, but with an artlessness which completely destroys their sophistication; a really sophisticated person wouldn't say the extraordinary things she does; her very bawdiness has all the naïve crudity of a child. I found myself flinching mentally not from any sense of

prudery or of being "shocked" in any conventional sense, but simply from the "shock" of the realization that her droll unprintable remarks were to her not bawdy at all, but merely ordinarily amusing conversation. Her every movement and gesture suggests the same naïveté. She has a habit of sitting in a straddling position with her skirt above her knees and her thin legs dangling, precisely like a child, and of standing with her feet apart and her slender, childish body thrown a little back . . . with a cheap virginian cigarette dangling from her lips, there is very much of the gamin in that attitude, and it is there, too, in the slightly suggested air of impudence and defiance and expectancy, curiously boyish—the provocative boyishness of the young street-arab on the qui vive for the policeman round the corner . . . but terrifically feminine too, with that provocative sexual quality of the gamin. A difficult thing to define, but Cicely Courtneidge in some moods has it; Tallulah Bankhead has it when she is not smothering her personality under camellias—which don't suit either her or her temperament, and Ivor Novello in *The Rat* was the essence of it.

With Elsa Lanchester it is as though one moment one is looking at an unconsciously droll little girl of twelve, and the next at a young apache. . . . One minute you feel that she ought to be wearing a gingham frock and a white pinafore, and the next that she ought to have a beret crushed down on to her lovely short red hair, and a scarlet handkerchief knotted about her throat. That "underworld" quality was expressed in her playing of the young prostitute in the Court Theatre production, *The Outskirts*. But she told me she did not enjoy playing that part; it is not the sort of thing she wants to do; she has no "urge" for dramatic acting; she likes singing Cockney songs such as she sang at the "Cave of Harmony," playing the bedraggled, humorously pathetic, charwoman or little "slavey," or the little girl . . . yet for all that, in a long golden mid-Victorian gown, singing "After the Ball was Over," she is quite lovely. But she somehow contrives to endow that sentimental ballad with a quality of naughtiness which one feels quite sure the composer never intended when he wrote it! She

can introduce ridicule into the most nauseatingly sentimental song ever written—and a note of the *risqué* too when she likes.... Some subtle nuance of expression or gesture, a wickedly childlike widening of the eyes, a slight lifting of the brows in childish surprise as who should say, " But have I said anything out of place ? " and even " After the Ball was Over " can suggest something vaguely verging on the improper. . . .

Ten Nights in a Bar-Room, which Peter Godfrey produced at the Gate Theatre, was of course the ideal medium for Elsa Lanchester's piquant personality ; it is curious that she should have been offered so many prostitute parts—which she has declined simply because she does not regard herself as a dramatic actress and does not want to be one ; I don't know why revue producers do not clamour for her, for she is inimitable in the full sense of that grossly overworked word. She is personality personified, a quite unique personality.

It is a little difficult to realize her as married to Charles Laughton ; but that is probably because it is difficult to imagine such individuality being paired off with any other. But Charles Laughton is himself one of the oddities in human nature ; he, too, is quite unique. To meet him off the stage is to recall, immediately, his acting as *The Man with Red Hair.* . . . That pale puffy face, curious manner of walking, his shoulders hunched up, one a little higher than the other, that jerky step, these things happened to fit into the rôle of that dreadful sadist, but they are there as a natural part of Charles Laughton too, and if one saw the play the realization is a little shocking, because in spite of Laughton's off-stage gaiety the association of ideas persists, irresistibly.

He is what can only be called " a born actor." I don't mean merely because he always wanted a career in the theatre, but in the wider sense, in that one feels that he is acting pretty nearly all the time. He cannot describe a person, for instance, without springing to his feet to demonstrate that personality by acting it. He has the complete un-self-consciousness of the natural actor ; he is a living paradox inasmuch as acting to him is the natural thing ; it would be unnatural for him even in the course of ordinary conversation not to act. He

has a terrific exuberance which reminds one of Noel Coward. A conversation with him is tremendously entertaining but a little exhausting; he does not stay still for five minutes at a time; mere mention of a foreign railway porter will cause him to leap to his feet to give an impersonation; and it is not merely his physical mobility, but one feels—as with Noel Coward—the galvanic working of his mind the whole time, so that being with him is rather like being all the time in an engine-room with all the engines running. . . .

His interest in the theatre is consuming. He showed me some sketches of a couple of sets designed by John Armstrong for a production of *As You Like It*, and was manifestly irritated because I merely remarked that they were "interesting" . . . It was obviously for him precisely as though I had said, "Very nice." He showed me the manuscript of a new Edgar Wallace play which had been specially written for him; it did not have to be read far before one knew which was the rôle created for him; he will never have to adapt his personality to a part; it will always be the part which will either have to be written for him or adapted to his personality. That is where, I think, he failed in *The Silver Tassie*. He was trying to do something other than himself. But he enjoyed acting in that play and liked himself in the part. He would have made an interesting Spandrell in *This Way to Paradise*. It would have been a more sensual interpretation than Leon M. Lion's brilliant performance, but very well, I think, could Laughton have captured the subtle, poisonous, perverted decadence of the part.

My meeting with Elsa Lanchester and Charles Laughton was a little odd, because it took place in a nursing home, where Laughton had been having his tonsils removed, in the middle of the run of *French Leave*. He was convalescent, and leaving the next day for Italy, and he and Elsa were very excited over their plans, like a couple of children. A young man from Cook's called in whilst I was there to complete their final travelling arrangements. He must have felt that his call upon this strange pair was as good as going to a matinée. Laughton decided that they couldn't go to Taormina

because it would be full of American tourists—whereupon he must immediately jump up and give an imitation of American tourists viewing the view. One felt that it only wanted Elsa to skip forward with a song and dance to complete the entertainment. Instead, whilst Laughton was entertaining the young man from Cook's with his American impersonations, she gave a very good imitation of a coy lady novelist of our mutual acquaintance whose name happened to crop up in the course of conversation. I don't think there is much malice in Elsa Lanchester—she is simply a born mimic.

When the Cook's part of the programme was over, Laughton asked me a little petulantly how on earth I expected to get a real impression of him and Elsa when I come to see them deliberately for that purpose.

"We are naturally restrained," he said, "because we're both self-conscious knowing that you've come to see us specially to write about us. How could you expect us to be anything else?" I could only reply that if their present exuberance was to be regarded as restraint, then normally, when they are alone, or with anyone they know really well, a sort of riot must take place....

When we were talking of what I had written about Elsa having "sex-appeal," Laughton laughed and said that he wished someone would say the same of him. We talked about faces and how they could be re-arranged with plastic surgery. Elsa said that during his illness he had, strangely, got fat, but that his face was settling down again now—whereupon Laughton must go down on his knees before me and perform a sort of salaam, praying that I would write of him as I had written of Elsa; then he sprang up and embraced Elsa, declaring that she was the only woman who had ever found any sex-appeal in him.... He seemed rather wistful about it. Elsa reassured him, tenderly; she said that the women were "mad about him" in *The Silver Tassie*, and he seemed comforted. I suspect that in the presence of a third person they play up to each other. They certainly make admirable foils for each other.

The romantic stories of Laughton's humble beginnings to his "meteoric career" are somewhat exaggerated, for

although it is true that he has been a waiter, it was in his father's hotel. There seems to be a common idea that Laughton was a waiter one day and a famous actor the next, but it wasn't quite like that; he studied dramatic art at an academy at which Komisarjevsky was a professor. Komisarjevsky is said to have singled out " the fat boy " as a pupil of promise, and later, after Laughton had made a name for himself, to have had the experience of the fat boy whom he had taught to act turning round and trying to teach him all about the theatre. I have the story at second-hand and cannot verify it, but it is probably true, because there is certainly a touch of arrogance in Laughton's manner; he gives the impression of a person who would not like to be contradicted or corrected. He declares that Elsa is a " born mocker," but I do not feel that there is much of the spirit of mockery—not in the derisive sense—in Elsa's mimicry; I should say that there is much more mockery in Laughton's own psychology; he would be contemptuous, I think, where Elsa would merely be good-naturedly amused.

The last I saw of this strange pair was when they stood with their arms about each other laughing through the gate of the lift of that nursing home. Elsa's tiny childish face with the curious curved narrow forehead and the dark red hair swept back—like the picture of Alice in *Alice in Wonderland*—and Laughton's pale puffy face, pressed cheek to cheek, saying good-bye and bidding me come to see them, " In our untidy little flat."

" It's only a *little* flat," they chanted, mockingly, " but *we're* fond of it! " As the lift slid down to the ground floor and I emerged into the twilit wistfulness of Park Lane, I thought of some of the " impossible " things Elsa had said, and of Laughton's irrepressible bursts of acting, and the story of the young woman who sat at the piano " in 'er nood," came into my head, and the verdict on that young woman seemed somehow to apply to that odd pair I had left, " No, not mad, my dear, but *strainge*, I grant yew. . . ."

XIV

GWEN OTTER

PORTRAIT OF A BOHEMIAN

IT was suggested to me that in writing of Gwen Otter I should do so as "portrait of a hostess"—the most interesting Chelsea hostess of the last thirty years, but I did not know her in the heyday of her reign as a Chelsea hostess, and it is as one of the last of the dying race of Bohemians that she presents herself to me. Her parties have become a legend, like the stories of and about her brother, Frank, but it is a legend that my generation knows only at second-hand. The Bright Young People have replaced both the "green carnation" Bohemians of the "greenery-yallery-Grosvenor-Gallery," and those of the *Pink 'Un* school of the "roaring eighties" to which personalities like Frank Harris and Frank Otter belonged. Gwen Otter represents the *fin-de-siècle* tradition of the eighteen-nineties, a tradition fast fading into the background. Still to her house come all kinds of odd and interesting people, theatrical people, painters, writers, and people who exist like herself, and as her brother did, merely as personalities; but it is a dwindling group. Young Bloomsbury and Chelsea have nothing to do with the older Bohemianism; the *salon* is dead, and the cocktail party has taken its place; there is dancing now at Romano's, and the Sporting Club lingers like a memoir of its own dead life.

The house of Gwen Otter is somehow an anachronism, because of, not in spite of, its modernity. It is out of harmony with the mass of tradition which Gwen Otter represents and which is recreated impalpably by her presence. At the top of the staircase, lined with Aubrey Beardsley prints, one vaguely expects to come in to a room with a glass chandelier and plush chairs, to find George Moore standing before the fire-place with a piece of bread and butter in one hand and a cup of weak tea in the other, looking down at a pretty woman

reclining on a sofa, and saying with his mouth full, " May I have you ? " as was his fashion.

But instead one comes to a recess with a Moorish arch and walls painted to represent what looks like a Moorish palace, or something out of a provincial pantomime, and as soon as one has got over the shock of that one passes into a room vaguely like a studio, with a deep blue ceiling, canvas-coloured curtains tied up with deep blue glass beads, over the mantelpiece a Venetian mirror, and on the mantelpiece itself a photograph of Epstein's Tomb of Oscar Wilde, a restaurant-gala-night " novelty," and a beautiful little alabaster idol with a cheap bead serpent twined ludicrously about its neck. . . . There is a very low divan piled with shabby cushions, in a recess a grand piano thick with dust, an entire wall of the room given over to books, the eighteen-nineties rubbing covers with the very latest of contemporary output, the newest fiction, poetry, biography, autobiography, belles-lettres.

Downstairs there is a dining-room designed by Mrs. E. V. Lucas, canvas-coloured walls with reddish-orange paint-work, striped orange linen curtains, and on the wall opposite the fireplace a John lithograph of Aleister Crowley, that high priest of black magic who likes nothing better than to be regarded as His Satanic Majesty the Prince of Darkness, and who would take it as a compliment to be called an arch-devil.

Knowing that Crowley is one of Gwen Otter's oldest friends I asked her if she could tell me the truth about him and the dark stories of drugs and black mass circulating about him, but I gathered from her, as from a woman artist I know who once had a studio next door to his apartments, that there is no clearly definable truth about him ; save that he is a *poseur* who has come to believe in his own poses—so that they are no longer poses—and that having built up this sinister reputation for himself he goes on playing up to it.

Gwen Otter's Sunday luncheon parties are part of the routine of her life, like Epstein's Sunday afternoon " at homes " : there is a curious quality about those parties, difficult to define. It is not that the people she collects are particularly queer—at the last one I went to the

other guests were Mrs. W. L. George, a young advertising man, an ex-fiancée of Max Beerbohm, and Norman Haire. But nobody except Norman Haire seemed to come alive. I do not mean that there was lack of conversation, but everyone else seemed curiously unreal, like people talking and eating in a dream. I had the feeling that we had all somehow got into a land where it was always Sunday afternoon. . . . There was a shell on the table, in a yellow bowl, nothing decorative about it, just a shell in a bowl, pointlessly. . . . We lunched late, and before we rose from the table the fogginess of the early winter afternoon was creeping down as though the atmosphere that enclosed us was being made palpable. There was the little listening figure of our hostess seated behind the joint, a little deaf and always a little late in on the conversation as a result, and sometimes in her slow deliberate fashion recounting an anecdote, with a clever mimicry and sharp unexpected flashes of wit, and then something in the atmosphere would quicken before subsiding again into that indefinable sultriness. She narrates rather than talks, and is at her best when she can be induced to recite. She is completely lacking in self-consciousness and has a droll, keen sense of humour and burlesque. I have never heard on the stage anything as intensely amusing as her recitation of Ella Wheeler Wilcox's " the woman is stoned but the man may go." With anything intentionally humorous, one feels, she would not do half as well, but the sentimentalities of poor Ella as rendered by Gwen with her delicious sense of the absurd bringing out all the bathos and banality, are too funny for words. The only thing I can compare with it is Elsa Lanchester's rendering of that classic ballad, " Sell no more drink to my father."

The impression I have of Gwen Otter is that she only comes alive in these burlesques, and when she is narrating anecdotes ; at other times she seems to be curiously withdrawn into herself, even in her most vivacious moments. I feel with her as with Rebecca West that not in a lifetime of association would I ever get to know her. Her manner is kind, even demonstratively affectionate, and yet I feel all the time that she is not really there, and am

reminded of Alice and the Duchess and her irrelevancies. Gwen Otter is not irrelevant, yet somehow all that she says seems irrelevant to some secret self hidden away inside her, just as the modernity of her house seems irrelevant in relation to the atmosphere of tradition which abides in it. I have an impression of her as a lonely woman, in spite of the crowds of people she knows, and who come and go in her house—lonely with the loneliness of the child who was left shut outside the hill after the Pied Piper and all the others had passed in. One would like to collect the remaining handful of the last of the Bohemians—George Moore, Frank Harris, Max Beerbohm—and recreate for her a *fin-de-siècle* coterie over which she could preside with a grace and distinction and wit wasted on the present generation.

An extraordinarily interesting woman, of remarkable intelligence and culture and wit, and who shall say what ghosts of the eighteen-nineties are shut up in that curious, unget-at-able hidden life of hers? One is left wondering why all the most interesting people are the last to write their reminiscences.

XV

LOUIS MARLOW AND ANN REID[1]

PORTRAIT OF AN ODD PAIR

At the time when everyone was talking about *Mr. Amberthwaite* I had not met that brilliant book's most amusing author. Apart from the fact that he had written this book all I knew about him was that he was a close friend of my friend Douglas Goldring and had been at Cambridge with my friend Ralph Straus. Ralph said, "You must meet Lewis," as he will persist in calling him, and Douglas said, "You'll love Louis," and showed me a picture of him in bathing costume . . . and then I did not think I was at all likely to love Louis. . . . Besides, when people keep on insisting about a third person one gets prejudiced and obstinately sets out

[1] This was written in 1926 Ann Reid is now, alas, dead (E. M. 1936).

resolved not to meet that person if it can be avoided. One feels that one simply will not be bullied into meeting people—any more than one will be bullied into seeing a popular play or reading a much-discussed novelty ; one's egotism revolts at doing what everyone else is doing. Whereas if people had said, " There's no point in your meeting Louis Marlow, I don't think you'd be interested," I should probably have felt at once that here was somebody I simply must meet. . . .

However, one hot summer day Douglas Goldring returned to England from his years of exile in the South of France, came out to my cottage and triumphantly brought with him Louis Marlow and Ann Reid, who besides having written *Love Lies Bleeding* and *We are the Dead*, has the distinction of being Louis' wife. Louis is enormously tall, and Ann extremely *petite*, so that it is quite ridiculous to see them together. Ann is almost aggressively a feminist, while Louis has a kind of Ludovician attitude towards women, a little patronizing, a little contemptuous, but rather amused. *Love by Accident* is the sort of book women inwardly hate but can't resist. Louis himself is rather like that. One has all the time the feeling that he really despises women and regards them with a good-humoured contempt, but he is so gay and amusing and somehow *kind* about it that one likes him even whilst resenting him a little. Just as one feels that Ann despises men a little, but tolerates them along with all the rest of life's unavoidable irritations. You feel that this odd pair respect each other because they meet on the grounds of a mutual sex antagonism, and that if Ann " adored " the opposite sex, or Louis was " crazy about women," they would loathe each other simply because they would despise each other's point of view so unutterably.

On that summer day when Ann and Louis came out to my house I had a sinking feeling that in spite of my readiness to like them both I certainly wasn't going to like Ann. She is very shy, but I mistook her shyness for a deliberate unapproachableness, and felt rebuffed. I felt that I had run up against a stone wall, and such a cold stone wall. . . . I told Rebecca West this and she said, " Oh, no, she's not a bit cold or unapproachable,

only terribly shy. . . . And she's so lovely to look at ! " I said that I didn't think so, that she struck me as colourless—I suppose it must have been because I was still smarting under what I had imagined to be a rebuff to my proffered friendliness. It seems odd to me now that I ever thought this, because some months later Louis and Ann came out to see me again—" under the auspices " of Ralph Straus this time—and quite suddenly I saw what Rebecca meant. I thought, " It's true. She is lovely. Lovely as a small delicate porcelain doll." Not with the vivid flamboyant loveliness of Rebecca herself, but with a delicate, pale pastel loveliness, like that of a snowdrop or a crocus. She has exquisite, delicate little hands, and in the pleated white satin skirt and odd little velvet jacket which she wore on that occasion, sitting seated with her ankles crossed and those tiny beautiful hands in her lap, I felt that if only she would shrink to doll-size, like *Alice in Wonderland*, she would be quite perfect to pick up and set on the corner of the mantelpiece, as lovely a piece of black and white porcelain as one could wish for. . . .

But she remained life-size, and very, very modern. By which I mean that she is essentially a feminist, and her views on marriage and motherhood are essentially post-war, and she has a disconcerting habit of emerging from the impalpable walls of shyness and silence behind which she hides quite suddenly and revealing herself as the possessor of a devastatingly sharp discernment of people and things and a pretty wit. She will recount amusing anecdotes in a quiet droll manner which makes it all seem exactly like something in a novel by Evelyn Waugh.

Louis, as a personality, did not present the initial difficulties that Ann did. When he is not at home writing books he is wandering off to odd places like Wigan, lecturing on literature. " Wasting his manhood in the provinces," Ann calls it. He has the distinction of having been to both Oxford and Cambridge. He was sent down from Oxford not for being " de-bagged " like Evelyn Waugh's young man, but for being unorthodox—atheism or blasphemy or something odd, which annoyed him very much. He arrived in London determined to be

really vicious, and walked about Piccadilly in search of vice, but couldn't find anything suitable, so he went for a ride on the inner circle instead. Then he went to Cambridge, where the chief points in his career seem to be that he had a fight with Ralph Straus, and first blossomed into print with a story written in conjunction with him and published in the *Smart Set*. It was their joint literary debut. The hero of the story committed suicide " during temporary sanity."

It is the fashion to refer to everyone as " amusing " nowadays, but there are really very few people who are consistently amusing; anyone can be funny—or even witty—occasionally, but the person who is naturally amusing because of an irresistibly droll outlook on life is rare. After Norman Haire, Louis Marlow is quite the most infallibly amusing person I know. Norman Haire's drollery derives from an incorrigible sense of humour and sense of the ludicrous; Louis Marlow's from a temperamental gaiety and a good-humoured irony. Authentic wit is a dying art because it springs from an innate perceptiveness concerning people and things which few people nowadays either have naturally or trouble to cultivate. Louis Marlow is one of the few people who have it naturally. His perceptions are never truer, and he is never more serious, than when he is being amusing. In a few droll remarks he can convey the whole psychology and physical type of a person.

He was once describing a woman to me. He said that she was " the sort of woman who ought never to be allowed to leave her bed. She metaphorically always takes it with her wherever she goes." Which reminds me that Ralph Straus told me that Louis Marlow's *Love by Accident* was all about a man who couldn't avoid women " because every time he got into bed he found a woman there. . . ." The essence of Louis Marlow's ironic, mocking sense of humour is contained in that book. We were talking about it at a Bloomsbury cocktail party just before it was published. I asked him if he would send me a copy " and write something compromising in it." He replied gallantly that he would inscribe it " with love and kisses," which he did, sending it tied up with red ribbon. . . .

Louis saying shocking things with his charming smile, mocking eyes, and quiet cultured voice, with Ann looking down demurely with an odd little Mona Lisa smile playing round her small mouth, and that suggestion of half ironic, half whimsical thoughts going to and fro in her hidden mind, like quaint birds in a twilight wood, . . . the tall, loosely built Louis, and the tiny doll-like Ann looking like something out of the Russian Ballet with her smooth hair and pointed face; odd people to be married to each other, odd for them to be married at all, you feel, and yet, when you know them you couldn't imagine them being anything but married to each other. "For fuller particulars," as the advertisements say, read *Two Made their Bed*, though how much of that is true and how much fiction is not for me to say. But it, too, is a study of an odd pair. . . .

XVI

RALPH STRAUS

PORTRAIT OF A LITERARY CRITIC

It says a great deal for the personal charm of Ralph Straus that I should have formed my friendship with him *after* his review of my *Crescendo*, for he said of the central figure of that book which I had built up with infinite care and observation, "Golly, what a hero!" To which my instant reaction was "Golly, what a critic!" A critic has a perfect right—indeed he cannot help—liking or disliking an author's characters; he must obviously react to them as to living people, according to his temperament and point of view, but the function of literary criticism, surely, is to determine whether having created certain characters the author has or has not "made a good job" of them—made them in the image of life and psychologically accurate. Moreover, the realist—as opposed to the romantic—school of novelists does not set out to present heroes or heroines, but merely men and women in all the queerness and complexity of their human nature.

I poured all this out in great bitterness of spirit to Mr. Comyns Beaumont of *The Bystander*, in which publication the review had appeared. Mr. Comyns Beaumont, all on the side of youth and modernity, suggested that I had better lunch with Mr. Ralph Straus and himself and take the war directly into the enemy camp. I replied grimly that there was nothing I should like better; so it was arranged. I did not in the least know what sort of person Mr. Ralph Straus was, and I did not care; I went along to Ciro's on the appointed day in an aggressive mood determined to teach at least one critic the gentle art of criticism. . . . I thought he would probably be a rather superior person with a superior manner and a contempt for the younger novelists. I was introduced to a kindly looking person with amused eyes.

Rather in the way in which Mr. Cochran produced "Trini" as The Most Beautiful Girl in the World, Mr. Comyns Beaumont produced me to Mr. Ralph Straus with an air of "Here's-the-most-modern-of-all-the shocking-modern-young-women, what-do-you-think-of-her? Amusing-creature-don't-you-think?" and ordered a second round of cocktails in order to encourage us all. . . . As I am nothing if not suggestible, the editor of *The Bystander* may be said to have had a success as impresario on that occasion. . . . The distinguished critic remarked afterwards that I said the most shocking things as casually as asking for a glass of water. . . . And Mr. Comyns Beaumont commissioned a series of articles on "What I know About Men." . . . It transpired that I know so much about them that that series rather nipped our friendship in the bud . . . but that is another story. More importantly, Mr. Comyns Beaumont is what is commonly known as "a dear," and I owe him a debt of sincere gratitude for paving the way for a friendship with the last person in the world I ever thought I should like.

It should be recorded to Mr. Straus's credit on that literary occasion that he defended himself as well as he could between wrestling with his steak. It was an uneven contest, anyhow, for Comyns Beaumont was almost aggressively on my side, so much so that I began

to swing over to the left wing, as it were, and to " quite see " the " eminent reviewer's case for not putting in to novels studies of cases which to be maintained ought to be kept confined to the records of a psycho-analyst. . . . But since then he has evidently recanted, for he praised *The Lost Child*, which was a clinical study of a pathological case of the most morbid kind. Phillips Oppenheim came over to our table during the battle of words and steak. He was officially in a nursing home, but had a sort of " ticket of leave " to go out, and as soon as he had lunched was going back. . . . So, as Lorelei would say, what with one thing and another it was quite an amusing meal for a girl, " if you know what I mean." . . . I thought Oppenheim looked as much *un*like as Edgar Wallace looks *like* a writer of thrillers. Fat and jolly, he looks more as though he would write nice clean fun for the *Boy's Own Paper*. . . .

When we finally emerged into daylight again there was a great clashing commotion of bells from St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, and cold bright sunlight which the bells somehow stabbed like steel spears. A striped awning outside the church indicated that two more people were being what Ralph Straus has called *Married Alive*, and what with the bells and the sunlight and the cocktails there was a great exhilaration in the air . . . and waiting on the kerb for the traffic block to disperse I somehow shed a shoe, so that Mr. Ralph Straus must go down on his knees that the impertinent author of *Crescendo* be re-shod. . . . At which the editor of *The Bystander* leaned against a lamp-post and laughed immoderately, swearing that I had done it for the purpose, and regretting the lack of a camera, because, he said, the picture of Mr. Ralph Straus, the distinguished critic, re-shoeing the well-known young novelist, Miss Ethel Mannin, was *too*, too lovely. . . . But I think Mr. Ralph Straus thought it " too, too shy-making. . . ."

It was very courageous of Mr. Ralph Straus after that to take me to the Titmarsh Club at which he was speaking some weeks later—he is a remarkably good and witty speaker—but he must have been a little nervous, for he told me that I must try and behave properly, and, if I had to speak, to try not to be too outrageous. . .

People seem to be constantly giving me instructions of that kind. When Mr. Allen Lane took me to the Authors' Club he told me to "dress quietly" and remember that his mother would be there. I think I behaved quite nicely at the Titmarsh Club, except that I said I couldn't bear Thackeray, and why was the Club called Titmarsh. . . . It was suggested at that dinner that Ralph Straus should do another *Portrait in Pencil*, but of Thackeray this time. If he does I hope he will take a page out of Ephesian's book and give us a pen-portrait. Pencil is too soft a medium for a full-length portrait. But perhaps my own anti-Dickens complex is at work here and I am prejudiced.

A number of novelists have established reputations as book-reviewers, but Ralph Straus is unique, for in addition to being novelist, biographer, and critic, he is a publisher as well, so that what he doesn't know about books should be not worth knowing . . . though I still think he was wrong about *Crescendo*,[1] just as he still thinks he was right. It will not in the least "cramp his style" as a critic to find a portrait of himself in this book—if he wants to be rude about the book he will. His honesty is one of his most attractive qualities, that and a droll sense of humour and capacity for being neatly amusing. He deserves credit for being the originator of the remark that the present-day young man when he writes a novel has a tendency to write of Christ as though he had been at Cambridge with Him.

I very nearly wrote about Ralph Straus as "Portrait of a Distinguished Person," except that that suggests a pomposity which he completely lacks, but he is one of the few authors who look like an author ; that is to say his personality really does suggest writing rather than stockbroking or plumbing. He might possibly be mistaken for a rather smart and modern doctor, and he was, in point of fact, a medical student for a good many years ; it was a toss-up whether he qualified as a doctor or a psycho-analyst, or both, but when a young man begins writing novels and biographies in his early twenties it is quite obvious that he cannot end up as anything else than a man of letters. In any case had

[1] This was in 1926. I now more than share Mr. Straus's opinion (E. M. 1933).

it been a choice between the other two professions it would have been psychology which would have claimed him, for psycho-analysis still keenly interests him. But I think he would still have written books in his spare time . . . such of it as was not devoted to tennis and squash rackets. . . .

When I use the word " distinguished " in connection with him I am not thinking so much of his work as novelist and biographer and critic, although his career has been distinguished from the point of view of the cultured quality of his work, but of his personality. I always used to wonder what people writing after posts meant when they stated that they were " of good appearance " ; now I think I know ; they imagine that they have an ability to look like Ralph Straus. He dresses well ; it sounds an unimportant thing to say about a brilliant person, but in his case it is somehow part of his personality. I mean that whenever I see Ralph Straus walking up my garden path I feel that he " gives tone " to the premises. You can tell by the elegant angle of his elegant hat that he is a Distinguished Person. I would like him as a permanent fixture seated on my loggia wall, complete with hat and most literary looking pipe, looking like " a happy snapshot of a distinguished author " in the shiny pages of *The Bookman*. There ought to be a nice shaggy dog seated beside him, and a couple of books, one of them open, lying negligently close at hand. He suggests books as positively as Arnold Bennett doesn't. . . . And it is refreshing in the literary world to meet once in a while someone who " looks the part."

I like his friendly facetiousness, too. " There is someone who wants to meet you," he will write, " I can't think why, for I've told him you're the worst woman in London. I've forgotten who it is now, but come and have a cut from the joint and two veg with me on Wednesday, will you ? " As likely as not the cut-from-the-joint-and-two-veg will begin with caviare and vodka in a setting which looks as though it had been lifted whole out of the Chauve Souris. . . . I suspect Ralph of having like a sort of secret vice an incurable passion for doing all the fashionable things and knowing

all the right people, so that when he writes to one from a castle in Scotland you feel that he is doing the thing most natural to him. I have heard him called a snob. Perhaps he is. Most people are snobs in one way or another. Snobbery is probably the least harmful and the most entertaining of the vices available. Some people collect titled friends, others postage stamps, etchings, or first editions. If Ralph Straus did needlework in his spare time, like Ernest Thesiger, or grew grass in lacquer bowls in his dining-room like Norman Haire in the fond belief that it was " decorative," or kept a stack of pianola records in a corner of his sitting-room like Rebecca West, I might think it odd of him, but still like him, or even if he were really " queer " and beat his secretaries as a form of making love to them, like someone all of us in the literary world know, but who shall be nameless. . . . So long as he continued looking like something out of the pages of *The Bookman*, and went on being the amusing and charming person that he is, and so comfortable to be with—the sort of person you don't mind having drift in when there is nothing in the house but bread and cheese and beer, and you have forgotten to order fresh flowers. . . .

" Such a nice home you've got," he will sigh, sinking into an arm-chair and stretching out and proceeding to fill his pipe. " I often think I'd marry for a really good home like this. . . . I've often wondered what it must feel like to be kept." I tell him that I've often wondered, too. . . . And then we laugh and talk about the latest books, and usually disagree violently. I always feel that life with Ralph Straus is all books—and cricket. That he is a person who lives by, through, for, and in books, and, as I have said, his very appearance suggests books.

He is, like Gerald Gould, keen in his disapproval of the modern tendency to " break bread " with a celebrity and then go home and write the most intimate and embarrassing details of his or her private life, to accept the hospitality of a public person and then write an essay for a newspaper or a book of reminiscences describing him or her as a pompous old bore or a pathetic figure of ridicule. But in spite of the fact that he will find no

treachery of that kind in this book, I am quite prepared for him to dislike it—for he can no more be " bought," thank heaven, with a little friendship than can Arnold Bennett with a little flattery—wherewith I shall be moved to protest, and to type him yet another of my scarlet letters—the red type indicating economy on the black side of the ribbon, not passion, as I have explained to him—upon receipt of which he will probably with characteristic good humour once more invite me to have a-snack-at-the-bar or a cut-from-the-joint-and-two-veg in some suitably expensive and fashionable setting, and so we shall go on in pleasant amity, as all good little authors and their reviewers should . . . but so seldom do.

XVII

A. S. NEILL

PORTRAIT OF AN EDUCATIONIST

LIGHT, as somebody has remarked, comes to us in divers places. It was on the night-boat going over to Dieppe that I first heard of A. S. Neill. I was going over to Paris for a few days with a couple of art students who had undertaken to show me round the art schools, as I was collecting material for my novel *Pilgrims* at the time. It was a fine, soft moonlight night, too good to turn in, so we stood about on deck, and the students asked me about my child and said what they would do with theirs if they had one. " You mustn't send her just anywhere and have her messed about," they said. " Why don't you send her to A. S. Neill's ' free ' school ? " I told them that it sounded like a board-school, and that I had been to one of those, and though it hasn't done me much good, I would admit that it hadn't done me as much harm as might have been expected—much less harm, I suggested, than a really good school might have done. They suggested that Ethel Mannin's daughter was worthy of something better than a good education, and I said I thought so too, but how did one avoid it ? Couldn't one write a

book, perhaps, on Education, its Cause and Cure. They chorused, excitedly, that that was just it! A. S. Neill *had* written such a book; it was called *The Problem Child*, and only cost five bob, and I must get it as soon as we got back to London. They said I *must* have heard of Neill—he had written "those Dominie books," "You know, *A Dominie's Log, A Dominie's Five, A Dominie in Doubt, A Dominie Dismissed.*" He got chucked out of Scottish educational circles, they said, for daring to have Ideas about education. I took a deep breath and bade them tell me more. . . . It seemed incredible that there really was another person in the world with the same views about the futility of education that I had. . . . It all sounded too good to be true. So we stopped on deck all night talking about Neill and education, and how the best way to educate a child was by not educating it, and the best way to bring up a child to leave it alone. . . .

And as soon as I got back to London I bought a copy of *The Problem Child*, and was so excited about it that I wrote to Neill at once and said that my heart went out to him. He replied courteously that he was glad of that, and wouldn't I come and see his "group." I went, taking Jean, who was then aged five, with me.

The school was then at Lyme Regis, in a big square house at the top of a hill. The gates were painted black and orange, which I thought encouraging. I hardly know what I expected. There were a great many "noises off," yells and whoops and shrieks and laughter, but nothing in view except a disconsolate looking hen walking across the untidy lawns. The front door, also painted black and orange, was open and I saw into a whitewashed hall with wildly futuristic paintings on the walls, and cocoanut matting on the stained boards of the floor. I pulled the bell-rope and the bell went clanging through the house, but for some time nothing happened. Finally a black-haired, stockingless, sandalled young woman came round a corner and looked surprised to see me, although her smile was friendly enough. I explained who I was and said that I was expected. She said she would see if she could find anyone—she thought everyone had gone bathing

" except a few of the kids." . . . That I had made a five-hours' train journey, was " expected," and had arrived meticulously on time, obviously was of no importance. She showed me into a big room with more whitewashed walls and futuristic paintings, all discs and angles and cubes and distorted perspectives, in the German vein. . . . There was a grand piano in the room, and on it wild flowers in glass jam-jars. There were also rickety looking bookshelves overflowing with books of all descriptions, English and German, novels, poets, works on psychology and psycho-analysis. There were basket chairs with orange cushions, and on the bare boards of the floor Persian rugs. A shabby, untidy room, yet it somehow suggested light and air and personality. A room into which one might come and flop down and talk about oneself—or stay silent, as was most comfortable. A room in which you could sit with your feet on the mantelpiece and it please you and say anything you like—the more revolutionary and " subversive " the better. Through the windows a great cedar tree reached its arms out over a tennis lawn, and beyond it the sea, the colour of light merged in a shimmering opalescence with the sky. Whilst I looked about and waited, and wondered, two boys and a girl, all hatless and in riding breeches, rode up on ponies and dismounted at the crumbling steps leading up to the front door. The girl, I afterwards learned, was Homer Lane's daughter. Neill was one of Homer Lane's disciples, and to his everlasting credit had the courage not to withdraw his friendship or waver in his loyalty either during or after that disgraceful trial.

Finally A. S. Neill came in. I must give my first impression of him, because now that I have known him for years and count him amongst my closest friends, it is more difficult to give a clear-cut impression. One grows used to one's friends and scarcely knows what they are like externally, but that hot summer afternoon when I met A. S. Neill for the first time I have a vivid picture of a tall, thin, slightly stooping figure, with a lean, clever, sensitive face. I had formed no conception of what I thought he would be like, but somehow he was " right "—just as surely as had he been a little

portly thick-set figure he would somehow have been all wrong. He wore grubby white flannels, an old and sagging tweed coat, and a gay, careless sort of tie—and sandals. He always dresses carelessly like this. His long fingers were stained—as always—from the metal-work which is his recreation from child-psychology. He gave the impression of shyness, and one felt that he hoped he wasn't going to be asked a lot of tiresome questions. We talked for a bit and he dexterously kept the conversation away from children, psychology, and education.

Presently other people drifted in, members of the staff; there were no introductions and nobody seemed surprised to find a stranger in their midst; being there, one was accepted without question; orange cups and saucers made their appearance; a yellow-haired Swedish girl passed me a sandwich; people wandered in and out. It was all very casual—a simple, comfortable, un-self-conscious, friendly sort of casualness, infinitely refreshing. In such a community you may come and go as you please, talk or remain silent as you wish; if you are there food is put before you; if you don't happen to come in when food is being distributed that is your look out, you cannot expect people to fuss over you, just as if you want to talk there is always some one intelligent and sympathetic for an audience, and if you don't want to talk nobody is going to mind. You can turn up at any hour of the night or morning and people will just say "Hallo," even though you may not have been near the place for months. Nobody questions your comings and goings. Nobody minds any kind of queerness in any one else. The atmosphere is really "free." You can read at table if you want to and get up and leave it as soon as you have finished eating; nobody minds . . . you feel that if you turned up to lunch in a loin-cloth nobody would take much notice, and that whether you had just murdered your grandmother, or taken up kleptomania as some people take up poker work, is all one. . . . Perhaps it all sounds a little "mad," and coming from the artificiality of the outer world it seems so at first, but how refreshing it all is after everybody else's smothering "sanity"!

It is very difficult to compress the " atmosphere " of Summerhill into a small space. I tried to convey it a little in my book *Green Willow* in the parts dealing with the schooling of the children. Perhaps in trying here to crowd too much into a small space I have given a picture of a rather eccentric group of people doing nothing but indulge their egos to an accompaniment of bad manners. Well, that is the charm of Summerhill—that there you can indulge the idiosyncrasies of your particular ego to the full, and there is no fussing with superficialities, but there is a great deal more than that which needs to be conveyed before you have a true picture of this community which Neill has created about him. Here you have a group of people who dance and sing because they get fun out of doing it, not with any solemn self-consciousness. Someone will sit down at the piano and crash out " The Volga Boat Song " with a good many bad chords, but with what zest, and everyone sings because they want to, because they are happy. The Summerhill sing-songs are numerous because they are always impromptu—somebody gets an " urge," and people charging down the stairs or tearing along the corridors come in and join in just for fun. And they sing anything they fancy—from Shenandoah's plaintive romanticism to " The Bells of Hell go ting-a-ling-aling for you but not for me." One minute somebody is struggling with Stravinsky, or the gramophone Neill made for himself is crooning " *L'Après Midi d'un Faune*," and the next the whole school is revelling lustily in " She was Pore but she was Honest." . . .

Occasionally Neill writes a play and the community act it; as often as not the plays performed are impromptu, but they are always wildly amusing; I have never seen a less self-conscious community of adults and children. Neill has a keen sense of humour, and a droll, caustic wit, and he is so remarkably good an actor that one feels that the Stage lost a wonderful comedian when he overlooked it in his repertoire of professions.

A performance in public of some of Neill's sketches by some of the Summerhill children when the school was at Lyme Regis, was one of the most interesting entertainments I have ever seen. The standard of acting from

the children was remarkably high, and Neill's own contribution inimitable. The self-confidence of the children and their complete freedom from affectation contrasted vividly with most school plays one has seen performed, in which the children have been so conscientiously drilled in their parts that all originality, like their own personalities, has been blotted out. These youngsters were obviously enjoying themselves, and that Neill himself was taking part in the performance made the whole thing into the nature of a glorious "rag." The high spot of the production was when a little German girl forgot her lines for a moment, remarked "Oh God!" in a moment's self-disgust, and then went tranquilly on again completely unruffled. The good Lyme Regis people must have been very shocked, but the local people always regard Neill's community as "queer." The Lyme Regis people had a theory, I believe, that the school was composed of bastards, mentally deficients, and orphans. . . .

Neill delights in doing things with his hands, as a change from psychology, and a good deal of brass and wood work is done in the school workshop, but there is nothing of that dreadful Montessori "art and craftiness" about it. When Neill paints futuristic designs on the garage doors and the doors of the outhouses, it is for the sheer fun of doing it, not for artistic effect. The children do not make nice little wooden napkin rings messed up with a lot of blue paint to take home and show proud parents during the holidays; the things they make in zinc or brass or wood they make for themselves, because they want to, and not by way of "learning" art. . . . When Neill paints all the plain deal dining-room tables different colours he is merely indulging his own love of colour, not being "arty." Because of a complete lack of self-consciousness there is more art and culture at Summerhill than in any self-conscious Chelsea or Bloomsbury group.

One of Neill's favourite assertions is that one must "think internationally." You can't help it at Summerhill, for there are always all kinds of people there, both amongst grown-ups and children, German, Dutch, Swedish, Polish. I do not propose here to go into

Neill's educational methods—he has written about them himself, and I have written about them elsewhere, in various articles and in my book *Common-Sense and the Child* at which I am now at work, and for which Neill is writing the preface. Which reminds me that a clinic which was asked by my publisher if it would take up a number of copies of the book when published, replied that it could not do so if A. S. Neill wrote the preface!

I realize that here I have written more about Neill's school than about its creator. That, however, is inevitable. Summerhill *is* Neill. It is the direct expression of his personality. Once when Neill was seriously ill I found myself getting into a panic, not merely because he is a very dear friend, but because there swept over me the realization that if Neill were to die there would be no one to take his place, and I shuddered to think what would happen to all the people, adult and children, who came to him to be made happy. For Neill's essential philosophy of life is that there is no such thing as wickedness and goodness; there is only unhappiness and happiness; he does not say be good and you will be happy, but be happy and you will be good—for that is the ultimate goodness, simply being happy.

When I wrote of Neill in a magazine article recently, referring to him as the greatest living educationist, he protested, "But child, I can't live up to it! People will expect me to know the capital of Chile and the tributaries of the Thames, and I don't and never did!" And it is true that it looks odd, somehow, when I write, as at the head of this article, "A. S. Neill, M.A." because it suggests all the pompous pedantic things which Neill is not. He was officially educated at Edinburgh University "and father's village school." He has been, variously, gas-meter factory office-boy, draper's assistant, journalist, teacher—till orthodox education would have no more of him—and so he has had the real education. He belongs to the little group of sane people we have with us to-day the D. H. Lawrence-Jacob Epstein-Bertrand Russell group.

Children love Neill because he understands them; he is their friend. He has done amazing things with

children, and if instead of Borstal institutions and reformatories which never do reform—we could have happy communities run by A. S. Neill all over the country there would be an enormous decrease in juvenile criminal statistics. I have seen children who have been sent to him because no other school would have them and parents were in despair transformed in a couple of terms from sly, unlikable little thieves and potential criminals into happy, lovable youngsters whom no one who had not seen them before could imagine had been anything else. How does Neill do it ? Simply by his infinite understanding and patience and love of children ; he has knowledge in him like a light. He *knows*. People have come from the other side of the world to meet Neill and learn of his methods. He is literally unique. And the community he has built up around him, courageously, after years of struggle and set-back, and always refusing to compromise with his principles, even when it meant financial loss and a heart-breaking starting all over again, is, I think, the happiest place in the world. My admiration for A. S. Neill is unbounded. He is one of the very few people in this queer world doing something of real value. He is the pioneer of the New Education, with all the true pioneer's unflinching courage.

And I must pay tribute to Mrs. Neill, who is as much a personality as Neill himself, and as vital a part of Summerhill. She is the sanest and most lovable woman I have ever met. I certainly admire her more than any woman I know. One feels with her, as with my psycho-analyst friend, Dr. Eder, that there is simply nothing in human nature which would surprise her or which she would not understand. There is something intensely alive about her ; she is a vital person, with that curious electric quality about her which in a different way Noel Coward has, which one feels all the time yet which is difficult to define, the electricity of a vital personality.

She is one of those rare women who can suggest breeding even when wearing the oldest clothes ; an old jumper, a tweed skirt, brogue shoes, hatless in all weathers, striding along with a stick, she always somehow contrives to look " a lady," not in any narrow,

middle-class sense, but in terms of that suggestion of breeding and culture; there is a quality of personality in her which shines out like a light; she, like Neill, is very definitely "a person"—and few people are that.

Knowledge of psychology alone is not sufficient to hold together a big and complicated organization like Summerhill, and Mrs. Neill's practicality is as needful as Neill's wisdom—not that Mrs. Neill herself isn't a very sound psychologist. The two of them working together form the perfect partnership. Mrs. Neill is Australian, with all the colonial's lack of affectation and snobbery; as a child she was brought up in the open air, and it is as though all that freedom and cleanness has been woven into her so that she has it again to give out through her vital energetic personality.

There is something splendid about these two and the work they are doing together. They are so sane, so courageous. There is something immense about their sanity; it is somehow all-embracing. "Lovely people," is the way a friend of mine whom I once took to see them described them. Perhaps the adjective sounds a little odd, and yet somehow it does describe them—for splendid is too cold a word, suggests something super and idealized, whereas "lovely" suggests all the splendid qualities endowed with a warm and lovable humanity.

Yes, I think there isn't any better phrase. . . "Lovely people."

XVIII

DR. DAVID EDER

PORTRAIT OF A PSYCHO-ANALYST

In spite of the fact that the words "repression," and "complex" have been absorbed into the popular tongue as definitely as "movie" and "talkie," and all the most unlikely people have heard of Freud, the general attitude of the lay-mind towards the science of psycho-analysis is one of extraordinary flippancy. There are a few

people who attempt to take it seriously, but in the majority of instances the attempt does nothing more than demonstrate the fact that a little psychology is a dangerous thing. The modern young mother who has read a little Watson, a little Freud, and endeavours to apply her odds and ends of information to the upbringing of her children is a much more dangerous person than the old-fashioned type of mother who simply does not consider the word psychology in connection with the handling of children; a positive harm is always more dangerous than a negative one. I hold no brief for the old-fashioned parent who regards the psychological care of children as "stuff and nonsense," but the harm they do is less positively harmful than that done by experimenters in psychology. It does not occur to anyone to pick up a few technical terms and then imagine that they know all about engineering, or that a little knowledge of elementary arithmetic is all that is necessary to a comprehension of higher mathematics, but both the people who are impatient of the Freudian theories, and those who imagine that they understand and endorse them, are for the most part lamentably uninformed. The study of psycho-analysis is not something one can take up like fretwork or a foreign-language-in-twenty-four-lessons, and the tendency to regard it as such is as tiresome as the general tendency to regard the psycho-analyst as either a charlatan or a crank. It ought, therefore, to be more generally known that the British Psycho-Analytic Society, with Ernest Jones at the head, most rigorously insists on all its members being analysed, and working under experienced members of the Society, before practising as psycho-analysts. If the medical profession would also insist on its practitioners taking a degree in psychology it would be an equally good thing. That is the trouble with the medical profession, as a body it knows nothing whatever of the first principles of psycho-therapy. There is a much greater need for the medical profession to study psychology, than for practising psycho-analysts to study medicine, but by insisting on their members being thoroughly qualified in analysis before practising, the British Psycho-Analytic Society eliminates the charlatan and protects the public

from the dangerous experimentations of pseudo-psychologists who have read a little Freud, a little Jung, a little Adler, or all three, and imagine they know the rest. . . .

It is an interesting sign of the times that an increasing number of young men studying medicine to-day are not interested in medicine, *per se*, but as an apprenticeship to psycho-therapy. At present all our leading psycho-analysts are older men and women who have been drawn into the Freudian movement as a result of their own personal experiences, investigations, and observations. Eventually the old-fashioned doctor who prescribes a tonic and a change of air for a case of nerves or depression will be regarded precisely as we now regard the doctor who used to rely on the application of leeches and the letting of blood as a sovereign remedy for all ills ; in the matter of intelligence there is nothing to choose between the two. The psycho-analyst, considered so radical to-day, is merely the ordinary intelligent practitioner of to-morrow.

It is not my intention to trace here the beginnings, development, and future of psycho-analysis ; these few introductory remarks are intended to serve the purpose of disposing of the popular idea that psycho-analysis is a sort of new " stunt "—in spite of the fact that its language has been absorbed into the jargon of the bright young people. And now may I introduce you to a psycho-analyst ? Dr. David Eder. He is not a young man, and he knows all there is to know about human nature. I am aware that that is a big statement, but I make it without any qualification whatever. He did not acquire this knowledge merely by reading text-books ; complete knowledge of anything so intricate as the mental and emotional mechanism of the human being is not to be gained like that. He knows the human mind because he has himself endured fundamental experiences, pain, and conflict, and in his wanderings in all parts of the world come into contact with all kinds and classes of people. It may be said of him that he has learned what he knows of the human mind at Court and in the cottage, in the market place and in the prison, in the monastery and in the brothel,

nor in the working out of his own destiny has life spared him.

In the solving of his own mental problems he has been a traveller to the wild places of the earth, made mighty journeys up the Amazon, and crossed the Andes from East to West. He has been a colliery doctor in a small mining village in the North of England, and medical officer in the tropics, on the Upper Amazon. He has been through three revolutions, and existed on mouldy rice and dried meat in a besieged garrison, with beri-beri, malaria, and dysentery rife in the camps; hunted butterflies and beetles in the forests of Colombia, and fallen among cannibals. Some of the spoils of that adventurous hunting are to be found in the Natural History department of the British Museum.

Collecting butterflies and beetles may seem a queer occupation for a medical man and psychologist, but they were not collected as some people collect postage stamps, for a hobby, but in the course of his studies of natural evolution. Here, you see, is a man who has gone to infinite trouble to investigate all the details of the mystery of life. Thirty-nine years ago, before he qualified in medicine, he took a degree in psychology—a psychology which in those pre-Freudian days had, as he says, " as little bearing on human affairs as the study of the dry bones." Working as a doctor in South America and in this country, he was interested in the psychological aspects of his patients' troubles, and tried various methods of treatment—suggestion and hypnotism—before the discoveries resulting from Professor Freud's investigations in the realm of the unconscious became available as a step forward in the evolution of the science of the human mind. To this new science he brought the same careful investigation and patient study which he had devoted to his beetles and butterflies, to medicine, and what was then known in psychology. The Freudian theories excited him as they excited every one practically interested in psychological research. Here, it seemed to him, was the key to the mysteries of the human mind at last. Here the answers to the conundrums of his own ego, the resolving of his own psychological problems. His days of wandering the

mountains, forests, rivers, seeking to work out his own conflicts, were over. Here at last was light let into the labyrinthine ways of his own mind, and through that light let into himself, illumination upon the minds, souls, spirits, or whatever one likes to call it, of his fellow-men. Humanity could grow sick not with the ills of the flesh, but the ills of the spirit ; the sickness of the mind could disrupt the smooth working of the body's mechanism . . . herein lay the germ of a new therapy. It was not so much medicine and surgery which suffering humanity needed as a light to lighten its darkness, a disentangling of the conflicts which destroy life ; there were cancerous growths of mind and spirit as well as of the flesh, things the surgical knife could not touch, and here at last was the instrument for their elimination. . . .

For twenty years now this wanderer-naturalist-psychologist-doctor has been devoting himself to the study and investigation of that unconscious which governs human conduct so much more importantly than external things. His practice as psycho-analyst began with his application of this knowledge during the war to cases of shell-shock. To-day he has almost ceased to practise medicine ; for twelve hours or more every day he is investigating the subtleties and intricacies and complexities of the human mental and emotional make-up. Men and women come to him, tormented, bewildered, worried, depressed, unhappy, unable to adjust themselves to life or some aspect of it ; they are required to lie quietly in a condition of physical relaxation and talk at random, emptying the content of their mind. The psycho-analyst explains very little to his patients ; his method is to point to significant features of their conduct, so that they can gradually work out their unconscious motives for themselves ; sometimes they find out too much, for psycho-analysis is, as Dr. Eder himself says, a two-edged weapon ; sometimes the patient puts up too great a resistance to analysis and it becomes impossible to find out enough. " Sometimes one fails," he sighs, " one doesn't know enough. The human mind is a terribly complicated thing."

His humility is utterly sincere, but in view of his immense comprehension of humanity almost fantastic.

Before I met Dr. Eder I had had him described to me as lovable ; I had always heard him spoken of as " dear old Eder." I was inclined to suspect that this was merely the result of the usual—and necessary—" transference " of a patient for the analyst. . . . But when I met David Eder for myself then I knew that " lovable " was the only word. When I was in the middle of that dark tunnel into which I found myself so unexpectedly and horrifyingly plunged, seeing no gleam of light at the other end, it was as though his wisdom and understanding and sympathy took hold of me like strong gentle hands. I owe him my life as positively as though in a case of acute appendicitis he had successfully operated upon me. I was crucified, dead, and all but buried, and he gave me back my life, not through analysis—there was no need of that, but through the outpouring of his wisdom and understanding, his patience, and his sanity.

It is no exaggeration, or mere emotional fervour, but quite literally and intellectually true to say that in this matter of infinite understanding, I believe in David Eder as some people believe in God. He has none of the sloppy, well-meaning, tact-ridden kindness of the third-rate intelligence. He does not say things to spare one's feelings—as he said to me, " As an analyst I have quite lost the habit." He is much too honest—and too sane to omit saying the thing which hurts—he would no more think of it than as a doctor or surgeon it would occur to him to omit some essential operation merely because it was likely to be painful. He knows all about the clean aseptic wounding rather than tolerance of the slow septic poison of tact and lies and half-lies and evasions. If he had ever resorted to the dishonesty of tactfulness in order to avoid hurting my feelings I could not respect him as profoundly as I do. When someone suggested to me that as an analyst he would not tell me more than was good for me to know, the world rocked for a few moments, and did not resume stability until I had his reassurance that this was not so. He said, " I can't tell people things to soften their feelings ; I'm quite out of practice ; I don't say things to please you or as much as is good for you, and I'm never tactful."

He also said to me, when I told him that I had been all my adult life looking for the completely honest person, "Don't go seeking for the completely honest man, leave him in heaven or in hell, just as you like. Don't spell truth with a T, only with a 't.'"

It is because he has himself been caught up in the rapids of life that he can show other people the way out. I rather think that the Institute of Psycho-Analysts ought to add that to their qualifications; I should say that in the practice of psycho-therapy and psycho-analysis experience of life is a good deal more important than the taking of a medical degree. A psycho-analyst above all people needs to know the practice of life as well as the theory of it; experience of itself is useless, just as theory of itself is useless. David Eder has known life, all that it can do to one, and fail to do, and his scientific knowledge of the working of the human mind makes him able to apply his own experiences in the light of science, and his scientific knowledge in the light of experience.

But you must not picture to yourself someone very solemn, weighed down with a sense of the complexity of human life, with a background of psychological text-books, but someone very human and simple and lovable, and not without a worldly sophistication or sense of humour—and the text-books well-leavened with the poets, Housman, Yeats, "A. E." An eminently comfortable, as well as comforting, person to be with. A Jew—"the wandering Jew" was how he referred to himself when telling me of his adventures and wanderings in South America—and intensely interested in the complicated international problems of his race. Why is it, I wonder, that something like seven out of every ten charming and intelligent people one meets are Jewish? A third of the people I have written about in this book are Jews. They are of varying degrees of intelligence, but they all have in common a quality of life peculiar to their race, as though life burned in them like a pure flame; it shines out of them like a light; you see it in the live animation of their dark eyes, flashing with mockery, amusement, alight with eagerness, interest; it is as though in their long centuries of history

they had long ago got hold of life and never let go, regardless of disbandment and persecution.

David Eder's manner is quiet, unassuming, unobtrusive; but when he begins to explain any fine psychological point, a sort of eagerness flames up in him—as though it is of the utmost importance to him that you should understand—an intensely eager desire to convince because of the profundity of conviction in himself. "You must understand——" he will say, "How can I explain to you——" . . . but that is only when his own psychological enthusiasms and convictions are invoked, the sudden upleaping of a wave from a deep, quiet sea of infinite wisdom and gentleness and understanding. He listens more than he talks. That, he will tell you with his kindly smile, is what he is there for. . . .

He is a man who can help others as a result of the completeness of his own experience; a man who has lived intensely and suffered most of the things humanity is called upon to suffer, but who has finally struggled through to the sort of satisfaction in life which it is given to few people to achieve, but which in an analyst is of supreme importance. No one can solve the problems of another person's life until he has solved the problems of his own life. An analyst must not, either consciously or unconsciously, seek satisfaction for an empty emotional life of his own in that of his patients; any such neurosis in himself would make the true analysis of other people utterly impossible. It is because he has succeeded in solving his own problems and getting his own life into order that David Eder is so supremely well equipped to practise as a psycho-analyst. He has found the simple essential thing which poor humanity finds it so hard to secure for itself—love and contentment in his home-life.

"I, too, have a great love-affair," he told me once. "my wife!"

In an age of cheap cynicism regarding marriage and the love that lasts a lifetime, and the peace it brings, his quiet sanity stands out like a light.

I told him once that I was growing more and more to a "retrogressive" belief in the things in which it was not

fashionable to believe these days—in monogamy, marriage, double beds, home-life, and love equal to the level of " each day's most quiet need, by sun and candlelight " —" All desperately old-fashioned, I know," I said, a little apologetically.

He smiled at my apologetic self-consciousness.

" Old-fashioned," he said, " but the more we live the more we learn that the old-fashioned things are the truest—and the best."

Not quite the lay-idea of a psycho-analyst, perhaps, all " modern " iconoclasm, catch-phrases, and complexes, but this happens to be a portrait from life—and a tribute to one whose gentle wisdom and understanding has its roots in life itself.

XIX

RADCLYFFE HALL

PORTRAIT OF THE AUTHOR OF " THE WELL OF LONELINESS "

I WOULD sooner write of Radclyffe Hall as Portrait of the Author of *Adam's Breed*, but it is as author of *The Well of Loneliness* that she unfortunately figures in the public imagination. I say " unfortunately " because the fuss made over that over-discussed book has served to make the general public forget that before she wrote that clinical study of female homo-sexuality, she wrote a book which, in the rarity of its literary quality and imaginative insight into ordinary everyday human nature, is amongst the finest things which have yet been achieved in contemporary fiction.

This does not mean that I depreciate the suppressed book ; I found it profoundly moving and beautiful, a delicate and lovely and sensitive piece of work, but one got so tired of being asked if one had read *The Well of Loneliness*, just as now one gets tired of being asked if one has read *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, so that one ached to cry out : " But my God, the woman wrote something else beside that—something altogether bigger ! " One began to resent that so-persistent Well. One found oneself

wondering how many of all the people clamouring for it out of prurient curiosity realized that here was something that literally *bled* . . . so that the clamour and the curiosity became an outrage, indecent. . . .

The most pitiful thing about *The Well of Loneliness* outrage, of course, is that the book was selling before the outcry. The majority of people, one gathers, imagine that it has only enjoyed a big sale in France and America because it was suppressed here; the point is that it was selling here on the strength of the author's previous reputation and an almost unanimously eulogistic press. It is insulting both to the author's literary reputation, and to a serious literary piece of work, to suggest that it only sells now as a result of its suppression. It should be remembered that *Adam's Breed* sold over twenty-five thousand when it was first published and had become a hardy literary perennial long before the Well sensation.

Radclyffe Hall has the supremely essential quality for a woman-writer—she has a masculine mind, which means that she can write with equal psychological accuracy of both sexes. Women who haven't masculine minds shouldn't attempt to write books; they should confine their prattlings to publications of *Pansy's Paper*, or *The Wee Wife's Weekly*, variety. Radclyffe Hall isn't that distressing thing "a lady novelist"; she is a woman-writer.

Usually when people describe a woman as "masculine" they imply the sort of thing which Viola Tree does so inimitably on the stage—the clumsy, thick-ankled, untidily tweed-clothed hoyden. Radclyffe Hall is the definitely masculine type of woman, but not by any means in that tiresome and unattractive sense suggestive of police-women or tomboyish daughters of county families. Her masculinity, sartorially, is of the exquisitely tailor-made kind, and she is one of the handsomest women I have ever met. I am not sure that I wouldn't describe her as beautiful, in the best sense of that poor much-abused and overworked word. She has a beautiful head, and sleek, close-cropped fair hair with a slight wave; keen, steel-grey eyes, a small, sensitive mouth, a delicately strong aquiline nose, and a charming

boyish smile which lights up the pale gravity of her face remarkably, dispelling that faint suggestion of severity which it has in repose. She has slender ankles and wrists, and beautiful sensitive fingers, and she is slightly built without giving an impression of smallness ; there is about her, generally, a curious mingling of sensitiveness and strength, a sort of clean-cut hardness which is none the less brittle.

The texture of her personality is as unique, but more difficult to convey. Perhaps it is a little " suggested " by the fact that for the rest of the day on which she came to see me, the house seemed to hold something of her, an aura of personality. All consciousness seemed somehow to have grown vibrant with her, as though something of her had entered into oneself, as music enters into one to vibrate in the memory long after the actual sounds themselves are spent ; or as some subtle perfume insinuates itself into one's sense, one's hair, one's clothes, one's very skin, and will not be eradicated. . . . And yet it seems, somehow, too, that writing of her one must not become rhetorical lest one lose the essentially sane, quiet, clean-cut lines of her. One must see her as a cameo rather than a mosaic.

There are women who suggest warm rooms with hothouse flowers and too many silk cushions and shaded lights . . . but Radclyffe Hall suggests a cool, whitewashed room, bare as a ship ; a room of deep curtainless windows and a few spring flowers, yellow and white, and the simplicity of Stark furniture, a room in which the prime quality would be light and simplicity and complete freedom from the excrescences which clutter up the muddled mess we call civilization. . . .

And that being so, it is somehow odd to find her interested in psychical research, and believing in the intercession of saints. Though I admit that this may only seem odd to me because of my own strictly rationalist and scientific outlook on life. I simply had not, somehow, associated Radclyffe Hall with anything psychic, so that for a moment this revelation somewhat blurred the clean-cut outline I had of her. But her belief in these things is woven into the very fabric of her personality ; they are not for her a complication added to the difficult

jig-saw puzzle of life, as I see them, but a great light let into her life, the ultimate simplification. She hates a bounded horizon, and these beliefs open up for her boundless horizons. For her they are great shining realities, and so that image of light and simplicity is restored—one perceives that it had only momentarily dimmed in the twilight of one's own scepticism, since one recoils, involuntarily, from the mental attitude which one's own ego instinctively as well as intellectually finds untenable.

Radclyffe Hall is a Roman Catholic and a socialist. Her outlook on life is essentially humanitarian. When a rich man offered to pay the expenses of litigation during the trouble over the Well, she refused because she could not accept so great a sum of money whilst thousands of miners were starving. She hoped that this would persuade him of the better way to use his wealth, and she sold her house in order to be able to meet the expenses of the case herself. Various people at the time started to raise subscriptions towards the costs of the case, but she stopped them all as soon as she heard of them, and when people sent her cheques she returned them, though she was nevertheless deeply touched by such generosity coming from complete strangers.

I was interested to learn from her of the widespread sympathy in all directions which the case aroused; miners and railway men in the North of England were amongst her most ardent champions. The most cruel and abusive letter she had was from a Jesuit priest, as was also the most beautiful and understanding letter. She believes that the Church is coming increasingly into line with modern thought—this she told me partly at my expression of surprise over the sympathetic letter from the priest, and partly in reply to my view that there was little room in the Church for intelligent, thinking people. Her own attitude is that there isn't room for them out of it. She told me that her psychic research work years ago did more for her in the matter of straight thinking and intellectual accuracy than any amount of ordinary educational mind-training. I should have said that it would afford one about as much good—which in my estimation would be *nil*, but there again I must admit to prejudice.

With her method of work I am more in sympathy. After she has written out the first draft of a book and corrected it, she dictates it to a typist, revising as she goes along. The great value of this method, of course, is the reading aloud—the supreme test of good English. She herself does not type, she must have what she herself calls " the marriage of pen and paper " to make her thoughts flow, and this reading aloud for the test of what she has written. It is only fair to say that she herself regards *The Well of Loneliness* as a superior piece of work, from the literary point of view, to *Adam's Breed*, and this not because of any greater personal feeling for the book, but simply because she regards it as a better piece of writing ; she took infinite pains with it, and spent two years on the writing of it.

I admire Radclyffe Hall's courage tremendously. I had expected to find her despairing and embittered, but she is not even in despair about the puritanism of this country, as so many of us are ; she contends that we are not really puritanical at all ; merely hypocritical. She was too conscious of the great waves of sympathy flowing out to her from all directions during *The Well of Loneliness* case to become bitter about the ridiculous affair—even though it meant the destruction of two years' conscientious hard work and the sale of her beautiful house. She feels now that she has said all she has to say on the subject with which she dealt in that book, but she told me that if ever the time comes when she feels she has anything to add to it, she will have no hesitation in adding it !

The last I saw of her she was retiring to a seventeenth-century cottage at Rye to get down to work on a new book. . . . I hope, for the sake of literature, that no forbidden theme will creep in and demand expression, lest truth and beauty be once more sacrificed to make a bonfire for puritans.

XX

ARNOLD BENNETT[1]

SOME IMPRESSIONS OF A GREAT MAN

My great difficulty, of course, or perhaps it is my saving grace, is that I have never been capable of being impressed by celebrities. I can never get over the fact that they are human beings like the rest of humanity. I find that I meet them and talk with them and break bread with them, and go away afterwards and remind myself that I have been in the presence of the great. But it does not, somehow, mean anything. I cannot feel anything but that I have met a certain man or woman who was interesting or not, as the case might be; and when people are interesting it does not matter what they have done or have not done, one is interested in their personalities; and when they are not interesting it does not matter what they have done or have not done; one is not interested. The mere state of being a celebrity cannot of itself invoke a reaction of interest. And usually, I have found, when one tries to recall what celebrities have said one finds that they have not said anything at all out of the ordinary. After all, why should they? It is only professional celebrities who are forever self-consciously making *bon mots* and quotable observations. I should call Bernard Shaw a professional celebrity. He seems to be a reliable and inexhaustible source of "copy" for all interviewers, to have all the right gestures, and be "discovered" always under all the most journalistically satisfying conditions. Arnold Bennett I should describe as a professional human being.

I have sat next to Arnold Bennett at one of those small intimate dinner parties of four or five people, and I cannot recall that he said anything more penetrating, or profound, or witty, than anyone else I have ever sat next to at dinner. I have danced with him reflecting the while that a few years ago I would as soon have dreamed of dancing with the Archangel Gabriel as with the great

[1] This was written during Arnold Bennett's life-time. E. M. (1935).

Arnold Bennett, yet clasped to that distinguished corpulence I found myself registering no emotion or sensation beyond a vague regret that great men should stoop to the antics of the foolish instead of keeping to the things in which their greatness shines. The Arnold Bennett of to-day is not built for dancing, whatever he might have been in his youth. Perhaps that thought occurred to him, too, for he said, in that thin, high-pitched voice which is as famous as his upstanding tuft of hair, that dancing was " a very funny pastime." I agreed, and reminded him that Aldous Huxley had defined it forever as " the imitative copulative article," which appeared to amuse him. For the rest we talked of this and that, even as you and I. It is true that when the talk turned on to books he volunteered the remark that D. H. Lawrence was " a very great man," but that has been discovered by lesser intelligences than that of Arnold Bennett.

I have been present at various other dinner parties at which Arnold Bennett has also been a guest, and have always been struck by his look of intense boredom. Whether he actually has been bored on those occasions it is impossible to say, but certainly he has looked as though he were ready to expire of ennui. He has never seemed to speak unless spoken to, and his eyes have had a fixed, far-away, expression as though he were not present in his body in that place. The sagginess under his eyes has emphasized this look of weariness, and at all parties he invariably goes home round about eleven o'clock and nothing on earth can prevail upon him to stay once he has made up his mind to go home. He always appears to be very nice about it, but always very firm. He has work to do to-morrow, he will say, he must get to bed early. . . .

It is part of his systemization of life and the business of living twenty-four hours a day. He is the Apostle of Efficiency. Going to bed early and starting work early next day is part of that efficiency. The curious part about Arnold Bennett is that he is one of the most frankly commercial writers living, and yet he remains great. Genius will out. For him there is no virtue to it ; he has the virtue of hard work.

But I gathered from my conversation with him on the subject of work that the more work one does the less in time one ought to have to do, and that after the early years and the period of apprenticeship to have to work more than five hours a day, when one is a writer, is a confession of failure.

Arnold Bennett's great strength, I think, lies in his immense common sense. It informs everything he writes, every judgment he pronounces. He is a man of intensive and far-reaching culture, but he is never highbrow. There is nothing " precious " about his culture. And his manner, like his every literary pronunciamento, is completely without affectation. It is said that he likes limericks of a Rabelaisian flavour. I should think that he probably does. Why not ? He is interested in literally everything—shops, football-matches, seaside piers, music, literature, ill-health, dramatic-critics, Greek plays—why not limericks ? And everyone knows that all the cleverest and most amusing limericks are the bawdy ones.

I love the story which is told of Arnold Bennett and the young man who so much wanted to meet him. A mutual friend introduced them during a chance encounter in the street. At the spot at which they stood a carter was carrying a heavy trunk into a house. The young man stood waiting for the great Arnold Bennett to say something witty or profound, but Arnold Bennett was preoccupied with the spectacle of the man carrying the heavy trunk. He would talk of nothing else. It fascinated him. No human being ought to expect another human being to carry a trunk that size. . . . Did they realize what the weight of such a trunk must be ?

That, it seems to me, is typically Arnold Bennett, the professional human being. I have seen him thoroughly peeved because a restaurant band offended him. " Are we not the kings of this place, you and I, George ? " he demanded of George Doran, the American publisher, our host of the occasion. " Must we submit to this ? Can we not order this band to be removed ? " A positively schoolboy peevishness, but when he is enjoying himself he can laugh like a schoolboy, too. There is a great simplicity about the man, an immense friendliness and

kindliness. George Doran is one of his oldest friends. He published his *Old Wives' Tale* on the recommendation of Mrs. Doran. To Arnold Bennett Hugh Walpole owes his conquest of America, for it was Arnold Bennett who told George Doran that he ought to publish him. Walpole at the time was disheartened and depressed and in a state of despair about his work.

It must be tiresome sometimes being Arnold Bennett, for I suppose that since he has done book reviews in the *Evening Standard* every publisher in London has tried to win the favour of his notice for some pet book . . . but to Arnold Bennett's everlasting credit he cannot be cajoled into noticing a book which he does not consider important. Publishers cannot do more than go on hoping. . . . I do not know about which of his books it was that a critic referred to a love-scene as " an orgy of lust," but Arnold Bennett is said to have retorted, " Orgy of fiddlesticks ! If love isn't an orgy of lust it ought to be ! "

I hope that story is true because it seems to me so essentially the sane, common sense. humanitarian attitude one might expect of a really great man.

XXI

SOMERSET MAUGHAM

PORTRAIT OF A DRAMATIST

THE fact that Somerset Maugham writes novels, and has, indeed, in *Of Human Bondage*, written one of the finest novels in the language, becomes curiously immaterial when one sets out to make a portrait of the man. Any true portrait of him cannot be other than portrait of a dramatist. It would still be so even if he had never written a play. One feels that he sees life in terms of an interminable three-reel triangle drama. Even when he writes a comedy, as in *Our Betters*, the thing is a tragedy of life, the grimmest kind of comedy, that of making mock lest one weep, that of being satirical and cynical lest one grow angry or sentimental. Somerset Maugham is never sentimental ; he knows all about the pain lying like an

open wound at the heart of life, but he never sentimentalizes over it ; he probes the wound, not maliciously, but with a surgeon's curiosity, and to show you how it bleeds, presuming that you are as interested in the process as he is himself. . . . Actually he would have been a doctor had he not decided to practise literature instead.

In appearance he is dark and small and dapper ; in manner charming, courteous, a little courtly, and frequently amusing, but it is as though something is smouldering in him all the time, a kind of bitterness which emerges in the persistent streak of sadism in his novels and plays. " Sensitive " and " sardonic " are the two words which leap to the mind in attempting to describe both his appearance and his manner. One feels that he has a profound sense of life, of its dark strangenesses, and pain burning at the core of it like a dark fire, and he outside of it all, looking on, conscious of humanity's passion and suffering, pitying, yet acutely interested —absorbingly interested.

When I first met Somerset Maugham several years ago my book *Pilgrims* had just been published and had been described in America as " another *Of Human Bondage,*" and I was somewhat embarrassed, fearful lest Maugham should for a moment imagine that I took such adulation seriously, and really flattered myself that my book was anything of the kind, and that he might be contemptuous. I have since found that he is never contemptous of anything in human nature—he is too passionately interested in it for that.

We sat in a window-seat in one of the great windows of the Savoy looking out through the trees to the river—the occasion was one of George Doran's literary dinner parties to his authors—and I told him how much I had admired and been moved by *Of Human Bondage.* I ventured to suggest that it was largely autobiographical. He suggested, broodingly, that surely all novels were largely that. He contemplated the dark river, hung with light and star reflections, as though he were contemplating the dark tide of life itself. We talked of books and people. I said that one grew a little tired of literary scandals, this perpetual gossip as to how this, that, and the other novelist, actor, actress, dramatist, was messing up his or

her domestic relations, always the same story of So-and-so being divorced or divorcing, living with somebody else, all this divorcing and giving in divorce. . . . He replied with an unforgettable, quick, curious, eagerness "But isn't it interesting? It's life!" Always that preoccupation with the interestingness of humanity's passion and suffering and folly. He might have been wrung with pity at some manifestation of humanity's pain, but he would never cease to be profoundly interested, or be capable of seeing it other than as a dramatic spectacle with possibilities for a novel, short story, or play. . . . Always that irresistible appreciation of the thing's dramatic quality. It has its significance that what is probably his greatest play, *The Letter*, is based on actuality. I heard the other day that the woman of the drama is still living, dragging out her tormented life to its bitter end, so perhaps we shall have a sequel to the play. . . .

Somerset Maugham is a man who has to "get back" on life. The young man in *Of Human Bondage* had a club-foot, it will be remembered. His creator has a stammer. It is true that nearly every book of any feeling, certainly nearly every great book, is largely autobiographical, not in precise detail, but in its manifestation of the author's attitudes and reactions to life. Maugham himself has explained this in the postscript to *The Casuarina Tree*. He defines a work of fiction as "an arrangement which the author makes of the facts of his experience with the idiosyncrasies of his own personality." There is more of the essence of Maugham's—on the surface—rather elusive and baffling personality in *Of Human Bondage* than will ever be got out of any personal contact with him. The personal contact yields the charm and interest, without the subtleties and the inner fire.

The superficial impression is one of a handsome, cultured, charming, distinguished man of the world. *Elegance* is perhaps the only word which adequately conveys his fastidiousness both of person and culture. He is a disciple of the exquisite, and he has the material means with which to indulge his taste for the exquisite in all directions. His famous Villa Mauresque at Cap Ferar is as exquisite as the utmost resources of civilization

drawn upon by an epicurean taste can make it. He is an epicure in the matter of food. He will serve truffles as a course in themselves. He inclines towards the exotic. His very presence somehow suggests black marble bathrooms and the last word in bath-salts. He reminds one of something out of a Wilde play. He dresses immaculately upon all occasions. When he gives anyone a gift it is invariably something rare—such as a white malacca cane which has belonged to an Eastern prince. Anyone can buy a malacca cane, but it takes Somerset Maugham to find a white malacca.

He is a man of the world in the most literal sense. One home does not satisfy him ; he wants a home wherever he finds a spiritual home, and the idea of any one *pied-à-terre* bores him. He is of the temperament that needs a fashionable apartment in Paris, a flat in Mayfair, a villa in the South of France, none of them necessarily permanent, but because wherever his spirit comes home, there, for a little while at any rate, he must make a home—or yearn to make one, without in the least committing himself to it forever.

He has wealth, culture, charm, every equipment for social success in the most fastidious circles, but he has, too, this slight physical handicap. Actually it is of slight importance, for he has a charm of manner and a *savoir-faire* which in any case would over-ride a great deal, but it would seem to be, nevertheless, the clue to his dark, sardonic, sensitive psychology, and to account for the streak of sadism running through all his work, and his preoccupation with the pain of life. It is as though he himself has never forgiven life.

I hear that he is contemplating endowing a scholarship to enable young writers to travel. One would have thought that anyone who knew as much about human nature as the author of *The Trembling of a Leaf*, *The Painted Veil*, and *The Sacred Flame*, would have seen through the fallacy that travel broadens the mind or is of any value in creative work, but it is possibly his dramatic instinct at work—the spectacle of the restless young writer yearning to go " beyond the sunset and the baths of all the western stars " in ultimate realization of himself. . . . " We live to be happy so short a time,

and are so long dead. . . . Life in its futility, its short pleasure, its sharp pain. . . . Death with its mystery was the only thing that mattered." There speaks the dramatist, who speaks in everything that Maugham has written, a cry of pain in the dark jungle of human nature. It is written, there, too, in the dark smouldering eyes, the sensitive sardonic mouth, the outward and visible sign of the inward and hidden dramatist. . . .

XXII

BEVERLEY NICHOLS

PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG MAN

BEVERLEY NICHOLS has written about " everyone," but so far as I am aware no one has yet written much about him. I don't know why, for he is certainly one of the most interesting of our clever young men, and it is time, anyhow, that some of the nonsense about his " conceit " was cleared up. Whenever I hear anyone assert that Beverley Nichols is conceited, I know that all that they know about him is that he wrote *Twenty-Five*. Though why a young man should be presumed to be conceited merely because he sets down a series of impressions of his elders and betters eludes me. Since then Beverley has, in the jargon of the critics, " gone from strength to strength." He has written several more books, including *The Star-Spangled Manner*, in which it may be said that The Bright Young Person is Shown to Have a Heart. In that book his impression of the Thompson-Bywaters trial, and the description of his emotional reaction to Harlem, are pieces of literary impressionism which are the best answers to his critics. They are a revelation of a very deep and real and sincere feeling for life. Anyone as superficial as most people seem to imagine Beverley Nichols to be, simply could not have written them.

As a matter of fact there are several things which might, humanly, justify a little personal vanity in Beverley. He is undeniably good-looking, and undeniably clever. Also, like most people who have ever

done anything, he has made himself. When he came down from Oxford he " knew nobody " ; now he " knows everyone." In a few years by sheer hard work he has made a reputation for himself. But he is not in the least spoiled or swelled-headed. He is the sort of young man whom elderly ladies define as " a charming boy." In short, a really nice young man. . . . But *Twenty-Five* has taken a lot of living down. People have a distressing tendency to forget that Beverley has not been twenty-five for some years now, and also that he *has* written other things, and much better things.

The people who have made up their minds that he is a conceited young upstart like to assert that he tries to do everything Noel Coward does, and can't. So far as I know he has never attempted to act, but he can write plays and compose music, the latter neither better nor worse than Noel's. But perhaps I am prejudiced, or " abnormal," for I found the music of *Bitter-Sweet* the essence of all the musical-comedy staleness and all the *Blue Danube* sentimentality ever orchestrated. I should say that Beverley is like Noel in the one respect that he has a similar dash of genius, but I should say that Beverley's dash of genius is as badly underrated as Noel's is overrated.

When I first met Beverley Nichols several years ago, I liked him because he shared my own enthusiasms and " adored " cats, caviare, and Van Gogh pictures. Also he has what Balzac calls " the truest form of genius "—immense personal charm. In the course of subsequent encounters, my liking for him has deepened with a realization of his quality of simplicity and sincerity. He has, too, that valuable capacity for " seeing through " social hypocrisy and cant, and every form of humbug, without growing cynical about it. Noel Coward sees through things, too, but he is cynical or amused where Beverley is either passionately contemptuous or merely pitiful. There is not much of the superficial bright young person about a young man who will take you round his garden and tell you how the lupins and larkspurs are coming on, show you his carefully fostered rows of sweet-corn, and discuss with you, with a positively

mother-love, the prospects for his young radishes and spring-onions.

At the risk of sounding like the diary of a newspaper social gossip, I mention that Beverley has a sixteenth-century cottage near Peterborough, where in the summer he gives luncheon parties under a pear tree, and watches his lupins grow. If in contemplation of Beverley the cottage figures overmuch in my consciousness it is partly what the Freudians would call an " anxiety neurosis," for though I, also, have a cottage, Beverley has a thatched roof to his, and an orchard . . . an apple-orchard . . . and a vegetable garden, which is a lovesome thing. . . . I have a wild patch where bluebells, primroses, and daffodils grow wild under old trees, but how shall I not be jealous of Beverley all the same, for he has a meadow, and fifteen thousand bulbs waiting to blaze for him in the Spring. . . . I am not sure that anyone ought to have fifteen thousand bulbs *and* an apple orchard. . . .

The interesting part about Beverley is his curious combination of boyish enthusiasm and worldly shrewdness. He is capable of a lyric rapture over apple-blossom one minute, and the next he is absorbed in the columns of the *Financial Times*. Similarly he has two sides to him where people are concerned. When he dislikes anyone he can behave very badly and be as tiresome as an obstreperous small boy; when he likes anyone he is confiding and affectionate. For him, one feels, there are only two kinds of people, those who are " dears " and those who are insufferable. He loves gossip of the amusingly malicious kind, without being in the least malicious himself; and he loves to talk stocks and shares.

He has a great humility, this audacious young man who is supposed to be so conceited, and will speak broodingly of " all the things one doesn't know." A very charming person, with a brilliant pen, a great feeling for life below the surface of things, a great sense of fun, and a sensitive sense of beauty—whether on canvas or in the smell of lilac on the wind—rather more than clever, yet rather less than genius even in its loose modern interpretation. . . . One feels that he has seen through nearly everything, and yet somehow managed

to retain a sort of Rupert Brooke enthusiasm for almost everything. . . . He has, in short, all the essentials for the portrait of a most interesting and unusual young man. . . .

I have seen him in ecstasies over a clown, clapping his hands, slapping his knees, crying "Bravo!" and excitedly demanding of everyone why all Europe did not know what a marvellous artist the man was . . . and the next minute I have seen him furious over a cabaret dancer—literally furious and crying, "My God, why must she be so indecent?" . . . She was a silly simpering little thing, cloyingly feminine, sex-appeal laid on with a trowel, the sort of woman whose presence somehow suggests twin-beds and pink silk négligées messed up with marabout and rose-buds. . . . One knew what Beverley meant. One gathered that she made him "quite sick." . . . And then a few moments later he had forgotten his anger and disgust, and was gazing lovingly at the rich brocade coat of a skate-dancer, and murmuring ecstatically about the lovely, lovely material. . . .

He has a great feeling for materials and colour. He is sensitive to clothes both on and off the stage. It would be interesting—and what Osbert Sitwell would call "wild fun"—to turn him loose and give him a free hand in designing the costumes of a modern ballet . . . with music by Stravinsky, choreography by Serge Lifar, and *décor* by John Armstrong. And Noel, Beverley and young Vivian Ellis in a *pas-de-trois*, "The Three A-Muses." . . . Mr. Cochran would produce, of course. We have had Mr. Cochran's beautiful Young Ladies, why not Mr. Cochran's beautiful Young Men?

XXIII

WILLIAM GERHARDI

ANOTHER STUDY IN SUPERIORITY COMPLEX

I HAD wanted to meet William Gerhardi ever since an enthusiastic American publisher declared that we would make "a marvellous pair to show round New York to-

gether." It is always interesting to see the sort of thing other people would like to see one paired off with. I told the American publisher that I was " game." But I left America before Gerhardi came into the scene, and then the months passed, as the novelists used to say, and my literary agent said, " You must meet William Gerhardi. He wants to meet you, but he's just gone off to Russia. But the last thing he said to me when we stood on the kerb together in the rain, was ' Don't forget I want to meet Ethel Mannin as soon as I get back.' " I said, " It seems to me that as soon as I get into a country William Gerhardi goes out of it, or vice versa." Soon after that I went to the South of France, and the literary agent wrote, " William Gerhardi is now back in London." But I couldn't rush back immediately having only just gone out, and by the time I did get back the elusive Gerhardi had gone off again, and it began to look as though never the twain would meet, and a lot more time went by.

So I thought I would try reading a little Gerhardi, just to see if I really did want to meet him after all, in spite of the fact that I was told he had blue eyes and fair hair and that we should like each other. So I started on *Futility*, because that was All the Gerhardi There Was at that time. " How often then I dreamed of those white nights of Petersburg, those white mysterious sleepless nights. . . . Fanny Ivanovna was alone, and we sat together on the open balcony and talked about her troubles in the white night. We sat listless. We felt a strange tremor. We waited for the night, for twilight ; but they were not. Heaven had come down over earth. It was one splash of humid, milk-white, pellucid mist. We could see everything before us clearly to the minutest detail. The street with its tall buildings tried hard to fall asleep, but could not ; it, too, suffered from insomnia ; and the black window-panes of the sleepless houses were like tired eyes of great monsters. Now and then a man would pass beneath us, his steps resounding sharp and loud upon the pavement. Curiously, he had no shadow. Then he was gone, and there was not a soul in the street."

So then I knew I must meet William Gerhardi. Only I read an article by him in a woman's magazine in which

he said of what use were women if one could not desire them, because at their best their conversation was not good enough . . . that made me angry, so that I knew more than ever that I must meet Gerhardi. I bought *Polyglots* and tried to read it, and couldn't, and thought that perhaps after all it wouldn't matter if I didn't meet Gerhardi. . . .

And at that point it was that we were invited to the same dinner party on the same night. Remembering those white Russian nights it occurred to me that it would be " suitable " to wear a white and silver dress with " milk-white pellucid " lilies. . . . So we looked at each other across the flowers on the table and talked of *Jazz and Jasper* and found that we had not much to say to each other. And Gerhardi circulated the port in the wrong direction, which I took to be an ill-omen. . . . We regarded each other at length and fixedly but with the cold stare of curiosity rather than the warm light of interest. I remember saying that all women were natural-born masochists, and he retorted that one might as well say that all mice were masochists and all cats sadists. I said perhaps they were, and I thought, " You with your pale baby face and your stone-cold blue eyes, you're a sadist " . . . and wondered.

When it was time to go our host most carefully and conscientiously put us into the same taxi, and closed the door on us with a sort of flourish as who should say, " One can do no more. . . ."

So we drove on through the white mysterious sleepless night of Regent's Park and Gerhardi shivered a good deal, and I asked him if he were cold, and he said No, was I ? I said No, it wasn't I who shivered, was it ? But as though I had answered yes he put his arm round me, to keep me warm, he said, and added, " So you're a masochist ? " I said not particularly, and we arrived at his flat. He insisted that I must have a drink and see his new book, *Jazz and Jasper*—he had an advance copy.

The *tête-à-tête* was not a success. We quarrelled quite bitterly, and Gerhardi wound up by referring to himself as a man of genius, and me as the meanest woman he had ever met. There was not, he declared passionately, another woman in England—or was it Europe ?—who

would treat him so. At which I laughed "a little, privately," like his own Fanny Ivanovna, and went back down the stairs and out again into the white sleepless night of Baker Street, and his face in the "milk-white pellucid mist" was white as any Russian night, and as cold.

"I shall tell everyone," he said, "that Ethel Mannin is hard and cold and mean." But I just laughed and like Fanny Ivanovna went away into the night.

I met him again a year or two later at a cocktail party. I was shocked by the change in his appearance. It may have been his violently blue shirt and collar which made him look so shadowy-eyed and blue in the face. He had quite lost that look of a spoilt baby, but he seemed gayer. Or it may have been merely the cocktails.

"What has Gerhardi been doing with himself?" I asked someone.

"God knows," said one.

"What does he usually do?" asked another.

"Everything of course," said another.

I went up to him. "You remember me?" I said. He regarded me with interest, and it was obvious that for a moment he didn't, then he smiled. "Why, yes. It was at ——" He mentioned our host. "Yes, I remember. Everything. And you?"

"Yes," I said, "everything."

He laughed. "You behaved very foolishly, did you not?" he asked.

"No," I replied, "merely rather unexpectedly."

"Sometime you must come again and behave differently. Yes? Or are you still afraid?"

But already, before I could answer, his eyes had come to rest upon another woman—yet another heroine for a novel on Russian themes, maybe, and I heard someone behind me say, "Gerhardi's well away," but whether they meant cocktails or potential seduction I cannot say.

A little later, at a party at Rebecca West's, Gerhardi's name cropped up in the conversation, and a young girl laughed, "Oh," she cried delightedly, "did he offer to seduce you? He did me. He said it would make me write better, but I said I didn't think so."

So then Rebecca told the famous story which will never die about Gerhardi riding about the Riviera on a

horse and carrying a portable typewriter ; and everyone said, " Oh ! Gerhardi ! " like that.

But it is only fair to add that he has done a lot of other things, too, because he can write O.B.E. after his name, and B.Litt., and M.A., and he has been a Military Attaché of the British Embassy at Petrograd, and been with the British Military Mission to Siberia, and has the Czecho-Slovak Croix de Guerre, and the Order of St. Stanislav of Russia, and a lot of other things like that, and the last I heard of him he was flying away in an aeroplane with a Ranee or something to India, all arranged by my Lord Castlerosse, so that the *Sunday Express* was full of paragraphs about it, and I expect lots of girls reading all about it in bed on Sunday morning, and, seeing Gerhardi's pretty baby face must have thought that that was just the sort of daredevil young man with romantic tendencies that they would like to meet, and would have been ever so much nicer to him than a hard cold mean girl like I, if you know what I mean . . . so that it looks as though some girls waste their opportunities, as you might say.

XXIV

BEN TRAVERS

PORTRAIT OF A LOW-BROW

It was Ben Travers' own suggestion that I should write of him as a low-brow ; otherwise I think I should most probably have written of him as " a portrait of a happy man." He has got all he wants, and there is, he declares, no one he would change places with. Not quite all he wants, perhaps, because he would like to be a serious dramatist instead of a writer of successful Aldwych farces—but that is rather conventional of him, for what comedian has yet been born who hasn't wanted to be taken seriously, from Charlie Chaplin downwards ? The clown who yearns to play Hamlet is a stock figure of romantic idealism ; there are so few first-rate tragedians, too, both when it comes to a matter of acting and of playwriting, and a man who has written as many good

farces as Ben Travers—*The Cuckoo in the Nest, Plunder, Thark, Rookery Nook, A Cup of Kindness*—simply has no business to be hankering after drama. He is one of the few people who have the precious gift of laughter—a gift so much more precious than that of being able to move people to tears; there are quite enough tears in the world already, and not nearly enough laughter.

Knowing that most laughter-makers have these absurd hankerings after the dramatic, when I knew that I was going to meet the man who has made all London laugh I was quite prepared for him to be a gloomy, Hamletish sort of person, taking his humour sadly. Instead I was introduced to a dapper, fair-haired, genial little man who simply radiated cheerfulness and good-will. But talking to him I discovered that writing really humorous plays is a very serious and solemn business, and once we had begun to talk "shop" the conversation became very serious indeed.

Ben Travers is another of those "born writers" who write because they must, and for whom all life is material for plot and copy. He is a tremendously prolific writer, but he tears up ninety-five per cent of everything he writes, and he has spent years learning stagecraft—both of which facts some of our dramatists might do well to make a note of, because if they would we might got more serious plays as good in their way as the Aldwych farces are in theirs. He is a born writer, too, in his consuming interest in his work. He told me that he is always instinctively jealous of other playwrights—until he knows them, and then he becomes ashamed that he has ever been jealous of them, because when he has met them he invariably likes them and admires their work.

Travers' confidential manner is most engaging; you do not have to dig down under a lot of surface rubble composed of all the little conventional hypocrisies and reserves to get to the real person. It is as though he says from the moment he shakes hands with you, "Look here, I'll tell you right away the sort of chap I am." And he does. Inside an hour he had told me all about how he works, how he feels about his work, his devotion to his youngsters, his views on education, and his tastes in literature. And I liked him enormously, in spite of the

fact that we disagreed wildly on my pet subject of child-education, and that he admires Dickens and O. Henry more than any other writers living or dead, whereas I cannot bear Dickens and refuse to get excited over O. Henry. Moreover, I have gone on liking him in spite of the fact that he assured me I would like the works of Ernest Bramah, and sent me *Kai Lung's Golden Hours*, which is precisely the sort of thing which, after Dickens, I abhor most.... But there are some people one cannot help liking, and whether one agrees with their views and literary tastes or not becomes unimportant. I liked Ben Travers for his simplicity and friendliness and honesty. He is one of the few people that success cannot spoil. A sort of warmth radiates from him—the warmth of a man who loves his fellow-men and is at peace with the world. There is something eager about him—he is eager in his confidences, eager to make one see how it is with him about himself and his work, eager to give out friendliness and to take it in, eager to like and to be liked, and a kind of nervous shyness and sensitiveness behind all this facile giving out. . . . He reminds one of the nicest kind of schoolboy and the friendliest kind of dog.

You know before he has told you that if he plays any game it is cricket. Anyone so very much an English public school product would not do otherwise. He has all the " right ideas " inseparable from the system—the value of " a good education," discipline, playing cricket, and so forth. One would expect him to write " nice " plays, with Pollyanna heroines, rather than rollicking farces. I didn't ask him whether he read Walter Scott as well as Dickens, but I feel sure he does, and that as a schoolboy he adored *Westward Ho !* and *Treasure Island*. His education alone would see to it that he had a proper appreciation of these things. A very conventional person. The same ideas and attitudes in anyone else would have bored me, if they had not aroused active hostility. But I cannot imagine anyone not liking Ben Travers, be his ideas as conventional as the Bishop of London's, or as " outrageous " as my own. His personality predominates over his views on life and letters—the heart-warming personality of an honest and quite unaffected and genuine person.

I hope he will go on writing delightful farces for that lovely Aldwych happy family—Ralph Lynn, Mary Brough, Tom Walls. He spoke very warmly and appreciatively of them, both as artists and as personalities. It will be a great pity if he puts aside his schoolboy gaiety and gives us some tiresome triangle drama. He must go on writing farce—because he is one of the very few people who can.

During dinner he had to go away because he had put a trunk call through to his wife—he telephones her every night when he is in town, which is exactly what one might expect him to do. It is true he made a half-shy, self-conscious little joke about it, but one feels all the same that he does it because he very much wants to, and likes him for it. But if ever I dine with him again I shall insist on choosing his dinner for him. A man who has made a fortune by making all London laugh really owes himself something better than cold steak-and-kidney pie for his dinner, particularly when a whole list of exciting things are at his disposal. " I'm no good at choosing food," he said apologetically, with that schoolboy naïveté of his. I told him that that was pretty obvious. It was also obvious that he was much more interested in " talking shop " than in eating. I have never met anyone so absorbingly interested in the technique of writing ; for him it is a craft, like carpentry or metal-work, which, of course, accounts for the success of his plays. Will other playwrights please copy.

XXV

THAMAR KARSAVINA

PORTRAIT IN PASTEL

THAT intense, white face ; those night-dark smouldering eyes set in their great shadows like sorrow in pain ; the slow, steady rise and fall of the beckoning scarf as Thamar waves from her tower luring travellers to a feast of death ; the wild orgy of dancing ; Thamar brooding with her " large lustful eyes " ; Thamar beautiful and cruel and

pitiless mounting to her tower again when the feast of death is over, and once again the slow, steady rise and fall of the beckoning scarf. . . .

Years ago that picture was painted indelibly on my memory; I never saw that ballet danced again, but one night not long ago I saw again that white face, those immense smouldering eyes, beauty blooming like a flower in a wilderness of dreariness. It was at one of those dinners at which about two hundred people are present and the speeches drone on interminably. Women were in the minority, but the few present seemed as dull as the Stationers' Hall itself. But there at the far side of the hall was this moon-pale face, those great night-dark eyes, and memory stirred in its sleep.

I turned to my companion, "Who is that beautiful woman?" I asked.

"Which? Where?"

"There is only one," I said, and looked at her across the tables.

"Karsavina." The name fell like music into the droning dreariness.

Memory wakened and became a flame. The steady rise and fall of the beckoning scarf. . . .

"Thamar," I said, "Thamar Karsavina," and it was as though one had repeated a lovely line of poetry. . . .

I could not know then that I might ever know the exquisite privilege of her friendship. Thamar Karsavina is one of the rare and lovely things in life, like hearing the Ring music for the first time, watching Woizikovsky in *L'Après Midi d'un Faune*, knowing the resurgence of Spring in one's heart when one had thought never to live or love again. She has the white beauty of moonlight, and the dark beauty of pain. It is more than the beauty of her exquisite person; it is a quality which flows out of the delicacy and sweetness of her personality, and the perfection of her art, emanating from her like perfume from a rose. Prose is the wrong medium for the expression of that quality; music might capture it, or poetry, but any non-metrical arrangement of words must be in the nature of poetry translated into prose; the painting of Corot, the music of Tchaikovsky, the poetry of Mallarmé—all the subtle nuances of colour and tone im-

plicit in these things, but not the hard outlines of prose. . . . I find in myself no need to apologize for writing lyrically of Thamar Karsavina ; if one cannot be lyrical about pure beauty what shall one be lyrical about ?

There was a night at the Russian Ballet when a member of the company handed Danilova a rose from a bouquet which had been handed up to her ; it was a charming gesture, apart from being an established part of the etiquette of the company in this matter of floral tributes, and yet somehow it was all wrong, that handing of a single rose to Danilova who should have had all the roses of the world laid at her adorable feet that night. . . . It is how I feel in this matter of paying tribute to Karsavina.

I have a memory of her on a day of early Spring sunshine and light snow, with a flaming sunset and an amber light in the sky, and the air cold and clear as crystal. She had been showing me some of the beautiful stately old houses of Regent's Park, houses mysterious and romantic with wooded gardens enclosed behind ivied walls, houses with yellow façades and pillars like small palaces. She pointed out various houses where she had thought at different times she would like to live.

" You should have a palace," I said, " several palaces."

She said that yes, she would like that, " But I would like also a tiny little cottage where I could reach from room to room, and where I could have a little kitchen and prepare little dishes. And I would like a cockatoo."

" A white one with a pink peak," I suggested, thinking of the pink walls of her house—as much like a Russian house as an English house can be made—and of the little boudoir gay with French chintz on the walls.

" Grey and pink," she insisted, " and it should not live in a cage, but on a little perch—do you not think so ? "

I thought so. I could not give her a cockatoo at that time because of the psittacosis panic, but when I had left her I bought her a little pink blossoming azalea tree in a gilt bowl . . . only to reflect ruefully how like it was to handing Danilova a single rose. . . .

I am glad that there was snow on that day when I first came to her house, for the white trees at every window converted Regent's Park into a Russian land-

scape and made it easy for her to talk of Petrograd. The mysterious silence of falling snow, and Karsavina in her low voice, with its rhythmic accent, talking of Petrograd before the revolution, with its baroque palaces, the classic austerity of its public buildings, its wooden houses, such love in her voice, and all the wistfulness of the exile. . . . She lost everything in the revolution and was months getting out of Russia, but she did not fare badly at the hands of the Bolsheviks; they had, she said, a contempt for the intelligentsia, but a profound respect for the artist. As an artist she might remain in the country without suffering personal harm, or leave it without let or hindrance. Some of her confiscated possessions came back to her in England —she bought them back! She saw a carpet in a Regent's Street stores and recognized it as her own; she went into the shop and asked them where they had procured that carpet; they told her from Soviet Russia; she told them that she could tell them the design in detail—it was of special design and hand-woven—and the stores sold it back to her at the price they had paid for it. She recovered several chandeliers in the same ironic manner —by buying them back; but she was much too overjoyed to have them back to feel any bitterness about it.

Her house is completely expressive of her personality. Pale pink walls, pastel blue ceilings, baroque gilt scrolls, stone angels, a gilt St. Florian over a marble mantelpiece, Louis Quinze chairs, superb chandeliers, a pendulent blue glass star, shelves of Russian china, formal flower-prints on the pink or yellow walls, and sketches of ballet costumes she has worn, crowding books, English, French, German, little deliberate touches of theatricality expressed in a drift of red silk draped over a stone carving above a mantelpiece and in endless little charming artificialities. A gay, coloured, completely theatrical atmosphere, eclectic as Karsavina herself. A touch of the baroque, more than a touch of the rococo, but a charming rococo, like that of the Chauve-Souris. . . . And to know Karsavina is to find it impossible to visualise her in any other setting. She has an intellectual admiration of the modern school of interior decoration, but it omits that element of the frankly theatrical

which is emotionally important to her, so that she can admire without liking it, as she does the music of Stravinsky. Her personality is essentially of the theatre—yet she is completely without affectation, and utterly sincere. But she loves the theatre, the colour and pulse and flavour of it, and has done since she was a child. She has a doll's house furnished in the same manner as her own house, with the same touches of gilt and wine-coloured silk and formal decorativeness, and a tiny doll in a stiff pink silk gown lying in an ornate little French bed.... Yet from delighted contemplation of the doll's house she will look up and speak of the essays of Lamb, or the novels of Dostoieffsky.

She has a great love of the English language and the arrangement of words. She reads Lamb over and over again for sheer delight in his purity of style. Two contemporary novels which delighted her more than anything she had read recently were *Harriet Hume* and *The Bridge of St. Luis Rey*, and she lamented that *Mirror for a Witch* was not better known.... We talk of modern novels for a while, and then she takes from a shelf a book of German fairy-tales and explains from the illustrations their scope for ballet. She is planning to do some of them for a short season in German in the autumn. There is no place for ballet in this country any more, she sighs, "unless one is content to be a music-hall turn."

Her admiration for Diaghileff is boundless, but she felt that even before his death the Russian Ballet was nearing its end, because, she insisted, it had reached its limits and tried to go beyond, and any great art must finish when it tries to do that. "When dancing develops into acrobatics that is the end of dancing as ballet," she said, and for a few minutes we mourned the prospect of a superb artist like Woizikovsky being reduced to touring the provinces and the suburbs with all the glory of the ballet behind him.... Woizikovsky the greatest artist of them all, an echo of Nijinsky himself.... Could nothing be done? Did no one care?

But Karsavina shrugged with the philosophical resignation of the theatre, and asked, "What can one do? The artistic life is always precarious; one goes up

and down. . . . There will always be a little group of them keeping together at Monte Carlo; but Diaghileff is gone, and there is no one to hold them all together any more. . . . He kept them together; no one else could; oh, but he was a wonderful person; I would like to write a book about him!"

In Thamar Karsavina's philosophy of life there is a pattern and a rhythm, to deviate from which involves discord and disintegration; one must work out one's destiny, nor seek to resist it. . . . It is a philosophy to which a sceptic like myself cannot subscribe, yet one perceives that for Karsavina it is the only practical working philosophy. For her how should life be other than the working out of a geometric pattern, a choreographic rhythm?

She has an intense and comprehensive appreciation of life, of all the details which contribute to its pattern but which would escape a less sensitive perception—the happy combination of sunlight streaming into a room where a fire leaps in the hearth, and the white light of snow outside—firelight, sunlight and snow-light. . . . Her quick involuntary appreciation, "Isn't that lovely?" Her delight in interior vistas, looking back at the wide room we had left across a marble-floored hall dominated by the gilt St. Florian . . . she must have observed it hundreds of times, yet each time seen it afresh with spontaneous æsthetic joy. . . . There was that same appreciative pleasure in her voice when she was describing to me the nuns in a convent down the road, the way their coifs framed their faces, the peace they suggested, and the romantic quality of their secluded lives. Her delight in her home is boundless, and her pleasure in cooking simple dishes part of that delight. "A release for that side of me which has always had to sacrifice so much to the theatre," was how she expressed it. There is such a graciousness about her, and she has the authentic artist's lack of artistic self-consciousness; she does not talk about "My Art" in the Isadora Duncan fashion . . . instead of reclining on silk cushions and recalling past glories she goes to a spirit stove and makes an omelette for luncheon, nor in watching those beautiful delicate hands doing prosaic practical things

does there seem any incongruity in recalling their gestures in waving the scarf from the tower. . . . To have eaten food prepared by those beautiful hands is, to the properly appreciative, a privilege.

From Thamar Karsavina I received my first valentine. There was one lying on the desk in her study, a pretty thing of silver and paper lace such as I had not seen since I was a child and my mother had shown me something similar. I said that I did not know such things were still made ; she told me that there were not many of them made to-day—the modern valentines were ugly things ; but had I never had a real valentine ? But then I must have one . . . she had thought of sending me one on the day, but had not known if I would like one, and nice ones were not easy to find ; she had two left—if I did not think them too bad. . . . I thought them both charming, and chose a quaint little affair with hearts and cupids and ribbons. She wrote upon the back of it, and gave it to me smiling. " And now," she said, " we must be friends for a whole year." Sometimes lovely things happen in life. . . .

Thamar Karsavina. . . . One should be a poet to write of you. We shall meet again when the crocuses you love spread white and purple ballet skirts like *Les Sylphides* under the trees, and when the summer lilac foams along the stately yellow terraces where we walked, but I shall keep this picture of you in your plain black dress, with the little black hat and the short veil just covering your great eyes, seated in the tall window when the earth and trees were white and you talked of Petrograd and the snow fell silently like inward weeping. And I shall keep my valentine, seeing always your pale beauty against that formal background of little coloured flowers. . . . There is all of you in that valentine, all that charming artificiality of the theatre, and all your gracious sweetness and simplicity. There is only one person more memorable than *Thamar* of the ballet, and that is Thamar Karsavina herself.

XXVI

MEMORIES OF THE RUSSIAN BALLET

I

DIAGHILEFF is dead. The Russian Ballet is no more.[1] What is going to happen to that little band of artists which Diaghileff held together as nobody else could? Nobody seems to know—or care. They are scattered; there will always be a few at Monte Carlo, which will be a sort of base; Serge Lifar has been absorbed into revue, and because he is young and beautiful and versatile an Anton Dolin popular success is assured him; the last one heard of Woizikovsky he had gone over to Pavlova—with a future in the suburbs and the provinces. . . . Woizikovsky whose *Faun* left one as shaken as Lifar's left one cold. To have seen Woizikovsky's Faun, and then Serge Lifar's is to know what the older generation means when it shakes its head and sighs, "Ah, but you should have seen Nijinsky. . . ." When I had only seen Woizikovsky and could not make a comparison I used to be irritated by the insistence on that Nijinsky comparison; but after I had seen Lifar in the same rôle I began to comprehend the regret of the people who had seen the *Faun's* creator. If there is the difference between the Nijinsky and Woizikovsky interpretation that there is between that of Woizikovsky and Lifar, no wonder the older generation sighs. . . .

Heavens, the difference between those two fauns! And how one wanted to cry out to the people who have seen only Lifar's faun, "Ah, but you should have seen Woizikovsky. . . . Lifar was as beautiful as a painting on a Greek vase; but he wasn't a faun; he was never anything but a beautiful boy; when he grasped the little transparent blue garment of the loveliest of the elusive nymphs and carried it away in triumph to the top of his sun-warmed rock, though clasping it to him eagerly, drawing it to himself, as he sank face downwards on to the rock and slipped again into his dream-tranced sleep,

[1] This was in 1926, before the De Basil revival. (E. M. 1936.)

it was never more than a strip of blue cloth, a veil, a scarf, a piece of material out of a draper's shop. . . . But when Woizikovsky bore it away to the rock it was a woman he carried in his arms, a woman he held at arm's length, gazing upon before he drew her to him and slipped down with her in his embrace, in exquisite sensuality, an ecstasy of voluptuousness. . . .

Mallarmé's " elusive eclogue," and Debussy's music, are nothing if not exquisitely sensual, an æsthetic sublimation of the voluptuous, but Lifar conveyed nothing of that quality ; he was just a beautiful boy practising charming eurythmics with a few nymphs ; there was no warmth to him, no passion, no colour. Woizikovsky was a faun ; he was pagan ; the sensuality of the long hot afternoon was in him, and the slow dull fire of wine and sunshine and desire ; he was the substance of a dream, but a carnal dream ; you felt the sun and the wine in his blood, and the warm, voluptuous drowsiness of his dreams, and how the sweetness of the vine was in them, and the heavy scent of the wild thyme with the afternoon sun on it ; you felt the lust in him, and the solitariness of the wild thing, half bold, half frightened ; you felt his passion in your own body ; you felt the urge of his desire in the surge of the music, and the harp was the beating of his heart ; you felt the ebb and flow of his dreams as the harp descended a scale of liquid notes and the violins rose in a crescendo of tremulous gladness, quivered for a little in a rich glad song, then melted away in a plaintive diminuendo . . . the repetition of the theme of the harp, the alternating resurgence of delight and diminuendo of weeping, the merging of passion into tenderness, the final slipping back into dreams with the last sigh of the harp. . . . Woizikovsky caught it all ; you felt that you could not bear it, nor yet that you could bear it to cease ; it was pure ecstasy, an emotional orgasm, and it left you shattered. . . . Was Nijinsky better ? Can pure beauty be surpassed ?

Lifar's faun had beauty and grace ; Woizikovsky's life and passion ; one is moonlight ; the other, pure flame : Lifar should never dance in any ballet touched by the fire of emotion ; in pure æsthetics of form and rhythm like *The Cat, Pas d'Acier, Ode,* he is superlative. The

same comparison between himself and Woizikovsky arose in *The Gods Go a-Begging*. Lifar's shepherd was purely decorative; Woizikovsky's alive. Lifar's shepherd would hold the hand of the little servant maid and walk with her among the flowers and be her playmate; Woizikovsky's shepherd would be her lover. Lifar strutting in velvet and laces in *Les Fâcheux*, Lifar acrobatic and "modern" in *Pastorale*—but not Lifar as the flame-like chief in *Prince Igor*, any more than Woizikovsky as the pale beautiful young prince in *Swan Lake*. Lifar's art is a terpsichorean abstraction; Woizikovsky's, a living flame. I do not mean that Lifar is lacking in vitality—he puts terrific energy into *Pas d'Acier*, *Les Matelots*, and *Apollo*; he was brilliant in the eccentricities of *The Prodigal Son*, but his art, taking colour from his physical type and his personality, is essentially decorative, dehumanized, lacking in warmth, metaphysical. His technique is greater than his inspiration. Woizikovsky is a great artist because he has faultless technique lit by imaginative inspiration. Lifar as an artist is interesting in the same way that the music of Stravinsky and Georges Auric is interesting: it arouses interest and it invokes admiration. The art of Woizikovsky is eclectic: it has the fire and spirit of Borodin, the romantic beauty of Handel, the capriciousness of Debussy, the tenderness of Tchaikovsky.

And Lifar has gone into revue, and Woizikovsky God-knows-where.

2

The white, flower-like beauty of Danilova is like the beauty of Woizikovsky's faun, almost unendurable. It shines out like a light, unquenchably, even through the grotesqueries of *Petrouchka;* in *Pas d'Acier* she could convey a quality of the gamin, without ceasing to look like a flower—a spray of white blossom blown amongst the steel and concrete and right-angles of modernity. That pale perfect oval of her face, those enormous brooding eyes, that white gravity.... Danilova ethereal in *Swan Lake* and *Les Sylphides*, heart-breakingly wistful as the doll in *La Boutique Fantasque*; Danilova flower-

girdled, flower-wreathed, in *The Gods Go a-Begging*, Danilova like a piece of exquisite porcelain in blue brocade in *Aurora's Wedding*—only music can adequately convey the lyric loveliness that is Alexandra Danilova. I once saw her on the sands at Juan-les-Pins. Amongst all those other women with their pseudo-pearls, their make-up, their bracelets, their coloured costumes, their flaming parasols, little Danilova in her dark costume, with no make-up, no jewellery, only her pale grave beauty . . . was like a madonna lily in a field of strident poppies. For a moment the lovely music of *Les Sylphides* crept up like an invisible wave of pure beauty on that garish shore.

Tchernicheva's beauty is of a different texture. Tchernicheva and her mocking mouth . . . there have been moments when I have thought her as beautiful as Danilova, but there is that undoing touch of mockery and imperiousness. It is a beauty which excites; but Danilova's beauty melts, it is an ecstasy not of laughter but of tears, like the music of Tchaikovsky. Tchernicheva as the nymph in *L'Après Midi d'un Faune* was superb; she has just the right quality of elusiveness and mockery; Danilova would have been too tender and frightened a nymph; Tchernicheva would be resentful and on the defensive, and bewildered, but never afraid. She would have made a delicious siren in *The Prodigal Son*, or film star in *Pastorale*.

I do not know whether she ever played these rôles; I have only seen them interpreted by Doubrovska. One says "played" rather than danced for in these newer ballets there is more pantomime and satire than ballet in the true sense of the word. *Pastorale* was brilliant satire, but not ballet, any more than was the Sitwell-Berners concoction, *Neptune*; that was pure pantomime; I do not know how *Ode*, with its combination of acrobatics, expressionism, and cinematographic effects, might be defined, but it also was not ballet—an interesting exhibition of acrobatics, but acrobatics are not dancing, and to divorce the ballet from dancing is to establish a paradox, and a contradiction in terms. The outstanding memories of *The Prodigal Son* are the satirical, amusing music of Serge Prokofieff, and Doubrovska's superb

manipulation of her long red velvet train. She, like Nikitina, has personality and technique without inspiration. It is in the combination of flawless technique combined with a living flame of inspiration, as you get it in the art of Woizikovsky, Massine, Karsavina, Tchernicheva, Danilova, that you get the great artist.

3

Russian Ballet audiences were surely the worst-behaved audiences in the world. Two-thirds of them seemed quite incapable of realizing that the music is an integral part of the ballet. They went, one felt, because it was the fashionable thing to do. I am talking of the stalls, of course. If those bare-backed, pearl-hung women had behaved in the gallery as they behaved in their stalls there would have been a riot. It was the gallery, not the dress circle and the stalls and the boxes, which represented that section of the British public which really cared about the ballet. English audiences during the ballet season at Monte Carlo were just as bad; they came in late, and chattered during the overtures, and made inane remarks. One felt more than ever that art was esoteric, and that their presence there was an outrage, like the charabanc parties of conducted tourists who wander over lovely old cathedrals. There was nothing like the Russian Ballet for making one an intellectual and æsthetic snob. But there was also nothing like the Russian Ballet for making one feel that one had grown wings and soared amongst the stars. One got drunk with beauty. And last-nights were as exciting as *premières*. I have always remembered the spectacle of a young man in the upper circle on a last-night; he had clapped and cheered until he was exhausted; he was leaning over the rail with his long fair hair falling over his face and crying hoarsely, "Serge! Serge!" Serge Lifar was standing in his *Aurora's Wedding* blue velvet and holding a huge wreath of golden laurels. . . . Finally when he could clap and cheer no longer the young man sank back into his seat huddled there in a state of collapse. But a black-haired Eton-cropped

young hermaphrodite standing next to him continued to wave and clap and yell. There was a great cry for Sokolova that night—she had been the Swan princess. The upper circle was still yelling for her long after the safety curtain had descended. " So-ko-lo-va ! So-ko-lo-va ! " Audiences would call like that for Désormière when he had been conducting, and the upper circle go on calling long after the stalls and dress circle and boxes were out on the pavement looking for their cars. The emotional fervour, the wild hysteria, of those Russian Ballet farewells, the flowers, the wreaths, the exhausting applause, the relentless calling of the gods—to the gods. . . . It was something unique in the theatre ; something that will never come again. For Diaghileff's dead.

The Russian Ballet was the urnings' outing—for both sexes. Those pale slender young men who called each other " my dear " and raved about Serge Lifar, and who during the intervals stood about in pairs or groups of their kind and discussed the music of Georges Auric and Prokofieff, the painting of Pedro Pruna and Marie Laurencin, the choreography of Balanchin and Massine . . . and those Eton-cropped young women with collars and ties and tailor-made suits who also called each other " my dear," addressing each other in low husky voices and standing about in twos or threes of their kind, but talking in a murmuring ecstasy of Tchernicheva and Danilova, of Nikitina in *Les Biches*, quarrelling a little over thin, colourless little Alice Markova and Vera Savina, growing a little jealous of each other's enthusiasms, reassuring each other with soft light caresses of boyish hands . . . charming little urnings, so " interesting," so much alive . . . a good deal of pose to it all, but why not ? Better an amusing, intelligent artificial " viciousness," than a dull and stupid and sincere respectability. The respectable people only insist so much on their honesty because they have nothing else in their favour ; it is like the chastity of the plain woman—making a virtue of necessity.

All the interesting oddities of humanity seemed to find their way to the Russian Ballet ; Edith Sitwell in long green brocade with long tight sleeves ; Ernest Thesiger thin as a lath and with the look of a vicious ascetic. If any man

could make asceticism vicious, and vice ascetic I think he could; he looks as though *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* and *Fleurs du Mal* might repose side by side amongst his bedside books. Osbert and Sacheverell could always be found at the ballet on a Monday night when the new ballets were presented, Sacheverell with that incredibly lovely wife of his, a more etherealized version of Frances Doble.

One could also always find, too, curious "intermediate" types of humanity—reminding one of the photographs in Hirschfeld's Institute of Sexual Psychology . . . the sort of thing which feeds its body at Eustace Miles and its soul at Rationalist Press Association Meetings, particularly on nights when a sexual issue is under discussion . . . the sort of thing which flourishes like queer human fungi in Bloomsbury and the by-ways of Chelsea, and which on those ballet nights remained as definitely "queer" whether it decked itself in white ties and tails, or flannel trousers and hand-woven pullovers of many colours. . . .

At His Majesty's, at the Lyceum, at Covent Garden, ah, how little we dreamed that Covent Garden would be the swan-song of the ballet, that for the last time we had seen *Aurora's Wedding*, which bored us as a ballet yet which was somehow part of the ritual, like the floral tributes and the hysterical applause from the upper circle. . . . So naïve, that *Aurora's Wedding*, and we knew every note and step of it by heart—a little ridiculous, with every artist doing his or her "little piece," but what scope it gave us for letting ourselves go over our favourites . . . and how some of us resented it when Anton Dolin first took over the blue-bird rôle that had always been little strutting Idzikovsky's . . . and how the upper circle nearly fell off its perilous perches with deliriously happy excitement when the "Three Ivans" came whirling on and Woizikovsky's wonderful smile flashed out . . . heavens, how could the stalls sit with such wooden faces? One would find oneself wondering what on earth one was doing there, between "Tantamount House" and Suburbia . . . one ought to be upstairs with the people who cared, who knew what an artist Woizikovsky was, and who applauded until they

were too exhausted to applaud any more. . . . And how some of us would wait impatiently for the banalities of the fairy-tales to be got through and the arrival of that supreme moment when Danilova and Serge Lifar would dance that final *pas de deux*. Ah, but when at last it came we that knew it had been worth waiting for . . . it left one laughing and crying, foolishly, drunk with beauty, 'crowned with love's best crown, and feasted with love's perfect feast. . . .' Lifar beautiful as Lysippus' "Mercury," or a Grecian sleeping faun, Danilova with her white sad-sweet face like a lovely unearthly flower. . . .

But the curtain has gone down now for the last time on that concluding pageantry of velvets and brocades and feathers, on the duchesses, the marquesses, the cavaliers, the maids of honour, the Nubian slaves waving their great fans, on the porcelain princesses and the naïve fairy-tale people ; no more the stately polonaise, the gay mazurka, no more the rapture of that *pas de deux*. . . . And no more the fire-lit background of the camp of *Prince Igor*, or the exciting simplicities of *The Midnight Sun* and Rimsky-Korsakoff's unforgettable music. . . . Woizikovsky a flame of life as the Midnight Sun, and Danilova a white flame of pure beauty as the Snow Maiden. . . .

I believe with Karsavina that the Russian Ballet had reached its limits before Daighileff died, that it was pursuing a course which would have led, inevitably, to the ultimate destruction of the artistic form it set out to achieve. It had passed from the romantic movement of Fokine to the modernities of Massine. Even within the circle of the romantic movement itself it is a long way from *Carnaval* and *Les Sylphides* to *The Fire-bird* and *Petroushka* ; and in the new choreography it is a long way from *The Midnight Sun* and *Children's Tales*, *Les Pas d'Acier* and *Le Sacre du Printemps*. Balanchin with *The Cat*, *The Ball*, *The Prodigal Son*, went still farther, and by the time we get to *Renard*, with choreography by young Lifar himself, we know that the ballet had exploded itself. *Renard* was not merely danced, it was sung and played. The night it was produced for the first time in London we had the whole history of the ballet, we had Fokine's *Carnaval*, Nijinsky's *Faune*, Balanchin's

Gods Go a-Begging—but it should have been *The Cat*, for in *The Gods Go a-Begging*, with Handel music and Bakst scenery, Balanchin reverted to an earlier mood of the ballet and re-embraced the romantic tradition of Fokine.

Polemics were inseparable from the Diaghileff ballet, of course—as they must be with any movement essentially occupied with living art—but whether one feels that the ballet had already gone beyond its true æsthetic limits, or whether one perceives it as merely upon the threshold of a new artistic renaissance, the fact remains that it drew to it much that was vital in European art. There was a tendency for anyone who had anything interesting to say in terms of æsthetics to gather round Diaghileff—in painting, Picasso, Pruna, Braque, Matisse, Derain, Bakst; in music, Debussy, Satie, Auric, Stravinsky, Sauguet, Rieti, Berners, Poulenc, stand out. This country, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, all brought their contribution of whatever was newest and most interesting. Diaghileff was the rallying point of radical contemporary European art; his genius took each individual unit and gave it coherence and a new form, as part of a whole. Now that he is gone, and the ballet disintegrated, there is no longer that artistic unity. He achieved so much that what he might or might not have achieved within the next few years melts away as of comparative unimportance. The tragedy of his genius is that his art has not the static quality of painting or sculpture, or musical or literary composition; with the cessation of his directing and controlling ego, it, too, ceased to be; the choreographers, the painters, the composers, the dancers, are still there, but disintegrated like so many broken and scattered pieces of a Grecian urn. Who is there with genius enough to reassemble those pieces? Answer comes there none.

Within a few months of each other we have lost two people whom we could not afford to lose, because there is in neither instance anyone to take their places—Serge Diaghileff and D. H. Lawrence, the one the high priest of art, the other of life. Which is to say, of beauty and truth.

XXVII

BERTRAND RUSSELL

PORTRAIT OF A FIRST-CLASS MIND

SOMEBODY whose opinion I respected had said, " Bertrand Russell is the most brilliant person in the country, possibly in Europe ; he has a first-class mind." Somebody else had said, " Bertrand Russell knows everything —except the human mind." I remembered that his most important work was the *Principia Mathematica*, and, about to meet him, was afraid. I expected to find pure intellect, dehumanized. I was prepared for a soulless savant and found a Pyrrhonic philosopher. I should say that Bertrand Russell knows everything—including the human mind.

The beauty of Bertrand Russell's beautiful mathematical mind is absolute, like the third movement of Beethoven's *A Minor Quartette*, or the complete circle of a logical proposition as propounded and proved by Spinoza. It would be as easy to write lyrically of it, as of Karsavina's beauty or Ponsella's voice. It is odd, when you come to think of it, how much excitement there is going on in the world all the time over physical beauty and the various manifestations of art, and how little, in Western civilization, æsthetic values are evidently applied to intellect. I suspect that bad films and the popular press have debauched our sense of proportion. . . . Diogenes himself, in spite of various spectacular little eccentricities, might not have aroused so much contemporary interest had he had these implements of mass-production thought to contend with.

There is something curiously symbolic, I think, about the fact that Bertrand Russell works, like Galileo, in a tower—but a tower furnished not with the implements of astronomy, although that is one of the many subjects in which the author of the Principles of Mathematics is interested, but with books. Climbing the stairs to that book-lined work-room, with its windows looking north, south, east, and west, and talking there with its owner,

is to climb out of the welter of confused thinking going on in the world and feel oneself a little nearer the stars of pure reason, an experience as refreshing as it is rare. Rare and refreshing, too, Bertrand Russell's quiet manner after the bombast of some of our so-called "intellectuals." For him all thought is plastic and fluid, and all belief subject to revision in the light of any new evidence either for or against which scientific research may yield. It is typical, and indicative of the beautiful dispassionate quality of his mind, that dealing with a violently controversial subject like life-after-death, he writes, quietly, "There are always different ways of accounting for any set of phenomena, and of these we should prefer the one which is antecedentally least improbable. Those who already think it likely that we survive death will be ready to view this theory as the best explanation of psychical phenomena. Those who, on other grounds, regard this theory as unplausible will seek for other explanations. For my part I consider the evidence so far adduced by psychical research in favour of survival much weaker than the physiological evidence on the other side. But I fully admit that it might at any moment become stronger, and in that case it would be unscientific not to believe it." He reasons; he never postulates. He has the complete freedom from dogma which only the first-class mind ever achieves. It is a mind which rejects that which its rationality cannot accept; he does not categorically deny that soul and body are disparate; he writes, "I believe this to be a metaphysical superstition." For him "everything is a matter of organization, nor of primal substance." It is in that rare marriage of humanism with rationality that the essence of Bertrand Russell's genius lies. Better than any anecdotal illustration I could tell concerning him is this conveyed by what he writes about his rational disbelief in the survival of life after death, "I believe that when I die I shall rot, and nothing of my ego will survive. I am not young, and I love life. But I should scorn to shiver with terror at the thought of annihilation. Happiness is none the less true happiness because it must come to an end, nor do thought and love lose their value because they are not everlasting.... Even if the open

windows of science at first make us shiver after the cosy indoor warmth of traditional humanizing myths, in the end the fresh air brings vigour, and the great spaces have a splendour of their own." I am not sure that in addition to being pure reason that passage isn't also pure poetry.

I feel that I need make no apology for quoting at length from Bertrand Russell's writings, because he himself said to me that I would get more of him from his books than by talking with him. " It is easier to express oneself if one hasn't to be thinking of what the other person is going to answer back," he said.

We talked of a good many things that afternoon in that symbolic tower—of Soviet Russia, the future of marriage, literary censorship, child-education. Russia he regards as the intellectual hope of the world—with the possible exception of China and Japan. Civilization, he said, is moving Eastward, Western civilization being crushed out by " American barbarism." . . .

I asked him—not then having read his book on *Marriage and Morals*—what he thought of the future of marriage in this country, " If any," I added laughingly. But he replied seriously that he was strongly of the opinion that there would be a " tightening up " of marriage and divorce laws not merely in this country but throughout Europe—" because of the increasing power of the Roman Catholic Church." It would win, he said, by sheer force of numbers; the free-thinking intelligentsia does not reproduce itself in sufficient numbers to be of any force. . . . I suggested, despairingly, that Russia at least was escaping from the tyranny of the Church. But to that he retorted that it was merely substituting the religion of Marxism for the religion of Christianity, and pointed out that communism itself involves very heavy moral obligations. " Then is humanity never to know freedom ? " I cried. But he could offer no hope for humanity in the matter of freedom, not, he said, whilst it had need of society; the only freedom lay in solitude—which is not possible to our gregarious nature. The family itself involves all manner of sacrifices of personal liberty, and the State is merely an extension of the family society.

Inevitably we talked of children and education—inevitably because Bertrand Russell runs a school, not as completely " free " as A. S. Neill's, perhaps, but nevertheless on definitely radical lines. He started the school because he wanted a school for his own boy and girl—a school which would give them his ideas of education, which is not the orthodox idea. Before starting it he went to see Neill, for whom he has considerable admiration, although he does not endorse his views in their entirety. Neill regards all education to which the child does not turn of itself as completely futile; Bertrand Russell does not go so far as that; he contends that there are some things which it is good for a child to learn even when it is not particularly interested, and certain points of discipline—such as personal cleanliness and regular bedtimes—to which it should submit whether it likes it or not, for its own good; Neill would claim that the moral pressure involved was a greater harm than the possible consequences of refusing to sacrifice personal liberty for the sake of discipline. Neill aims at complete freedom—as complete, that is, as any individual unit can achieve in society; Bertrand Russell aims at a maximum freedom consistent with his conception of individual well-being; in the matter of education he is a radical without being an extremist; Neill is an out and out extremist. Actually the divergence of opinion resolves itself into a matter of theory rather than practical application; actually Bertrand Russell's children get rather more freedom than theoretically he allows them, and Neill's rather less.

Bertrand Russell told me that he did not cater for the abnormal child as Neill did, but when I asked him, somewhat surprised, what he would do if in spite of that he found a problem-child in his group—a thief, for example—he laughed.

" But I don't regard stealing abnormal in a child," he said. " On the contrary, I should regard a child as abnormal if it didn't steal! " He explained that he wasn't thinking of " the natural vices," he didn't mind those, but of pathological cases. In the matter of sex-education he sees completely eye to eye with Neill, and he has the same distrust of parental influence—

except in the case of that very rare phenomenon the intelligent parent—and the same unsentimental love of children.

"I like the very young," he told me, "they're unspoiled."

Like Neill, too, he has difficulty in procuring the right people to carry out his educational ideas.

"It is really dreadful," he said, "the way education has got into the hands of spinsters!" But he was not thinking of spinsterhood in terms of whether a woman was married or not, but of mental attitude . . . so long as she regarded her sexual inexperience as a matter to be rectified as soon as opportunity presented itself. . . .

The question broadening out into one of sexual ethics, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and its author inevitably came into it, and the question of literary censorship. Bertrand Russell is one of the very few people in this country who are for the complete abolition of any kind of censorship.

"Let people send pornographic postcards through the post, if they want to," he said. "What does it matter? The people who can be affected by them are the kind who secure them, anyhow. People protest, 'But if they should get into the hands of the young,' but an intelligently sexually educated young person could not be affected by pornography of any kind; the aim should be not the suppression of pornography, which keeps interest in it alive, but an intelligent sex education which will make it pointless."

Conversation with Bertrand Russell is an exciting adventure, full of surprises—at least the reaction is one of surprise until the realization is born in upon one that every unexpected twist is exquisitely consistent with everything that has preceded it, and that one is only surprised because one is not accustomed to the infallible precision of the mathematical mind. Living perpetually in a half-light of confused and inaccurate thinking, any sudden emergence into the white light of pure reason is inevitably bewildering until one grows used to it. Seeking about for the most apt simile I find that the mind of Bertrand Russell summons up a number of images—

sunlight deflected from the blade of a sword, a highly intricate piece of machinery which is yet superbly simple in the perfection of its working, an horizon, with an horizon's illimitableness. . . .

He should have lived, as he himself would have preferred, in the eighteenth century—the French eighteenth century, with its leisurely culture and intellectual elegance. The mornings occupied with a little highly polished, brilliantly satirical writing—something in the manner of Voltaire's *Candide*—the afternoons engaged in witty conversation in the distinguished company gathered in the *salon* of a lady of fashion—savants, philosophers, dilettanti, *littérateurs*, an intellectual aristocracy, an aristocratic intelligentsia. . . . Very well does Bertrand Russell with his lean clever face and fine, thick, silver hair and his aristocratic ancestors, fit into that picture. Blue blood is a little out of place in the twentieth century—particularly when you happen to have " subversive " views like Bertrand Russell. . . . He might, of course, when his children are beyond school age, and there is therefore no longer any need to run a school—a hopelessly uncommercial proposition as he runs it—retire to his tower and live the life of a sage, devoting himself entirely to mathematical philosophy and research, contemplating the stars rather than humanity, the metaphysical rather than the material; at present he is more interested in matter than in mind, and for him metaphysics could never go beyond the bounds of pure reason into unscientific abstractions—a tendency which he sees in Aldous Huxley in the light of the last chapter of *Point Counter-point*, in which a hedonist is won over to " absolute proof of the existence of God " by a gramophone record of the *A Minor Quartette* ; a tendency which occasionally breaks out in H. G. Wells in bouts of Undying Fire and God-the-Invisible-King-ing. The test of a first-class mind is that it stays intellectually pure to the end.

We talked of first-class intelligences in their application to literature. He deplored contemporary lack of culture, how few people even amongst the intellectuals read anything outside of contemporary literature and the works of their own country. He contends that there are no

essentially great writers to-day. I suggested that there was a really great novel waiting to be written by Bertrand Russell. He laughed and told me a plot he had long had in mind, a novel of ideas of the imaginative calibre of the early Wells, but to be written in the manner of *Candide* . . . it is not at all likely that he will ever write it, since writing his books, running his school, and lecturing in America, are about as much work as even a methodically hard worker such as he can get through, but heavens, what a masterpiece it would be if he did ! Such wit and brilliance and satire, and no mere Shavian pyrotechnic display either, but alight and alive with fundamental truth. In order to write the really great novel that no one was writing to-day, he said, one must be able to get outside of one's experiences, and see them in their application to humanity in general, not merely in relation to oneself. I sighed. A combination of Aldous Huxley's cold, inquiring dispassionateness, and D. H. Lawrence's ardent overwhelming flame, was so clearly called for. . . . A counsel of perfection. . . . For his part, said Bertrand Russell, he preferred to read detective stories, because he did not expect them to be other than entertaining of their kind, whereas he could never help wanting a book which set out with serious intentions to be first-rate . . . and to-day there weren't any.

I love Bertrand Russell's sense of humour. He has a dry, caustic wit. He told me of a dream he had had—he insists that he really did dream it—in which God called upon him. He knew, he said, as soon as he opened the door that it was God. God told him that he had always admired his work and would like to do something for him ; He reminded him that He was Omnipotent and therefore could grant any wish. Bertrand Russell thought a moment and then said that he would like to have Noah's Ark. " I thought I could show it and charge for admission, and make some money," he said. But God shook His head, and said He was sorry, but He had sold the Ark to America. . . . I don't think anyone but Bertrand Russell could have had that dream.

The greatest compliment ever paid me came from Bertrand Russell. He said, " Talking to you is more

exciting than making love to almost anyone else." For me the whole point of that tribute is that it came from Bertrand Russell, and it is no idle returning of the compliment to say that listening to Bertrand Russell talk is infinitely more exciting than being made love to by almost anyone else.

I wanted to write of him in this book for two very strong reasons, the first that for years I had regarded him as the greatest mind in the country, and that without any qualification whatever, and the other that the person to whom this book is dedicated had for him the sort of reverence that some people have for God. I had always hoped that I might one day meet the author of the *Principia Mathematica*, but that there should ever be friendship between us seemed as unlikely as being invited to a cocktail party given by the Pope. I was told that it was useless asking him to come and see me, because he didn't like people and was averse to going out. I was led to suppose that he was pure intellect and nothing else. All kinds of tiresome people claimed acquaintance with him and referred to him familiarly as " Bertie," for which I could have murdered them. Some of them said that he was " mad," and recalled what they considered his outrageous policy during the war, and his work for conscientious objectors—but those were the people who thought that all conscientious objectors ought to be shot, and that all Germans were monsters who ought to be exterminated from the face of the earth. Sidney Dark once referred to him as " an anæmic worm," which is probably the only funny thing Mr. Dark has ever said. It is odd, too, how invariably when people disagree very strongly with a man's beliefs they can always think up something about his morals, stirring up a mess of emotional reactions and calling it thought. . . . It does not seem to occur to the people who quarrel so bitterly with Bertrand Russell's attitude in the war that he had tremendous moral courage, and that his sanity stood like a rock in a sea of hysteria and emotionalism. He went to prison for his sanity and courage, of course ; straight-thinking is the one thing which is simply not permitted in this country. In prison he got into trouble for laughing. His laughter comes unexpectedly like his

flashes of wit. It takes a first-class mind to find anything to laugh about in prison . . . but Bertrand Russell found a good deal to laugh over ; he had plenty of time in which to think about the madness going on in the world outside, you see. . . . He came out with his reputation considerably damaged so far as the academics were concerned—they considered that he should have kept out of the imbroglio, though it would have been more reasonable for them to have endorsed his conduct as the practical application of an academic point—but with his courage and his sanity as flame-like as ever.

The reputation Bertrand Russell has built up for himself without ever at any point capitulating to popularity is quite simply terrific ; only genius can possibly achieve that sort of thing. It is more than one of the fashionable Anglo-American reputations ; more than a European reputation, itself a big thing ; it is literally a world-wide reputation. He has an immense following in China and India, and no amount of caustic comment upon American barbarism can affect his reputation in the United States. If he were a little less intelligent he might become a cult—like Rabindranath Tagore. There is apparently no false modesty about Tagore, for Bertrand Russell told me of his visits to him when he—Russell—is staying in Cornwall, and Tagore comes with a retinue of disciples and sits with them grouped about him, and there is a discourse between two sages. I like the picture of Tagore with his flowing beard and his Oriental mysticism, his exotic pseudo-philosophic poems, with their pomegranate and lotus-bud imagery which goes down so well with bored Knightsbridge matrons—" such beautiful thoughts "—seeing himself as a fellow-sage with Bertrand Russell. . . . Bertrand Russell with his amused eyes, the sudden unexpected laugh that leaps out like his wit, like a faun from a thicket ; Bertrand Russell, with his ascetic face, his precise speech, and his rational mind, " like water brimming in a crystal bowl ". . . . And Tagore with his flowing robes, his reverent disciples, his crescent-moon idealism. . . . It is an amusing picture, but I prefer to think of the author of *The A B C of Relativity*, and *The Analysis of Matter*, alone in his tower reading detective stories as the only unpretentious form

of fiction he can find, as a rest from mathematical philosophy, marriage and morals, and running a school . . . or playing with his own children on the rocks of the Cornish country to which he belongs . . . or Bertrand Russell in a French eighteenth-century *salon*, being witty with Voltaire, philosophical with the Marquise du Chatelet Lamont, radical with Jean Jacques Rousseau . . . heavens what fun they would all have had together, Voltaire with his mockery and wit, the Marquise with her remarkable, brilliant mind, Rousseau with his revolutionary theories regarding education and the State . . . and even without Einstein and relativity, atoms, and the quantum theory, what fun D'Alembert and Diderot and Bertrand Russell might have had together collaborating on the *Encyclopédie*, and in any spare time left from that he might have written a satire with Montesquieu and given him a few more epigrams, or a comedy of manners with Marivaux, and then in the afternoon to the *salon* of some distinguished and lovely lady, where the wit and wisdom flashed and glittered like the chandeliers, or the jewels in the rings of a marquise. . . . Either that or the ascetic solitude and austerity of the whitewashed tower, and it must be the tower, since the twentieth century offers no alternative but unspeakable vulgarity and incredible stupidity.

I approached the writing of this essay on Bertrand Russell with the utmost diffidence, and embarked upon it in a spirit of utmost humility; to write it as I could wish I should need a command of words burning with a pure gem-like flame like the prose of Walter Pater, and the intellectual range of J. B. S. Haldane or Aldous Huxley, and no one is more sensible than I am myself of my inadequacy in both respects. Yet in spite of this very lively sense of inadequacy, it would be the sheerest insincerity on my part to pretend that I do not feel that there is also justification for the attempt to set down, however inadequately, my intellectual appreciation of Bertrand Russell as a first-class mind, and my personal appreciation of him as an admirable and lovable personality. The justification lies in the fact that for me the mind of Bertrand Russell is the anthropomorphized apex of supreme intelligence.

A disgust at the confusion and unsatisfactoriness of our present civilization has run like a *motif* throughout this book ; and I am well aware that my enthusiasms and my intolerances of the people I have met derive from this preoccupation, and it is in the light of this realization that I have left the writing of my appreciation of Bertrand Russell till the end of the book ; I began by dedicating the book to a first-class mind, and I cannot more fittingly conclude it than by a study of one The mind of Bertrand Russell reaches, in my estimation, " the utmost bounds of human thought," the culmination of human intelligence. I am not here concerned with Bertrand Russell as a person ; he may have all the moral virtues, or none of them ; in the consideration of him as a first-class mind these things are quite immaterial—as much beside the point as listening to Kreisler playing the *Meditation* from *Thais* and inquiring as to whether he was a dutiful son and a good husband. But whereas a man may be a first-class artist and yet be a failure as a human being—may fail, that is, to secure a fundamental satisfaction for himself in life—there is no such disparateness between a man and his mind ; his mind is quintessentially himself, inseparably part of his natural chemistry, like his glandular secretions, may indeed be part of them, and the thing we ambiguously refer to as " spirit " may, in the light of anthropological research be ultimately revealed as a purely physiological process.

A priori, therefore, the possession of a first-class mind is inseparable from intelligent living, and intelligent living is inseparable from the procuring of that satisfaction in life which is the whole art of living ; again a priori, therefore, the person with a first-class intelligence must be a first-class individual. Pettiness, meanness, cruelty, are stupid ; the first-class mind is therefore incapable of them, but in this connection intellectual brilliance should not be confused with the first-class mind ; some of the most notorious tyrants in history have been intellectuals ; but intellectual brilliance is no guarantee against blind-spots of stupidity. Nor does stupidity necessarily run to pettiness, meanness, or cruelty ; very often it runs to sainthood. But neither

the saint nor the tyrant can be said to be a first-class human being, or to have laid hold upon the art of living; the ethic of life, each has formulated remains in the nature of an asymptote. Which is what life in the civilized state we know is for the majority of people, a line running nearer and nearer to a given curve without ever reaching it; the curve may be material success, money, emotional fulfilment, or a combination of all these things, but not until the first-class intelligence is attained do the lines meet. When you have considered a man's intelligence, therefore, you have considered the most important, because the greater, part of him; his quality as a human being will be commensurate with the quality of his mind. By his quality as a human being I do not mean his share of the traditional moral virtues; a man may have all the moral virtues of a saint and still be a failure as a human being; one would have to be a failure as a human being before one would find a need to sublimate one's dissatisfaction with life in the emptinesses of sainthood.

In writing of Bertrand Russell, therefore, as a first-class mind I also present him as a first-class human being—which is not as a saint, because, in the light of reason and pure logic, a saint is a very tenth-rate human being, and St. Francis as lamentable a failure as the Emperor Nero. Elsewhere in this book I have quoted A. S. Neill as saying "Be happy and you will be good," but that counsel presupposes a capacity for spontaneous happiness which civilization doesn't encourage in human nature. Neill has to give his children freedom in order that spontaneous happiness may be released in them. The highly complicated machine we have made of civilization does its best to dam spontaneous happiness at the fount by inculcating fear into humanity, through the channels of orthodox education and religion It takes a first-class mind to override the tyranny of fear in human life; when that is overcome you get a free people, free to think things out for themselves, free to lay hold on life and live rationally, "ready to be anything in the ecstasy of being ever." Aldous Huxley in *Point Counter-point* causes Spandrell to show "the way to Paradise" through the realization of absolute truth,

absolute beauty. Havelock Ellis in *Affirmations* writes: "The body includes the soul, and the Kingdom of Heaven includes the body. The one thing needful is to seek wisely the fullest organic satisfaction. . . . It is quality rather than quantity of life which finally counts; that is the terrible fact which it has taken so long for our race to learn. . . . It seems not unnecessary to point out that civilization was immortal long before the first Englishman was born. The races that have given the world the chief examples of fine living have never, save sometimes in their decay, sought quantity rather than quality of life." Spandrell in Huxley's book aimed at escaping life, taking refuge in abstractions; Havelock Ellis would have us cling closely to the earth, learning to grip it closely and nakedly—which is also the gospel according to D. H. Lawrence—but Havelock Ellis's philosophy is more complicated, for he bids us remember that the earth is not all of nature, and that "there are instincts within us that lead elsewhere, and it is part of the art of living to use naturally all those instincts. In so doing the spiritual burdens which the ages have laid upon us glide away into thin air." The principle and the theory are sound enough, but Havelock Ellis overlooks the extent to which civilization can thwart the natural impulses to happiness. Here is the illumination of a first-class mind upon the same subject, "Life should not be too closely regulated or too methodical; our impulses, when not positively destructive or injurious to others, ought if possible to have free play; there should be room for adventure. Human nature we should respect, because our impulses and desires are the stuff out of which our happiness is to be made. It is no use to give men something abstractedly considered "good"; we must give something desired or needed if we are to add to their happiness. Science may learn in time to mould our desires so that they shall not conflict with those of other people to the same extent as they do now; then we shall be able to satisfy a larger proportion of our desires than at present. . . . Nature, even human nature, will cease more and more to be an absolute datum; more and more it will become what scientific manipulation has made it. Science can, if it chooses, enable

our grandchildren to live the good life, by giving them knowledge, self-control, and characters productive of harmony rather than strife. At present it is teaching our children to kill each other, because many men of science are willing to sacrifice the future of mankind to their own momentary prosperity. But this phase will pass when men have acquired the same domination over their own passions that they already have over the physical forces of the external world. Then at last we shall have won our freedom."

I make no apology for quoting Bertrand Russell at length, because that too is my own innate conviction, the only hope I see for poor confused humanity stumbling through the darkness it has made for itself; if there is any way to Paradise, or salvation, or happiness, or whatever one chooses to call it, it is that white light of scientific outlook irradiating thought and guiding human conduct, stabbing like a sword through the welter of fear and superstition and muddled thinking which makes life, as the majority of people who compose Western civilization live in, the futile asymptote it is.

Bertrand Russell I see as a colossal figure towering above the stupidity and chaos we have made out of our civilization, supremely sane, splendidly courageous. I think of him in prison during the war laughing aloud at his thoughts on the madness going on in the world outside. . . . I think of him sitting for two years with a blank sheet of paper before him whilst the *Principia Mathematica* germinated in his brain, day after day sitting at his desk, getting nothing down on paper, yet this mighty work unfolding, disentangling, emerging into order from chaos, inchoate, yet gradually taking form. It took him and Professor Whitehead ten years to write this book, and the completed manuscript was so vast that it had to be taken to the publishers in a hansom cab, and the authors lost money on it.

Bertrand Russell worked on it, he told me, because he wanted to establish something objectively true, pure truth, and he thought that at the time he had done so, but now he is not so sure . . . and I think of him in his tower looking out across the English countryside to the infinite horizon, a small, quiet figure, completely lacking

in bombast or self-assertiveness, patiently considering the problems of humanity in the light of science, working it all out as a mathematical proposition, and truth flashing out of the exquisite precision of his mind like sunlight glancing off a sword-blade, absolute truth, absolute beauty. . . .

"Others abide our question; thou art free . . . out-topping knowledge."

With this humbly offered and so inadequate tribute to one whom I am not alone in regarding as the greatest living intellect of our age, I close my gallery of portraits of some of the people who have interested me. Many of them I regard it as a privilege to know. I have always been fortunate in my friends. For all the love and laughter and wisdom they have given me I am appreciatively grateful.

But I have gained soul's enrichment, too, from many I have not written about in this book. To them, also, I pay grateful tribute. They, too, are woven into the many-coloured fabric of my strange, lovely, crowded life.

I have lived richly and fully because out of abundant vitality, physical, mental, emotional, I have never been afraid to give myself to life. Never been afraid of the mad adventure, the gay indiscretion, of the warm unreasoning impulse, nor of the perilous delight and the dark pain of loving.

I believe in life, formless, chaotic, turbulent, and see no reason and know no need to seek meaning or purpose in it, rhythm or design. Merely to Be, and that to the limit of consciousness—that has always seemed to me sufficient.

Greater than all art, more important than all the talking of art and of life, this welter of sterile intellectuality which is the dry-rot of civilization, is the art of life. We needs must realize the art of living, savouring it bitter-sweet, tartly tantalizing, upon the tongue-tip of consciousness, before we can compass the living art.

Art, like love, and beauty, and truth, should not, does not need to be, talked about. It is implicit in life, as truth is implicit in beauty: it should not be spelled in majuscules, nor kept for spiritual Sabbaths.

If Man has any soul to save alive it is this—his consciousness of Life, and all that that connotes of earthly vitality, deep-springing delight and equally deep-springing pain.

Civilization, with its deadly forces of education and the artificialities of moral codes, does its best to stifle this consciousness at its birth; but some of us escape and survive, and discovering the lovely meaninglessness of life learn what it means to live.

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