OC
24533

DEZSÖ DE A. BALOGH
509 FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK 17, N. Y.

*Don't keep the Vanman Waiting*

*By Adam de Hegedus*

HUNGARIAN BACKGROUND
REHEARSAL UNDER THE MOON
THE STATE OF THE WORLD

# DON'T KEEP THE VANMAN WAITING

*A chapter of autobiography*

BY

ADAM DE HEGEDUS

NEW YORK TORONTO
STAPLES PRESS LIMITED
CAVENDISH PLACE, LONDON, W1

*This book is produced in complete conformity with the authorised economy standards*

FIRST PUBLISHED 1944
SECOND IMPRESSION 1946
THIRD IMPRESSION 1946
FOURTH IMPRESSION 1946

SET IN 10PT. BASKERVILLE ON 11PT. BODY

OC 24533

Országos Széchényi Könyvtár
Leltári szám:
B8114/60.

R
1965



*Made and printed in England by*
STAPLES PRESS LIMITED
*at their St. Albans, Herts, factory*

# PART THE FIRST

## *THINGS PAST*

# *THINGS PAST*

## ANCIENT HISTORY

THE SUMMER of nineteen-thirty-nine was a thoroughly rotten one. From May till September it rained hard: very hard in the afternoons and particularly hard during the week-ends. I do not know whether this had added to the already frayed temper of the nation; it had considerably added to mine. The weather was the last straw. I was getting fed up with my work, with political events and with the world in general. I had flown back from Budapest in the end of May after an agitated fortnight during which I tried my best to convince my editor, my editor-in-chief and the chairman that it would do the papers, and myself, a lot of good if I could spend the autumn in America. Our New York correspondent had left journalism for a chicken farm and the gap ought to have been filled for a time. In the end the three gentlemen, whom I saw separately, got together and agreed to pay for my passage. Since then I had been counting the days till the beginning of September with growing impatience.

Then I became very fed up with the house I was living in. My flat was on the top floor and my landlord had not yet managed to provide the house with anyone to open the front door when the bell was rung. I was much against taking a flat in South Kensington and it was only the delightful personality of Philibert, my landlord, and the romantic personality of Gustave, his friend, that made me forget my well-documented and closely-reasoned antipathy towards that royal borough. Philibert was a Hungarian gentleman of the old school. His manners were period pieces even in the nineteen-thirties; his charm and gentle goodness were timeless. Philibert was representing an association in England and every now and again he would lecture in Campden Hill or Tunbridge Wells on the vital necessity of the revision of the Peace Treaty of Tianon. I had no direct evidence of Philibert's doings on the lecture platform, but I had heard a good deal about them, and what I had heard was not always flattering to him. I could visualise the scene. Philibert was an extremely learned man with that encyclopædic knowledge of a past generation whose members are now fast approaching their seventies. There was little he did not know about Political History, Sociology, Geography, Science and the Arts. He spoke five languages fluently, but I had an impression that his English pronunciation was a trifle arbitrary,

which is the clear indication of a logical mind. An unkind Hungarian said Philibert was perfectly all right as long as he did not step on the platform. Because then something mysteriously went wrong. No matter what he lectured about, the thing at once became uninteresting as if by some evil magic, the same way as a good lecturer would invest the most commonplace statement with supreme interest. This was unkind and largely untrue. Lecturing is, anyway, about the most boring form of spreading information, and Philibert was a scholar who assumed that his public shared his own wide interests.

In between his lectures and preparations for various 'political campaigns' Philibert had made elaborate blueprints for proposed alterations in the house. The actual alterations needed were two partition walls and a door or two, but the trouble Philibert took in drawing the plans and explaining the project to a builder's mate from Fulham Cross was worthy of transforming a warehouse into a national monument. The job was, however, finished and Philibert brought over his wife, a gentle and quiet-spoken lady who looked incredibly young for her age. Then he filled the house with furniture and ornaments. It was then that I realised how absolutely perfect his sense of history and atmosphere was. The house was in South Kensington and Philibert instinctively made it look like the home of a retired Anglo-Indian colonel. There was Edwardian mahogany, and opaque lighting, Oriental ornaments and Imperial knick-knacks, stuffed birds under glass and potpourri in china bowls. Even the smell in the house was retired Anglo-Indian.

There was, however, no one to open the front door. I told him repeatedly that I was getting very bitter about it. He then sent me letters in his copperplate handwriting assuring me that in the end everything would be all right including the servant question, 'Yours always affectionately, Philibert'. In the meantime Gustave arrived from Geneva. He was another Hungarian, actually a Rumanian subject, whom the Rumanians had deprived of his nationality because of his political activities. Gustave was now running an organisation on his own money in Geneva to ventilate the grievances of the national minorities of Europe. He published two periodicals: one in French in Geneva, the other in English in London. The reason why I moved into the house was that Philibert and Gustave asked me to edit the English periodical. In return I was allowed a reduction of the rent. Since I was much interested in the minority question I took to my work with zeal, then I discovered that all that Gustave wanted was to translate articles by Bulgarian komitadshis, Albanian refugees, disappointed Slovaks, persecuted Anatolians, ill-treated Basques, indignant Assyrians and his own articles on the fate of Hungarians,

into English. Gustave was a lively little man of five foot two with an impressive black beard and a splendid sense of humour. He was an excellent pilot and from time to time flew over from Geneva to see how the paper was getting on. Then he went round London, met minority leaders, gave a few dinner parties to which he never asked me, then went out to purchase various ornamental weapons from the junk shops in Chelsea. He bought Albanian hanjars and a Montenegrin dagger or two and put them up the walls between the faded water-colours bought by Philibert, depicting 'Omdurman Days', by R. Caton Woodville. After that he urged me not to run after 'bits of skirts' but finish off the review in time, then he flew back to Switzerland.

I finished off Gustave's review then I went on being impatient. During the ten years I had spent as the London correspondent of my newspaper I was always anxious to spare a little time for serious writing. *The London Mercury* had just brought out a story of mine and gone promptly into liquidation. I had the manuscript of a half-finished novel in a drawer and some notes for another book. I had quite a lot of time but there was now no question of literary activities. I was going to America in less than three months' time, unless . . . yes, unless. The political situation seemed very serious in Europe. England was introducing conscription and I felt the necessity to emphasise in my articles the fact that England meant business. This was not sanctions against Italy and certainly not non-intervention in Spain. It was in this frame of mind that I received an invitation to a dance early in June. For the past two or three years I had refused invitations to dances and parties in general and those given by the 'great world' in particular. It had become my conviction that for a writer to seek the company of the fashionable and the smart is the sign of the second-rate, very largely because in the twentieth century the upper classes no longer represent a monopoly of culture. If an eighteenth century writer like Voltaire or Goethe, Pope or Johnson were taken up, he had usually profited by it, because Potsdam or the country mansions of Lord Suffolk or Lord Chesterfield had acted as incubators of talent. In the twentieth century the case was altered. The London drawing-room and the country house party had degenerated into a mutual admiration tea-party for unsuccessful writers and the late Lady Hawthornden's efforts in Paris to take over the mantle of Madame Recamier had only achieved for her the title of *Nôtre Dame des Pédérastes*.

In my young manhood in the early nineteen-thirties I liked to mix with the select, the prominent, the smart, the rich. I liked dining at Admiralty House, I liked going to receptions at Downing Street,

to parties given by the Londonderrys, the Linlithgows, the Duke of Westminster and I was looking forward to spending week-ends at Broadlands, Melchet or Sandon. I liked these excursions because I was romantic when I was young and because I always knew that mere wealth and elegance never make people dull, as mere poverty often does. And I felt I needed mixing with the great world, because I was very unsure of myself as a writer and as a man and because I was at times lonely and because I felt that comparative poverty did not brace me as I hoped it might.

Besides, in my first years in England, my contacts with the middle classes were not happy. They were quite cordial, I suppose, but I felt I had little in common with them and they were both reserved and patronising. With the upper classes, on the other hand, I had found points of more common interest. They were not reserved and strangely enough, not the least patronising. I don't know whether they really meant it, but it seemed they had accepted me on my own level.

I found more or less the same attitude on the part of the working classes. They were an attractive discovery for me, with those magnificent violent contrasts that went into the pattern of their lives. It may not be, therefore, surprising that in my first years in England I knew little more of the middle classes than a well-read geographer would know about Portuguese East Africa after having spent six weeks there and having read all the available reference books on the subject.

With the years before the war there came a change. I was approaching thirty, my material standards improved, and I began to feel that mixing with the Great World was a dangerous drug that elated me for a while, then dropped me quite as low, and a dangerous drug which, giving me a set of false values, was threatening to blunt the edges of discontent which is part of the writer's capital. Besides I had found that the doings of the smart, the rich, the select, were no longer acceptable material for intelligent fiction. After Proust and Vita Sackville-West and Aldous Huxley, I felt there was very little to say about them.

But now I was in the 'smart mood'. I was restless, impatient, worried. I felt I needed the drug, besides—like many other people—I felt that the party would be the last of its kind: possibly the last bit of attractive flare-up of a world which was collapsing before our eyes. This was a prospect that appealed to my archæological sense and to my reporter instincts.

It was called a 'dance' and it was given by the father of a friend of mine for her youngest daughter. In actual fact it was a ball where

there were almost as many grown-ups as débutantes. The host was a South African millionaire, who had given large scale political dinners to ambassadors, proconsuls and cabinet ministers in a large and lovely house in Bryanston Square. Now he was sitting in a wheelchair because both of his legs were amputated, his beautiful pink and silver head in the foreground of black leather, like a Lawrence portrait, as he received the dinner guests in the saloon.

'Nice of you to come,' he said to me and shook my hands so vehemently that the diamond-studded stars threatened to come off his breast. 'Hope you will enjoy yourself: some very pretty girls . . .' Suddenly he transferred my hand into his left hand and thrust out his right to shake hands with Anthony Eden.

After dinner I looked round in the large ballroom. There were several hundred people. Some I knew by sight, some by photographs. Some very lovely women. There were so many people wearing decorations that one felt a little naked. I was introduced to a woman of whom I had heard a good deal. She had a fine masculine intelligence that shone through her features. We danced, then we sat out a dance on the stairs, and she told me a story about her father: she gave a splendid imitation of his fixed gaze, his bearing, his voice ('that exotic amalgam of Eton and Derbyshire'). The story was good and it was not included in the two biographies of her father by Lord Zetland and Harold Nicolson.

Then we went into supper. The hostess asked us to join her table and there were about nine of us. My partner became engaged in a conversation with a man on her left. I knew him, he was a born raconteur with a repertory of stories that were polished, and perfect and assured the audience of a lifetime of service. ' "*Oh, Monsieur*", said the woman', he said, ' "*mon mari est très très occupé dans une petite chambre avec beaucoup de papier*". ' My neighbour laughed, a trifle too loudly: 'A grand story, Drino . . . one of your best . . . ' She laughed again. He went on to tell another : 'You don't remember my uncle, King Edward the Seventh . . .' he said. There came another highly polished story. I was looking at the Scottish handsomeness of the woman opposite me. A sweet face it was, Raeburn would have liked it, then my glance strayed to the family badge resting on its silk bow on her shoulder. Then I saw her husband and her brother-in-law sitting at each side of the hostess. I noticed that their ribands of the Garter slightly varied in colour. The elder brother's was almost *bleu marin*. ('Nonsense', said Queen Victoria to an apologetic court painter, 'sunlight does not fade the riband of the Garter. The dye is excellent.') He turned his head for a moment: his profile resembled his brother's on the postage stamps.

My partner turned back to me. She recalled our conversation on the stairs and said: 'Do you already feel like Talleyrand?'

'Not the least. When I am an old man I certainly shall not say to young people that they knew nothing of the "Sweetness of Life" simply because they had not lived through the nineteen-thirties. There is no parallel between our world and the *ancien régime* before the French Revolution. And as for the real *Douceur de la Vie*, that would belong to the new generation after us . . .'

'I wish you were right.'

And, it seems to me I shall be right . . . I thought as I walked home from the party. It was a very lovely party. I was glad I was invited, and I was glad that I was allowed to see the private luxury of the 'thirties in its full brilliance. But I do not for a moment regret the passing of the age of which this party was very probably the last beautiful flare-up. And I hoped I still should be young enough—after the hell which would follow—to enjoy and share the fuller liberty and security of the subsequent period.

The weather had suddenly improved in August. The sky over London looked as if the clouds had been thoroughly mangled out and drained of their last drop of rain. Another month, I thought, then I could leave Europe with all its hate, envy, insecurity, nervousness behind me. Another month and I should be seeing another world. Yes, I must write a little article, among others, called 'Autumn Over Manhattan' or should it be 'Fall in Manhattan'? The thing, however, did not seem certain at all. I was now sending scores of articles to Budapest about the first two months of the British conscripts. I was describing long visits to Hounslow Barracks: of how the first batches were shaping. I wrote two articles on the Fleet and several on the Air Force. I hoped I made it convincing that Britain meant business and that there could not be another Munich. But the uncertainty now seemed deeper than ever before. After Munich everybody said no war, after Hitler's entry into Prague everybody said war; then a month later no war, then in May war again, then in June no war, then in July war again and in August war. And this time more people said so than ever. Like most people I became so very confused that I no longer believed in war or in peace. I may sound very frivolous but when the news of the Russo-German pact had come, towards the end of August, I, along with my colleagues, gave almost a sigh of relief. That was the end of the suspense; there could be no more uncertainty, insecurity, fear: war was now a dead certainty. And we knew how the war would start: Britain would be forced to declare war on Germany. This did not seem absolutely certain before the Pact.

After this I became calmer and very busy. I spent the morning and the early afternoon gathering information, the middle of the afternoon booking my call to Budapest and waiting for hours till towards the evening I finally heard the voice of one of our shorthand writers from the other end. I would dictate him my story, then I would go out and have my dinner. I would go to a good restaurant and after it to a cinema. There was no need to save money. My American trip was off. On September the first, the telephone line to the Continent was cut off. Well, that was the end, I thought. I sent a wire to my parents not to worry, because I should somehow find a job. It was clear that I should no longer be able to telephone to Budapest and my paper on the other hand would not be able to pay a fiver every day for cables. What I did not tell my parents, however, was that on the same day I called on a friend of mine. He was an Army officer and I discussed with him the possibilities of my going into the Army. He said I came at the worst possible time. He quite frankly did not believe that the war was an absolute certainty, though it looked very, very serious, of course. And the damn thing was, he said, that in his opinion the Army was not absolutely ready. The Army was well-trained and the equipment was first-rate, but the Army was small.

'Precisely,' I said, 'One more reason for them to take me . . .'

'Well, not quite,' he said, 'because you had no previous military experience or training and it seems there is no crying need for men in the Army, either.' He said he heard the same about the Air Force too. The Navy was all right, the Navy was always all right and Germany hasn't got a Navy to speak of. Then he said he would make inquiries and would let me know.

Two days later the war broke out.

## MYSTERY OF INFORMATION

THE FOLLOWING fortnight I spent exclusively reading detective stories. I had not read a detective novel since I was about fourteen, though I had once been reminded by Austen Chamberlain that strange as it may seem, thrillers were the best sedative when your mind was troubled. He then showed me a whole library of them in his underground flat in Morpeth Mansions. Now, in the beautiful autumn of 1939, I seemed to make up for what I had neglected in criminology.

In fourteen days I read nine volumes by Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers and John Dickson Carr. In between *The Waxworks Murder* and *Lord Edgware Dies*, I wrote an article on the immediate reactions of London to the outbreak of the war, sent it to Budapest and left it to its fate. It actually arrived ten days later and was printed. After that I made half a dozen applications to various Government departments asking whether I could be of any use to them. I apparently couldn't, but they all 'appreciated my application with gratitude'.

This I found very touching but not exactly helpful, so I called on my Army friend again. His wife told me he had been sent to France, on active service. I then rang up a friend of mine in the Air Ministry and asked him to get me into the R.A.F. He said he would do his best. Then late in September I received a wire from my paper asking me to go on sending reports by mail, regardless of the time it would take them to reach Budapest. And my salary arrived. Since I was no longer tied to the telephone I moved my headquarters, along with all my colleagues. We were given desks in the Beveridge Hall of the Ministry of Information.

The Beveridge Hall looked exactly like an indoor swimming pool. It was large and square, had a glass roof and swing doors and landings on the end of which the hundred telephone booths were reminiscent of the cabins in which you change. The former dais with the steps leading up to it could have served as a diving-board. And J. H. Brebner, the Press Liaison Officer, who would appear from time to time over the stairs with a fresh 'release' and a portable microphone in his hands, gave the impression of a delightful member of the jury about to announce the results of the last race.

My desk was by the main entrance, sandwiched between a Hungarian and a Greek. My two neighbours—two charming elders —looked as if they wore their own jackets but somebody else's trousers. Opposite me sat Andy Rothstein of the Tass and Arvo Arvi, a Finn. The two were not on speaking terms after the beginning of the Russo-Finn war. I knew most of the people, from international conferences and from the corridors of the Foreign Office. There was Pertinax and Jean Oberlé, Geneviève, Tabouis and Sargint and Knickerbocker, and Frederick Kuh, W. N. Ewer and Vernon Bartlett: our betters in the journalistic world who put in brief appearances and people of my own generation who 'lived' in the Beveridge Hall. In the next block there were three elderly English reporters who would play pontoon all the morning waiting for releases, then came a typewriter: a bigger and better and larger typewriter, it seemed, than any other in existence, a typewriter, in fact, on which its owner might expect to write the annals of the history of the war; and in the shadow of the giant

machine, almost lost, a lightweight American. Then there came my old friend Bob Post, of the *New York Times*. Bob was a man who wore well tailored garments, whose buttons remained open at the most unexpected places. (Buttons, I find, give you a fairly good indication to their owner's character. The late Philippe Berthelot, who had been the permanent Under Secretary of the *Quai d'Orsay*, used to affect waistcoats so high that one could hardly see his tie and collar. His buttons were firmly fastened. All of them. Berthelot was a silent, frigid, reserved man. Bob Post was friendly, communicative, warm-hearted.)

Under the diving-board there was a desk which belonged to Ernest Hunter of the *Herald*, but Hunter needed no desk because he seemed to be on the run all the time. He was the most journalistic-looking journalist I ever met. His very name . . . Hunter . . . . Then came two desks occupied by a giant and a dwarf. The giant was six foot four, looked very typically Scandinavian: he spoke slowly and behaved with Northern placidity. He was Leo Rea of the Torino *Stampa*. The dwarf was little Orlando of *Radio Roma*, with a permanent smile and a permanent pipe. He played his typewriter with as much fervour as Horowitz rendering Tchaikowsky's Concerto in B Flat Minor.

In the centre of the room, next to a Swedish girl who was working for twenty-five papers and used more carbon-paper than anybody I had ever seen, there was Raman of the *Hindustan Times*. He looked like the Aga Khan. Then there came a 'Mystery Man'. He was very short and very bald and never said a word to anybody but smiled a kind of indulgent and forgiving smile all the time. His neighbour was a gentleman from the Balkans. The neighbour looked like a stage diplomat—striped trousers and dove-grey waistcoat and *Légion d'Honneur* in his buttonhole. He preferred to speak French and after he read a Reuter report he at once ran out to wash his hands. Then a table in aristocratic isolation, occupied by *The Times*. He was elderly and courteous and when he gave an opinion it always sounded like the obituary notice of someone who had died in a noble cause. Then two more tables: a bearded Swiss in camel hair waistcoat, who would gaze for a long time very cunningly at an empty teacup, then when his cigarette started to burn his forefinger he would suddenly raise his head and begin to dictate to his secretary.

From time to time there came the sounds of mysterious bells, sirens and signals reducing the clatter of voices in the Swimming Bath to silence and summoning the 'competitors' to crowd round the dais to hear releases or to take their 'prizes': the printed text of the releases.

Then there were a dozen naval cadets from various training ships

who acted as messengers and would take the copy to the censors. The censorship was under the direction of the Upper Deck. Admiral Usborne and Admiral Thomson, two delightful sea dogs, were 'day and night' at the service of the Press. They slept on bunks in their offices. The Senior Service was evident everywhere in the Ministry, not only in the Swimming Bath. One day Low of the *Evening Standard* made his appearance in the Beveridge Hall. We are old friends and I know every member of his delightful family. The 'Modern Hogarth' is too well known, with his beard, to need any further pictorial description. He is a very lovable person with a splendid sense of humour in personal life, so rare in cartoonists and professional humorists. And Low is extremely modest, which, I think, is one of New Zealand's most captivating inheritances. I am very grateful to him for his friendship and company and for the fact that he taught me how to play darts. I never had any social assets before.

'The Fleet is in,' he said with a smile as we made a tour of the building. Two days later he published a cartoon, depicting the M.O.I. as a battleship looking at 'copy' through telescopes. 'Twenty-seven and a half admirals for each journalist', this was his explanatory line.

The same evening I was dining with a friend. She saw the cartoon and she thought the most logical thing Britain could do was to hand the work of information over to 'The Silent Service'.

A week later I decided to go to Budapest to see my people and my editors.

## 'HUNGARIAN BACKGROUND'

THE BLACK-OUT in Paris was dark blue: a kind of *bleu foncé*, that made the boulevards look like a cold, impressionist picture: a cross between Whistler and Edmond Dulac. But night life was apparently still going on and the little green buses still tore along the streets with their legendary speed. I had dinner at the Alsatian Restaurant near the Place de la République, then I rang up a few friends and arranged to see them the following morning. Then I went to the Rue de Lappe to look round. The Rue de Lappe is a street full of *cafés chantants*, 'dancings,' *bistros*, and it has two brothels, all catering for the amusement, escape, distraction and biological necessities of lesser-well-to-do Frenchmen. It is a street neither smart, nor so sordid that it could have become part of the international tourist traffic. But, like most places around the Place de la Bastille it has a good deal of warmth and vitality.

Except for the 'blue-out', the Rue de Lappe looked exactly the same as it did the year before and I was lucky because as I entered one of the little *bistros*, I found my friend, Georges Maître, standing by the bar. Georges and I had met a few years previously at one of the 'dancings' in the street and we had made friends. He was a mechanic employed by Citroën and a member of the Communist Party. He said he was now working for an aircraft factory and felt much less proud of his membership of the Party, now that the Soviet had allied itself with the Nazis. But he was still the old Georges: good-natured, amusing, curious, a little irresponsible. We had a talk over a drink and I told him I was leaving for Budapest in the morning, but I would see him on my way back to London.

The following morning I went to see Kelemen, my Paris colleague, who lived near the Place du Combat. This was my third visit to his various abodes in Paris and each one of them looked like the scene of a violent murder before the arrival of the police. In the centre of the living room there was a table with a sad, green velvet cover, on the table an empty violin case and in it a pair of dark blue spactacles and a half-empty jar of apricot jam. There were several easy chairs in the room all representing various periods of the late nineteenth century French styles at their worst, occupied by books, news cuttings, directories, a broken-down *samovar* and a green typewriter with faded gold embellishments which did 'invisible' typing. I walked into his bedroom. In a singularly large French bed, surrounded by twenty-seven morning papers, almost lost, lay my friend. His beard longer than ever, he wore a beret, a thick pair of flannel pyjamas, a pullover and various other garments. 'Oh, it's you,' he said, 'I thought it was the masseur. I'm suffering terribly from rheumatism, and the landlord, he is a jackal, is economising on the central heating. Sorry you had to climb up to the sixth floor. The lift is not working because the creditors have seized it. But it does not matter, I'll get up and take you out to lunch . . .'

Then I followed him to the bathroom. It was a smallish room but it housed a rook with broken wings and two white mice. One was at large on the floor, the other in a bird-cage on the wall.

'Why separate them, Charles?'

'Because otherwise there would be ten dozen white mice in a month. They belong to a painter friend of mine who is away in the country and I am taking care of them for him.'

There were old suitcases in the corner, the shape and size used by travelling conjurers, with the coloured labels of many hotels on them.

After a time I got up from the edge of the bath—the bath was full of old books—because I realised that if I stayed there he would never

be ready, so keen was he to tell me all about Gambetta's fiscal policy and the latest joke about Daladier. Finally we left the house. We walked along the Boulevard de la Villette; he wore a felt hat with a very broad brim, like a wine merchant from Bordeaux up for the week, then we turned into the Rue de Sambre et Meuse. 'Good place,' he said and winked.

'Restaurant des Chauffeurs?' I asked.

'M'm. How d'you know?'

'Well, everybody knows that in Paris internal combustion and good food always go together.'

It was a restaurant very typical of the 10th Arrondissement. The tables covered with blue and white linoleum were surrounded by male nurses from the Hôpital St. Louis, and workmen from the *usines* round the Faubourg du Temple.

'*Monsieur est anglais*,' said Charles to the blue overalls by way of introduction, warning, preface. They made room for me.

'It's grand to be in Paris, Charles,' I said as I was eating the lovely pea soup.

'Oh, yes, yes,' he said, but there is no beef. It's reserved for the Army and coffee is getting very bad.'

'Is that all?'

I looked at the man opposite me, in a faded air-force blue overall eating peas with a knife with much relish and competence. Then Kelemen said it was awful how bored everybody was about the war already. 'We are only in the fourth month of it.'

'I noticed the same on the train as I talked to a few soldiers and civilians. They were very bored and fed up. A *poilu* who was going back to the Maginot line told me that his pay was a penny a day. I know he gets better food than the English Tommy and his meals include wine, but still a penny a day is monstrous. That's quite enough to make them feel fed up. In England people aren't fed up. The majority simply doesn't notice there's a war on.'

'Business as usual,' said Charles.

'Yes. The old slogans of the last war have been partly resurrected and the last-war cartoonists and actors had returned. I don't know which of the two attitudes is better. Boredom or ignorance.'

'Ignorance, by all means. The English ignore everything. They are beaten and they don't notice it, they go on fighting and in the end they win. I would honestly prefer your job in London . . .'

'With your rheumatism?'

'With my rheumatism. The atmosphere of Paris is not very pleasant for foreigners. It has never been pleasant since the last war, and whenever there is some national upheaval, the first thing the French do is

to turn against foreigners. Some people think it is because of the refugees. The cafés of the Champs Élysées and the smarter *quartiers* are full of German Jews and they are the most disagreeable people I have ever met, because they are more German than Jewish, but xenophobia is much deeper ingrained in the French mentality.'

Then we had coffee on the *zinc* of a little café in the Rue Juliette Dodu. Charles had obviously exaggerated; the coffee was still very good in Paris. Even in the 10th Arrondissement.

Then we talked about French writers. He told me that Céline was interned.

I looked up. I had a very great admiration for Céline, the author of an unforgettable novel *Journey to the End of the Night.*

'Why did they lock him up?'

'Goodness only knows. Why did the French lock up a good many foreigners in concentration camps as soon as the war started? They are trying their best to lock up all Leftist people. Céline, actually, was accused of having pro-fascist sympathies . . . which is not really logical,' he added with a sly smile, 'because France is getting almost more fascist than Germany. . . '

The train was very crowded. It was full of soldiers. It went very slowly. It was very warm in the compartment, a warm *bouquet* of a cheap scent, garlic and the murderous smells of *Caporal Ordinaire* and *Gaulois Bleu.* The little bulb in the ceiling made the compartment look like a linoleum cut. I think I must have slept a little because when I opened my eyes I saw that the lights were normal again and the black-out curtains were up. We were on the Swiss frontier. Tall and friendly young men in strange uniforms made us leave the train and queue up to be interviewed by a gentleman who wore a fur coat and a fur cap, the kind M. Molotoff would adopt on a foreign tour in winter time. He asked all of us whether we were in good health. I said I was very well, all things considered.

'*Merci*,' he said and put a stamp into my passport with a triumphant smile. The stamp said '*Le médecin de la frontière Vallorbe*'. How delightfully Swiss, I thought. When the whole of Europe is suffering from an agonising malady, a medical officer in Switzerland asks newcomers to the country whether they are individually and personally well.

The train became very cold as we entered Italy and I felt so very tired after twelve hours travelling that I did not want to face another night on a train without heating. I got out at Milan and spent a night at a hotel near the Dome. Italy looked as if she had already spent three or four years in the war. Even in the best of times Milan was a depressing town. Very efficient, but very glum. It was clean but without the

charm of the south. I had a very bad and very expensive meal at a restaurant and a cup of *ersatz* coffee. It was foul. Coffee, after all, was one of the very few luxuries of the average Italian. And Italy had been off coffee since the beginning of 1939. There was hardly any heating in the hotel bedroom and I had a cold, so I put my pullover on and went to bed trying to read the *Corriere della Sera.*

I spent another disagreeable, cold night with poor and expensive food and foul coffee in a small hotel in Trieste. The hotel smelt strongly of stale cabbage and the porter was very greatly surprised that I turned in so early. And that I returned alone. Perhaps the signor is sick—he asked with sympathy. Yes, I said, the signor was very sick indeed. The signor was travelling to Hungary and the journey used to take him eight or nine hours before the war, and now the signor had spent his third night breaking his journey and was still twenty-four hours from Budapest.

Jugoslavia was more civilised. I had a very good meal on the train. True the meat dish—a kind of *goulash*—made me sweat because of paprika and pepper and other spices which are widely used in Jugoslavia and must contribute to the national temper. I met a very charming young officer on the train and we entered into conversation. I like Jugoslavs. They are a dictatorship yet somehow they manage to be very democratic within limits. Everybody is of peasant stock. They are primitive, unspoilt, free of complexes and not the least snobbish. They respect the West, but what they adapt from the West is always adapted in view of their own national traditions. Adaptations never become a parody of Western ideas as they do in Rumania. Bucharest I found an unpleasant parody of Paris.

My father was waiting for me on the platform and pushed me into a taxi.

'How are things?' I asked.

'Nothing unusual. I just came back from Szent Miklos to get some wine for Christmas. You must try it. It's my old "Grey Monk" mixed with *Muscatel.* The *Muscatel* was left to dry before it was pressed. Kaidatshi broke his leg' (Kaidatshi was my father's wine-dresser) 'so, I presume, he cannot steal so much of my wine as before, at least while he is in bed. . . . There was a dreadful scene at home, yesterday. I was painting a chest. One of the Kalotaszeg affairs. I got the patterns from the Ethnographical Museum. I was copying a lovely eighteenth-century piece and while I was out having a walk your mother packed the whole thing up and sent it down to the cellar. . . .'

'But why?'

'She says it's too much mess and she wanted the "Poodle" to clean up the flat before Christmas so that you could sleep in the study. You know how things are with her.'

Later I heard another version of the Kalotaszeg chest, from my mother. Father apparently messed everything up with blue paint; carpets, the telephone, door knobs, the cats, even his own silver beard.

I found my parents' flat exactly as I saw it eight months previously and for that matter exactly as it stood during the last ten or fifteen years. In the hall there was a new coat-stand painted by my father in the Kalotaszeg peasant tradition. ('Don't put your coat on it,' whispered mother, 'the varnish still sticks after six months.') The flat was large and attractive with its rosewood *Biedermeyer* furniture, old Bohemian porcelain, the many musical clocks, the faded Aubusson carpet and father's large collection of law-books in splendid eighteenth-century bindings. There were three cats ('the youngest was born on my birthday,' said father, 'seventy-three years younger than I am'). The flat is an old house overlooking a public park in front and the Royal Castle at the back. It is very attractive and very uncomfortable. I have a suspicion that Hungarians, alleged to be a lazy race, are unable to create real comforts. I always find that the planning of their flats is hopeless, that beds are invariably hard and full of a formidable collection of bedclothes; telephones are, as a rule, put at the most impossible places and you can never find the lavatory.

'I want to show you something,' said father on Christmas Day just before dinner and got up from his chair. There came a terrifying plaintive shriek as if two cats were being murdered: 'Oh, poor little Cirmos,' said father and picked up the youngest of the three cats, 'I trod on his little foot.' Then he opened an old mahogany box and took out a photograph. It was an enlargement, it seemed, of a pastel drawing of a young woman, wearing a crinoline and resting her right arm on a banister. In the background I recognised the old Cathedral of St. Mihaly's of Kolozsvar.

'Is it grandmother?' I asked.

'Yes. I just got it from an old lady in the country who has the original drawing. It was apparently done in the 'seventies by her brother. The funny thing is that I quite clearly remember the dress she is wearing. It was light blue: a kind of lavender colour. Do you remember her at all?'

'Not well, except that she was always dressed in black and wore a lace bonnet and had a nervous charm and used to give me little French bonbons in coloured wrappers and the wrappers had a little rhyme

on them in French by Lafontaine and I had to learn the rhyme before I could eat the bonbon . . .'

I had to learn the rhyme before I could eat the bonbon because grandmother was very keen on education. She was one of the early supporters of the emancipation of women a good ten years before the suffragettes arrived. But she was seriously thwarted in her ideas because of the general trends of thought of her generation and because of the fortunes of our family. Our family in Hungary is usually called 'gentry,' but the term is misleading, like most borrowed words in most languages. 'Gentry' in Hungarian means the *petite noblesse*: a lesser aristocracy, which was originally a landowning class like the English baronets. Later, when through various economic crises but largely through the equality of inheritance the land had gone, the Hungarian 'gentry' had come to occupy all the upper strata of the civil service, diplomacy, judiciary and the Army. The division between the 'gentry' and the higher aristocracy, the magnates, was largely economic. Some of the magnates were very rich; they represented a great economic power, yet the gentry collectively represented more political power. The two upper classes of Hungary were not always friendly, and their isolation from each other was not entirely due to economic differences. There was a historical difference too, even if not so important. Some of the gentry families were considerably older than the magnates and the latter's titles were very largely given by Habsburg emperors in recognition of services which were not always an advantage to Hungary. A good many of the magnates were Austrian or Slavonic in origin or had intermarried with Austrians. The gentry said they themselves were 'pure Hungarians'.

The 'gentry' was, however, not one class. Some of them were great aristocratic families of old lineage and wealth, some comparatively recent and very poor, whereas the bulk of them, people of moderate means, formed the upper layers of the Hungarian middle class.

The most important point about the Hungarian class system is that it cannot be entirely interpreted in economic terms. Broadly speaking, it is, of course, a world where people differ from each other according to their income, just as in all capitalist countries, but traditions in Hungary seem an important factor in defining somebody's social whereabouts. There are countries which, before the war, in their own quiet way prided themselves on being more democratic than any other country, England included—the Scandinavian countries, Switzerland, Holland. There, I should think it is pretty safe to guess a man's traditions, opinions, social attitude from his income, but it is very rarely safe to do so in Hungary and in England. In these two

countries one must always take into consideration the respective traditions of the individuals. A civil servant in Hungary or an officer in England very often has the same income as their respective tradesmen, their tailor or their butcher, but they are by no means social equals.

It has often been suggested that there is a great deal of similarity between the upper classes of England and Hungary. On close examination the similarity turns out to be somewhat superficial. Some of the ways and forms of life of the Hungarian magnates resemble English ways or rather international ways in which the really rich live, but Hungarian magnates are a closed caste: they marry among themselves and almost always ostracise those who don't. Hungary had never really adopted the Norman system of primogeniture and consequently there is hardly any natural chance for the poorer magnates to become members of the upper middle class.

And similarly, there is little affinity between the working classes of the two countries. Even though the Trade Union movement is not powerful in Hungary and even though their liberties are more restricted and limited one finds that the Hungarian worker had not become quite as servile and deferential as the English had very suddenly become in the last twenty-five years. I had often tried to find an explanation for this and the only one I could offer is that the memories of an agricultural past are a much firmer reality to the Hungarian working man than to the English proletariat.

There is a much closer analogy between the shabby genteel classes of the two countries. They are both agonisingly conscious of their poverty and both display a pitifully brilliant ingenuity in trying to hide it. It would be very difficult to tell which of the two could outbid the other in the art of keeping up appearances in spite of overwhelming odds. They both subsist on working-class incomes, and consequently, both are forced into a close contact with the proletariat and they are both desperately class-conscious, clinging with the skin of their teeth to the mannerisms and trappings of gentility. It seems to me that the gulf between the two classes is so great both in England and in Hungary that for the older generations, at least, it would be almost impossible to accept each other on equal terms, even if they wished. It must be said that I had seen well-meaning and sincere efforts to do so in both countries.

My family was slightly above shabby gentility because both of my parents had inherited a little property and because they had only two children, but father used to tell me that he had to abandon his early ambition because of the comparative poverty of his early youth. His original intention had been to become a professor of Constitutional

History at the University, but that would have meant at least five or six years of independent research and unpaid lectureships, which he could not afford. He had, therefore, entered the civil service as soon as he left the University and remained a civil servant till his retirement. He had been, I always heard, an intelligent and good administrator; first a county official in a province of Hungary where the minority issue had rendered work very delicate and very difficult; then, after the Peace Treaties, he had been taken over by the Treasury. He eventually rose to quite a high position and retired with a title.

Of the aristocratic traits my father displayed I think his complete lack of class consciousness was the most typical, because I had often found that attitude all over Europe among the members of the older, historical aristocracy. Father, since I had known him, had always treated everybody as his social equal and he had done it in the most natural manner. He was completely at ease with peasants, gamekeepers, policemen, small artisans, and his contacts were always miraculously free from any strain on his part to show that he was demonstrating democratic behaviour or that it was his 'duty' to be pleasant to his social inferiors. For this there may be several explanations. One of them, I should think, is that in common with aristocracy firm in the saddle, he was so instinctively and so deadly certain of his social position that he could allow himself the widest freedom. Accordingly, he never minded what sort of friends I had gathered or brought home, the main criterion always was that the friend in question should be 'honest and intelligent'. Occasionally I returned with gipsy boys who were always intelligent and seldom honest. True, of course, that Continental education is far more egalitarian than the English. In my particular *Gimnasium* there were the sons of cabinet ministers, bishops, rich business men and those of several small artisans—barbers, pastrycooks and shoemakers—sitting next to each other.

Another explanation, I should think, is our Transylvanian origin. That eastern province of Hungary is very much what Scotland is in relation to England. It is a province that had for a time been ruled by its native dynasty and for centuries had supplied national leaders for Hungary. Transylvania is mountainous, Calvinistic, vital, comparatively poor and far more democratic than Hungary. Transylvanian magnates had by no means formed an isolated caste, they had often intermarried with the 'gentry'. They were completely unselfconscious and they were certainly not afraid of being revalued and found wanting. They had certainly never needed efforts to make others aware that they were entitled to a particular form of respect. I remember quite clearly one summer afternoon—nearly thirty years ago—seeing my grandfather in a dirty overall, wearing a large weather-beaten straw

hat that only the poorest peasants would wear, with another similarly dressed old man, planting a number of fruit trees in his garden.

'Is he Aurelia's child?' the visitor asked as I went up to them.

'Yes,' answered my grandfather, 'just going to school. Too big for his age, don't you . . .'

The visitor shook hands with me and when I said good-bye to him he gave me a silver florin.

Later I asked my grandfather who the visitor was (because no one else had so far given me anything beyond a crown).

'Old Desider Banffi,' said my grandfather. 'We were at school together. Knows nothing about fruit trees . . . '

It was about a year later, after I had seen the visitor sitting in my grandmother's kitchen and discussing family affairs with her while grandmother was supervising jam-making, that I found out that my grandfather's schoolmate was Baron Desider Banffi, ex-Premier of Hungary, the owner of a large estate and a great favourite of the Emperor.

As I see my parents' household I find it Bohemian in the best sense of the word. There is a kind of carefreeness about it which I always admire in other people and seldom practise myself. A kind of leisurely nonchalance had come into their lives since they had grown old in those years I had spent away from them. Time it seems stands still in the flat and few things seem to matter. The motto is 'we have such a short time left, why bother about it,' at least that is what mother says when I suggest that it would perhaps be better to have the telephone in the study than to tuck it away in a passage between the hall and the bathroom, or when I suggest to her to engage a maid with whom communication is easier than with Roza. Roza is called 'The Poodle' in her presence but not within her earshot because she is stone-deaf. If one asked her for a glass of water, she would nod, then would return at an alarming speed with the telephone directory and would offer it with a sweet smile. 'What I really wanted was a deaf mute,' mother would say to visitors when they noticed that communications with Roza involved a special procedure, 'but that would be awkward so I did the best I could.' Roza had been serving my mother for about ten years and since then her deafness had got considerably worse. This had necessitated the replacement of the electric bells in the kitchen and in the hall with louder ones about five years ago. Then last year my father had to get an extra loud one. On both occasions father insisted on doing the work himself and last year he nearly broke his leg falling off a ladder. The new bell is a replica of a fire siren which now fills the whole house when it is rung and frightens the retired titular abbot who lives in the flat next to my parents with his two elderly and un-

married sisters. I personally like Roza and her poodle-like devotion to my mother, but I would prefer to have a domestic who is less of a 'character'. Like the new cook. Cooks are always 'new' in the house; they change with alarming rapidity. They all like mother but they don't like Roza. In ten years she has caused about ten cooks to leave. Or was it twelve? My sister knows better. She is the only statistically-minded person in the family.

It is no use suggesting that mother change her domestics, her newspaper, her tradesmen, or this or that. 'With such a short time left, my dear . . . however, if you think it would be really better . . .'

It is usually my aunt Elizabeth (whom father calls 'The Cardinal' because she wears tailored black cassocks with many little buttons and because she had spent ten years in Rome, writing occasional articles for a Budapest paper, gambling on various stock exchanges and getting an enormous amount of fun out of Vatican intrigues and of running after Gabriel D'Annunzio) who tries to use me as a go-between between my parents and her advanced ideas.

'For God's sake try to persuade your father to sell his wretched vineyard. He cannot sell his wine and I am sure that his wine-dresser keeps *maîtresses* on your father's money. Your father's got the same mad obsession as ours. In our father's case it was black buffaloes. Somebody told him that buffalo milk is good for children, so he bought four. The buffaloes were difficult to milk because they tried to gore the milkman each time, then year in year out they were expecting and the end of it was that we had to buy milk from outside. . . . I'm sure Kaidatshi keeps *maîtresses* on your father's money.'

I would laugh at the suggestion, having seen Kaidatshi once, a wizened little peasant with two left feet, then I would say that the vineyard gives great pleasure to my father and besides I think it goes so well with his personality.

'There you are,' she would say with a triumphant smile, 'you are an individualist like your father . . . I s'pose there's nothing like a good fixed delusion to make people happy. It's the same old thing with our family. You are all individualists. You all pursue the impossible. You too, with your English literary ambitions and your English citizenship. I could honestly never understand you. Why you gave up diplomacy and settled down in London, of all places. I have only been to London once all my life and I ran away after a fortnight. Is the Cecil still going? The most overrated hotel in the world. I s'pose I lived too long in Latin countries, but I never liked England. They only had one good thing: the theatre. That was first-rate, the best in the world I should say, but that was all. Is the old Embassy still in Belgrave Square? I remember meeting Queen Alexandra there, she was very pretty and

frightfully deaf. . . . I would understand if you had gone to live in Paris. Paris has a literary background, but London . . . ?' Here she would raise her eyebrows: 'I know that the English are a pleasant and civilised people and I suppose there is culture in England if you look for it hard. But why are the English so afraid of it? Why is stupidity such a cult in England? Why is stupidity a compulsory social convention? Why is it "bad form" in England to be intelligent?'

'I don't know, Aunt Elizabeth,' I would say meekly, reflecting it was a beautiful sunny day and I ought to go out ski-ing in the hills. 'In certain respects I'm English myself; you see it's a fundamental characteristic of the human race to adapt itself to its environment . . .'

But Aunt Elizabeth refuses to be paid with small cash. She laughs and shows her excellent teeth, then she puts her hand on my shoulder and lowers her voice so that we could not be overheard. She would smile the smile of accompliceship and would say in an undertone: 'Tell me, Adam, what had made you to settle down in England?'

'Atmosphere,' I would say, then I would look at my watch and leave 'The Cardinal'.

## MYSTERY STORY

I USED the word 'atmosphere' when my aunt asked me about my choice of country and nationality, but my own private word is 'climate'.

The moment in the life of some young men when they feel they must break away from their family had come when I was nineteen. There is nothing out of the ordinary about it. It had come into the life of a good many young men and it will come into the life of many more. In some cases the desire was combined with literary or artistic ambitions. This is a little more exceptional but still fairly common. But there must be few young men of nineteen who would suddenly decide that they would settle down in a certain foreign country, whose language they hardly speak, and would try to become writers in that language. This sort of thing is irrational; a trifle absurd. It is almost what the French call *acte gratuit*—an act whose motives are so very complex, hidden, obscure, that all that a good novelist could do with it is to describe it faithfully without trying to explain it. Gide and Duhamel are the great men for it. In Gide's novel, *Les Caves du Vatican*, a young man, otherwise quite normal, during a train journey finds his fellow passenger an objectionable person: he suddenly gets up from his

seat and pushes the other out of the window. In another Gide novel, *The Counterfeiters*, a group of young men utter counterfeit money, 'just for fun'. In Duhamel's novel *Salavin*, the hero—a young clerk—one fine morning cannot resist the temptation to put his finger on his boss's neck—under the hair, 'just to see what the skin feels like there'—and is kicked out on the spot.

Many people may raise the point that such things don't happen in real life. I am not so sure. It is certain that such *actes gratuits* are very, very rare in real life, yet the impulses themselves are present in most of us. There was a time when many of us might have had, or perhaps actually had, the desire to push an unpleasant travelling companion out of a train window or to put a forefinger on somebody's neck, 'just to see what the skin feels like there'. And there are thousands of other irrational impulses: the parents of a thousand *actes gratuits*. The only difference is that most of us—very wisely—resist the impulse and come to no harm.

There may be some budding writers to whom it might occur, after a short visit to Rome or to Paris, to settle down there and become a writer in French or Italian, just without any reason. But as soon as the 'mad idea' comes they dismiss it. The irrational impulse comes, but it does not become an *acte gratuit*.

Because that was the thing I did when I was twenty-one. I came to England a year before my final examination, partly to learn English for the Hungarian diplomatic service and partly to read a few reference books on International Law for my doctoral thesis. I spent five months between a South Kensington boarding house, the British Museum Library and the streets of London—more in the streets I should say—and towards the end of the five months I had decided that I should only return to Hungary to pass my final examination, abandon all plans for diplomacy, then by hook or crook I would return to England and settle there for good and become an English writer. The story of those five months is not particularly interesting. Outwardly nothing whatever had happened to me. I remember those five months quite clearly. I met very few people outside the boarding house and there certainly were no emotional experiences connected with anybody I was meeting. I had two or three hard years behind me spent in swimming and athletics and study and literary efforts and, on the whole, I had regarded love as 'very silly' and sex as 'quite unnecessary'. I remained innocent till I was twenty-two. The outward story of those five months is not interesting, but it is still a mystery to me what actually must have happened to me between June and December, 1927, nearly sixteen years ago. Years after I had actually settled down in England the thing was not yet clear to me. All I remembered I had

was an all-powerful desire to stay here, to settle down here and nowhere else, no matter what might happen and regardless of any consequence, economic, political, social. In the eighteen months I spent in Budapest after London I was unhappy and actually homesick for England. By then I knew that I had fallen in love with England. It was love, it was clear, the symptoms are easy to recognise in retrospect. But I still don't know what I loved about England. My emotions were not directed towards anything detailed and concrete, but it was love all the same because I had suffered like hell and cried quite a lot, then I would take a tram to the sports-ground and indulge in wild exercises. But athletics, like drink, only gives you temporary relief. I had a tormenting and magnificent desire to return. In other things I was 'quite normal', I suppose, but this affair was certainly a disease, a disease for which 'Anglomania' would be a very misleading description. Misleading because I had never in my life entertained the slightest wish to have been born an Englishman, just as I never wished to become an apple tree. And misleading because that 'Anglomania' which had swept the Continent after Byron had finally gone from Hungary with some members of the generation that immediately preceded mine. My own generation looked towards England with admiration and respect; at times with envy, but never with abstract and burning sentiments.

It is true I did not want to remain a Hungarian, a professional, patriotic (I think I have it) a *practising* Hungarian. Of course, I was and still am, an internationalist, but that is beside the point.

It was long years later that I could take stock of the feelings which had prompted me at the time to 'burn all bridges behind me'. This actually happened in Paris. I remember the day quite clearly. It was two o'clock in the afternoon, it was October. I had lunch at a small place and I was watching the rain descending over the Avenue Simon Bolivar. It was then that the word suddenly entered my mind. The word was CLIMATE. Not the physical climate, of course, not the weather. It was England's *mental* climate that had proved so all absorbing, so conquering, all powerful, compelling, that it made me feel at home at once, that I found that England was my proper mental atmosphere. This is a thing which is a little easier to explain to an Englishman or to an American than to anybody else. Easier because among these two races the voluntary expatriate is a little more frequent. But saying this I don't, of course, mean those Britishers and Americans who used to form colonies in France, Spain and Italy, because they consisted mostly of unmarried or widowed women who were prompted very largely by the physical climate to move to a Latin country, or by the fact that life under the attractive Latin skies

was far cheaper than in England. The Englishman I really mean is the occasional legatee of a now almost extinct type: the 'mad Englishman,' the English eccentric, who without any reason would suddenly begin to peddle the Bible in Spain with an umbrella, or decide to leave his country and take up residence somewhere else. In connection with Hungary I know of two cases: one being John Paget, quite an enjoyable author of travel books in the mid-Victorian style, who had settled down in my native Transylvania in the eighteen fifties and had acquired Hungarian citizenship. But Paget was a rich man and so was Terrence Egan, an Anglo-Irish landlord who became a Hungarian in the 'seventies.

I have nothing in common with writers in exile, because the exiled writer as a rule writes in his mother tongue; besides in their case there is the inevitable background of political or racial persecution. In my case there was neither. Politics only began to interest me in the years immediately before the war and since it is an almost purely scientific interest and since I never had extremist political views either to the right or to the left, I could have lived absolutely undisturbed in Hungary.

Talking of writers on the whole, I should think I have perhaps more in common with the American expatriate writers who had settled in England between Henry James and T. S. Eliot, but again these were, and are, writers in a language which was not so fundamentally different from their mother tongue as mine. Besides, they had made very vital and very important contributions to English letters. I, therefore, hasten to add that any resemblance between my position and that of, say, T. S. Eliot, is purely incidental.

## MALICE IN WONDERLAND

AT FIRST blush during the winter of 1939 Hungary looked a 'pleasant neutral' country. There was no black-out, of course, and the atmosphere was calm. What a change after 'neutral' Italy, of which two days were more than enough for me. This was, however, a superficial view. As I went round the town calling on various friends and acquaintances the picture grew more and more serious. 'Neutrality is not an attitude that we can keep up for a long time,' said my editor. 'For some countries neutrality in war seems to be a profession; we cannot imitate their example, no matter how we would like to. All we could get, it seems

to me, is the prolongation of the bill. We shall get that, but the bill will be presented one day and then we must pay . . .'

Then he locked himself into the room with me so that nobody could disturb us and he went through with me the policy relating to my work in London. He said my salary would be raised, then he said the war made very little difference to general principles of my work. I was still at liberty to send anything I thought fit, but it was naturally out of the question that I should identify myself with the official British view in my articles. I could quite naturally give the official view, but I should have to mark it clearly as such. He said that if Britain wanted to have a mouthpiece in Hungary she could quite easily buy a newspaper for herself, the same way as Hitler had bought the former Budapest newspaper of the Royalist party. That paper seemed more Nazi than Hitler.

This was an interesting comment and I heard something very similar from a journalist friend of mine. He had spent some time in England in his youth and he was more pro-British than strictly neutral. He said he was disappointed with British propaganda in Hungary. During the last war British propaganda had at times been perhaps unscrupulous, but all the same, very successful. In this war it seemed feeble. It was all very well that Hungary was an unimportant country from Britain's point of view, in that case why make any propaganda at all? He raised his eyebrows: 'Because what they are doing now is poor work. It had been perhaps better to do nothing. Knowing England, the trouble I think is that England's leaders are absolutely certain of victory (I am certain too) and they think Hungary and the rest of the small countries shall be completely convinced of the justice of the British cause when Britain achieves victory. So why make good propaganda? I am very sorry because this attitude is false. Britain has been for a long time neglecting an opportunity in Central Europe and she is neglecting it now. And I am very sorry because, well, you know it yourself, the majority of the people in Hungary are not pro-German. They had never been so and after having lost a war on Germany's side they are still less so. But there are other things. They are afraid of Germany and German propaganda is very good. As a matter of fact it is better than it needs to be. I hate saying so, but Germany at this present moment is having a better case in Hungary than any other country. Their propaganda in Hungary is based on truth to a large and undisputed extent. It harps on the fact of "goods delivered". The recurrent refrain is: "What did England do for you?" Then they answer it: "England was a signatory to the peace treaty which cut Hungary to pieces. And what did Germany do for you? Germany returned the southern districts of Slovakia to you. And now we are trying to return

other parts of 'The Thousand Year Old Hungary'. And we shall return them . . ." This, my friend,' he said with a bitter smile, 'is a very difficult argument to contradict. Hitler is a blackguard but he has assumed the role of a benefactor to Hungary. Treaty revision and the issue of national minorities are very difficult problems and you know I am not an imperialist. I do not want the return of those parts of Hungary which, although they had actually belonged to Hungary for a thousand years, had been mainly inhabited by Serbs, Rumanians or Slovaks. But I think it is just to insist on the return of the essentially Hungarian parts. Those few people in England who know about the situation agreed to this principle and agree to it all the time, yet they have done absolutely nothing. Hitler treated the Czechs in an unjustified and brutal manner when he marched into Prague, but before that —in September 1938—he had done a perfectly justified thing in demanding the return of those parts of Czechoslovakia which were mainly inhabited by German or Hungarian minorities. It is all very well for England to threaten us. So far there are only carefully veiled threats in the British propaganda towards Hungary. Later on the threats will be stronger . . .'

'What do you mean?'

He laughed.

'You mean that England and Hungary might go to war?' I asked.

'It looks almost inevitable. We shall have to toe the line. We had been paid in advance with slices of Slovakia and we shall get another advance. The next step is Rumania. Hitler would cut Rumania to bits. I happen to know the plans. The Soviet would receive back Bessarabia, we shall be given Transylvania and Bulgaria would get the Dobroudja. . . .'

'Isn't that clear to you? Rumania is guaranteed by Britain. Just think. . . .'

'And do you think Hungary would march into Rumania?'

'Shall we?' He laughed bitterly, ironically. 'The point is that Hitler wants us to join him, the same way as he wants Italy's adherence too. With Mussolini, however, Hitler's game is not so very easy. He can resist Hitler. We cannot. I can just see Italy out of the war, but I'm sorry to say I cannot see Hungary out of it. And then along comes British victory and the Peace Treaty: Britain would carve Hungary up again and lay down one foundation for the next war. The trouble, you see,' he went on, 'is somewhere in the fact that England seems to have lost her mission in world leadership. I don't know how to put it, but something has gone fundamentally wrong. It started after the last war. England began to lose interest in the rest of the world and with that she began to lose her leadership . . .'

'And Germany is taking it over . . .' I said naughtily.

He made an impatient gesture with his hand. 'I don't mean any such idiocy. It is something which you cannot understand because you are younger than I am. My generation—and I'm nearly fifty—had been brought up in the belief that there is a thing called British civilisation, which is portable and which can be translated into foreign tongues. It was the leading civilisation in the period in which I had grown up. That civilisation, my friend, is more than a chain which you at times pull in the lavatory, more than hot and cold water, more than a dinner jacket which you can put on for evening meals and more than a collection of pleasant social conventions, though these are parts of it. That civilisation was also ethical attitudes and ideals; a kind of *Weltanschauung*. It was a *Weltenschauung*, regardless of the fact that *some*'—he gave the word 'some' an ironic stress—'that *some* Englishmen seem to be proud of the fact that the English have no *Weltanschauung*. In any case, the things which I grew up to know as 'British civilisation' included a kind of tutelage for small nations. That tutelage has gone. It was supposed to have been taken over by the League, and the League, after all, was England and France, and neither England nor France have done anything for the small nations except when they needed them. I cannot help looking on the history of the last twenty years of England as a history of a civilisation in decline. England will win the war, decline or no decline, but it seems that world leadership is passing on to someone else . . .'

'You mean America?'

He nodded. 'I'm sorry to say, yes. Somebody has to take it over, somebody has to do it, because world federation is nonsense, and America is potentially fit for it. And I'm sorry because I frankly like England and because I don't know America. But still, it had to come. British civilisation, the finest the world has ever produced, is going and there is another one coming. It will not be the same thing. It will be efficient, no doubt, and it will be up to date, but it will lack all the attractiveness British civilisation had for me and for my generation all over Europe. The younger generation won't notice the difference.'

A few days later I was operated on for tonsillitis. As operations go it was a very minor one, but I must say I enjoyed the fuss they made. It took place in the very largest operating theatre of a private nursing home and there were more people assisting the surgeon than when royalty had been operated on. There were five arc lamps and everybody wore white masks and dramatic expressions. I was, all the time, looking for the camera, microphone, and director. The operation itself was not painful, but I could not swallow for a good ten days after-

wards. I spent three days in the nursing home, then I went home and felt very bored, so on the following day I decided to go out ski-ing in the Buda hills. It was a very lovely day and little by little I took off my jacket, my slip-over and finally my shirt. It was not pleasant, of course, to fall on to icy snow with naked shoulders and back, but there were other compensations. The same day the surgeon rang up our house, just as a matter of routine, to ask how I was getting on, and was deeply shocked when he heard I had gone out ski-ing. He left a message for me to ring him up at once. I did. He then told me that he used the most up-to-date method with the operation: no stitches in the wounds, just tying down the arteries, so the wounds could easily reopen, and I could quite easily have a nasty hæmorrhage, if I had a bad fall ski-ing. I thanked him for the information and went out ski-ing every day. I had several falls. They made me feel good.

The following week it began to thaw so I put in an appearance in the office. They were running Somerset Maugham's *Ashenden* as a serial in the paper and they asked me to write an introductory note on Maugham. I did it and I wrote another doodle on my journey across the Continent. Then I wrote two thousand words on Harold Nicolson's pamphlet *Why Britain is at War* which I thought was easily the best piece of propaganda written in the beginning of the war. It saw daylight in my evening paper. It occupied a whole page in the paper, and the following day the editor was summoned to the news department of the Foreign Office and was shown a letter from the German Legation relating to my article, to me, to Harold Nicolson, to Britain, to neutrality; especially to neutrality. The editor said 'It won't happen again,' then came back and told me not to take any notice of it.

Then I went about seeing people. I called at the Legation. I found that Alvary Gascoigne had left Budapest for Tangier and I was introduced to his successor. He was a young man and his name was Summers-Cox; then I had lunch with Redward, the Press attaché, and went round the two cafés inhabited by British and American journalists. In the Café Hangl, on the Embankment, the journalists were busy over the marble-topped tables rubbing out with petrol the dark patches with which the Hungarian censor obliterated certain news items in London papers sold in Hungary. The dark squares looked like imprints of the black-out.

Most of my English colleagues were fully convinced that Hungary would be invaded sooner or later.

'They are incorrigible optimists,' said Segrue, the *News Chronicle* correspondent with whom I was lunching one day. 'Or perhaps they are not willing to see the possibility of Hungary going over completely to the Axis . . .'

Then one evening in the Café Hangl I saw my old friend A. He said he had just come out of prison.

'? ? ?'

'You don't read papers,' he said, a man wounded in his pride. Then it came out that A. was for four weeks in 'protective custody' in connection with one of the biggest political scandals of Hungary immediately before the war. One day to the greatest surprise of everybody Bela Imredy, the anti-semitic Premier of Hungary, was forced to tender his resignation because it came out that his own grandmother was a Jewess of Austrian origin. This was, of course, just like the Zinoviev letter, part of a successful political campaign against a political leader and A. was entrusted to dig out the documentary evidence from various Viennese archives and registries.

'It was really most awful,' said A. 'The official reason for my detention was an article I wrote in an opposition liberal paper in which I expressed my admiration for the beautiful neo-baroque memorial of Imredy's grandmother in the Vienna Jewish cemetery. The outlines of it were really so very graceful,' he added with a smile.

There was a good deal of latent anti-semitism in Hungary. Everybody said it was bound to come sooner or later because of the virtual monopoly of Jews in Hungarian finance and trade. Hitler's arrival gave it a fresh impetus. A few months previously Hungary had brought in the Anti-Jewish Act of 1939 which had restricted the employment of Jews in practically every field of employment to their proportion in Hungary.

'It's not quite as bad as it could have been,' said a Jewish friend of mine when we discussed the subject, 'but I'm afraid this is only the beginning. There will come other laws, more and more restrictive, till finally, we may come to something like the Nürnberg Decrees. So far, Hungarian anti-semitism is at least sincere. German anti-semitism was insincere and brutal from the very beginning. Germany had hardly a serious Jewish problem, compared with Hungary. And yet the Germans had started out with the principle that the Jew was an Oriental and inferior race which would pollute the nation and as such must be exterminated. The Hungarian attitude so far is the very opposite. The new anti-Jewish law practically admits that the Jew is so good and so efficient in business and finance, so much superior to the Hungarian Gentile, that the latter must be protected from them by means of state interference. In order, therefore, that the Gentile should have a better chance of success and so that there could be no grounds for popular manifestations against Jews, the state decrees that in the larger commercial firms, only 20 per cent. of the total employed could be Jewish. Small firms, of course, are not affected, but in big firms what actually

is already happening is that little Jewish clerks are thrown into the street in order that the Jewish director's son could stay in the firm in a well-paid job. It is true that there are all sorts of exceptions to the general ruling of the law. If you have the Military Medal or some other decoration from the last war, or if your father was killed in the last war, or if you were given war pension because of your wounds or illness arising out of war service, you are not being officially regarded as a Jew. If your wife is a Gentile, again, you don't count as a Jew. Then if you can prove that your family had lived in Hungary for several generations, you are technically a Gentile. There is some sense in it, you see, some system, some glimmers of humanity, some legal background. But I'm afraid this is only the beginning.'

'You mean because Hitler is pressing for some more?'

He nodded. 'You see what's happening in Italy. There were hardly any Jews there . . .'

'And some of them are the very finest, especially the Venetians.'

'You are thinking of Disraeli.'

'No, I'm thinking generally of the Sephardic Jews, one of the finest races on earth. The race that gave us Spinoza, the Montefiores, the Henriquezs, the Guedallas, the Sassoons. Camille Pissaro and Modigliani the painters and Proust . . .'

He smiled tolerantly and made a desperate movement with his hand.

'Sephardic or Askhenazi, it's all the same. Hitler hasn't got your tidy mind, besides I can tell you that the Askhenazi Jews are quite as good as the Sephardics, or quite as bad . . .'

'I'm not arguing about that. I was just thinking aloud. The problem as I see it is somewhere else. Anti-semitism is just a part of nationalism and nationalism is just one of our most painful collective maladies. Or would it be more correct to say that anti-semitism is a subject controlled almost entirely by economic prosperity. When there is prosperity there is no anti-semitism, but there is anti-semitism when there is unemployment. The Jew is the first scapegoat, because—through a vicious circle—he has a much stronger racial identity than the other races alien to the country in which they live. It was significant, I think, that during the anti-semitic outbursts in East London, before the war, there was an outburst against Irish immigrants too. Not intensive, of course, but still, this proves my case that anti-semitism is a case of chauvinism.'

'I don't know,' he said, 'I've been through one war already. I spent four years in the trenches and I shall go through another now and in the end I shall be lucky if they will let me live.'

I left my friend and as I walked on I could not help feeling that his fears were to a large extent justified. Riots and pogroms were unlikely

to happen in Hungary, but the law was likely to become very cruel. I wondered if social reform would solve the Jewish problem in Hungary. The social reform that was actually law, but the social reform which Hungary's rulers were so reluctant to carry out. The expropriation of the mortmains, ten or twenty or thirty thousand acres, sometimes in extremely inefficient hands, to satisfy the perfectly justifiable hunger of poor, landless peasants for land and livelihood was law, but the rulers of Hungary had done their very best to prevent the law being carried out. And the reform of the Civil Service too. . . . They were problems deep and dark indeed, and ugly, very ugly . . .

It has been said that it suited the Hungarian ruling class to keep the Trianon grievance as an open sore and so to divert public opinion from urgent domestic reforms. This is only partly true. The ruling class certainly made very good use of a genuine grievance to divert public opinion, but on the other hand, it could not have suppressed it even if it tried to do so, against its own selfish interests. It could not because Trianon meant the loss of at least two and a half million Magyars (the official Hungarian claim was over three millions), and this was a problem too serious to need much amplification and it defied suppression. Had the agricultural reform been carried out the situation would have been much more satisfactory, but it would not have succeeded in burying the Trianon grievance completely. At times one is almost forced to think that nationalism is a feeling which comes as a strong second after the satisfaction of the primary needs of life.

The Jewish problem for me was something I had to study. It was not as easy for me to grasp it as it was to Hungarians from Hungary. I had spent the first fifteen years of my life in Transylvania where there was no Jewish problem, simply because there were hardly any Jews. The Jew in my earliest memories had appeared as a figure of fun, and a figure towards which at times we grew affectionate. 'My Jew,' said my uncle, meaning the innkeeper in his village. Then there came an anecdote and we all laughed. Then there was our family doctor, who was Jewish and whom father called by his Christian name. Then there was a rabbi with whom father used to have long and exciting discussions on the origins of religion during long summer walks. And, I think, there were two Jewish boys at school.

By the time we moved to Budapest, Hungary had already had its revolution and counter-revolution. I saw nothing of either of them and I could not quite grasp an occasional anti-semitic outburst coming from someone who had seen them both. Then I was sent to a school; a very 'up-to-date' one. In the class of thirty boys I was the only Gentile. It certainly made a difference, a very great difference, indeed. My schoolmates had behaved towards me exactly as if I were a member of

the Royal Family in somewhat reduced circumstances. Practically all of them were better to do than I was, and certainly better educated, yet they seemed to outbid each other to be pleasant to me. They seemed to be proud of me or perhaps of the fact that a member of the 'gentry' was one of their schoolmates. And they were different boys from my rowdy schoolmates at Kolozsvar, who were completely 'democratic'. One of them, the baker's son, one day bashed the head of another, the bishop's son, as an afterthought following a friendly game of football. They were certainly not intellectual like these Jewish boys who were reading Anatole France and Oscar Wilde and Freud and Mereshkovsky and asked me to their houses where their mothers—far better dressed than any female member of my own family—gave us sumptuous meals in heavily gilded dining-rooms, apologising all the time for various invisible deficiencies.

It was a strange world, I thought. I was sixteen.

I went to see my friends in the Foreign Office and they promptly took me in to see Csáky, the Foreign Minister. I never really liked Csáky. He was somehow very bumptious and he had nothing of the sweetness of his mother (she had been one of my father's friends when they were both children). Then I called on a few friends in the Prime Ministry and the next day a message came that the Premier wanted to see me. I had known Count Teleki very well from my boy-scouting days, but I had not seen him for five years. He looked very ill—in fact he told me he had just got out of bed. His face, always thin and yellowish, looked thinner, his eyes behind his glasses very tired and no longer smiling. He kept me for an hour in his lovely office overlooking the river and the Pest side, which originally had been Count Sandor's bedroom (Sandor—'The Devil's Horseman' of Herring's aquatints—used to mount the stairs on horseback and dismount on his bedroom landing). Teleki fired question after question at me, his face grew serious and he put the wind up me the same way as some of my university professors had done. I suddenly remembered having the same sensations when another Premier had submitted me to a thorough examination a long time ago. He, like Teleki, also had been a professor, but his room was simple and spare and the view from the room was the provincial Irish charm of Merrion Square.

Then, seeing my serious face, he realised, just as de Valera had done, that he was a victim of habit, or the 'occupational disease' of all professors, so he began to smile and ease off a bit. Then he said I shouldn't worry about the fact that Hungarian papers were getting very anti-French and anti-English in tone. 'It may be unpleasant for you in England, of course,' he said, 'but the thing cannot be altered. Neither England nor France did anything for us when we were fighting against

an act of injustice, but that's neither here nor there now. . . . You just go on writing your articles from London. It looks amusing, of course, that in the same paper there is an anti-British article by someone and a pro-British article by you. That's neutrality, you see. . . . You will find that some of your reports and articles will appear with long cuts, and there are others which might be completely suppressed. Don't worry about that. We are neutrals and we have to observe certain rules.' (Here he sighed significantly. I had found out from my editors that the German Legation in Budapest had twice complained about 'the general tone' of my reports from London.) 'You shouldn't let your vanity carry you away, Adam,' he said, and smiled the way he did when he and I carried a tent-pole together during the Birkenhead Jamboree and he had said that I had a flair for leading him into the deepest puddles: 'Some of your articles won't see daylight, but that does not matter, because the article in question will be read by me . . . d'you get me? The censor automatically passes on to me a copy of all your messages which he cannot allow to be printed. The point is that I must have as complete a knowledge as possible of what is happening in England. The diplomatic reports are very good, but naturally slow and not fully detailed. So go on sending them. Lately you have been a little casual . . .' (So he had noticed it.) 'Was that because you found so many of them cut? I thought so. Well, you needn't worry. You just go on. Your salary will be forthcoming the way it did. And now run along.'

He gave me a warm and cordial handshake—Boy Scout fashion—with his left hand, and that was the last time I saw Teleki.

During my stay in Budapest my editor had jokingly suggested that I ought to stay in Hungary for the duration of the war. 'You would find it much safer,' he said, then added: 'In any case, I can see that you are apparently toying with the idea yourself. You asked for three weeks' leave, then you had your tonsils out and convalesced for another fortnight, then there came the heavy snowfall and trains stopped. Next time, I presume, you will have your appendix out, then any other parts of your body you can spare. True, of course, there is nothing whatever happening in London. . . .'

Then to my surprise the question was opened by my father. It had never been discussed earlier. When I had originally announced my intention of becoming British over ten years ago, my father said—just as I expected him to say—that it was really a private affair of mine, just as if I had made my choice of a girl, and he said he knew that I was acting on strong convictions. On such occasions he always sounded like the sovereign in a Constitutional monarchy receiving the leader of the majority party after the fall of the previous government. And

later on as I went to visit him every year—already an Englishman—I had noticed with a smile and not without affection that my father began to treat me as if I was still his 'beloved son' but also an Englishman. Before that, father, who likes the English, had at times made mischievous and amusing comments at the expense of my adopted country; after my naturalisation the thing had stopped in my presence. I was still very much his son, but I was somehow out of the family—as if I had become a Roman Catholic monk, in whose presence it was not courteous to ventilate any doubts about the existence of the Deity.

This afternoon, I was accompanying my father on his afternoon walk in the Buda hills.

'I don't for a moment try to persuade you,' he said gently, 'to stay in Hungary for the duration of the war, because that would be very disloyal to your country. Please don't misunderstand me, but I am your father and I cannot help being concerned about you being in England during the war. I cannot help thinking about it. These are not normal times. War emphasises nationalism, races become more self-conscious, more clannish than ever before, and they cannot help developing xenophobia. The English certainly respect their contracts—in your case your naturalisation certificate, but the time might come when the country might get into difficulties. And what then? In wartime the niceties of the Constitution are suspended and every country becomes a dictatorship. There is no limit to suspicion and prejudice. Remember Prince Battenberg, who was a great naval commander, a great patriot, and a good Englishman. . . . He was kicked out in the middle of the war . . .'

'But, my dear father, that only happened because the general public in England did not then know that Northcliffe was already insane. I am not important enough for that sort of thing.'

'Yes, yes, but what would happen if the Little Grocer gets into temporary power over you somewhere—in some Government department, where he can do you a great deal of harm: police, public security, goodness knows what. He does not understand your mentality because he is the Little Grocer, because, poor thing, he does not know better. He is the same in every country. He is a more international type than you could guess. He is present in Hungary, too; the difference is that in Hungary he would not dare to do anything against you, whereas in England I don't know your position. The Little Grocer hates foreigners. And I quite understand why. He is kicked about by his betters in his own country without a chance for him to kick them back. He must take his revenge and the obvious person is the foreigner who during a war cannot kick back. It is, you see, obvious that the Little Grocer is, so to speak, conditioned to become the worst type of loud "patriot".

He has little money, he has no culture, he has never travelled even in the very Empire of which he is so proud. He cannot make any more money; say he doesn't like alcohol; what are his pursuits then? God and nationalism. But he is half-educated, therefore he doesn't believe in God. So there is nothing but nationalism for him. Fascism is directly invented for him. He could lose himself in it, dissolve in it as a maniac in religion.'

'But what an unnecessary fear,' I said. 'True that we have the Little Grocer type in England too, but England is not Germany or Italy or France, for that matter, and the Little Grocer could never rise to a position in England where he could really harm me. In wartime he might become very unpleasant to me and irritating, but nothing more.'

'Why?'

'Just because England is England.'

Father looked at the ground for a moment as he is wont to do when he is thinking deeply, then he suddenly raised his head with a chuckle. 'I get you. You mean he couldn't get into an important post not so much because he is a fool and because he is a self seeker and a moral coward, but simply because he has never been to a public school. Is that what you mean?'

## THE 'GOOD TIME' IN PARIS

A WEEK later I left Budapest. It was the beginning of March and I decided to spend a week in Paris. I went back to the old hotel where I had stayed as a student in the early 'thirties, in the Quartier Latin. It was just off the Boulevard St. Michel. Incidentally, they gave me the same room on the second floor, overlooking a medical bookshop, a dairy, a *bistro* and a *hôtel garni* frequented by South Americans. There was no change in the room. The central heating was the same over-decorated cast-iron affair, painted with silver, the papering was the same old acacia sprays on a light mauve background, the ashtrays were still advertising *Cinzano* and the *Magasins du Louvre*, and as I opened the wardrobe cabinet it gave the same old sweet smell of moth balls which French moths must dearly love. Nothing was changed in the room except that the window leading into the tiny balcony was now decorated with geometrical patterns of sticky paper in case of air raids and over one of the front doors opposite there was a board: '*Abri* 30 *personnes*' I was not surprised over the lack of change. I knew that

that little geographical entity between the river, the Boul' Mich and the Jardin des Plantes, commonly known as the Latin Quarter, had not changed in essential spirit, in habits, or in anything else for centuries. And I was pretty certain that I should find it absolutely unchanged when I returned to it after the war. A few of its houses, churches, bookshops, cafés, hotels might be hit by bombs, but the Quartier would go on, it seemed, for ever. Paris may, or may not, be a conservative town; the Latin Quarter is more conservative than anything on earth.

I had lunch with Georges Juhas. Georges and I had been members of the same Athletic club in Budapest, in the mid-twenties, both of us training for the same distance, except that Georges was champion of the four-forty flat and I champion of nothing. Later he left Budapest for Paris, became a pastrycook and was making money out of his little shop in the Rue St. Jacques. I liked Georges. In his earlier years he was a romantic character, now he was leading a life that would no longer inspire a writer of romantic inclinations. He had discovered the real meaning of life and his place in it. In his case it was Paris, *pâtisserie*, money-making and a pretty encouraged-blonde Hungarian wife.

I went to have coffee at the *Capoulade* in the corner of the Boul' Mich and the Rue Soufflot. The scene was the same as years ago. The same Siamese, Bolivian and Bulgarian students drinking coffee, quarrelling over articles in *La Nouvelle Revue Français* or some of those new literary monthlies that never survive more than three issues, and buying peanuts from a negro peanut vendor. At his old table in the corner there still sat the old Montenegrin conspirator correcting his inevitable galley proofs, and next to him at another table, the elderly Rumanian *cocotte*, almost hairless, with a Chilean of whom nobody knew anything beyond the fact that he had syphilis.

The same evening I had dinner with the Press attaché of the Hungarian Legation and he told me that Kelemen was interned. No reason was given.

'What can you do?' I asked.

'Nothing, I'm afraid.'

'But surely you know he's entirely innocent.'

'Oh, yes, at least we think so. We tried, but the authorities refused even to discuss it . . .'

'You must do something about it, Jules, you really must . . .'

'I shall try again,' he said, irritated, 'but it's very difficult. There is a military dictatorship in France, in case you didn't know. This is not your England.'

'I know, but the Legation really must do something because the man is helpless.' I was feeling angry and frustrated because I knew that

if I wrote a protesting article about it my paper would not publish it because Kelemen was of Jewish origin. I heard that the French had interned scores of poor, alien Jewish intellectuals, but I did not know them. Kelemen, however, I knew personally. He was a colleague, he was completely helpless, completely innocent, elderly, rheumatic, and he had spent twenty years in Paris. Besides he was born a Roman Catholic (if such things would mitigate his case).

'We shall try again,' my friend said. It was only later that I understood his own difficult position and his reluctance to put himself out too much in cases like this. He, himself, was also of Jewish origin and his own position was not too easy either. At moments he must have felt that he was kept on by the Hungarian government only because he had served them for some thirty years and because he was indispensable.

With a bitter taste in my mouth I wrote a letter to my editor about Kelemen. My editor was a very comfort-loving person but he had a sense of justice. And if any journalist in Hungary had the ears of the Government it was he.

The following week I had to call at the *Conciergerie*, because according to the new regulations no alien could stay in France for more than twenty-four hours without a permit. I was received by a young woman, very fat, very dark: the type of *femme du midi* who is dark even in the white of her eyes. I told her I wanted to stay a week in Paris.

'*Avez-vous quelques raisons particulières, Monsieur?*' she asked.

'Madame,' I smiled at her, 'I could invent a lie about "*affaires importantes et urgentes*" or about business and journalism; the truth, however, is that for me it is a spiritual necessity to spend a few days in Paris every year. This may be irrational, may be frivolous in wartime, but that's the truth, *c'est tout . . .*'

She smiled, then added: 'I quite understand you.' That moment she looked exactly like *Marianne* after a season on Ovomaltine. 'Will you wait . . . *un petit moment . . .*'

She disappeared behind a door with my passport, then a *petit moment* later she returned.

'You have to pay five francs,' she said, firmly, '*pour le timbre*,' she explained. 'The permit is granted.'

'*Madame*,' I said, '*Je regrette beaucoup que nous avons eu seulement les rapports officiels . . .*'

'*Comme vous-êtes gentil*,' she said and handed me my passport with the *permis de séjour* stamped on it. 'Have a good time in Paris' she said as I shook hands with her.

I knew I should.

I felt good all over as I walked down the staircase. This was France,

or shall we say, this was civilisation. One would go up to a little official and tell her that it was a spiritual necessity for one to stay a week in Paris and one would get the permission. They would accept it with a smile. It certainly is civilisation to accept other people's idiosyncrasies. True, mine are comparatively innocent. But then, I reflected, walking towards the Boulevard Sébastopol, what about Kelemen and what about countless other Kelemens for whom it would be a 'spiritual necessity' not to be interned, all the more because they are perfectly innocent, especially Kelemen. My little raptures over civilisation suddenly seemed very frivolous. Then I began to argue with myself. First of all, I had written to the editor about Kelemen, and the editor would definitely do something, then there was good reason why my request for a *permis de séjour* should be granted—I was British, I was an ally, it was pretty sure that one day I should be called up to defend the cause which was France's cause, too. So I did not pursue the line further; the line which makes most of Galsworthy's novels so unreadable, but I reflected instead that this was an opportunity, perhaps the last opportunity, for me to enjoy Paris before it was too late. I certainly did not know that three months after I walked along the Bourlevard Sébastopol towards the Gare de l'Est, France would surrender, and that I would not be able to see Paris for many years, regardless of my 'spiritual necessity,' and I certainly knew little about the sufferings of the victims of the *Loi des Suspects* in the various concentration camps. All I knew was that I was in Paris for another five days, that it was March and that as likely as not this was my last fling on the Continent, because the phoney war must come to an end and I was certain to be involved in it myself. Maybe I should have to fight in France, so I should see France again, but that would be in different circumstances. This was my last fling. *Après nous le déluge*, I shrugged my shoulders. That motto of pre-revolutionary French aristocracy always sounds to me as if it were coined for a firm of plumbers.

For me a 'good time' in Paris means rambling through the town alone, sniffing into places, revisiting the background of my young manhood, then a few good meals at various restaurants, buying a few books, handkerchiefs, a bottle of Lanvin's After-Shaving Lotion, seeing a new play or two, a few picture-shows in the Rue de la Boëtie, calling on a few friends, and café conversations with perfect strangers. And I cannot say which are my favourite quarters of Paris, the same way as I can immediately say that my favourite London districts are Paddington, Marylebone and Islington. For me all the twenty administrative districts of Paris are of the same attractiveness and interest. I know them all between the Gates of Clichy, la Villette, Lilas, Vincennes, D'Orleans and St. Cloud fairly well and I am equally at home in the Places

Vendôme, des Vosges, Blanche, Montmartre or Péreire. I know them all and I like them all and it does me good to see them once a year.

This time, however, there were no interesting picture-shows in the Rue de la Boëtie. In a shop window I saw a Picasso of his earlier period, very unlike his harlequins and his cubist rhapsodies, but it was a fine piece of work: very Spanish, very sombre. For a single second I thought it was a Zuloaga. Then in another shop window—a book shop—I saw something more exciting. It was the complete manuscript of Gide's *Journal des Faux Monnayeurs*, a very famous book in France: a book in which, among other things, the greatest living French writer tells the story of how he wrote his perhaps most famous novel, *The Counterfeiters*. I went in and the assistant took the volume out of the window for me to see. It was not without deep emotion that I looked at the pages in Gide's handwriting, though I know absolutely nothing about graphology. I wonder what those strange elongated 'f's' and 'g's' that Gide makes three times as long as his other letters would mean to a great expert like Raphael Schermann, and what conclusions he could draw from the fact that Gide puts a full stop after his signature. I am ignorant of graphology, and Gide's thin strokes that seem hardly to touch the paper, look to me very much like the script of other Frenchmen I I know, yet his handwriting, if I look at it for a long time, gives me a sinister, uneasy, yet very fascinating sensation.

Then I walked out of the shop after thanking the assistant for allowing me to look at the manuscript. He asked ten thousand francs for it. Not cheap and not dear. Some literary snob would be sure to buy it, if there are still a few literary snobs left. It seems they are a race which is steadily disappearing, like buffaloes, and in a way I am sorry for this, for the literary snob and his brother, the culture snob, are possibly the only types of snobs who at times have performed a very useful function: they helped to make culture 'fashionable'.

Then as I walked on I thought I would ring up Gide and ask him to see me. I had not seen him for six or seven years. But Littré 57-19 did not respond to that strange, high-pitched, asthmatic, entreaty which is the ringing tone of Paris telephones.

What would be Gide's views on the war? A most interesting subject. What would be the greatest French writer's reactions to this clash of two opposing ideologies: totalitarian and democratic? And what would he—at one time a Communist—think of Russia making an alliance with Hitler? . . .

And now as I am writing these lines about Gide, I get up and open a file where I keep a few objects valuable to me and I take out one of André Gide's letters, which I received from him in December 1933.

It is dated from Lausanne and in it Gide tells what had brought him to Communism, and for my benefit *he tells it in English.*

'*Il me semble*' the passage runs, '*que l'avant dernière phrase devrait être réécrite à peu près comme suit* (*je vous laisse le soin de corriger, si mon anglais est incorrect*). What brought me to Communism? It is not a book of Karl Marx, or of others, but immediately (and early) the Gospel. If anyone can be said *Christian* without (the) faith, I am, and remain, a Christian. But I believe, with modern Russia, that Religion (such as the churches have made it) is now the worst enemy of Communism, the worst enemy of Progress).'

The last sentence is no longer true, but what he had said about being a 'Christian without faith' is one of the most significant clues to Gide's personality.

One afternoon I called on my friend Lucienne Lavech. She lived in the Rue du Simplon, on the other side of Montmartre near the workshops of the 'Eastern' Railway. I had met Lucienne first when we were both students in Paris. She was reading philosophy and specialising for a teacher's diploma in English and I used to 'look in' at the *Sorbonne.* Later we decided to exchange French and English lessons, in order to learn colloquialisms, slang and the finer shades of grammar. I would come along three or four times a week to the Rue du Simplon and we would sit in the little apartment of two rooms, Madame Lavech sometimes joining in our 'lessons'. Lucienne's father had been killed in the last war and Madame was supporting her meagre pension working in a bank. Sometimes I met relations: an uncle who looked exactly like Léon Daudet (he was *provençal* too). He was verbose, demonstrative, very charming and a little bit mad, I think. Then a 'rich' aunt who lived in the Grenelle, wore dresses like the elder generation of the *Faubourg* and told me that she had known Edmond Rostand. The Lavechs and their relations were a little bit of 'real France', I had thought when I was young, and when you are young you like to generalise. In any case, they were the sort of French *ménage* the average foreigner seldom sees. I knew several people in France like the Lavechs and they had very greatly contributed towards my love of France. They were amusing, yet fundamentally serious, extremely polite, well-read and had all those fine virtues that are the grace of Latinity.

'*Mon cher Adam,*' said Madame as she opened the door, 'what a surprise.' She let me into the tiny sitting room. I had not seen Madame Lavech for three years. She told me that Lucienne had married ten months previously a forester from the Indre et Loire and that they were living near Tours. 'We sent you an *annonce de mariage*, didn't you get it? Fernande, my son-in-law, has been called up and he is now '*quelque*

*part en France*' and *ma pauvre Lucienne* is in Tours staying with her in-laws, expecting a baby.'

'You don't look like a grandmother, Seraphine.'

'No, my dear, but I feel like one. *Attandez*, Adam, I managed to get a little veal (very difficult to get decent veal in these days) and there is some *Beaujolais*, stay for dinner and tell me your news. It's dreadful, isn't it. My poor father saw '71 and the last war and now we are in it again. I cannot understand this war at all. We declared war to help Poland, but we knew beforehand that we couldn't help Poland. And if we declared war for some other reason why didn't we say so? Hitler couldn't have attacked us, or you for that matter, because we have *La Ligne Maginot* and you have the Channel. Why declare war when we had spent a lot of money on fortifications and you on battleships and made ourselves impregnable. It's the bankruptcy of logic, I'm afraid. And we are so proud of our *raison* and of our logic. You know . . . I gave up reading newspapers. I used to read the *Figaro*. It was beautifully written and I loved André Rousseaux's literary criticisms. Then Coty got hold of it and ruined it and I changed over to the *Petit Parisien*. That old *concierge*-paper became quite readable two or three years ago. Then'—she shrugged her shoulders—'I saw that no French paper had any policy at all and I gave up reading newspapers. Now I only listen in to the T.S.F. but there is no news at all.'

It would now be very easy to find the exact explanation for Seraphinë Lavech's mental attitude towards the war and the mental attitude of the whole small *rentier* class of which she was one example, but this was March 1940 and I knew nothing.

I found that Jean Humbert, another friend of mine, was ill in hospital in the country, so I sat down the following morning to write a little article on wartime Paris and took it to the Hotel Continental to be censored and forwarded to Budapest. Then I called on Georges Maître.

I found him at home in his room in the Rue de la Roquette, behind the Place de la Bastille.

'Thank you for waking me,' he smiled at me showing his beautiful teeth. It was twelve o'clock. 'I am now on nightshift at an aircraft factory.'

He did not shave, but washed his face and hands in a small bowl of cold water, then he wiped his hands on the towel the way I used to when I was six, and lit a *Caporal*. We went out to have lunch near the Place Voltaire, at a small place where Georges was apparently well known and greeted the *patron* and ten other people by handshakes. I was also presented to the *patron* and to the ten others at our table as '*un ami anglais*'. We had a very good meal. This was the first time to my

knowledge I had eaten horseflesh. It was very good and not the least sweet as people generally described its taste. It was served with a *sauce chausseur* and the whole meal did not come to more than about one and six. (Two days ago I was toying with the idea of going to Prunier's one night and having a last meal of *Langouste Thermidor*.)

Georges was now much more serious than two months ago. Before now I had always thought of him as the only Communist of my acquaintance who had a sense of humour and that sweet Latin temperament, a mixture of carefreeness and mental agility. He said he took back all he had said about Russia in December. Russia was a victim of Western Imperialism, just as the French and English workers were. 'Our real war,' he said, 'is not against Hitler and Goebbels and Goering but against people like Daladier and Bonnet and the *Deux Cents Familles*, the shareholders of the *Comité des Forges*, the Regents of the *Banque de France* and the rest of the exploiters of the working class. Especially against people like Daladier who got in because he said he was fighting for the working class, then, last year, he crushed the strikes. I have a kind of respect for people like the *Haute Finance*, like Neuflize and Hottingeur and François de Wendel, because they are at least brutally frank in their policy of exploitation, they don't pretend like that traitor Daladier. *Daladier, bah . . . c'est le type de l'homme qui m'emmerde . . .*'

'Yes, my dear Georges,' I said, 'but if you pursue your logical argument you end up by refusing to fight Hitler . . . and, I ask you, what is your choice, the Nazis or the *Deux Cents Familles*?'

'Well, that's it,' said Georges and shrugged his shoulders, 'that's the conclusion an intelligent mind would reach. What the hell can we do? The place I am working in is very divided in its opinions. The older Communists, of course, are very dogmatic and don't tolerate argument. We, the younger ones, on the other hand, are very bitter because there is no one we could follow.' He then told me that the output of his factory was small. He had an impression that the French Air Force could not stand up to the Luftwaffe. 'Luckily,' he said, 'in this war aircraft is not a decisive factor.'

As I walked home I reflected how easy it was for me to get on with Georges and with other people I knew in the French working classes. Very few English working men had ever 'accepted' me so fully. They usually had their suspicions first about somebody who looked so obviously 'bourgeois' as I did; especially the older generations of English working men. Georges knew very well that I was not a Communist; not even a sympathiser. Yet it was very natural for him to accept me as a man who was an *écrivan* who could not help being non-political. True, of course, that I was a foreigner and as

such I may have had some curiosity value for Georges, though we rarely discussed England.

Then I began to reflect that Georges was perhaps not a real Communist. Just as there are so many so-called 'bad Catholics' who are *croyant mais ne pas pratiquant*, Georges believed in the movement but he did not practise Communism. He was perhaps too much of an individualist or had too much sense of humour to go further than his membership of the party and to voting Communist at the general elections. When all is said and done Georges was probably not more than a dabbler in Communism, a dilettante like so many young bourgeois intellectuals. The only difference was that Georges did not look *unlike* a Communist, in other words, his identity as a Communist was convincing. Because he looked like a 'typical' French working man nobody would have suspected him of being a dilettante. But, I think, he was a dilettante all the same, in the way there are dilettante poets and writers among those who practically starve, dilettantes who 'love writing' and who would never make real poets and writers, because the true and vital difference between the dilettante and the real writer is not a question of income (as it is generally supposed) and, I am inclined to add, not even the degree of technical competence (as the average critic would sum it up) but a question of mental outlook and fundamentally, the quality of the mind.

## WHILE FRANCE FALLS

LONDON HAD changed very little in the three months I was away. During the day there was hardly anything to suggest that we were already in the seventh month of the war. Philibert greeted me with the old, sweet smile. He said he was lecturing and that he was preparing a 'campaign' to further the interests of Hungarian revisionism, but he could not tell me anything further about it. 'You will see,' he said with a mysterious smile. He talked as usual, in the tone a very delightful elder would adopt when talking to a child of four. He handed me a note from Gustave. Gustave asked me to send on to him at Geneva an Albanian hanjar and an Afghan skean-dhu. He apparently left both articles in his flat. I did not know whether he used these ancient and romantic war weapons as ornament in his house in Geneva or whether he was collecting an arsenal for the defence of his oppressed national minorities. He asked me in his letter not to be late with the new issue of the *Review*.

There was little change in the Ministry of Information either. Except the minister. Lord Macmillan was replaced by Lord Reith and the American correspondents still said it was a phoney war. It did look it. Next to my desk I discovered a serious-looking gentleman reading a Hungarian newspaper. He turned out to be the newly-appointed correspondent of the Hungarian Telegraph Bureau. He said that Dr. R., the previous correspondent, had been recalled to Budapest. Since he did not know London well I offered to show him round.

That moment Rasch, a Hungarian journalist, entered the Hall. I got up to go up to him. I had not seen him for three months. Rasch, however, hardly looked at me. And when I smiled at him he gave me a cold nod. I was dumbfounded, What on earth had happened? We were fairly intimate before. I knew he was very strange at times, and very easily excitable, but I could not understand his behaviour. It was incomprehensible the more because the following moment he was greeting a Polish colleague, all smiles, in his usual, over-anxious-to-please manner.

'Was that Rasch?' asked the new colleague.

'Yes,' I said, still dumbfounded and shameful.

'He was dismissed by his paper, you know . . .'

'Yes, I heard it in Budapest. *Azest* was liquidated and they did not take him on the new paper . . . . It must be a blow to him, because he is very vain, but financially it may not make a great difference to him.'

We went in to a press conference. '*Artillery action north of the Magino Line. Nothing further to report.*'

'Well, after you send that to Budapest we can go out and have lunch,' I said to the new colleague. His name was Rozgonyi.

I drove him to the Csárda in Dean Street. It was very full, as usual, and for the first time during its existence it was full of English people. We were joined by a friend, a naval officer, who said that he was certain that the tradition of bad cooking in England would not survive the war.

'I mean it seriously,' he said, 'you will see. More and more people realise that our cooking has sunk to such great depths that it would be impossible to sink any further. Belonging to a very snobbish nation which clings to the habits of their rulers, people in the middle classes begin to eat good food and go to restaurants where cooking is good, simply because they think it is smart to eat good food. It is a very useful snobbery. In the olden days the ruling class ate over-elaborate food, now they eat much simpler good food; the bulk of the middle classes still clings to the bad old standards, but the traditions are

ORSZ. SZÉCHÉNYI KÖNYV-TÁR

collapsing, cooking is becoming less ornate, less fussy, and better. And these foreign restaurants help. They came into being to cater for foreign colonies in London, at least for such members of foreign colonies who couldn't afford luxury feeding and at the same time would not eat the rubbish which is served by the middle-class English restaurants or by some of the older foreign restaurants that have sunk into English standards. And you see what happens. We invade them. They have to enlarge their premises. You could open hundreds of them in England now, war or no war. There is a terrific opportunity to cater for the new masses . . .'

'You mean the same thing as the birth of the popular press?'

'Yes, you hit the nail on the head,' he said with joy, 'in the last ten years something has been happening in English eating similar to what happened to English education in the 'seventies. The culinarily uneducated got educated for the first time as an after-effect of the last war and foreign travel and by the opening of a few foreign restaurants (even the Corner House helped). The demand is there. The only difference is that the classes involved by the two processes were different. The Education Act involved the very lowest, whereas the discovery of good food involved the middle classes. The working class still eats expensive rubbish (tinned apricots, very large ones, you know) but they are snobs and it won't take a long time for them to take us off: simply because it is "smart" to eat simple and appetising food.'

Rozgonyi said a few words in defence of English cooking; they sounded like a government statement on foreign policy.

I found Michael Rozgonyi a most delightful companion. He was touchingly serious, but his seriousness somehow did not add to his age; he was well over forty and looked considerably less. He had started life as a budding schoolmaster and though he went into journalism straight away, there was something of the schoolmaster in his attitude to life and people. Or was his seriousness due to the fact that he had spent a good deal of his time accompanying Hungarian cabinet ministers on foreign visits, usually in search of international loans or prolongations?

I was too busy not to attribute any importance to Rasch's behaviour towards me, no matter how strange it was. Then one day another colleague of mine told me at lunch that Rasch said to him that while I was in Budapest I intrigued against Rasch, did him out of his job out of pure spite and malice, and that he regarded me as his wickedest enemy. I opened my eyes very wide.

'I tried to argue with him,' said the journalist, 'knowing you and

knowing him, but it was no use. Knowing *him*, I should say. You know how mad he is. Full of the most unexpected contradictions, self-mortification, conceit, pride, vanity and anything you like. He has developed quite a persecution mania on the subject. So you need not feel flattered. If I had gone to Budapest instead of you, he might have accused me of the very worst crimes against him. Poor chap. I'm not surprised. Men like him cannot be happy. Especially with his appearance.'

'I don't know, he isn't quite as bad as you think,' I said. 'I know him in Berlin in the early thirties. You ought to have seen him then. When he came to England he became westernised. Now he takes a bath regularly and has developed social ambitions. I was rather surprised when I saw him a few months after he arrived in England. And quite a lot of people took a liking to him.'

'Because the English like being flattered . . .'

'I don't know if the English like flattery more than any other race, and I don't think Rasch goes out of his way to flatter people more than the average foreigner does in England.'

'No, that's just the point. He flatters them by implication. You see your attitude and my attitude to people is entirely different from his. When we meet an Englishman, say a journalist or an official, we talk to him as one talks to a social equal. We are completely at ease. We are impressed by things that impress normal people: we are impressed by intelligence, success, privilege, social position, wealth and the rest. With Rasch the thing is different. When he talks to these people he is, above all, immensely impressed by the facts that the person is not a Jew and that the person is an Englishman. This may be because he is a newcomer to England and he is not taking his surroundings for granted yet, but I think it is part of his terrific inferiority complex. He may not put on his ingratiating manners, his irresponsible flattery, his charm, he may not make such a fuss about people, may not entertain them because he wants to profit by it; he may do all these things out of pure respect. People in turn, of course, take to him. They are flattered. Everybody likes to feel powerful, because everybody needs a certain amount of reassurance. They are flattered by the fact that a person like Rasch gives them so much attention. Because, after all, Rasch is a successful journalist who makes eight or nine hundred a year, his father is a successful doctor, and when he asks them to dinner and they find that he quotes *bons mots* they have made and showers little attentions on them, they cannot help feeling that Rasch is a very nice person. They are not of an analytical turn of mind and they don't know that poor Rasch goes through agonies when he is alone, that in his loneliness he is dying to be

accepted by "good-class" English people, because he feels he has nothing but his intelligence and his capacity for making money. He has no background in England and he has no background in Hungary. Besides, life must be very hard for him. He is, you see, a sexual snob. He would go to bed with an insipid, unattractive person for the mere fact that the person was Gentile and English. The fact that someone is related to a knight sends shivers down his spine. The fact that someone is his "superior" is a sexual fetish for him.'

I smiled; then I forgot all about Rasch till I heard the charge again from another source. I was very offended because of the way he treated me on the day I returned to London, but I decided not to ignore the affair. It was all very well that he was inclined to be hysterical and at times unaccountable, but this was not known by his English friends, and some people, because they took him at his face value, might give quite serious credence to what he said about me. Besides, I had heard lately that he referred to me in as many words as a Fifth Columnist—which in May 1940 was too much even for my self-complacency. I rang him up one afternoon and told him I was coming to see him.

He lived in Weymouth Street and he contemplated leaving it because he found it impossible to pronounce the word 'Weymouth,' especially on the telephone.

'Who told you?' he asked me as I told him why I had come to see him. There was, if anything, a pleasant surprise in his tone.

'Practically everybody who knows you and knows me. I personally think it would have been so much better if you had come to me and told me so, I mean if you believed all that rubbish, instead of going to tell other people . . . but that's beside the point.'

'It was very unkind of you to use your influence to have me dismissed,' he said sulkily.

'I presume it's no use telling you I had nothing whatever to do with it. But even if you rather overestimate my influence in Budapest, why on earth should I try to do you out of your job? I certainly did not want your job. It was absolutely no advantage to me.'

'Then why did they kick me out?' he asked, giving the question a masochistic air.

'There may have been reasons. First of all the anti-Jewish law. The idea perhaps was to admit a poor Jew to the Press chamber, instead of you, because you have other means of subsistence in England. Besides, your former paper has become very pro-German and they simply don't want anybody to represent them from London.'

He seemed to meditate for a moment in silence, then he looked up with a triumphant smile:

'Then why did you go to Budapest?'

'Now, listen,' I said, more in anger than amazement, 'I know you are mad, but there are limits to madness. You don't seriously think that I went all the way to Budapest, putting up with a good deal of inconvenience and spending a lot of money, simply to do you out of your job. Do you?'

He seemed to reflect for a moment, like very old men, then his 'fire' returned. Again he looked triumphant and now-I've-got-you as he looked at me:

'And your connections with the President of the Press chamber?'

'Well, what about it?' I got irritated. 'I know him intimately. He happens to be one of my editors. I asked him to give me a rise. He did it.'

'Is that all he did for you?'

'My God, you don't imagine that I used his help to get you kicked out when I wanted his help to get a decent salary for me? Why should I? What advantage would it have been for me to have you kicked out . . .'

'Oh, you might have been angry because of Lily Haller . . .'

I suddenly saw the light. In 1937 my paper had given me six months' notice. I did not attribute much importance to it, because the paper had done that sort of thing fairly frequently as an incentive to its staff to work harder, and during its existence it had never fired anybody. In my case their justification was that since they refused to raise my salary from four pounds a week, I refused to write more than a certain number of articles a week and spent my time writing a book and more articles for *The Observer*. Then my editor tried a bit of blackmail. There was the Haller girl in the office who would have done anything to get to London and the editor allowed her to come and write articles from here, hoping that I should see the rival and reason. As a matter of fact I did. I began to work with great zeal and they began to publish fewer and fewer of Lily's articles. By the end of the six months I was taken back again and Lily returned to Hungary, rich in experience.

Rasch was very favourably impressed by Lily's youth, good looks and the fact that her father was a general. So he decided to patronise Lily. He suggested articles to Lily. He actually wrote articles for her. He took her out, he introduced her to people, he invested a good deal of his time in Lily and in return she—on her own confession to me—allowed Rasch to kiss her twice on her mouth. . . . 'I went home and gargled afterwards,' she added. 'He is a nice man and very generous, but those heavy lips . . . ugh.'

'Why do you laugh?' asked Rasch. 'Isn't it true?'

'Isn't what true?'

'That you got angry with me because I supported Lily . . .'

'Why should I?' I broke out in a loud laughter this time. 'Why should I be angry with you? I knew they were blackmailing me. . . . On second thoughts it may not have been a very nice attitude on your part because you thought that the dismissal was final, but still, it's no use doing something which—three years later—might give you pangs of conscience. As it happened I did not take any notice of it. Otherwise I would have told you there and then. And, I hope you won't resent this, I would have gone straight up to you and told you, instead of going around and telling people about it.'

'I see,' Rasch said. 'That's very different. Only I heard somebody saying that you intrigued against me.'

'Who was it?'

'I can't tell you. I gave my word of honour . . .'

'Did he give you his word of honour when he told you that?'

Rasch did not answer. He walked up and down the room in his heavy flannel dressing gown. He looked like a rabbinical student. Then suddenly he switched on the wireless. A voice which later on we grew fond of, and which became known as Bruce Belfrage's, announced the fall of the Channel ports.

'This is much more important,' I said when the announcement was over.

Rasch again did not answer. He looked as if he might faint any moment, then he straightened himself up a little, 'This is the end.'

'Yes,' I said, 'it might mean the end of France.'

'The end of France,' said Rasch with despair and contempt in his voice. 'Who is talking about the end of France? It's the end of England and the end of civilisation.'

'They could never invade England,' I said.

'I have spent over ten years in Germany and I know them. Don't argue with me.'

'And I have spent over ten years in England and I know them too. This country cannot and will not be invaded.'

But it was useless to argue with Rasch. I seemed to convince him for a few moments, then he began to agonise again.

'You don't realise what the implications are. You don't realise what is happening to the German refugees in Belgium and Holland.'

'Don't I? I read all about it in the papers. But that is beside the point. You are not a refugee; you are a Hungarian citizen and a neutral. Now does that relieve you, if I cannot convince you that England won't see an invasion?'

He seemed a little relieved for a moment. In fact he smiled as he shook hands with me when I left.

After Rasch had 'forgiven' me, or at least had acted as if he had forgiven me, he transferred all his interests to the impending doom of England and civilisation and the extermination of the Jewish race. In the dark corridors of the Ministry he was seen talking to Hungarians and others, explaining the implications of the latest news. There would be Civil War in England, the thing was now certain. Mosley and his Blackshirts would act as Fifth Columnists. True, Germany had no Navy, but England would be taken by para-troops. He became more and more agitated as the days went by. He seemed to gloat over German victories with a kind of masochistic delight. 'We are finished . . .'

Finally he proved to be too much even for Michael and his calm nerves. It was lucky for Rasch that people had a sense of humour, because he was really a case of spreading alarm and despondency. He went on with his nightmares all through the summer months.

It was long after my call on him that I had heard that Rasch had gone round in March and April telling everybody that I was working for a Nazi newspaper. To English friends he did not always say that I had done him out of his job. He said that I was supporting the Nazis and my visit to Budapest was most mysterious. It was true that my paper now had begun to publish articles that might have been written by Goebbels or by Alfred Rosenburg. At least my morning paper. The evening one was still maintaining a shadow neutrality. What he, however, forgot to add was that his own paper had actually been publishing signed articles by Rosenberg when Rasch was still working for it. After the fall of France there was a horrid change in all Hungarian papers. Some other colleagues told me there was an alarming change in all the Press that was left still free in Central and Eastern Europe.

Again there was little to do. Since the Channel ports were taken, telephonic communication with the Continent became an impos-sibility. We had to cable, which involved a new technique. Or rather a new technique for me. It reminded me of the old-world newspaper correspondent, like H. M. Stanley or George Augustus Sala, composing his 'special cables.' I soon learnt 'cablese,' but there was very little to send. France was taken and there was a lull; would it be another period of phoney war? The weather became very bright and I drove out to the Serpentine in the mornings after I attended the Press Conference, and sent my cable if there was any chance of cabling. I

reflected that this was an opportunity for me to write something serious. I had been toying with the idea of two books for some months. One on the Life and Times of King George V; more on his times than on his life, in reality the background story of the period between the two wars. The other was a novel, the plot of which had occurred to me quite a long time ago. I decided I would do the novel, principally because there was no need for research in connection with the novel and I knew I would be able to finish it fairly soon. Accordingly I started the novel, based on the notes I had made several years ago. I started the first page of the novel on June 26th, 1940. These two facts together seem very strange now. In my diary there is the following entry for the day: '*Town is full of New Zealanders in Boy Scout hats. Like a friendly invasion. Most charming and well-behaved people. Directed one to Trafalgar Square this morning. Philibert thinks German oil supply might give out soon. He does not share my fear that Hungary would be involved in war if she marches into Rumania. My fear is v. distant. Rumania is so very far away. Started novel this afternoon.*'

That was all. Looking back on it (I am writing this in May 1943) my attitude seems to me not so much frivolous as fantastic, in view of what has been revealed of the conditions of June 1940. There was apparently a widespread invasion scare over England among people who 'knew.' I must say it was very lucky for me not to mix much with such people. People in the M.O.I. were very calm about things, except Rasch, who became wild again, because a Berlin friend of his was interned. There were one or two air raids in England, mostly in the country and mostly against aerodromes and the sirens went a few times, but there was nothing apparently except some German reconnaissance planes over the Metropolis. Ideal conditions for writing a novel, it must be said.

But I could not settle down to writing the novel after all. I spent a week on it. I decided to use as much dialogue and as little comment as possible, and walking up and down my room I made notes for lines of possible treatment. It began to fascinate me. I reflected that the '*circus*' would start soon. This is one of my private words and means the following: I would spend a sleepless night on a chapter, would return very urgently from a walk, or put down something in my notebook at a most unlikely place, such as travelling on the underground, then I would think the thing was good. Then the next morning by clear cold daylight I would have my 'doubts,' then I would lose my temper and cut out the 'good thing.' The following day I would feel 'doubtful' again for cutting it out. This time nothing of the sort happened. A week or ten days after I began the novel I suddenly had a good deal to do, a street in the City was bombed and Michael

and I went out to see the damage. That was London's first taste of the Blitz. The damage was intensive but it only affected a few houses and a church. It did, however, a good deal to remind us that the lull was coming to an end and that something was starting. Then like a bombshell came the news from Vienna. Hitler had forced Rumania to cede some of her territory to Hungary and Bulgaria. I felt very relieved that my friend in Budapest was wrong, after all. This was a 'peaceful' settlement. At least there was no war about it; but the next moment I began to fear again. The ceding of a part of Transylvania to Hungary surely meant a second fulfilment of Hitler's promises to Hungary, or shall we say the second instalment of a loan to Hungary. And it was certain that Hitler would not be satisfied with Hungary acting as a granary for him: to supply Germany with foodstuffs. I was afraid Segrue was right. It was certain that Hitler would want active co-operation, he would want Hungarians to fight on his side. But against whom? What would be the next step: Jugoslavia? There was a treaty between Hungary and Jugoslavia, and surely Hungarians would not go to war against the Jugoslavs whom they had grown so fond of in the last four or five years? My fears were not allayed by the fact that the official British point of view concerning the partitioning of Rumania was what I had expected. Rumania had behaved in the worst possible way towards everybody, but chiefly towards the Allies to whom she owed so much. She had had everything she had wanted at the Peace Treaties—and more. Most of her representative politicians had behaved in a shameless manner all through the last thirty years. The partitioning had served her right. It was very obvious that British public opinion did not exactly applaud when the Vienna decision was made public towards the middle of August, because the Agreement had after all strengthened Hitler's hand, but there was no feeling of sympathy for Rumania. 'To be a Rumanian is not a nationality,' said a diplomat friend of mine a few years back, 'it's a profession.' This, I suppose, may be largely true about the ruling classes of Rumania and perhaps about the intelligentsia too. Rumanian peasants, however, like most peasants, are a simple, unspoilt, kindly race, with good looks and a good deal of natural charm. I remember them quite well in my early childhood and in my travels after the war. But then who in the West knows Rumanian peasants? A few casual travellers. For the rest of them Rumania is identified with the 'representative' class, and the same applies, I suppose, to every country in Eastern Europe.

It was in the middle of an air raid that I listened-in to Teleki's speech transmitted from a Budapest railway station as he arrived from Vienna. A bomb must have fallen very close because my windows

trembled, but I was too keen on hearing the Hungarian Premier to pay any attention. It was an impromptu speech and in the middle of obvious joy and jubilation in Hungary it must have sounded very depressing. He refused to be made a national hero. 'In these grave times it is the supreme duty of every Hungarian to do his utmost to work for his country.' Grave times? I reflected, when he had just returned from Vienna to announce that Hungary, after twenty-two years of bitterness, had at last received satisfaction, that 'justice' was done, that the Peace Treaty of Trianon was now really a 'filthy rag of paper' as it had been referred to during those twenty-two years of heated irredentism and agitation for a just settlement. Grave times? I knew that Teleki was always a little schoolmasterish, a little always too serious and pedagogic, but this speech sounded like a grave announcement of danger. What on earth was the meaning of this? He had used the Hungarian figure of speech 'dog's duty' in his peroration, which in English would mean something like 'absolute devotion.' It was clear, of course, that the Award of Vienna was made by Hitler so as to create a stronger source of irritation for both parties. It was obvious that Hitler made the Award a lever with which to play up Hungary against Rumania and vice versa according to his momentary interests. All this was more or less clear to me, but why should Teleki be so very gloomy about this? There must be something much deeper, more dangerous and threatening for Hungary. But what could it be?

It is a frequent temptation for a writer to smuggle in bits of his knowledge of later events when describing his own reactions to events as they occur. If he submits to this temptation he might emerge as a prophet. A prophet on false pretences, of course. As an afterthought to Teleki's speech I certainly felt that something was fundamentally wrong about the Award of Vienna and I certainly knew that Teleki's grave warning, instead of an expression of triumph, meant that Hungary was in danger of being involved in the war. In August, 1940, however, I did not realise that less than a year later, Hitler would attack the Soviet and would then present the bill to Hungary for services rendered.

## BLITZ

THE LULL that came during July and August seemed too much for Rasch's nerves. 'This is the end of civilisation,' he said to me and to all and sundry. He went from friend to casual acquaintance carrying alarm and despondency, but even his timidest colleagues were not

willing to be frightened, surrounded as they were by a sea of calm Anglo-Saxons. 'He is a Jewish alarmist,' someone said to me in the Beveridge Hall. The statement was misleading. Rasch was an alarmist and he was certainly also a Jew, but not the two together. Jews being, collectively speaking, an intelligent sensitive and imaginative race, they have, one is often told, a greater sense of danger than races like the English. Or perhaps they dramatise their feelings more vividly, because one heard that there was perhaps a greater measure of uneasiness among Jews in general in the difficult days of 1940 than among the Gentiles. That uneasiness was justified but it was not striking. I, myself, did not even notice it. With Rasch the attitude was different. He was not part of any mass hysteria, he was a case of individual hysteria to which the alarming news from the Continent gave a strong impetus. A mutual friend said that Rasch was a sex maniac, and in his opinion that was at the bottom of his hysterical outbursts. Not knowing much about Rasch's biological composition, I had to reserve judgment on the deeper causes of Rasch's attitude, but this was not the end of it. When bombs began to drop in the outskirts of London and there came a few air-raid alarms Rasch suddenly decided to leave England. This was towards the end of August. He hurried round to a few of his influential acquaintances and said to them that it would be a very important thing if the Hungarian communities in the United States and Canada were organised against the Axis, and that he would be willing to do the job. One day he came down to the Serpentine and told me that he was leaving for Canada early in September.

'I'm sorry for you,' he said with unsuppressed triumph.

'Sorry, why?'

'Because you have to stay in England . . .'

'But I don't want to leave even if I could. I have my job to do.'

'How long for?'

'I don't know and I don't care.'

'Supposing the invasion of England does not succeed' (he was getting decidedly optimistic) 'what will you do if your paper dismisses you?'

'Why should my paper dismiss me?'

'Because Germany would take Hungary over and you don't imagine they would keep you here . . . a British subject . . .'

'In that case I shall volunteer for the Army. In any case I am liable to be called up before long.'

'You will like the Army, I must say.'

'Now, listen,' I said, 'I don't like the Army and I am not in the least certain I shall make a good soldier, but such things don't matter. It's a duty, that's all . . .'

'I'd like to see you in uniform.'

He never saw me in uniform. I was busy one evening typing out a message about the air raid damage to Silvertown when Helström, a Swedish colleague, came up to me and said that Rasch was dead. He was apparently on the *City of Benares*, which was torpedoed on its way to Canada. Eye witnesses said that the last that was seen of Rasch was that he was running about the deck wailing and screaming like a woman.

We were all busy now. Michael persuaded me to spend my nights with him and the rest of the Press in the shelter at the M.O.I. It was very noisy at Onslow Gardens, but later I came to the conclusion that the shelter was still noisier. So after about a week I decided to return home and sleep on the top floor as before. We would drive out in the morning, Michael and I, to see the damage caused during the previous night, then we would go back to the Ministry and write out cables. Our reports in those days were not unlike the reports of assessors employed by insurance companies, except for style. We saw a good deal of beautiful heroism. Beautiful heroism in spite of the fact that I had expected the Londoner to react the way he did. I knew he was a romantic and I knew, or at least fancied, the qualities in him that go into quiet heroism. Yet the thing did strike me as beautiful, because it was beautiful human behaviour under stress. The causes did not seem to interest me. An American colleague said it was not surprising because the English masses were not used to the refinements of life. This may or may not be true; I don't think it is relevant.

Like most Londoners I received my first taste of total warfare during the Blitz. On September 7th three Swedish colleagues and myself drove to Bermondsey. It was a historic occasion; one of the minor battles of the war. It was a ghastly night yet the strangest thing was that none of us were afraid. We felt too excited and important and full of professional and private curiosity. We did not bother about the bombs that kept falling dangerously near or about the bits of shrapnel that fell on the roof of my car. We could see quite a long way ahead in the red illumination of several fires. At a street corner we were stopped and were asked to give a lift to a wounded fireman. Two of the Swedes got out and the fireman was lifted in. By the time we arrived at the hospital he was dead. It was the first time I had handled the body of a dead man.

Then Michael asked me to go with him to spend the week-ends in the country, because he wanted to have one good night's sleep after the racket in the Ministry shelter, where censors, cable boys, messengers and admirals occasionally walked through his bed or

stumbled over his prostrate body in the dark corridors. So I left London for a few week-ends during the Blitz. We rang up several hotels between High Wycombe and Oxford, but there was usually no accommodation. We usually had to go to Oxford or to Luton. One week-end I took him to stay with friends near Bedford.

Then came the bombing of inner London. The morning following the raids Michael and I, and sometimes other colleagues, would go out and look at the havoc in the West End. This was journalism, no doubt, a professional activity, and what I put down in my note-books would appear in Budapest the following day as 'reported by our London Correspondent' but I felt how difficult it was for me to be the 'impartial observer' and to be 'neutral.' Through the passage of years London had become my personal background, and the lanscape of the town a backcloth to my personal history. I knew London more intimately than I knew any other town on earth. I had spent six years in Budapest and twelve in London and now that I saw the town in ruins it came back to me that London, after all, was 'my town', if I could ever claim any town as such. During these professional excursions I became very emotional. It was only now that I realised how much London meant to me, how much she was part of my life. Very probably she meant more to me than to the average born Londoner, because he was not a Londoner by choice.

My emotional outlook was very unreal. The damage was no doubt considerable when it came to be assessed in terms of money, but after all, the raids had destroyed comparatively little in London that was of great artistic or historical value. There was the Guildhall, yes, I wrote an article about it over ten years ago, and there was St. James's, Piccadilly, and St. Clement Danes and All-Hallows-by-the-Tower. All three fine old churches, but they represented more sentimental than artistic value to me. I used to have dates in front of St. James's and I used to attend services in All-Hallows in my Boy Scouting days. When I thought of them I never came to regard their architectural beauty or their antiquity. The thought was something deeper, more personal, more emotional. I know that literary and artistic memories can attach you to a house, to a street, to a district as strongly as ties of the blood, but there are ties that are stronger than these, and stronger than ties of the blood.

It was a shock to me to see a house in Berkeley Square in ruins because I used to dine there, and another one in Paddington because I used to make love there, and yet another one in Pimlico because I used to live there. And it was a shock to me to see a store in ruins in Oxford Street, for a totally unknown reason. It was not connected

with my life-story; it sold ladies' dresses mostly and I should think cami-knickers, and as far as I remember I had never been inside it. Besides it was a singularly ugly building, old-fashioned and over-articulated, but I felt that its 'Australian butter' coloured walls and the blue name-plate with the gold lettering was somehow an integral part of my London. And I thought the same about a number of other houses I knew in Mayfair, in Chelsea, Holborn, Pimlico, Fulham. They were all parts of my London. The damage was somehow a personal loss. I knew very well that those houses could be built again and would certainly be built again, in fact it seemed that the houses that would rise in their stead would perhaps be more pleasing to the eye, more comforting to the mind and more satisfactory to the body than the old ones, yet I felt that the old ones were irreplacable. Something was broken that couldn't be mended and it would never be the same thing again. Then I would shrug my shoulders—because we can't live on emotions alone—and I would re-read my copy and cross out one or two of the more 'private' and emotional sentences and change an adjective or two.

Then Philibert one day suddenly told me that he would move out of the house. Gustave was now unlikely to return and it would be, in any case, very unsafe for us to stay any longer. He sent a letter to Geneva giving Gustave notice. I quite understood Philibert's anxiety. The danger was brought home to him very vividly. The telephone girl at the Legation, dear Iphigenia Vukovich, whom we all loved, and who was as much part of the building as the document cases, the sealing wax or the extra-territoriality, was found dead one day. She was killed by bomb blast in her flat; and a week or two later an English friend of Philibert's had met his death somewhere in Earl's Court. Philibert said it was unsafe to stay in town. He became much concerned with the idea of moving to Oxford. First he decided to evacuate himself and his wife, then he decided to close the house and take all his furniture with him, including the stuffed birds under glass. The great impetus came a week later. 'There's a bombed house on the Fulham Road,' his voice sounded lugubrious on the telephone. 'It was bombed five days ago. A direct hit. It must have been a land mine. I saw it this afternoon. Apparently they cannot dig the bodies out. The smell is something frightful. I became quite sick. I have a very acute sense of smell. I am moving as soon as I have fixed up the house in Oxford . . .'

The same afternoon I passed Fulham Road and I stopped in front of the house Philibert indicated. It must have been a direct hit, I agreed. 'Lucky thing there wasn't nobody in it,' said a man in A.R.P. uniform. 'It's been uninhabited for the last three years. Condemned,

you see . . . Yes, it's an awful stinking smell . . . comes from the dairy next door. They are making cheese, see. Well, you can't get no cheese at the grocers or at the dairy either. Only the smell . . .'

Philibert, however, was adamant. He laughed when I told him the story, but I saw he was right in his fears. He drew up complicated plans for moving out and I decided I would move too. There was little to attach me to Kensington. Gustave would not return and his review in defence of the minorities of Europe would have to wait till after the Peace Treaties. Besides I never liked the district, where I had spent well over seven years and from which I had run away to more 'live' parts of London, such as Pimlico and Marylebone. This time my choice fell on Pimlico again. It was cheap and I had spent a year there in 1929 and I felt I would be glad to live there again. I was shown a flat and I liked it. It was in one of the squares, on the first floor and it had a balcony. I had never had a balcony before and I was looking forward to it. Fate, however, decided that I would not have the balcony after all. Two days after I signed the contract I was rung up by the proprietors and was told that the balcony was practically the only thing that was left of the house after the previous night's raid. They, however, had another house, he said, in another of the Pimlico squares, quite near the river, he added, as a kind of special attraction. I saw the other flat. It was the entire ground floor with nice, large rooms, a large dining room to serve as sitting room, no balcony, true, and the front room windows were smashed by bomb blast.

I took it.

## O. H. M. S.

THEN THERE came a lull again in London. It was towards the winter, the blitz being transferred to Coventry, Birmingham, Sheffield, Southampton. Michael and I went on our tour as damage assessors. We drove to Coventry and saw Southampton. We wrote our reports.

Both of us had worked a good deal through the autumn but the work somehow looked unreal to us. For a journalist it is as important to see his stuff in print as for an actor to feel the public beyond the footlights. We had not seen a single Hungarian newspaper since France fell. Then they began to arrive in haphazard parcels, thirty to forty issues on one single day, with a delay of six months.

One night Michael and I were dining at Olivelli's, surrounded, as always, by other colleagues and officials from the M.O.I. There

was a heavy barrage outside and Michael decided to sleep at the Ministry shelter. An American colleague and I went out to look round the Soho pubs. This was my first 'pub crawl.' It was a very exciting 'crawl' with the night outside noisy as hell. He said it was a pity we weren't dressed because he had two tickets for the Queen Caroline Ball in Grosvenor House. Then we had a few more drinks and I decided to go to bed. As I walked out of the pub in Shaftesbury Avenue to get to my car there was the loudest detonation I had heard through the blitz. It shook the street. I almost fell over. I saw people running towards Coventry Street. As I drove through Rupert Street and came to Coventry Street I had to stop. There was a large crowd in front of the car.

'Could you give 'im a lift, mate? 'E's badly hurt . . .' someone said in the darkness. I got out.

Two men helped a human shape into the car with difficulty. 'Charing Cross Hospital is the best,' they said.

It took us quite a long time to get through the traffic. It was just after eleven.

'I hope you are not in pain?' I asked.

'No, I'm all right,' said a voice, a young voice and a public school voice. Then as we had to stop again near Trafalgar Square I saw him by the ghastly illumination: a young officer in uniform. 'I was in the Café de Paris . . .' he explained, but I saw that it was not easy for him to speak. It took some time to get to the hospital, we had to make detours and we were stopped by traffic lights and crowds, then we were at the hospital and we helped him out. They had to put him on a stretcher.

The next morning I saw that the back seat of my car and the carpet were thickly covered with blood.

Then there came a lull for long weeks again and I began to feel bored. I still had a desire to separate myself from the unreality of the times and to sit down to write, but the thing seemed very futile. It was clear that the lull could not be anything but temporary. Something must happen soon. But when? And what? And though the events seemed negligible and my work dull routine, I had no desire to do anything beyond being anticipatory and excited.

Then came a bombshell. I was just going through the leaders in *The Times*, the *Manchester Guardian*, and the *Yorkshire Post*, when Michael came up to me with guarded excitement.

'Teleki's dead,' he said.

'Who told you?'

'It's on the tape.'

'Good God! It must be murder.'

'That's what I thought too. There's just one line on the tape. Let's ring up the Legation.'

Eaton Place, however, knew nothing further. We decided to stay in the whole day and watch the tape and buy every edition of the evening papers. Finally, at five in the afternoon when I could not bear it any longer, I rang up Tudor Jenkins on the *Evening Standard* and Jenkins told me that he had just received a message from Budapest: Teleki had committed suicide and had left three letters behind, one addressed to Admiral Horthy.

'Well,' said Michael as I told him my news. He made a bitter, resigned movement with his hand and looked darkly and sadly in front of him; then it was six o'clock and we heard the news.

It was suicide beyond doubt. Apparently the Hungarian government tried to hush it up and its first announcement was that Teleki had been suffering from heart trouble and had had a stroke. But apparently the thing could not be denied.

It was also announced that Bardossy was the probable new Prime Minister.

'That's the end,' said Michael and I in unison.

I drove to the Legation. Barcza, the Minister, was still in. During the blitz he had evacuated himself to Sunningdale and drove out every evening.

'We might as well begin our packing,' he said. 'Martyrdom is not enough . . .'

The Legation building looked like a beehive. I left them because I knew they were very busy. As I passed through the corridor I saw the chief clerk emptying the contents of large dossiers from his steel safe. I reflected that to-night they would start burning their documents.

I drove back to the M.O.I. As I crossed the entrance-hall, Harold Nicolson stopped me to inquire. I told him what I knew.

'A very tragic thing,' he said.

It was obvious that the Germans had insisted on Hungary's co-operation in the carving up of Jugoslavia, or rather the Germans wanted Hungary to march with them into Jugoslavia. Obviously Teleki saw no other way out but to take his life.

The following morning the papers announced Bardossy's premiership.

I had known 'Latzi' Bardossy intimately. For three years he had been counsellor of the Hungarian Legation in London and in those days I was in almost daily contact with Eaton Place. He used to ask me to dinners at his house; and finally, while the Press Attaché was away on his summer holidays, Bardossy asked me to deputise as Acting Press Attaché of the Legation. This I had done during two summers, and

most of the time I worked under Bardossy. He was the most ambitious man I had ever met in my life and the second vainest, but his company was very entertaining because he was an amusing and cultured person. Educated Hungarians at times can be murderously and irresponsibly amusing at other people's expense, and Bardossy was first rate at that evil art. 'Let's work out a hierarchy,' he would say to me one day, 'who are the stupidest Hungarians in London? Now don't count the Second Secretary next door, poor chap, he is a case of arrested development. I want just plain, ordinary stupid people.' I would meekly suggest A., but Bardossy would impatiently wave his hand at me and prove that B. was far stupider. If he was in a good mood he could, one after the other, give breath-taking renderings of various people we knew in the Hungarian Foreign Office. I remember one of his best 'numbers': an old Austro-Hungarian ambassador, now dead. He did him four times for my benefit and I thought Florence Desmond could not have done it better.

Bardossy had passed all his school examinations with first-class honours and to a certain extent—at forty-three—he still retained a few of the less pleasant characteristics of 'top boys'. Like so many cynics he was suffering from acute gastric trouble. He had several operations and, after he had left London to become Hungarian minister in Bucharest, I saw him again one summer in Budapest. He looked ghastly. His face, thinner than ever, had a strange colour of green and amber. He said his kidneys were affected too. I reflected later that it was strange that practically every leading Hungarian politician in the last few years had been suffering from kidney trouble. This had killed General Goemboes and Count Csáky, the Foreign Secretary, and both of the recent Premiers, Daranyi and Teleki, had been suffering from it. Could kidney trouble be the occupational disease of political leaders in Hungary?

I should have liked to see 'Latzi' Bardossy now in the moment of triumph. For a decade it had been his greatest ambition to become Foreign Secretary. He had worked for it as nobody else had worked for that job. A few years ago it had seemed almost within his grasp. When Kanya had to retire (kidney trouble again) there was a toss-up between Bardossy and Csáky and the Regent chose Csáky, who was even younger than Bardossy. Bardossy must have felt very galled. But Csáky, though he looked youthful and energetic (or was it merely his bumptiousness?) had died a year after his appointment and Bardossy had achieved the crowning success of his life. He was barely fifty and Foreign Secretary of Hungary. It had never occurred to anyone before that—and I am toying with the idea of including Bardossy himself—that one day he should become Premier of Hungary. Or does ambition

know limits? Then it happened as we expected. Bardossy was apparently ready to co-operate with Hitler, and Hungary was marching into Jugoslavia. I sat down at my desk at the M.O.I. and wrote a cable article under the title *Goodbye to a Desk*. I felt that the contact between my readers and myself was such that it was fit to say goodbye to them after twelve or thirteen years.

But I was too late. We had already broken off diplomatic relations with Hungary during the day and the Ministry refused to transmit my cable to Budapest.

I was feeling very sad and very disgusted. My job had gone but that was not important. I should find another and in any case now that Teleki was dead and I could no longer do that very, very little which I had tried to do, the best thing I could do was to volunteer for one of the Forces. I was feeling very sad and very disgusted. Hungary's march into Jugoslavia was open treachery, there could be no doubt about that, especially in view of the circumstances, as I saw them. I felt more and more and more disgusted as I went through the history of the last few years of Hungary's relations with Jugoslavia. There was a dispute between the two countries about a strip of Jugoslavia which had belonged to Hungary before 1919 and which still had an important Hungarian racial minority. The dispute had gone for twenty years, though the last five years of the twenty were spent in a gradual improvement of relations between the two countries. Finally there came a Treaty of Friendship. That Treaty had a very genuine foundation and when it was made I was sure that the average Hungarian certainly meant it. The two nations had genuinely discovered that they had much in common, and the Treaty was really only a symbol because in the years immediately preceding it there was a very pleasant interchange of cultural and other communications between the two countries. I don't know if Hungarians had 'always liked the Serbs'; I do, however, know that they had never disliked them and that even in their hours of tribulation they had never disliked them nearly as violently as they disliked the Rumanians. Hungarians always said that the Serbs were brave soldiers and that they were a fine race. Then a few months after the signature of the Treaty of Friendship, Hungary, on the side of Hitler, invaded Jugoslavia. I quite understood that Teleki, who was a scrupulously honest man, had taken his life, possibly because he thought this might act as a warning to his country or perhaps because he was so disgusted and fed-up that he could not see any other way out. Or could he? There was an alternative. To tell Hitler plainly that Hungary was not willing to go against Jugoslavia, in which case Hitler perhaps could not, or would not, invade Hungary? Here was a mystery. Martyrdom, however—as Barcza had said to me—

was not enough. And there was nobody in the Hungarian Parliament, not one single man, who would have dared to get up and tell the nation that what Germany expected Hungary to do was a particularly filthy piece of treachery, in spite of Bardossy's thin excuses and pretexts that the Jugoslav Regency—which had actually signed the Treaty—had been deposed by a *coup d'état*. There was not one man in that chamber who would have told Bardossy to his face that he was a traitor.

. . . Or perhaps I am somewhat muddled in my summing up of the situation. It is easy to condemn people from a distance of a thousand miles, in the middle of a war, and when you only know the main facts and none of the details.

I wondered what the average man in Budapest, in the country, thought of it; people I knew. My personal view is that Nazi propaganda could not have misled them and doped them and blinded them quite as much as to have made them lose their conscience and their sense of decency completely. Then there may be something in the old platitude that nations have the leaders they deserve.

After this there was nothing to do. It was much the same as the situation in which I had found myself when war broke out. Incidentally I became de-reserved a few days after I lost my job. So I would soon be called up.

Then a friend of mine said that the call-up might take a year. It was still very slow. I had a certain amount of money, but I knew that no more was forthcoming, so one fine morning I went to one of the R.A.F. Recruiting Depots to volunteer for service. I was interviewed by a young pilot officer. He asked me what I had done in civilian life, then he went into my education and finally said that all the R.A.F. needed at that moment were armourers and artificers and he quite frankly advised me not to ask him to sign me on. He said he had to take practically everybody who volunteered, but armouring would not suit me. He smiled and added: 'I know that the life of the mechanic has a strong appeal for an intellectual and I'm certain you would be only too eager to sign on and get in. You would find it fascinating, but only for a short time. The moment the attraction of the novelty wore off you would lose your interest and would get very fed up with it.' He then lowered his voice so that the flight-sergeant who was interviewing another candidate could not hear it, and added: 'My unofficial advice to you is to go and worry your friends in the Air Ministry. You are sure to have some there—ask for a more suitable job in the R.A.F.'

I went to the Air Ministry twice but my friends refused to be worried by me. Considering that in those days Goering had caused them considerable worry I was not in the least surprised that they ignored my

application. Then I went to see a friend of mine at the Admiralty and he took all my particulars and said he would let me know about it, though it was extremely doubtful if I could be of any use to them in spite of all my qualifications, because of my foreign birth.

After this I shrugged my shoulders. I had done what I could. I felt very badly run down because I had had no holiday for over a year, so I decided to leave for the country house of a friend of mine in Staffordshire. I love that house, its large and beautiful garden, its unpretentiousness, the friendly cordiality of host and hostess. I know practically every one of their friends and relations, every single inhabitant in the village they live in, and almost every nook and cranny in that part of the Midlands. It was in that house that one cold, summer morning some seven or eight years ago I began my first novel and now the house and its atmosphere and the bracing Midland air was inspiring again. I decided I would finish the novel after all. There was a good opportunity. I had just enough money to see me through a few months and I was certain I would not be disturbed now. And I wanted to gamble against my bad luck. I reflected that if I didn't sit down to write, they would not call me up for a year or so, but if I did I should provoke the call-up soon. I had not had my notebook with me but I began to think again of the various possibilities of treatment. Then two days later I left the place for London.

I felt I had no need for a holiday or for seeing people or for any amusement. On my arrival I did not unpack but went straight to my sitting room and took out the file of my notes and manuscripts of *Rehearsal Under the Moon*. Then I plunged myself into it. A few mornings when work did not go satisfactorily I went up to the Serpentine and had a swim, sometimes in rain, sometimes in sunshine, then I returned to find that the whole sequence had to be rewritten.

Early in June, one day when there were unexpected difficulties about bits of dialogue, I had to attend my medical at Willesden. It was obvious now that the call-up would not be very long delayed. I returned to the novel at once. I must clear things up. By the middle of September it was finished. I sent it to a publisher. The publisher said it was unusually mature work for a first novel, but it was out of the question for him to publish it, because the background of the work was the nineteen-thirties and nothing could be so far removed from his public than that period. He said I ought not to be discouraged, because eventually I would find a publisher for it. In any case he advised me, privately, to change the time sequence in the second part of the book. It was too abrupt. I reflected that his advice was sound and I made the alterations.

The rewriting took about three weeks. It was now October. A glorious, crisp, English autumn over Pimlico with sharp air to brace the senses. It was about four in the afternoon and I went through the revised version of the novel. I felt I could no longer improve on it. It was now out of my hands for better or worse. I slipped another sheet of paper into my typewriter, a page to go after the title page, and I typed out the name of my host and hostess in Staffordshire.

The moment I placed the dedicatory sheet into its proper place and put the fastening clip over the pages, I heard the postman's knock on the front door. There was a letter for me. It was in a greyish, yellow envelope with an oval slit on it to show my name and address. It came On His Majesty's Service. For a moment I held it in my hand without opening it. I knew it was coming. It had now come. How is this for perfect timing, I reflected?

And I was not ironical.

# PART THE SECOND

## *MEMOIRS OF A GUNNER*

# *MEMOIRS OF A GUNNER*

## ONE ONE THREE O THREE NINE THREE

I WENT a day earlier because I did not want to travel all night. I had never been to Wakefield before, and as it happened this was my first time in the West Riding. I knew there would be plenty of chance to have a look at the town later, but now it was almost dark and the man who got out of the train at Doncaster told me it was hard to find rooms in Wakefield. I tried half a dozen hotels to the left and right of the big, circular building of the Yorkshire Penny Bank. The Stratford, the Woolpack, the Commercial, the George, the London. Then the policeman thought I ought to try the Lupset Estate, which was out of town and usually had vacant rooms.

The moment I entered the hotel there came an air-raid warning. Its tone was deep, slightly guttural; an angry, masculine disapproval compared with the agitated, almost feminine screams of London sirens. The first warning I had heard for a year. It was October 1941.

'You better coom dahn t'basement,' said the landlady nervously.

'Nay, it's noothing. Take it easy, muther,' said her son. He was an airman; his tunic unbuttoned; he wore slippers. 'Take it easy, it coomes to nowt. So you coom from Loondon?' He turned to me. 'You're used to it. Ah wor stationed near Loondon during the blitz . . .'

Since there came no other sign of any enemy activity we all went back to the parlour and crowded round the fire.

It was, it seemed, a family party: the airman's wife, his sister, a big, dark-haired girl, a man who looked like a foreman in a coal mine, and two or three others.

'We aren't really a hotel,' said the landlady, 'boot we like to oblige commercial gents . . .'

I watched them fascinated, as always when I hear Yorkshire being spoken. They did not talk broad Yorkshire, like that old soccer supporter I had met a year before the war in a pub on the Edgware Road. He had come down for the Cup Final and had a large blue silk doll in his buttonhole and had said among other things that beer in London was like horse's piss. These people in the Lupset talked more like Edmund Gwenn in Yorkshire plays.

'So you're joining the Army,' said the airman in the tap-room later. We were standing each other Tetleys.

'Yes,' I said, 'this is my last night in Civvy Street.'

'Aye, it's not a bud life.' He jerked his head sideways.

'Have you been in long?'

'Nine months G.D. I'm joost being transferred to Air Crew. Boot it's the same in t' Army. First month's the worst, with kit inspection and P.T. and inoculations and dentist. The first thing they doon to me they yanked oot all me teeth, top and bottom. . . . These are false teeth. I joost had 'em. . . . Birthday present,' he grinned. 'Ah wor twenty-four ten days ago.'

I asked him if he knew the address of my regiment. He shook his head, then he turned to the coal foreman talking to someone else back to us.

'Mr. Pinchbeck, d'you know where the ——th Regiment hangs oot? This lud's going to join them . . .'

Mr. Pinchbeck knew it. And he knew a *lud* that used to work in the place. Gamekeeper he was and the place was called Wintersett Abbey. A big place, some three miles out of Wakefield. Anybody could tell me. Take the bus from the Woolpack public house.

There came the All Clear. I decided to go to bed.

I was fairly tired but it was early and it was quite natural that sleep would not come too easily. In less than twelve hours' time I should no longer be a civilian and all that that word might have meant. A great change in my life was at hand, no doubt. Possibly one of the greatest. Who knew? To-morrow I should be a soldier. The prospect did not alarm me. It had never done so since the outbreak of war. True, I wasn't overjoyed at it but I was quite looking forward to it, all the same. It was to be a change and I was desperately in need of a change, desperately in need of renewing myself and doing something concrete and 'real' at last. My life in the Army might become something like a visit to a strange country, of which I had heard a good deal; a strange country, more dull perhaps than attractive, but strange all the same, and that was something. I am by nature curious and I have a capacity for surprise which is supposed to be the earmark of halfwits and the authors of readable travel books.

I came a day earlier and I met no one on the train who would be joining this regiment and this reminded me of the only thing that at times had made me slightly uneasy when I thought about the Army. It was privacy. I had spent the last fourteen years living alone and I had grown fond of solitude, the type of solitude which one can stop at will. This was the problem. Pascal knew all about it; he is my witness, but then you may not know Pascal . . .

Other problems did not worry me: age or lack of comfort. It might be difficult for people of thirty-five to get on with others ten or fifteen years younger than themselves, because age and experience separate

people more than climatic differences and money. But I think I am sociable, people as such interest me more than anything else on earth, I make superficial friendships like lightning and my mind is fairly elastic. And lack of comfort would not worry me in the least. When all is said and done, comfort is a business of immediate sensations. I like comfort and I appreciate it, at times it is necessary for me, but I can do quite easily without it. I had 'roughed' it very often. I had been a Rover Scout for five years, had slept under canvas in midwinter, I had done a certain amount of boxing and wrestling, ski-ing and riding and tramping in my time, and as writers and journalists go I could probably be described as 'tough'. Physical discomfort would not give me serious worry; mental discomfort might.

When the conductress asked me whether I wanted a return ticket to Wintersett, I said I wouldn't be returning and I smiled at her with feigned self-pity, because she was good looking.

'It isn't as bud as all thut, lad,' she said, because she had a warm heart.

The roadway was narrow. We soon left the town, crossed a stone bridge built in the shape of a 'Y' and went over a hill. It was now open country both sides. 'The Yorkshire Moors.' The phrase had leapt into my mind like an explanatory caption and I opened my eyes wide to take it in. There was a bluish-grey haze over the fields, a kind of smoke, a sombre, melancholy, but all the same an attractive tone I had never yet seen before. But I knew it had existed. I *felt* it all the time I was reading the Brontës, Priestley, Phyllis Bentley, even that somewhat over-rated Winifred Holtby.

A small village came, grey and righteous like the birthplace of a labour leader, then the moors again, then autumn trees, another small village and in the background a slag-heap. It was smoking gently like a miniature volcano. I like slag-heaps. (All right, *I keep them.*)

Then we arrived. There was a soldier standing in front of an iron gate.

'You're early,' he said, and jerked his thumb towards the lodge on the right.

The lodge was large, in pearl-grey stone with an Adam fanlight and hardly any furniture in it. An elderly sergeant stood by the fire.

'Good morning,' I said.

It was not a cheerful good morning, an ingratiating good morning, an apologetic good morning, nor a friendly one. It was a business-like, conventional good morning, a condescending good morning if any.

He looked up, a little taken aback. Then I noticed there was another sergeant there; much younger. It was the younger sergeant who re-

turned my greeting first: loud, fast, a little anxious, startled, almost deferential.

He took my call-up notice and consulted a list, then told me to see the clerk in the office.

I walked up the drive. The drive was long, some fine old trees, then a very large lawn; deer gazing towards me, ready to bolt, then suddenly I saw the Abbey. From the drive it looked dark and menacing, like a backwoods earl about to cut off his only daughter, then as I got nearer and nearer to that weather-beaten grey stone as it stood on the edge of the lawn, with a semi-circular staircase leading up to the main entrance, its right wing missing, I suddenly remembered. I suddenly remembered a picture. An old mezzotint seen somewhere in a landing or corridor, an engraving in a shop window with its edges slightly freckled, a photograph in *Country Life* and the caption: '*WINTERSETT ABBEY. The seat of Lord Ossett . . .*'

The staircase was fairly narrow with mahogany banisters and the landing had some fine mouldings; Adam, no doubt.

The clerk returned my call-up notice after he read it. 'You may keep it . . . as a souvenir,' he added. He smiled. Then he recorded in a large book that my initials stood for Adam Martin, that I was born on December 14, 1906, that I was a Presbyterian by religion, that I did not belong to an approved society, that I was five foot eleven and weighed eleven stones and one pound. He put down the name of a friend of mine as 'next of kin in absence of relations living in the United Kingdom'. Then he handed me a slip of paper.

It was my Army number. It was 1130393.

As I went through the arch on my way to the Quartermaster Stores to draw blankets I saw a squad of men drilling on the square. Tomorrow I would be doing the same thing. Perhaps this afternoon? If that sergeant went on shouting like that he would develop corns on his vocal cords.

'You'll find straw in the tent across,' said the Quartermaster Sergeant. He sounded surly and ill-tempered. Later I found that all Army Quartermasters were surly and ill-tempered, with good reason.

'Here, you better take a dozen of 'em palliasses and fill 'em for the blokes that are coming to-day.' He said this to a soldier who was hanging about in the stores. 'Show him where the straw is. Plenty of time till dinner.'

First he showed me the room where I was to sleep. It was in one of the stables, across the yard.

'You better take one of them bottom bunks, keeps you out of the draft, see.' He was short, had a Welsh accent and his hair was going very grey at twenty-five or seven. I find that is common in Wales.

We carried the empty palliasses into the tent and he fell promptly asleep on a large, square mound of straw. I began to fill a palliasse, then another.

Two civilians came in, young men of twenty. 'Cor, blimey, they don't half mean business in the Army. We just arrived an' start work stryghtaway . . .'

'Did you expect the sarn't major givin' you a feather-bed? You bin 'ere long, myte?'

I saw some more of them at dinner. Dinner was in the servants' dining hall. We queued up in the corridor tin plates in hand. There was a long row of bells under the ceiling and words under each bell. 'Blue Gallery', 'Library', 'Oak Room', 'Tapestry Room', 'Billiard Room', 'Chintz Room', 'Morning Room', 'Miss Maude', 'Miss Beryl', 'Mr. Maurice', 'Mr. Henry' . . . For whom the bell tolls . . .

The soldiers invaded the tables, noisy and quite cheerful. We civilians kept quiet at a separate table. As I was eating my bread and butter pudding, I looked at the others round me. Most of them were thirty-fives like myself, with a few twenty-year-olds thrown in. Quite well dressed in sombre colours, but it seemed they looked older than their age, and depressed and anxious, not even pretending to be cheerful, not having any curiosity about the Army. Even the twenties looked solemn.

After washing up our plates we returned to the stables. About ten of us. The others came later. We stood by the window watching men drill on the square. I watched the men in the room. So these were my fellow soldiers, the ones who were called up with me to fight for England. These were the people with whom I should be living in very close physical contact. The people with whom I should be sharing my new life, God knows for how long.

We found out that practically all of us came from London, then the talk stopped as if we all felt we had said too much.

They were people I would pass every day in the street, sit next to in the Underground, bus, cinema; people I would meet in shops, in the crowds in Oxford Street. Most of them looked pleasant, there was no mistake about that, they looked pleasant and sociable, after a fashion, and honest. Some more arrived, all from London, all pleasant, sociable after a fashion and honest. All respectably dressed, mostly thirty-fives. But now in the very first hour of our acquaintance they all looked alike, they all seemed to have the same personality, even the same features, like the Chinese when you see them in a bunch for the first time.

Beneath our friendliness we were, I felt, all careful, 'not to commit ourselves' and 'not to give ourselves away'. I personally felt slightly

uneasy, thinking that they would notice how different I was from them. A stupid thing to feel uneasy about because it cannot be kept secret long, especially in the Army, but still there it was. I would try to pretend for a time that I was not really different from them. I would try to dramatise and underline the elements and features of my nature which were not different from theirs, but sooner or later pretence would become difficult. True, of course, that by that time we should know each other better.

My first impression was that they all appeared 'older' than I felt myself to be. Not physically though. The man who was to sleep above me had large masses of hair and his skin was smooth as a baby's. The little man who was now sitting on his bunk did not look more than twenty-five. It was a mental 'oldness', I felt, not reserve, not shyness; it was contact and preoccupation with things that make the mind older, adjustment difficult, elasticity reduced, and do little to develop that graceful scepticism that allows man to question where he does not understand. For a moment I thought that outlook, that attitude which reflected itself in their features came from responsibility, then I dismissed the thought because I was already thinking that they were more 'responsible' and 'better' men than myself. Long interest in the life of working-class people and occasional contacts of near intimacy with working men of my own age made me check the—almost natural —sentimental and emotional impulses that well up in me when I meet The Little Man. They were no novelty to me, I began to reason. I did not yet precisely know how to talk to them but I knew very precisely how not to. And they interested me. And . . . I smiled with a little malignant satisfaction (malignant because my contacts in the past were not always successful) that we were now in the Army and they would have to, they would be forced by circumstances to accept me as 'one of themselves'. Or would they? I cannot perhaps go quite as far, but it seemed safe to say that circumstances were giving me a unique opportunity to be accepted as such and an opportunity to see them for a prolonged period at much closer quarters than it was possible for me to do in the past.

And because they were by no means complete strangers to me, almost my first observation was that as representatives of the 'lower income groups' they were dull. It is only the middle-class enthusiast, led by selective ignorance, prejudice against his own class, romanticism or a very typical case of sexual fetishism, who thinks that working-class people are *always* more interesting than their betters, and *always* brighter.

They looked dull. Of course they looked dull—the idea suddenly entered my mind—it was very natural that they would look not so

much dull, as numb, and in a sense, afraid. They were waiting to be wheeled into the 'theatre' and they knew that the 'operation' could not be entirely painless. And that there would be 'after effects', of course. They did not know who would perform it, whether he was a skilful surgeon or a bungler. All they knew was that the operation was unavoidable. That was it. I was certainly not seeing these people now in their 'natural surroundings'. On the contrary, I was seeing them divorced from their proper background and during a crisis in their lives. But, I reflected . . . all the more . . . they ought to look all the more 'interesting', because they are in a crisis.

They didn't. They just said nothing and went on looking out of the window, looking at the square where an officer was now making his appearance.

After tea I found out from a soldier that there was a Recreation Room: the former Servants' Hall with a few easy chairs, a fire, a radio, a billiard table and a ping-pong table. I decided I would read a little. It was raining outside and there was no fire yet in our stables. I opened my suit-case and looked at the books I had brought. I brought several because I was told by someone I met on leave that one gets plenty of free time in the Army and one cannot always go out. So I packed up books I always wanted to read and never had time to. I brought Montherlant's *Les Célibataires*, a volume of James Thurber, Fred Urquhart's *Time Will Knit*, Bragg's *Electricity*, Professor Darwin's *New Conception of Matter*, two novels by George Gissing, Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* and the Nonesuch Donne. I took the French book out of the suit-case. I had read bits of it on the train. I had my suspicions that Montherlant, like so many French writers, would do all the talking and reduce his characters to puppets.

It was only the following morning that we met our sergeant. His name was Carter. He was just under thirty, a trim man in a well-fitting battledress with a heavily pencilled moustache. He told us that he was a Londoner and that he had spent well over ten years in the Army. After this it came out that practically all the forty of us came from London. This was a little disappointing as I was looking forward to meeting provincials, particularly Midlanders, Northerners or Scotsmen, with whom I always think I have a little more in common than with Londoners.

The very first thing the sergeant did was to cut our hair. I was afraid of the hair cut because my hair is very unruly and it is very easy to make a mess of it.

He made a mess of it.

After the hair cut we marched down to the Regimental Stores to draw our uniforms and about an hour later we marched back stagger-

ing under the weight of our kitbags, but completely transformed. I knew the fit was not correct and that owing to anti-gas treatment our battledresses looked as if milk had been spilt over them. There was no mirror in the Q stores but I looked at the others. Few of them really looked soldierly, but the uniform, it seemed, improved everybody's appearance. The twenties were the only ones who felt pleased over the change that had suddenly come over them, and they did not repress their feelings. My contemporaries seemed sorry for themselves. To say good-bye to civvies was the last straw. The only ones who smiled as they contemplated themselves were a brightish little Cockney and a man who turned up in grey flannels and had an educated accent. The little Cockney was called Robinson.

'We all look bloody awful, myte,' said the man who marched by my side. He marched as if he had a rupture.

'I don't know,' I said, 'it's habit, I s'pose . . . like everything.'

'I reckon I never get used to uniform.'

I said something reassuring, but I did not really mean what I said. So it was here that the first sign of my being 'different' asserted itself. I decided to be on my guard. I remained silent about my emotions concerning uniform.

It is one of my fundamental differences from other people that I am interested in clothes and that—this is perhaps more important—that I never deny my interest. Clothes, I think, are significant and the clues they give about their wearers' identity are not always misleading.

My own interest in clothes and in personal appearance are as strong as those of a young working man's before he gets married. It partly comes from the same source. The personal exclusiveness of the poor is mostly expressed in the things they wear. That a good many people in the English upper classes disregard clothes, or pretend to disregard them and taboo conversation about them, is very largely due to the fact that mass production has made good clothes accessible to the masses and they are, therefore, no longer a privilege of wealth.

I liked clothes but I was careful not to look 'original', in fact I camouflaged myself, the fact that I was a 'pro', that I was an intellectual, that I was a foreigner, that a good many of my ideas were unconventional. I conformed to sartorial conventions but I adopted those conventions that pleased me. In the end, I found, I looked English, almost dignified, but dull. By that time I had become the admirer of beautifully printed advertisements in beautifully turned out American magazines and I changed over to transatlantic styles.

I knew that 'serious Americans' and New Englanders and their imitators were quite as subdued and quite as traditional in dress at pre-war cavalry officers, and that style was not mine. I decided thas

the style which would suit me best was what was known as 'Dignified Hollywood' at thirty: double-breasted flannels with a low cut, combinations of coffee brown and golden yellow, or dark blue and light blue. I liked heavy worsteds, cheviots and flannels: materials that kept their shape for years. I liked cutaway collars that showed plenty of tie and shirt and I never let anyone clean my shoes.

I say all this because it was quite surprising with what gusto I fingered the items of the Army issue as they were handed to me. I decided that I should do my best to look a soldier. And I did not give one further thought to my civvies. I was waiting for a chance to see myself in a mirror, but all the same I felt glad all over. A changed man. I was now to all intents and purposes a soldier. There could be no doubt whatsoever of my identity. In civvies I tried hard to hide my real identity and rarely succeeded. Now the camouflage was perfect. I did not look the least bit a penpusher. I suddenly felt younger, eager, more concrete than I had ever been. I felt a man who had a purpose in life and a man who was very sure about his purpose. I loved the noise my boots made on the pavement. Shall I admit that my first day in the Army was quite happy?

After tea we had to form up again and go up to the Battery Commander's office for an interview with Captain Martin. Several people said he was a hard man, a disciplinarian and we all felt a little alarmed. I was about the eighth to go in. Nobody had told me how to present myself, but I guessed at once that I must not take off my cap like a civilian and that I must salute. I rehearsed the thing in my mind as I was waiting for my turn. Accordingly I made a terrific noise as I stood to attention and saluted very stiffly. He looked up quite favourably impressed.

'Stand at ease, please.' He had a drawl.

'Thank you, sir.'

'I should like to make as good an acquaintance of all of you as possible,' he said and smiled a little, 'and I'd like to know various things about you . . .' He closed a large sheet of paper which had been completed by the elderly officer when I had my medical, and he smiled again. 'I see you're a Doctor of Law and were a journalist. Now, let me see, is there anything corresponding to our O.T.C. in Hungary?'

'There isn't, sir.'

'Well, of course not,' he tossed his head apologetically, 'England being the only country where there was no conscription in peacetime. . . . What sports do you do?'

'Lately practically nothing beyond a little swimming and squash, but I used to do athletics.'

'Ah, that's very good. Running, I s'pose. . . .'

'Yes, sir. Four-forty yards and four-forty hurdles. . . .'

'Splendid. I want you to keep it up . . . By the way there's a cross country run next week. I'd rather like you to take part in it . . .'

'I'll be glad, sir. It isn't my real distance . . .' and I must say in fairness I had not run for over twelve years.

'And what about games?'

'I used to play soccer and hockey . . .'

'Hockey,' he said with warm enthusiasm. His face lit up. 'There'll be plenty of opportunity for you to play hockey here. A splendid game. I play whenever I can . . .'

He nodded again. 'Well, that's all, thank you. I say, don't forget the cross country run . . .'

## *UBIQUE QUO FAS ET GLORIA DUCUNT*

THE FOLLOWING day we had our inoculation and consequently none of us could go out during the week-end. We all became sick in various degrees, especially towards nightfall. My left arm, all of a sudden, had grown almost as big as the arms of the symbol of Labour on the Victoria Memorial. I walked over to the Naafi across the square and had a cup of tea. It was a cheerful place. It was painted a gaudy green and we were served by Sam, a big, dark, friendly man from 'Hoodersfield' who promptly told me that he had served in the R.F.C. during the 'lust war.'

Towards eight o'clock I suddenly began to shiver in my greatcoat sitting near the fire. My right arm, this time, began to ache. I decided I would go to bed.

I slept well on the whole but the pain in the arm did not go. It was Sunday, bright, crisp and cold. At dinner I sat next to someone from another squad. He told me that the initial training at Wintersett took four weeks and that Wintersett was called 'A' Battery, after which we would all go to Hemsworth for another five weeks' training, mostly driving. He said that the old platitude about the first month being the worst in the Army was doubly true about 'A' Battery, and that the captain was a bastard. His own squad was passing out the following Thursday.

'Going to be pretty bloody I can tell you,' he said. 'For a week or so you won't know where you are. From six in the morning till five in the afternoon you will be worked. Eleven hours, that is when

you are not on night duties, but later on you will be on guard and fire-piquet. There will be parades and marching drill and rifle drill, gun drill, target shooting, map reading, Morse, gas lectures, regimental history, and P.T. That's the worst, P.T.' he added. 'The Muscle Factory is next door, in the Gym. They chase you all the time. Then there will be kit inspection every Saturday. You have to lay out all your bloody kit. Then the parades in the morning. . . You'll have to polish your boots, one pair, the other's got to be dubbined. Look at my boots . . . You say they are polished . . . well, this morning, when they were better, mind, Mr. McCorquodale said they were filthy. The old colonel is very sticky. Polishing has been done away with long ago but he still wants shining boots. And buttons and cap badges. Yes, you have to shine your badge and all the fifteen buttons on your greatcoat. Arse-buttons, too, because he looks at you from behind, too. Then you'll have to wash your lanyard every night and see it isn't twisted on parade else you'd be put on jankers. It's a regimental tradition in the Artillery to wear it on your right shoulder and gunners are the only ones who use their lanyards. You pull off the firing lever of the guns with it. At least that's what "McCrocodile" has been telling us in Regimental History. He'd tell you all about '*Ubique*' and all the rest. Who's your sergeant?'

'Carter.'

'He isn't bad. Very ignorant and casual. Ours is Pringle. He's a grand chap. Only a bombardier though . . .'

'You mean two stripes?'

'Yes. Corporal in the Artillery. He was full sergeant in the Welsh Guards before the war, then they called him up as a gunner . . . you'll have hell for four weeks I c'n tell you . . .' We got up to wash up our things.

My arm was no longer actually aching but I had to be careful not to bump it into anything. I took Fred Urquhart's novel to the Recreation Room and began to read. It was called *Time Will Knit.*

The wireless was on full, several people talked loudly, there came the rhythmical fall of ping-pong balls and the loud footsteps around the billiard table . . . Then I don't know what happened . . . Did I try to make an effort to concentrate as I started reading the first few pages, an effort to isolate myself from the noise around me? It wasn't clear. Something happened to me of which I cannot truthfully give an account as one cannot truthfully describe in detail the transition between sleep and wakefulness. All I remembered was that I looked up all of a sudden and was almost surprised to find the Recreation Room around me and that there was nobody in the room to whom I could tell what I wanted to tell. Because it was very urgent

and there was a good deal I wanted to say, and I am certain if there had been somebody there I would have talked rather fast and fairly incoherently, as one talks when one is excited. Because I was excited. There are times in life when one has a sudden and overwhelming desire to share and communicate one's sensations. And this was one of them. I wanted to tell someone very urgently, that here was a comparatively unknown writer who gave very nearly the maximum of what literature can give . . . That I read the first chapter of a book which was published . . . (I turned back quickly to the title page) three years ago, in comparative secrecy. And that first chapter was much more than 'promising.' He writes about the obvious, but with what effortless ease can he communicate his impressions of the obvious, how his impressions suddenly become almost the private, personal impressions of the reader. The first chapter is a voice. The voice of a young Scottish-American describing his first visit to an Edinburgh slum where his grandparents lived. And what an attractive voice; one can quite clearly hear the husky drawl of a boy from Kansas with the accompanying facial expressions and gestures. And how Urquhart can evoke atmosphere, character, background. Everything is there, rich, colourful, alive, surging. Every sentence is commonplace but it has never been said before. That's what I wanted to say, but there was nobody there to whom this would have been 'news.' I went on reading.

In the second chapter the voice suddenly changed. Still an attractive voice, full of rich life, but no longer Spike Wilson's pure Kansas. It was a voice, female and steady, the voice of experience. I became a little confused, but pleasantly so. I kept turning back to the first chapter for reference. Then as I read on, it became clear it was the grandmother's voice reflecting about the past. Then I noticed that the second chapter was called *One Purl*. Again I turned back to the first chapter. It was called *One Plain*. Quickly, agitated, nervous, I turned page after page to find the title of the third chapter. It was *Two Plain*.

I began to smile. So that's why the book was not a success when it was published. Urquhart was experimenting with the most wonderful—and I personally think the most important, or one of the most important—subjects of the modern novel: the presentation of time. The narrative is continued in the odd chapters: 1, 3, 5, 7, and in the even chapters the past is evoked through a character, in the form of internal monologue. Again I turned back to the title page, then to the page after the title page. Yes, I remembered correctly . . .

> ' . . . There'll be no great decision. Time will knit and multiply the stitches while we look. A few hours we shall stand, a few hours

sit, a few hours talk or walk or read a book. The dishes will be washed, the table laid. Smells of sweet food will spread delicious wings. The daily commonplace will be said . . .'

Time will knit and multiply the stitches while we look, I take it, is the thesis of the book. A lovely line . . . by Harold Monro (somebody said Monro wasn't an 'important' poet. Must a poet be important?) and Urquhart writes about 'the daily commonplaces,' the daily commonplaces that make up the largest portion of life. But what a vitality this unknown writer has, how important, how compelling his statements become, how much of the sweet, rhythmical pulsation of life is behind each of his sentences. And behind it all one hears the measured tick tock of Time, as it goes on adding stitch after stitch on its great loom, one plain, one purl, one plain, one purl, one . . .

But . . . Is that really how time passes? Hour follows hour and minute follows minute and there are sixty seconds in each minute . . . Outwardly yes, officially, mathematically, legally, yes. But there is another kind of time. Another duration of time. '. . . *Il y a deux sortes de temps* . . .' I heard a voice, enthusiastic and vital behind an academic tone . . . I was sitting in the sour atmosphere of a lecture-room in the *Collège de France*, a girl making notes next to me, her nose shiny with perspiration, a bell tolled somewhere near the Pantheon with that deep, melodious resonance that nothing but the passage of centuries could give to metal, and over the dais that beautiful ascetic, Jewish face that was Henri Bergson. '*Il y a deux sortes de temps . . . c'est a dire . . . deux sortes, deux espèces des durées . . . la durée scientifique et la durée réelle. La durée réelle*,' he said, and the resonance of those two vowels gave me a slight electric shock. Yes . . . There is another time. A time which is inside us, a time which is unrelated to clock and calendar, a time whose categories are totally different from those of scientific time. And this is the kind of time, the 'real' duration, Urquhart is trying to recapture. And how well he does it . . .

Then I no longer felt the desire to tell someone all about it. I suddenly realised that this was *my* book, and the book of those who are thrilled by literary experiments. Our number is fair, I should say, but it cannot be very large, I'm afraid. What I had read of it so far was a great thrill to me, the same sort of thrill I remember having when I first heard the Tristan Overture and that little bit in the beginning when a dissonance brought over two wind instruments is unexpectedly, cunningly resolved by a sudden fortissimo entry of the whole orchestra. I was eighteen then. Now I am very nearly twice that and such things still thrill me. How strange it was that the crowd only likes stunts when the stunt is in terms of visual motions, say figure-skating or aerobatics, like looping the loop, or clearing a

ditch on a motor-bike. The crowd certainly does not like stunts in literature.

But the following day I did not continue reading *Time Will Knit.* I suddenly forgot all about the adventures of the previous night, all about Spike Wilson and his vague relation to Studs Lonigan, and his grandmother and about Plain and Purl, 'the same commonplaces,' and literature in general. It was Monday and after the first three days spent in the form of a pleasant visit to the Army, in spite of a still swollen arm, we began training. Marching drill by starlight before breakfast and marching drill after breakfast in the Yorkshire dawn, and still hot and perspiring from rifle drill we were given five minutes to change into P.T. kit and hustled into the gym where three N.C.O.s in blue pants and red and black striped jerseys began to chase us for forty minutes in that strange, high-pitched, nursery singsong voice of all Army P.T. instructors. Up and down . . . up and down . . . up and down and in . . . and out . . . and . . . in . . . and out . . . now change! Come on, Snow White . . . and you there with glasses . . . come on . . .'

Then we were hustled back to the stables to change again and get out on the square to pull about two ancient but quite serviceable howitzers, and were taught how to 'prove numbers,' how to 'tell off,' how to be prepared to advance 'without dragropes' and the other intricacies of 'standing gun drill.'

After gun drill there was dinner, after dinner, rifle drill, after rifle drill change into P.T. kit again and up . . . and . . . down . . . . and . . . in . . . and out . . . now change . . . with me . . . BEGIN. Then change back again . . . in 'double time' . . . I honestly can't understand how slow you are . . . !' Then we marched into a lecture-room and Mr. 'McCrocodile' gave us a lecture on harassing gases. Then there was tea at five-thirty and after tea we washed our lanyards and had a cup of tea and tumbled into bed. And there was no need for dragropes.

'And that was only the first day,' said the man who slept above me. His name was Pratt.

Since we were about forty strong it was decided to split us into two squads. Sergeant Carter took nineteen of us into one squad and little Sergeant Crombie had the rest: about five or six men of thirty-five and all the fifteen young ones. They thus became Squad 74 and we became Squad 75. It was obvious that there would be a rivalry between the two squads which started from scratch. My own squad now consisted of nineteen men each about thirty-five, and all Londoners with one exception. The exception was Murray. He was an old

soldier who had already completed seven years in the Infantry, mostly in India. He was a quiet fellow. Murray came from West Hartlepool and was a railway porter before he was called up. He knew all about the Army in general but he said that was the 'furrst' time he was in Artillery and though he didn't say so it was plain that the prospect did not please him.

'Why,' he said, 'when you talk to an N.C.O. in the Infantry you have to stand to attention. Here, you don't do that even when you talk to a sergeant-major.'

It was very natural that we had to consult Murray every two minutes. The following afternoon when the day's job was done, or rather when we thought it was done, Sergeant Carter came in and told us that we must have one pair of boots polished, the other smeared with dubbin, that we must buy Pickering's Number Twenty-two blanco and blanco our gaiters (he actually said 'anklets, web') we must fix the brass badge at an angle of sixty degrees on the left side of our caps, the cap itself must be stitched inside so that the tops should not open, then we must polish the two cap-buttons and the badge. Furthermore, we must buy two lanyards and wear them on the right shoulder, then there would be an inspection by Mr. McCorquodale and Captain Martin to-morrow at nine.

Murray was a little pleased, but the rest of the company looked confused. I decided that in future I would make a written note of all instructions.

Pratt came off his bunk from above me and we decided to go over to the Naafi and buy all the articles. He came from Dulwich and the first thing he said to me on arrival was that beer in Yorkshire was a washout. The other four occupants of the cubicle were White, Thorne, Spalding and Edmunds. The cubicle, when it sheltered a horse instead of six men, was called 'Grand Canal.' At least that was the name painted over the wall. Obviously one of the racehorses of one of the Lords Ossett. The next cubicle was called 'Khedive' and the third 'Coronation' (the lettering gave a hint that the horse was named after the coronation of George V. in 1911). The fourth cubicle had no name and its sole occupant was a London Irishman called Keehoe. (Everybody quite genuinely thought his name was Keyhole). On the stone floors there were coconut mats and there was an iron stove by the window.

Feeling still a little sick after the inoculation and somewhat exhausted by the day's exertion, I bought all the articles the sergeant said we must buy and went to bed.

Inspection was not quite as bad as we expected. We were first inspected, very lightly by Mr. McCorquodale, who made a few

comments, then by captain Martin. The captain spent a solid five minutes inspecting everyone. I dared not look but what I saw of it was like looking for little insects on the subjects of the inspection.

'Did you shave, gunner?' I heard him murmur. The murmur had a sinister note. 'Next time shave twice . . . Buttons . . . . buttons . . . This jacket needs altering sergeant. Too loose in the neck. Make a note of it . . . Buttons, buttons. Your trousers are too long . . . buttons, buttons . . . Your lanyard is twisted in the back. I really can't understand, did you walk about unshaven, with buttons open and dirty boots, in civilian life?'

Inspection over, the sergeant came into our room and began to thunder. He had never thundered before.

'Now listen here, all of you. The captain said 'e 'ad never seen a lousier squad all 'is life. And it's true, mind. Your turnout was terrible. Boots dirty, buttons not polished, lanyards twisted. This was the first inspection, so nobody will be punished this time, but I'd like to see one man jack among you to-morrow to turn up on parade as you turned up to-day. Is that clear? And now change for P.T. . . . in double time.'

The result of the exhortation was that we spent four hours the same evening getting ready. By the time I returned from writing a letter in the Naafi there was a ghastly smell of burning leather and burning shoe polish. Four people were waiting in the queue for a knife to get red hot in the mouth of the stove, then they began to rub the boots with it, smearing plenty of blacking on it. And spitting, spitting till the saliva began to sizzle.

'Toecaps furrst,' said Murray.

We went on working with anxious despair. About an hour later Pringle, the Welsh-Irish bombardier, came into the room. He looked at me struggling hard with the hot knife, then apparently he could not bear my inefficiency.

'Give it to me, before you make a —— mess of it.'

He then took the knife and put it back to the stove and when it was red hot he began to work on my right boot with the touch of the professional. I just didn't know what to admire most, his manual dexterity or the running commentary with which he accompanied his jobs. It was delivered in a very fast flow of speech with Irish and Welsh accents and it could not be printed even if I had made a short-hand note of it. I kept wondering how he could use the same unprintable adjective so often, sometimes twice in the same sentence. 'That's it,' he said, 'spit plenty on it, 's not —— difficult. Use your —— loaf. When I was in the —— Welsh Guards a man sometimes stayed in till eleven at night to get ready for the —— morning parade.

Spit plenty and now polish with the cloth. Don't use the —— brush because you break the —— shine. Use your —— loaf. And now I must be off. My —— wife is coming up to Wakefield to-night.'

With this he left me with the right boot as shiny and professional as I had only seen on Guardsmen in the park on pre-war Sunday afternoons. The left boot was still in the original dull state. It was obvious that my boots would look two odd pieces the next morning. And I couldn't possibly imitate his touch. A nice mess I was in.

It wasn't so bad, however, because at the price of two hours' sustained effort I managed to raise a similar shine on the left boot, too, though anybody could easily distinguish Bombardier Pringle's work from mine for a whole week to come.

On our tenth day in the Army we walked out to Wakefield. It was a Saturday afternoon, very bright and very cold. There was quite a choice of amusements. There were four good-sized cinemas, two Service canteens and, of course, the pubs. I was told they had singsongs every week-end. And there was a pub or two with music-hall turns: a speciality of the North.

The Y.M.C.A. was very noisy so I decided to go over to the Toc H canteen. It was in a little backyard, clean and quite cheerful. We had tea in the kitchen and I met a fellow gunner, called up at the same time as I, but he was in Squad 74. He was expecting his wife at the station so I walked with him to Kirkgate. We compared notes.

We agreed that P.T. was overdone, especially if we were hustled into the gym immediately after a meal.

'The intention is to toughen us,' he said, 'but so far the only result is strain . . . By the way, I wonder if you watched people who were put into a lower medical category at their medical, because they had flat feet or glasses . . . how soon they discover how to exploit their advantage to the full. Then when it comes to work I must confess I am at a serious disadvantage with most of my squad simply because the majority are working-class men. And it isn't because they are tougher than I am. There's something else. Some of these people had acquired and perfected in civvy street a trick by which they give the impression that they are working when they are swinging it. It's a trick which you can only acquire if you are paid by the hour. I s'pose I could acquire it too, but it would mean an effort, and a good deal of practice . . . Take the entertainments, for example. In ten days we had three. Attendance was not compulsory but you could not get away from them. You had to get the gym ready for them and afterwards at ten at night or before breakfast,

you had to carry the forms and whatnot back to the dining-hall. I watched the men working . . .'

'Meaning you haven't done any work yourself . . . apart from mass observation . . . ?'

He laughed. 'But seriously, it was amazing to watch some of my squadees. Some, who look quite stupid, and probably are, well, they cannot be entirely stupid, the way they fake being busy, the way they instinctively and quickly find the easy work and get out of the difficult work. It's self-defence, I s'pose. I haven't got it.' He smiled, then changed the subject. 'It's too much, I must say. You've been chased a whole day, then they put you on fire piquet and you can't sleep more than four hours with all that row going on, then you have to carry the forms out of the dining-hall before breakfast . . .'

'I wonder what's the theory behind it?' I said.

'Nothing. There's no theory behind it. It's just plain lack of thought for which certain justifications can be invented . . .'

I began to feel uneasy. He said what I guessed was the truth, but he said what I tried to overlook, to ignore, to forget. I knew there was no getting away from a certain amount of actual hardship, so I thought the best thing was to try not to think about it. And I knew quite well that a good deal of the hardship was unnecessary, or at least looked unnecessary, and this added to the strain.

'What are your reactions?' he asked.

'I feel very overworked, but I still try to take an interest in things, especially gun drill . . .'

'The point is that you are not encouraged to take an interest. And the bloody thing is that neither the N.C.O.s nor the officers make any allowance for age, which is a very important factor. I never realised the enormous difference between twenty and thirty-five till now. Nor do they make any allowance for the fact that you come from a different walk of life from the average recruit . . .'

We came to the station and parted company; and I was very pleased I need not answer his last statement. With great, very great relief, I noticed from practically the first day that both N.C.O.s and officers were making quite obvious allowances in my case. Sergeant Carter was almost perspiring in his endeavour to make me memorise the sequences for 'For inspection port arms' and when it came to the slow march, an impressive but difficult 'number,' which I simply could not do for toffee, in spite of my efforts, 'McCrocodile' took me out of the squad, while they went on slow marching with the sergeant, took me by the arm and said:

'Now, walk with me slowly, but don't bend your knees. Look up.

Don't try to concentrate too much. You're making an effort. . . . I've been watching you. Ambition is fine but you're wearing yourself out. Take it easy. Think about something else . . . Are you married?'

'No, sir.'

'I'm surprised at you.'

'I'm too, sir, sometimes.'

He laughed.

'Now raise your head a little more, that's right.' He withdrew his arm from mine. 'Left-right, left-right. Don't hurry, left-right. You're getting it . . .'

'Very kind of you, sir.'

'Do you think you could manage now?'

'I think so, sir. Thank you.'

'That's all right, de Hegedus. Only don't be so desperate about it. Easy does it.'

There were other little examples, hints, suggestions, some hardly noticeable. I was pleased and relieved because I feared quite naturally that instructors would lose their temper trying to make a soldier of me. At the same time, however, I felt a little alarmed that the others in the squad might notice that I was having preferential treatment. One night the P.T. sergeant came up to me in the Naafi as I was reading and he began to talk about books. He was a schoolmaster from Leeds. He, too, was very helpful in the gym when I looked awkward.

'I hate to see an ex-athlete running to seed,' he said one afternoon, 'you ought to be good with those abdominal muscles . . .'

Matter of fact the others did notice it. Especially Thorne. Thorne was the only man I took a dislike to the first week we met. He was a little muscle-bound Cockney, very noisy and vulgar without being amusing or vital. He had a low, animal forehead, a skin like the leopard's, and a bawling voice in which he sang treacly jazz numbers out of tune. He was a scrounger; always on the look-out for advantages.

'Mr. McCorquodale's taken a fancy to you,' he said one afternoon, while we were resting after dinner.

'Seeing that I'm the most awkward man in the squad.'

'You're after the stripe, aren't you?'

'That would be a strange ambition after my performance this morning . . .'

'You don't like me, I can see that.'

'D'you miss it much?'

'You *think* you're superior to me . . . don't you?'

'Now that you've talked me into it.'

There was laughter.

'He knows all the answers,' said Pratt from above me, 'give us a fag, mate.'

I reached a cigarette to Pratt.

'Me, too,' said Thorne, then much later added, 'please.'

'Here you are. Glad you like me, after all.'

'I was only joking,' he said, then after lighting the fag he began to bawl . . . no, began to hiccup *Yours Till the End of the Journey.* It seemed to come out of his stomach, as if he had swallowed an emetic.

What a misleading character, I thought. Being unspeakably childish, vulgar and rough, most people would almost automatically think he was a 'regular,' a 'character' or that he had a 'heart of gold.' His appearance and his personality on a passing acquaintance had somehow actually suggested these qualities. He looked natural, unspoilt, rough and ready. In actual fact he was very sophisticated, with the sophistication of the urban guttersnipe. His childishness, his vulgarity were not entirely a show, but they were partly put on all the same, not so much for the love of the game, but because he wished to profit by the fact that he was 'funny.' He was mean and a sponger and, it seems to me, his bravery was not in proportion with the volume of his voice. You learn a good deal about people in ten days if they are your army room-mates.

I was, for example, certain that Humby was a good lad. 'He looks like a sick crow,' said O'Brien once when we walked back from tea. O'Brien had been at Lancing and Balliol. We had a few good laughs together, but I felt a little uneasy about him. That O'Brien had a good opinion of himself did not worry me unduly, but I felt it would be a bad thing if I singled him out for what would appear to be a 'friendship.' Among the nineteen in the squad we were the only two who had received a comparatively expensive form of education, and though it would appear perfectly obvious and natural that two such persons would have a good deal in common with one another, I felt the thing somehow would not do. Besides, I was keen to mix with the others.

It was true that with Julian O'Brien I could talk about books and films and politics and about mutual friends. He was a knowledgeable and excellent talker. But I felt that books and films and politics and gossip about one's friends' private lives had suddenly lost their interest and attractiveness for me. I wondered if this was temporary. And I also felt that there was something about O'Brien that made me hesitate to look for a companionship for which even in the abstract I had no burning need. (I was not lonely or homesick in the least, nor was he as far as I could judge.) With all his easy ways, his charm and good looks, and geniality and breeziness and Irishness, I felt

there was something in him that made me cautious. I don't quite know how it was, but as the days went by he reminded me more and more of 'The Devoted Friend' in the Wilde fairy-tale ('Poor chap, he died so young. I *almost* gave him my wheelbarrow.')

Then there was Spalding, who had a Hitler moustache; he had been cashier at Smithfield Market. A very intelligent man, but he lost his temper easily, then he became very loud and helpless. Then there was little Rose. He had worked for Odhams; also a cashier. And Jim Robinson, a bright and sentimental little man with the tidy habits of a good housewife. Then Livingstone, a 'quiet man.' He had been an accountant and had originally come from Durham, but twenty years of London must have sapped a good deal of his original sturdy inheritance. And Sidney French, who looked Jewish and had been manager in a multiple shop, and little Bill Nixon who called everybody 'brother' (he was Methodism at its insipidest) and there was Gallington whom we called 'Uncle Gallipot'; he had worked for the Gas Light and Coke Company, a lovable man, and very intelligent on the quiet, but more helpless than anyone in the squad, and there was Green who was fortyish and amusing, who got tight pretty often. He was the only secondary-school man in the lot and he said he used to earn good money in the wholesale catering business.

And there was Paddy Keehoe, who used to be a roadmaker's labourer, the best-tempered Irishman I had ever met, though I had met many good-tempered Irishmen. I had never yet seen a manual worker so clumsy with his fingers as Paddy was, but he had all the qualities by which a man could make himself endearing to others. And though he seemed to have made up his mind to be amusing all the time, quite miraculously he succeeded in being amusing most of the time.

It was Saturday again, but it was in the morning and just after the nine o'clock parade. We were nervously adding the last finishing touches to our kit which was laid out on the bed according to the rules (we hoped). The kit inspection was to take place in a few minutes by Captain Martin. The previous night we had not been able to go to bed till eleven, shining our two plates and the mess tins with infinitesimally small pieces of steel-wool. I never would have thought that steel-wool, or rather the lack of it, could add such complications to one's life.

It was a grey, dull windy day. A perfect background for a Brontë novel. We were, in any case, in the Brontë country. Wuthering Heights and Haworth were a few miles off north-east.

Somebody switched on the light.

'Put out that —— light, you ——, they can see what a mess we are in . . .'

The light was switched off.

I was now standing by my bunk behind Pratt, ready for the inspection, but I kept looking at the 'still life' on my bed and comparing it nervously with the others. Hell, the anti-dim has got to be on top of the anti-gas ointment. I changed the position. I was not sure there wouldn't be a row because I did not shine the studs on the sole of my extra boots.

'Christ, I forgot to sew up my —— numbers on the blankets,' said Pratt. Quick as lightning he produced the four white strips of canvas on which he stencilled his regimental number. 'Here they go,' he said, with admirable resourcefulness, and placed them one under the other on the edges of his four folded blankets. 'Hope there won't be no draft,' he said.

We heard the door open. 'Eyes front!' bawled Sergeant Carter. The lights came on immediately. 'Blast,' whispered Charlie White.

From the corner of my eye I saw Captain Martin making his entry into the first cubicle, followed by Mr. McCorquodale and the sergeant-major. There was a deadly silence; it seemed, it could not be deadlier.

'Stand at ease,' shouted the sergeant. 'Party, party, 'shun.'

We heard footsteps; then:

'Were you not told to mark every article you are issued with? . . . Answer me, please . . . You were . . . Then, why didn't you mark them? . . . Why?'

A minute's silence. One could hear a pin drop. 'Sergeant-major, take his name . . .' and immediately afterwards:

'Those blankets look a little cock-eyed. Leave it now . . .'

'Stand at ease. Party, party, 'shun.'

I felt a little sick. The footsteps came nearer, then silence again, then apparently a pin must have dropped, because I heard a bang on the floor. 'Leave it now,' murmured the captain.

'Stand at ease. Party, party, 'shun . . .'

We jumped to attention. The three men entered, Sergeant Carter lingering in the background with an expression ready for any even tuality.

The captain looked at Pratt's first. It seemed an eternity. Then he bent down to look at mine. Then a second later he turned his back on me. He went over the other four. Then he left the room.

'Stand at ease.'

The room suddenly became alive, words began to fleet across, unusually loud, excited, relieved, someone began to sing aloud, the song punctured by a cascade of swear words, everybody began to talk all at once.

'Who was it who didn't mark his kit?'

'Paddy.'

'Christ, he's in for it.'

'What's the time?'

'Outside, Seventy-five,' shouted the sergeant. 'Draw your rifles from the stores, for target shooting . . .'

In the afternoon Humby and Pratt and I went out to Wakefield. We had tea at Webster's Cafe, then they decided to go to the pictures. I went for a walk. I walked across the Bullring towards Kirkgate. Then I suddenly saw myself in the mirror of a dressmaker's shop. I paused for a second. The first time I had seen myself properly in uniform. My gaiters were too large for me but I had managed to get a crease in my trousers. I adjusted my hat.

Target shooting was quite a success to-day. I was given sixteen marks, which was the fourth best out of the nineteen of us, the first being Murray, of course. He was a snipe shooter in India. It seemed pretty certain that he would get the stripe after the end of the month, when one man from the squad would be made temporary lance-bombardier. Nobody grudged it to Murray. We all knew he would deserve to be an N.C.O. He wasn't the least ambitious and he was very quiet and good-natured, seven years' Army service written on his face, his smile, on every movement of his body.

I reflected that we would spend another ten days or so at Wintersett then we would leave for 'B' Battery. Everybody said 'B' Battery was a better place. The O.C. was nice, work was much lighter and more interesting.

I had spent altogether three weeks in the Army now and I was neither particularly happy nor particularly unhappy. In spite of making me 'browned off' and disappointed and tired at times, the Army had still filled with curiosity. It was still a 'new life' to me and that aspect of the Army was naturally enjoyable. Fundamentally, of course, none of us in Squad 75 were different men from what we were three weeks ago, but in these moments—for me at least—the fundamental elements of human nature did not seem significant. And I enjoyed the fact that walking along the street in uniform I was 'incognito.' It was a disguise, camouflage, almost a case of false pretences.

I began to think of various people I knew. What would be their reactions if they suddenly saw me in uniform? And what would my father and mother think? I became alarmed all of a sudden. They must not know anything about it. It would have the worst effect on them. I took care that they should not know. I had sent a Red

Cross message to Budapest the day I received my call-up notice saying that I was now working in Yorkshire and that I was very well. Both of these statements were true. But they must not know. They were, after all, both over seventy and they had spent the last fourteen years worrying about me, even in peacetime, though I spent three weeks in Budapest every year and sent them a letter once a week.

I tried to see them now as I walked towards Lupset. It was half-past five in the afternoon and it was Saturday. Father would now be walking out with mother somewhere in the Krisztina Town in Buda, as they did every afternoon. They would talk about the season, something very poetical about autumn, then father would make a murderously amusing comment on one of their acquaintances and make mother laugh. Then mother would tell the latest gem about the 'Poodle.'

No, the Army was not a 'bad place,' looking back on the last three weeks, and I had no nostalgia whatever for Civvy Street, not even a secret one. I did not look at the London train with a sigh when marching out near the railway line, as practically all the others did. In fact, I felt ill at ease when I heard them shouting and waving after the passing train and I had to endeavour ('trying to put myself into their shoes') not to feel irritated at their perfectly legitimate impulses and outbursts. The explanation was too simple. I wanted to change my life; they didn't. I was curious, looking for unfamiliar landscapes, looking for the unexpected, for copy. They apparently weren't curious. They had left a good deal behind, a good deal for which they felt a warm, aching nostalgia. I had left practically nothing behind. Nothing which would make me long to get back.

They had left relations behind, the wife, the kiddies, and homes, and jobs and friends, and comforts and other things that make Civvy Street warm and desirable. What did I leave behind?

Out of nineteen I was one of the five unmarried. It was strange that out of the three 'ex-labourers' in the squad two were unmarried: Keehoe and Murray, because for 'unskilled labour' to be a bachelor at thirty-five is an exception. In my case there was no wife and children, and for that matter no relations either. And there was no job in actual fact to go back to (though naturally I could have found one). There was the novel, of course, and there were notes for other books. But literature was far away at this moment.

Or was it? It was only yesterday as we were waiting in the queue to be paid that for the first time I felt that in my literary career I was more or less in the position I always wished to be. Yes, in the

Army. I was in a position that was almost ideal for me. When at the age of twenty I had decided to become an English writer I must say I had gone the most unusual and difficult way about it. I had to work for a Hungarian newspaper to support myself, and this had meant a good deal of writing and thinking in Hungarian. That was very bad, of course, and what was worse, my journalistic work was dangerously interesting. Through the delightful and lazy nature of my editor I had come to enjoy an independent position and trust, almost exceptional for a man on three or four pounds a week. I could write pretty well everything about anything, subject only to the law of libel. At times I had a lot to do but I was my own master, made my own hours and I had six weeks' holiday a year. In the last two or three years, through force of political circumstances and entirely independent of my own talents, I had come to enjoy something like a nation-wide prestige in Hungary.

I had often wished to get rid of my paper because I felt I had been making no headway in English and also because I felt that writing for a paper was poisonous for literature. It would have been, for example, ideal for me to get a job in England far removed from writing. I would not have minded menial work at two or three pounds a week, but the thing was not so simple as all that. Because I tried. In those years there was serious unemployment in England, for one thing, and jobs of all types difficult to come by. I, therefore, had to make the best of a difficult job: I had to be satisfied with the 'gentlemanly' existence of the 'foreign correspondent' and turn to literature in my free time. My English—and therefore proper—output had thus boiled down to twenty short stories, three books, half a dozen lectures and about a hundred reviews and articles in English and American periodicals.

The Army, on the other hand, seemed to give me an opportunity to isolate myself from my past and from the subconscious influence and mannerisms of my mother tongue.

Was there anything else?

Emotionally nothing, I should say. There was one woman, a woman for whom I had for quite a long time more than affection. It wasn't love because I don't think I have ever been in love since I was fifteen, but it was more than friendship. She was now married and we had drifted apart though I still had the same feelings for her.

Then there was my flat, which had luckily escaped the Blitz, a flat which had meant a good deal to me, something of which at times I had been perhaps unduly proud, because it was in a way my own work and because people had at one time or another said it was attractive and because it contained my books. But looking back from

the 'Grand Canal' cubicle at the stables at Wintersett I did not miss its comforts and I no longer felt the same emotions about it as before.

Then there were friends, some intimate, some casual, but they were all busy now, most of them far away from London and I felt I was not quite sure whether I needed their company quite as much as I did in the years of peace.

There was, therefore, practically nothing to draw me back to London, and in all fairness I had to say also that lack of privacy so far was not so bad.

## 'ON GUARD'

THE FOLLOWING Tuesday I strained my loins trying to jump on a highly raised vaulting horse in the gym. The P.T. sergeant sent me to the M.O. and the M.O. said I was excused P.T. for ten days. I knew it would create a bad impression in the squad, except among the other four who were also excused. I liked P.T. in spite of its harassing character. I always felt fine after it, but I immediately thought of the advantage of the M.O's orders. During the P.T. periods I could read up gunnery from the text-books and practise Morse. I went to Sgt. Garnett and borrowed his beautifully illustrated big *Artillery Manual* and began reading the chapter on gun-laying. What a naïve civilian I was, thinking that the Army would allow such a thing. I had hardly reached the paragraph on Elevation, when the lance-bombardier from the Stores came into the room and took all five of us to the Q.M. Stores to grease football boots. I grumbled and swore along with the others and did as little work as possible in the Stores, but I had to agree with the 'Spirit' behind. If they left the average soldier free it was not likely that he would study the *Artillery Manual*. And we were told to report at the Q.M. Stores during each P.T. period.

*Extract from Diary.* 'I am writing this in a somewhat crooked position. Can't get near enough to table because of respirator under my chin and I cannot lean back much either because of "small pack" on my back. There is my mess-tin, knife, fork and spoon and water bottle in the "small pack". Three of us are on guard to-night. Just arrived. Guard room is one of the lodges of Wintersett by main gate. The one opposite is the prison. Two lanterns on table. There is a huge fire, and over the fireplace there are two pairs of steel manacles on the walls and keys the size and

shape one usually sees in the Papal Arms. The duty bdr. had marched us down from the Square, the orderly sgt. had inspected us, then he put O'Brien on the first period from six to eight, and from twelve to two, myself from eight to ten and from two to four, and finally Edmunds from ten to twelve and from four to six. And he dismissed Pratt as "attending man", whose duties would be to bring our supper and then go to bed.

'Spent practically the whole afternoon getting ready for the guard. Had to adjust our belt, so that it would fit perfectly and that is not easy when you are doing it for the first time. Then we had to draw our rifles and pouches, clean the rifles and put the pouches on the belt. After that Sgt. Cannon took the four of us to the Square and rehearsed those items of rifle drill, which are part of the guard parade—"For inspection port arms" and "present arms" in case the colonel came. (He isn't coming.)'

I must say I was looking forward to my first guard and I enjoyed getting ready in spite of the short agonies I went through trying to get the stiff web belt ready. Finally, we were ready, rifle on the shoulder, wearing our steel helmets for the first time. It was playing soldiers, I knew, but I liked doing it. I felt masculine, martial, impressive and proud. Then we were given our orders. In essentials it was an unchanged, time-honoured ritual dating back to the eighteenth century. I listened, elated and excited, as if I were given dramatic instructions for a small part in amateur theatricals. It was very thrilling.

I was anxiously waiting for my cue, to put my helmet on, pick up my rifle and take up my position in front of the lodge. This was a little more like real soldiering, I felt. I jumped from the form when the bombardier told us to get ready. He put six rounds of real ammunition into my rifle and at first he said I should not put on the safety catch. 'Safety catch ON,' said the sergeant with emphasis. 'He might fire on the major in his excitement.'

'It's bloody cold in there,' said O'Brien as he left his post.

I did not feel the cold at first. Perhaps I would feel it later, towards midnight, when I would have been standing there for over an hour and a half.

It was strangely quiet in the dark outside the lodge, with no other illumination than the masked headlamp of a car or the flickering light of a bicycle outside on the main road, revealing for a short moment parts of the landscape. There was a cross-road by the gate; it was very lonely now, towards half-past ten at night. I watched out from time to time whenever I heard sounds, watching rather anxiously, to challenge someone, to play the part of the sentry, rifle in hand. Nobody came. I put my rifle down on the barricade of sandbags shiny with frost. I

began to reflect on the possibilities of being seen now, in this new role by people I knew. That the dark figure of a solitary soldier guarding a baronial lodge in Yorkshire, England, Europe, was I. What would they think, people who knew me, because few of them would guess at that moment that I was in the Army. My editors in Budapest, colleagues in the Press Room of the M.O.I., Lucienne, who had perhaps taken refuge in her grandfather's farm in Bédarieux, Georges Maître, perhaps in a concentration camp, and Kelemen, perhaps out of a concentration camp. And Mrs. Twining, my old landlady in Pimlico, and Mrs. Pleydell, my other old landlady in Marylebone, and Diana whose father was now Prime Minister of England, and Walter who was flying his 'kite' somewhere in the Far East, and Lucy from the cash box of the Cyrano Restaurant, and that airman I met at a dance at the Palais, Hammersmith, six months ago, who said it would be hell for me, and Beatrice who (her secretary duly informed me) has now moved from the Ritz-Carlton to Madison Avenue, and Arthur W. Blair who had obviously gone back to Euclid Avenue, Kansas City, to finish his book on Crabbe. And the fat porter at the M.O.I. who looked exactly like Goering. And Dylan Thomas (the only poet I had ever known) who would at this moment be gazing in front of him in a Soho pub . . . And people, more people, friends, enemies, casual acquaintances, people I knew intimately or very, very slightly. What would they . . .

A car drew up in front of the iron gate. I picked up my rifle, then advanced a few steps and shouted as loud as I could: 'Halt. Who goes there?'

'Captain Martin.'

A door slammed.

'Advance one to be recognised,' I shouted even louder. A better chance than I thought.

The side gate creaked as it was opened. I stood still like a statue in the 'on guard' position, 'almost leaning (but not quite)' on my rifle, level with my shoulder.

'Is that you, de Hegedus?'

'Yes, sir.'

'I thought I recognised your voice.' He came nearer. I gave the salute with as much noise I could make. 'Quite good, quite good—he saluted absent-mindedly—'first time you are on, isn't it? But may I make a suggestion? When you come up to challenge someone, don't come out into the open so much; they might fire at you. What I would do is—er——' He hesitated for a moment, he looked round and then he began to smile with the expression of an inspired stage manager and pushed me back a yard or two towards the lodge.

'There,' he said with satisfaction in his voice, 'you agree with me, don't you?'

'Certainly, sir, thank you.' Then I knocked on the lodge door to get the sergeant out to open the gates.

'Well, good night to you.'

I felt pleased. He was charming to me. Everyone thought he was a bastard. 'May I make a suggestion?'

Then I went to bed for four hours, with pack and respirator on, so I could only lie on my sides, in the back room of the lodge. We were turned out of bed, however, because the R.S.M. came in during his midnight tour.

I was on guard again four nights later. I enjoyed it much less. The weather was much colder. It was also on Saturday, when I had planned to go to a cinema, so I went out at two to Wakefield to shop and to have tea at the Toc H. I met half a dozen people from Squad 73 (who actually had left the Battery a fortnight ago). Some said that 'B' Battery was not so regimental, others said it was worse; a third that it was equally bad.

Then at tea I sat next to Minney again. 'Hardship has no educational value whatever if you are over thirty,' he said. 'The system is maddening. No time to digest what you learn and very little strength to carry out rather hard duties. Maddening. All it will result in is a few nervous breakdowns. Look at Nobby Clarke . . .' I nodded agreement, but I made up my mind never to listen to Minney again, no matter how I liked him for his embittered intelligence, his honesty, and his sociability. Here was a man who, without knowing it, was trying to prevent me from adjusting myself to the Army. I knew jolly well without him telling me that hardship had little educational value when you were over thirty, especially when it was hardship that appeared unnecessary. I knew by now that the system, at Wintersett at least, was a little thoughtless.

I noticed that the Army ignored one of the greatest incentives to work: the pride felt in doing a job well, and I guessed (perhaps wrongly) what was subconsciously at the bottom of it: the dead certainty of victory in the long run, because of geographical and material advantages, and alliances. I knew, or at least I felt all these things, but I made up my mind deliberately to ignore them, to shut them out of my mind as if they did not exist, because I was determined not to become unhappy in the Army. And then along came Pat Minney and with the best intentions tried to undo all my work, tried to counteract all the medicine I was taking by making me conscious of the truth. Without meaning it and without knowing it, he was acting

almost as an anti-Army agitator. And one could not argue with his words, which were as clear and sharp and precise as a pair of surgical scissors, because they were the truth. I was allergic to Minney, because at that moment—an hour before my second guard within four days—despondency was lurking at the bottom of my mind.

There were two new squads of about twenty people each at Wintersett: 76 and 77. One came a week, the other a fortnight after us. Mostly twenties and mostly from the provinces. They were mixed bags, but as I met them I suddenly felt that ours was dull and insipid in comparison. I had had my suspicions before, practically at the end of the first day: a hunch, a premonition, the gambler's finesse, but now meeting the new arrivals brought out the contrasts in full and made my feelings concrete. I kept wondering what was wrong with them. What made them so dull, so colourless? Perhaps it was the fact that most of them—two-thirds to be exact—were aspiring, suburban, lower-middle-class, whose aspirations had already been damped and thwarted by the various ups and downs of the history of the past years. The war seemed to put an end to their hopes . . . instead of filling them with fresh hope. They were respectable, conventional, snobbish and intolerant. They seemed to have none of the qualities which you find so very often in manual workers: a happy-go-lucky, half naïve, half sophisticated, simple and cunning, generous and mean, enthusiastic, intense, humorous, but first and foremost a vital outlook and disposition.

The people in the other two squads were young and that naturally made a great difference, but also they were mostly provincials and I had a feeling that perhaps they would wear better than my squadees. The passage of years would fill them with that strange mixture of unfeelingness, prejudice, cynicism, fear, reservations and sentimentality, commonly and collectively known as 'experience'; their arteries would harden, their hair recede, teeth decay, their skin may not stay so firm and smooth, but I had a hunch that their vitality would not be subject to the same morbid and pitiful changes that had made my own squad appear to be so miserable. Perhaps I am wrong. Perhaps I am too sentimental. Perhaps they would be the same miserable 'old men' as the rest in my squad. But I did not think so.

That there was 'something wrong' with my squad was without doubt. I noticed that I was not the only one who had little in common with the others. In our squad nobody had much in common with the others. Everybody was sociable up to a point, but everybody disliked one or two others and there were no signs of friendships coming into being. A few of them sometimes went out together to pubs. Were they the kind of people who needed alcohol in order to enjoy each other's company?

* * *

'I am very glad to say,' said the Colonel, 'that I am well satisfied with your performance this morning.'

The Colonel was elderly and good looking, like an advertisement for a first-class military tailor. When he talked he closed his eyes and bared his teeth. 'You have been here four weeks now. You have finished your initial training and you will be leaving now for "B" Battery . . .'

It was here that Spalding had fainted. 'Passed out in the middle of the Colonel's pass-out speech,' said Sydney French later. It was raining hard and we were standing half-naked in the gym.

The few days previous to the pass-out were very heavy. Sergeant Carter said he had never had such an inefficient squad in his life (it came out that he had said that before—with regularity), and those who didn't pass out would stay another month at Wintersett. I had to make up for the ten days I was excused P.T. Gallington had to make up for the fourteen days he missed of marching and rifle drill because he was excused boots. Humby had become deaf because of his cold and could not hear the orders. But in the end everything went well. Just like the first performance of a play which looked very jerky during the last dress rehearsal. Few of us made any mistakes.

'Don't forget to cheer when the lorries leave the Square,' said Spalding.

We did.

## INTERNAL COMBUSTION

'B' Battery to a large extent was a better place than Wintersett, but I think it was the question of 'change'. True—as the others said—there was much less bullshit. Inspection by shell-shocked, short-sighted and well-meaning Mr. Crankshaw was a light affair, the sergeant-major was a heavy-weight Scot from Edinburgh, beaming with good humour. Captain Belmont, a good-looking and charming young man with a good-looking and charming young wife, was almost invisible.

Hemsworth itself was a collection of medium-sized country houses at the side of the common. The main building, in which we lived, was good eighteenth century but had fallen into disrepair since the first World War. It had stood untenanted for twenty years. Then came a Tudor building at the other side of the common, which, though it was said to be genuine, looked very much like Victorian Gothic. Possibly it was partly rebuilt. Then there were two more Georgian houses in between. One of them, in which the owner's family still lived, was supposed to be haunted. Finally, there was the Dower House where the officers lived.

In 'B' Battery we were learning Mechanised Transport, that is driving and maintaining lorries, riding motor-bikes, and the general principles of internal combustion.

The place was incredibly dirty, beyond the essential accompaniments and by-products of engineering, but it was a friendly dirt. Dirt, somehow, seemed to make the place intimate, almost welcoming. It was run to a large extent exclusively by N.C.O.s and they were philosophical, cheerful and pleasantly casual. Our own Sergeant Beaman, a man of forty with five years' service during the lean years, was in peacetime a lorry driver, with strong but muddled Socialist leanings that were more than tempered by sociability.

We would proceed to Hemsworth Old Hall and hear a pleasant chat, in breezy, slangy Cockney, on the crankshaft or on the oil system, then have a spot of dinner (spot is the operative word—rations were very small and the food not nearly so good as at Wintersett), then we would get on the trucks to be given practical instruction in driving on the road.

Out of nineteen only four of us had ever driven before: and we were warned by a lance-bombardier at Wintersett not to admit it, else we should pass out at once and be put on fatigues till the others passed out. True, I never drove a truck before. The first day I went out with Sergeant Beaman.

'What the bloody 'ell are you doing?' he said in quite good humour. 'This is not one of them Rolls Royces you are used to. 'Aven't I told you double de-clutch? And what the 'ell are you doing with your 'and. That's not a signal, that's a —— invitation for a tart to jump on. Anti-clockwise . . . my foot.'

Then came Driver Mitchison. He was a young man who had been chauffeur to a Leicester business man and had spent months all over the Continent with him; patient, gentle, intelligent, well-balanced. The very finest type of Young England. 'All you need is a little experience,' he said. 'I shan't put this, however, down in your book, else they pass you out before the others . . .'

Then came Fred Constable. He was a tough youth from Chesterfield. After having seen me changing gear climbing a hill, he nodded his approval and had lost interest in my driving. When we stopped for a smoke he suddenly said: 'How is it you could not avoid the Army? A bloke with brains like you . . .'

I smiled. 'Because I did not particularly want to.'

'You don't tell me you like it.'

'No, that wouldn't be true. But then I have only spent six weeks in the Army so far.'

'I hated it from the first day,' he said and spat with emphasis.

The same question was put to me again and again in 'B' Battery, especially by members of the W. Squad. The W. Squad consisted of some twenty N.C.O.s and men from various artillery regiments sent to 'B' Battery for a special M.T. course. They were my first contacts with old soldiers, because in 'A' Battery I had only met civilians in uniform—except a few N.C.O. instructors. Some of the W. mob were regulars, others had been in the Army since the outbreak of the War. They were a tough lot, just like Fred Constable, tough, intolerant, not very bright, but they had a great curiosity and interest in the ways of the world.

I watched them with interest and a certain amount of admiration. Since I put on the King's uniform I had become fond of regulars: they were an interesting type and I often had a respect for them. They embarrassed me slightly by telling me that they rather liked Germans. 'Why, they are people like us. Don't believe what the papers say.'

I thought first that their friendliness towards me had an afterthought: they wanted me to stand them drinks. To my surprise I was wrong. One boy from Somerset said he would see the sergeant-major and try to take over guard for me.

'Very nice of you, Halfpenny, but I wouldn't dream of it.'

'But I would do it for nothing . . .'

'I know. But I wouldn't dream of it. After all, I'm a soldier too . . .'

'That'z all right, kid, but you bin on guard three bloody timez already and you are not uzed to it. You feel zleepy when you go to the —— lectures.'

True, the guard business was overdone. In three weeks I had been on guard and fire piquet six times, which would not have mattered at all if during the day we were not expected to show an intelligent interest in the things we were learning. In the beginning we were all very keen about engineering; most of us in fact were looking forward to it. After three weeks we lost interest.

'—— all' was the typical comment.

A few days later I was suddenly called to the Battery Office. I felt a little uneasy, though my conscience was clear, or was it? Nobody's conscience is ever clear in the Army. The fat sergeant-major showed me a slip of paper. The adjutant wanted to see me at Wintersett the following day.

'Do you know what it is, sir?'

He shook his head and smiled.

'I wouldnie ken, de Hegedus. Mabbie they want to make an officerr of you. Shouldnie be surprised . . .'

The following day the adjutant showed me a note from the War

Office according to which as a naturalised Englishman I could object to being transferred to a combatant unit.*

'I don't want your answer at once,' said the Adjutant. 'Think about it and let me know later . . . plenty of time.'

'I think I can let you know my decision, sir, rightaway,' I said. 'I am willing to serve in any unit, combatant or otherwise, in any theatre of the war . . .'

'Yes,' he smiled. 'That's exactly what I thought you would say, when I saw you come into this room . . .'

Then I signed the official declaration. In three copies.

The following week I made an attempt to ride a bicycle. I had never possessed a bike, never ridden one and, now I come to think of it, I never had the desire to ride one. When I was five they put me on the back of a pony, when I was about seven my father taught me to skate, when about twelve he took me out ski-ing and a few years later my uncle, who lived in the country, taught me to gallop and to jump hedges. Cycling, however, was not part of my education; a pity, because one can never learn to ride a motor-bike unless one knows how to hold the balance on a push-bike. And in about ten days' time we would all be on motor-bikes. I therefore decided to take great pains to learn how to ride a bicycle. It was a difficult proposition because there was hardly any time and still less opportunity. We did not finish till it was pitch dark and it was not easy to try to learn how to keep one's balance on a push-bike when one could not see the road. Then I tried to do it in dinner-time. At any time I could spare. I made up my mind to pass out as a dispatch rider or end up in hospital with a broken ankle. I wanted to do it because I suddenly discovered the romantic aspect of the Don R. and because by now I was well known in the Battery. The Education Sergeant by chance had read a book called *Hungarian Background* and as a result I was appointed one of the judges of the Brains Trust, twice running, and took my place on the benches with Mr. Crankshaw, Captain Belmont and two sergeants. And our sergeant told me a few days later that O'Brien and I were under consideration to be recommended for an O.C.T.U.

In view of these things I felt it was important that I should overcome the handicaps and pass out as a Don R. On a Sunday afternoon in Wakefield I asked an errand boy, a nonconformist clergyman, and a WAAF to give me impromptu tuition. They did. But cycling cannot be learned in brief snatches, especially at the age of thirty-five. Still there was another week left and if I was lucky I should just manage. I had a few falls on the common and when we went to take our bath one evening Pratt asked why my legs were bruised all over.

Bruise or no bruise, I would pass out as a Don R.

*This order was revoked in June, 1942.

One of the effects the Army had on me was that I began to feel the necessity of thinking in political terms. Before I was called up I was certainly not a politically-minded person. Political orientation is a thing which you very often inherit from your father. In my case there was a negative inheritance. Father had disliked party politics all his life, I suppose mainly because as a county official he had to preside over general elections for over ten years. He had, however, some political consciousness and towards the age of forty or forty-five he had arrived at Christian Socialism, a well-meaning, respectable, spiritual kind of socialism, invented in the early nineteenth century by Comte de Saint-Simon. As a political creed it was very popular chiefly among the Roman Catholic clergy: among curates who would give their last shirt away and bishops who would distribute their rich revenues among the needy. Father took to it in spite of his fairly strong Protestantism, because he had found it congenial to his puritan spirit, his sense of justice, his irony, his thwarted ambitions, his occasional outbursts of individualism, but he practised it almost in secret as if afraid 'people might look'. Before the advent of post-war measures for social legislation he used to subscribe to various leagues, associations, funds formed to provide expectant mothers with free milk, needy schoolchildren with country holidays and Hungarian refugees from the Succession states with jobs. Then he had his 'poor visitors' who used to call regularly every week and to whom he gave legal advice and small sums of cash. But he certainly refused to join the party. His attitude was that 'politics are dirt'.

My own attitude to politics was almost entirely scientific and very limited. When I was a student, I should imagine, 'I knew all about it.' Hadn't I studied Political Economy, Sociology and Politics? Hadn't I written an essay on Bentham? Had not I taken a little more than the compulsory academic interest in the writings of the founders of Socialism? Hadn't I seen the life of the poor in many countries? I certainly had done all these, yet I had never taken to practical politics. I knew politics was as important as medicine but then I would never go to a doctor unless there was something wrong with me. This attitude may not have been entirely frivolous. There was a good reason why I muscled back to the overcrowded Ivory Tower, back to the clouds with a 'soul above politics'. It was the oddity of my personal circumstances. Economically I belonged more to the workers than to the middle classes. I had a very 'interesting' job, I made my own hours, was to a certain extent my own master, had long 'holidays with pay', my superiors had liked me and treated me with trust and kindness, but still, strictly speaking, I was an employee, a man with practically no unearned income, and my earned income was hardly better than

a factory foreman's. If income is a key, an index to a man's social status, I was certainly 'working class'. Hereditarily, traditionally, however, I was not working class. If I belonged to a niche, my place was somewhere among poor aristocracy sunken into the middle class. Since I never felt I had very much in common with the middle class on the whole, my duty, I felt, was more with the workers, but then the workers' ways were not entirely my ways. It was not their table manners and other superficial factors that repelled me. If I saw a man eating his peas with a knife I would regard it as a fascinating, but not a very comfortable activity. Their table manners, on the whole, always spelt for me a kind of exoticism which was quite attractive and vital. I was conscious of it, but it never put me off. What actually put me off from time to time was certain of their prejudices and snobberies, and these put me off because I knew that these were not even original but aped from the middle class, in slightly distorted forms. Middle class prejudices and snobberies, God only knows, are not attractive even when new and original, but to see them practised and voiced and adapted by the working class ten or fifteen years after they had discarded them is irritating.

And all this would not have mattered if the Labour Party before the war had not adopted an extremely short-sighted policy in its propaganda, which somehow seemed to suggest that a mere brain worker was inferior to a manual worker and even if it did not go to such extremes of stupidity it had managed to drive away an impressive mass of people like myself.

In view of all this it was very easy for me to adopt the non-compromising attitude that a writer should have nothing to do with politics. I was still taking an interest in political theory but my interest became more and more scientific. Fascism I found unscientific and false; Communism bureaucratic and narrow, though Communism had from time to time aroused my curiosity, especially during the years of the slump. Then I read Gide's record and I shrugged my shoulders, giving Communism the benefit of the doubt. What little I could gather from what I read was that there was very little in the Communist achievement up to the war that ought to have been absolutely adopted by any of the Western democracies, and that little was almost exclusively in the cultural sphere.

My politics, if I come to think of it, was democracy, that is parliamentary democracy to be exact, but I had never moved a finger so that democracy should work better or work at all. I had actually canvassed for a friend of mine who was an M.P. in the Midlands representing the National Government, but that I did out of personal devotion for my friend and because it was valuable material for my notebooks.

That in the Army I began to feel the necessity of thinking in political terms had nothing whatever to do with the other soldiers I was mixing with. They were, in a way, more political than I, because most of them had at least a political prejudice or two, but I noticed that they were steadily losing their contact with the actualities of the day and they were on leave for Democracy. It was no use asking them what were they fighting for, because with the exception of O'Brien—who was an intelligent and progressive Conservative—they would have admitted, after a few unsuccessful attempts to repeat a few slogans and platitudes, that they were fighting because they had been called up to do so. I suppose I became a little more politically conscious, because in the Army, divorced from one's natural background, one somehow sees the issues clearer and one's outlook becomes a little more serious.

It was during my second guard that I had suddenly remembered a remark already ten years old, and a remark the truth of which I could only see and appreciate now at the age of thirty-five, standing in the cold with a rifle on my shoulder in the dark Yorkshire night. '*The twouble wiv you iv tvat you're twying to be happy wiwout faif . . . and tvat, I gueff, iv wurry wurry difficult, you know . . .*' It was Joseph Hergesheimer who had said that to me when I was twenty-five. Looking back on the scene I see the friendly, kindly face of the old American novelist with his missing front tooth and his subsequent lisp and I cannot help feeling how right he was. It was, indeed, 'wurry wurry difficult' to try to be happy without faith. And it seems I never had faith. Then I remembered another remark. This came much later. From somebody of my own generation. He said, a Hungarian he was, that the trouble with our generation was that we had been brought up during the Locarno Interlude and that we took the calmness of that short, fleeting, unreal interlude for permanent reality. It was just a breathing space and we did not notice that. He was dead right. From the real prophets of our time: Marx, Freud, Bergson, Einstein, we were somehow seduced by the for ever unfinished conflict of André Gide's conscience, the quiet bourgeois radicalism of Thomas Mann and Georges Duhamel, by Aldous Huxley's beautiful intelligence and Virginia Woolf's verbal fireworks.

We all read Harold Laski and Ortega Y. Gasset and Gustave Le Bon and Madariaga and we all read Julien Benda's sermon *La Trahison des Clercs*. We all read these lesser prophets of the age, some of us because they were 'fashionable' and some of us with the excitement of reading a 'tec story, yet our real masters were still writers, poets, Ivory Tower (or shall we say, Glass Tower?) 'souls above politics.'

Not that we never thought about the 'real mission' of the twentieth century. We knew it had a mission. We knew that the two greatest

challenges that had been presented to our generation were the problems of how to renew and refresh and transform the out-of-date and moribund forms of social economy and social living together and to find a substitute in the form of an international organisation for the rivalry of sovereign states. We were not entirely blind not to see that during the Locarno Interlude they had only resurrected all that was most decayed about pre-war economy: the international adventures of impersonal capitalism. But still, we thought, or shall we be frank, *I personally thought*, a writer should leave politics alone . . .

When I was young I was a sentimental internationalist and I had invested with superhuman strength that very frail magic of Aristide Briand with which that delightful and very well-meaning elder had tried to create a United Europe. When I saw Briand tottering along the corridors of Geneva I regarded him with the kind of blind belief one extends to prophets and saints. And when I was still younger I had the same faith in H. G. Wells. So, I did have a faith once . . .

Then I began to think about people who would go and die for their Faith. Some of my contemporaries had gone to fight for democratic Spain and many of them never returned. The idea of a man taking up arms to fight for an ideology in general now had suddenly become very beautiful to me. In 1937 I had thought it was a commendable thing to do, a romantic thing to do, but it was somehow just a heroic and beautiful private affair, but a private affair just the same.

Yes, that had been my attitude, an irresponsible, almost frivolous attitude. In those days of the Threadbare Thirties I had strayed to an Arcadian, idyllic landscape, that was—looking back on it—dangerously like a stage *décor* by Rex Whistler. Even the factory chimneys, dockyards, pit entrances, slagheaps, and dole queues had looked somehow romantic. I certainly knew that they had existed, because I certainly moved about and I was a competent reporter. I could describe the atmosphere of a miner's cottage as well as I could describe a peer's music room. Photographically, 'documentarily', I made no mistakes. I knew a miner's crash helmet and Davy lamp and clogs as intimately as I knew the chain of the Garter or the ceremonial dress of the Bluemantle Pursuivant. And I loved to show off how well I could reproduce the conversation of a Parisian *ouvrier*, a retired German officer or a Liverpool dock labourer. Photographically, I was, in a way, correct, I suppose, but my 'angle' was somehow wrong. I thought I was a literary 'Camera Artist' and I thought I was showing things a trifle obliquely in order to make them 'new' and 'interesting'. That was my biggest delusion of all. I had showed things obliquely, very obliquely indeed because I was suffering from an astigmatism which was not merely ocular but also emotional.

True, of course, that in those years before the war I had one terrific problem. It was, I should say, the biggest piece of reality in my life that excluded practically everything else: my progress as a writer. I was experimenting, I was young. I was nervously turning the knobs: the voltmeter, the trimmer, the heterodyne, and the other controls on my little relay station, with a throbbing heart, trying to find the wavelength, the proper wavelength on which to send. I did not know my listeners and my listeners did not know me. I had decided on the language, yes, on the material of the broadcast, yes, I felt I had a good deal to say but I did not quite know on what point to switch the modulator and how to modulate my voice so that the listener should hear me well, so that he should become conscious that it was I who was transmitting and so that he should like my voice. The wavelength I felt was the most important. I felt I should have to find the people likely to be interested in what I was going to say. And I was certainly very unsure about my wavelength.

But all these things were far away from me now, guarding the lodge at Hemsworth Old Hall in the Yorkshire night. They were not unreal, no, because at times the past can be dreadfully, agonisingly, magnificently real, but they were the past all the same.

As for the present, I was in the Army in a very realistic world, there was no doubt about that. Very realistic. And I liked its realism; it was its realism I liked most about the Army. I was perhaps still a civilian in uniform, but I had a strong desire to be a soldier. I was taking pains. There was, I was thinking, nothing 'aimless' about it. I certainly had my war aims and I was glad I was fighting for them. I was for the war from the beginning, because I knew it was not true that 'wars don't decide anything'. Wars and military victories certainly decide things, if nothing else does. It is, on the contrary, Peace that is bad, stupid short-sighted peace treaties and mismanaged peace years that do the damage.

Then what were my war aims? I asked myself. I might be still slightly out of date, or unreal, but I certainly thought I had clearly defined war aims. I didn't feel the least hazy about their main outlines And it was easy to express them. I could put them into just one single sentence. But . . . I felt I must not pronounce that sentence. People would laugh at me, which I wouldn't mind much, but they would lose interest in me, which I did mind. Because that one single sentence looks dreadful in print. It looks much more dreadful than the worst collection of obscene words, the most unprintable curses, it would provoke a reaction more annihilating to anyone who utters it than if he had admitted that his war aim was to profit from mass suffering.

No, it isn't something you have never heard of. No, that's possibly

the greatest trouble about it. You have heard it, yes, you heard it too often. If you are temperamental you clench your fist when you hear it. If you are not, you smile contemptuously. Yet to me that phrase is still full of beauty, music, poetry, hope, no matter how heavily the discredit of twenty-five ugly years hangs over it. To me it is still very very real and an ideal for which I don't mind risking my skin. It is 'To Make the World Safe for Democracy.'

And I know I am not alone. I know that that phrase is still a piece of living reality in the minds of thousands of people who, like me, dare not say it aloud, like Orthodox Jews who must not refer to the Deity by his proper name.

The trouble, I suppose, is that we are unable to coin another phrase to express the same meaning, to cover the same idea. They are 'big words', of course, a little oratorical, but splendid, all the same, in their terse economy. It is almost like a line of poetry. And it has the quality of the 'last word' and the '*mot juste*' about it. You cannot add to it, you cannot heighten it; it's the maximum.

The other two last-war slogans are frankly funny: *Fit for Heroes to Live in* and *The War to End War*, and they deserve the contempt they enjoy. 'Hero' and 'Heroism' are very difficult words to use and *Fit for Heroes to Live in* . . . what childish naïveté, what a bardic line. It sounds as if it was borrowed from a prize-winning poem recited at some local Eisteddfod. It has a Celtic accent. And as for that other piece of nonsense, wars are an unfortunate necessity to which all the horrors of war cannot put an end. All we can hope for is that in a more democratic world they might be much easier to avoid. I, for one, am not the least sure that this present war might be able to perform anything like the great trick for which many of us are waiting in secret, hopeful and sceptical, the great trick: to discredit nationalism, which we think is one of the main causes of modern wars. The problem, it seems to me, is that science is not yet strong enough, not yet fully grown enough to take the place of nationalism. So far science has done one singular piece of damage. That was in the nineteenth century. Science had arrived, it had gained a prestige and its prestige was sufficiently strong to shake people's faith in religion, and by doing so it had allowed nationalism to take religion's place, to become the ardent faith, the new faith, the new drug, the most dangerous drug in the world. Morphine and cocaine are marked by two crosses on most international drug lists. Nationalism ought to be marked by seven.

This war we are fighting is a war of conflicting economic nationalisms and it certainly is not the war of the armament manufacturer (though he is pleased because he can sell more than ever before) or that of the Jew (though he is pleased because we are fighting against the Nazis)

or that of the Capitalist. (I'd like to know what he really thinks about it). This war is somehow not yet the 'People's War' though it looks as though in the end it might really become theirs. In any case it is *my* war. On the analogy of conscientious objectors I am a 'conscientious supporter' of it. I agree with it. I hate it, of course, like hell, but I am pleased all the same to fight in it. And all I want from time to time is a few steps, a few pieces of concrete evidence to the effect that we shall attempt to build a truer, more practical democracy than the one which emerged from the aftermath of the last war. Because the democracy I wish for is not in the least Utopian. It is quite within our reach to achieve. What do I want? An intelligent, planned Capitalist system with high taxation for large incomes in general and for large unearned incomes in particular, a better and wider system of social services and the end of *laissez faire* Liberalism, still dominant in practically every field of English life, creating ugly privilege right and left: in town planning, in education, in public welfare. In short: the existing social order deprived of its gross injustices. Life, in my dreams of that 'safe world', would still remain hard, but perhaps not unnecessarily so and wars would be more difficult to bring about. And in the meantime science might do its bit too . . .

'Careful' war aims, you may say. Unimaginative, too limited in scope and what is perhaps more serious they don't get 'at the root of the trouble.' Maybe not. Maybe I am merely recommending a superficial treatment for the symptoms, an ointment which does not go deep enough and does not fundamentally affect the main causes; but all the same, it would be worth while to try whether the old system in a more up-to-date form would work out a better shape of world for us. There is always time to be more revolutionary, to go further, to try more violent experiments. All you need is a little dynamite.

These were the thoughts that had come to occupy my mind in the Army. I was adapting a more concrete attitude. The Army did change me. Its effect on me was that of a stone falling into a glass containing acids. It had brought about a process known to chemistry as crystallisation. But the stone had nothing in common with the crystals.

## THE WHEELS OF CHANCE

On the whole we had a pleasant time and I began to see why most people preferred 'B' Battery to 'A' Battery. We drove out every day on the trucks and if the weather was too cold we soon found our way

to the Y.M.C.A. or the W.V.S. at Normanton, Barnsley or Pontefract, for a cup of tea. This was not, strictly speaking, allowed, but there are very few things, strictly speaking, allowed in the Army. When Fred Constable took me to the Y.M. at Normanton I felt a little thrill of tasting forbidden fruit. We were clearly wasting the Army's time, but then I knew how to drive and what I did not know about it, Fred Constable was hardly the man to teach me; besides, one felt one needed these little compensations for the hardships which in 'B' Battery were noticeable. We were on guards or on fire piquet every fourth night and the nights were extremely cold and the guard room was decidedly not the place to make up for lost sleep.

As I looked at myself in the large mirror in the lavatory of the Stratford hotel I noticed that the change was almost complete. My uniform had lost its shop-counter impersonality. It did not take on my character; it gave me its character instead. The neck had been adjusted by the regimental tailor and I had reinforced all the buttons which were not firm. I swapped gaiters with Pratt (mine were too loose, his too tight) and the result was satisfactory. My boots had acquired a soldierly finish and had to be restudded because of excessive square-bashing in 'A' Battery. Following the example of the men in the W. Squad I bought some pleated lanyards for walking out. That lanyard is the privilege—among others—of the Horse Artillery and of the Canadian Military Police, but nobody ever said a word when one wore it, after hours. And, of course, it is very smart. And finally I bought a walking-out hat. Red and dark blue. It cost eight-and-six.

'Now you will get your —— free,' said Thorne when I put it on the first time.

This impulse for self-adornment is quite typical in the Army. I was not the first who started these little excursions from the rigours of everyday, but I was not merely imitating somebody else's example either. I was just waiting for someone else to start the thing. The impulse was there already.

I did not go as far as Fred Constable, who wore khaki puttees adapted for battledress trousers instead of gaiters, or as far as 'Johnnie' Walker who had all the 'universal service pattern' buttons replaced with gun buttons (buttons, Royal Artillery) which he bought from an old soldier in W. Squad. Three months ago I would have regarded such things as childish, but now I somehow understood it. It was quite a natural reaction to uniformity.

One afternoon one of the lads from 77 Squad (freshly arrived from Wintersett) asked me in the washhouse whether he should have the Regimental Arms tattooed on his forearm or the more elaborate design of serpents and naked women worn by Jock Ferguson in W. Squad.

'What d'you want it for?'

'Joost for foon,' he said, 'a soovenier of my Army service. Lewks nice, don't it?'

'M'm, it has its points. Well, if you must insist I should have the Regimental Arms, *Ubique Quo Fas Et Gloria Ducunt* etcetera.'

'What colour?'

'Red, of course. Or red and blue. Who's going to do it?'

'Bloke I know buck in Wigan. Charges a quid for them Regimental Arms.'

But the visible change was slight no matter how apparent. There was another change in most of us that went a trifle deeper. We seemed to lose our sense of time. Some bought newspapers and read them, but only as an alternative for boredom. Interest in the things of the outside world had not ceased entirely but had become much reduced.

Since it was a professional necessity in Civvy Street I used to read, on the average, ten newspapers a day and felt very uneasy if I missed one or two. Now I was quite happy not reading newspapers for three or four days on end. Occasionally we heard the news on the wireless in the Naafi, but the information created little interest.

We lost count of time and it seemed the Army was the best place to forget about the war. We became conscious of being soldiers and after a time kept away from the company of civilians, as if they did not quite understand our language; feeling, all the same, a vague superiority and envy towards them. Civilians on the whole were very kind to us, they treated us to drinks, they gave us cigarettes and generally showed a sense of shame, pity and respect towards us. But after a time we felt we belonged to two separate worlds, and ours somehow looked unreal.

Then I noticed that on the buses the conductresses never charged soldiers the fare and only accepted it under protest. These hefty, Yorkshire wenches had a soft spot for us. And people were good to us in the shops, too.

All these things made me feel a new importance of life of which I only became conscious when I came into contact with civilians. I lost —or almost lost—an old identity and acquired a new one. It was a process that fills many a mind with dismay and resentment, but it gave me nothing but delight.

'If this sort of thing we are going through were part of a great experiment I would not mind suffering more, I would not mind even being sacrificed . . .'

We were walking out towards Wakefield one afternoon and Minney was thundering again. I had changed my mind about avoiding his company. I was now feeling less allergic to him.

'But the trouble is that there is no experiment,' he went on. 'If one day the major or anyone else suddenly gave us a talk I would immediately react to it in the most favourable way.'

'What sort of a talk?'

'What I would expect is the following. "Look here, men, you are going through hell and we know it. The thing is absolutely deliberate and intentional. You are on guard or fire piquet every fourth night. It is very cold now and you can't have a proper rest in the guardroom between your periods. During the day you have to attend long lectures given by N.C.O.s who are friendly enough but take very little interest in their work. In the evening you have to do various fatigues and at night you have to read up your notes, but there is no adequate provision for your work because the Naafi is noisy and crowded and the recreation room is not yet available. In addition, the food is not quite adequate. Well, we could give you a much better time. We could take you off guard duties while you are being trained, we could provide you with N.C.O.s who are much better at lecturing, and wouldn't refer to the commutator as 'commentator', we could provide you with a room for those who want to read up their notes and we could give you more adequate rations of food. But we are not doing it. We are deliberately forcing this hardship on you, which is all the worse because it looks so unnecessary. We are doing this for two reasons. One reason is to toughen you, to harden you, to make you try to sort yourselves out in a deliberately created muddle. The other reason is that among you, unknown to you and undetected by you, there are two psychologists, who watch you and study your reactions to this deliberately imposed hardship, in order to make an important scientific assessment of behaviour under stress. We want to see how a man robbed of his sleep almost to the point of it being temporarily injurious to health can react the following day to learning new and not very simple things explained by men who are bad lecturers. . . . Well, that is the sort of talk I am expecting every day. It would make all the difference . . .'

I smiled. 'I agree with the first reason: toughening,' I said. 'We do need it, but I'm afraid this is hardly the way to set about it. But as for the psychological experiment, my dear Minney, you will agree with me that even if we were used as guinea pigs they would not tell us about it because then we would not feel the hardship half as much, and in any case it would falsify the observations.'

Two days later we had our written test on M.T. It was fairly easy. Everybody passed it. The same afternoon I tried the push-bike again. It was promising. I could not yet keep myself on for a long stretch, but it was clear I was acquiring balance.

The same evening I received a letter of introduction from a friend of mine to her aunt, who lived near Wakefield in a famous historic house, so remarkable for its architectural beauty and for its interior decoration that it was—along with ten or twelve others—made free from requisitioning. I knew about the lady in question. She was a graceful and attractive old *grande dame* and I knew that her house possessed a remarkable collection of attractive English pictures: Dance, Hayter, Herring, Reynolds, and no less than ten paintings by Stubbs—one of my favourite painters. But as I held the letter in my hands I knew I would not go. All these things were grotesquely and strangely far away from me now, and I knew that the visit would provide violent contrasts and that consequently on return I could not help feeling unhappy. All I wanted was to be left alone to sort things out, to practise the push-bike and not to be prevented by thoughtless and unnecessary fatigues from taking an interest in the Army.

For fatigues had now become the order of the day. On the first day after the written test the four of us who had driven before in Civvy Street had been passed out in the practical driving test and were promptly put on fatigues the following day. Then one after the other the whole squad passed out and the fatigue-party grew in size.

The first day we were on coal fatigues. Shovelling large quantities of coal into the shed in the basement, our denim overalls were soon black and the coal-dust had settled on our eyebrows, eyelashes and on such portions of our hair as were left free by the hat. In the end we looked quite as black as Joe Smithers, the miner who worked in the nearby colliery and lived on the estate.

Smithers was a friend. I met him one night when I was on guard. I challenged his dark figure with my rifle in the 'on guard' position, then I recognised him and, since nobody was about, we laughed. Later he offered me a cigarette. I had to refuse but in order not to offend him I continued the conversation for a few minutes. (The orderly sergeant had gone.) Then a few days later I met him again in Wakefield. It was a Saturday afternoon and we went to the 'Dog and Gun' and stood each other Tetley's Brown Ale. He talked about the colliery, which I had visited when we were in 'A' Battery, thanks to the Educational Officer's enterprise and intelligence. I had been 'down the mine' before, in Staffordshire, but it was a 'personally conducted' tour on a day when the mine was not working (just as if you went to visit a theatre on a Sunday morning). This time I saw it in full swing. Smithers was a 'daytaller', his job was not, strictly speaking, actual coal heaving but something equally dangerous and strenuous: he put up the wooden props to support the roof. I told him that his props gave me nasty bumps on the head while I was 'travelling' his mine.

We met often after this and I got to like Smithers very much, with good reason. My observations may be inaccurate and misleading, but it is my belief based on contact with miners that, taken as a whole, they are the most vital, friendly, most cheerful, generous and the most intelligent section of the working-class community. They display on the whole a far greater interest in culture and have a greater sense of intelligent curiosity than workers whose jobs are better paid, less dull, less arduous and far less dangerous.

Then there came potato peeling, which is known in the Army as 'spud bashing' and is not a favourable pastime, especially in winter. Then a very unsavoury piece of fatigue: sorting dirty paper out of wet and rotten straw for salvage.

Two days later (because four were put back and had to repeat the test) we were on a digging fatigue, to dig up the whole back garden. It was naturally a piece of work I very much enjoyed. It was clean, it was in the open air and there was something rural and wholesome about it. But all the same I was very angry doing it, because most of these fatigues were unnecessary and were given to us so that we should not idle away the Army's time. I asked the sergeant whether those four or five of us who had never ridden bicycles previously could not be allowed to spend as much free time as we had to learn how to hold the balance properly, or to work in the M.T. workshop and have a little practical experience of engineering. The answer was 'No.' This is the only thing that makes me violent about the Army, even though I know that much the same lack of imagination must prevail in the armies all over the world, and even though I know that such pieces of lack of imagination, even if they are worse and even if they are practised on a much larger scale, have absolutely no effect on a country's chances of decisive victory.

My real source of anger was not only that I was not given a chance to practise on the push-bike, but the fatigues took away all my energy for practising it even in my free time.

All my fears were justified as the following days showed. One morning when every one of us had passed out on the road test and was given a War Office licence signed in facsimile by Sir James Grigg, we marched up to the stores and handed in our M.T. text-books and were given our motor-cycle outfit: a crash helmet, a pair of riding breeches, a jacket and goggles. I handled these articles, though they were smelly and dirty, with pleasure and a certain amount of pride.

Then we marched out on to the common, where there were five motor-bikes, all brand new. We took our turn.

'Now don't be afraid,' said Bombardier Banks to me. He was a

young man who was assistant instructor to our sergeant, 'I know you aren't sure of your balance, so I shall ride behind you.'

And with this he took up his position behind me on the bike, and put his hands on the handlebars.

'Now start.'

I started, according to instructions, or rather what I thought were the instructions.

'Not too much juice, you are choking it . . . that's better. Now slowly into first gear.'

The engine gave a grating noise, but it started, a little too violently for Bombardier Banks. He made me repeat it.

Then we started off.

'Don't be afraid, change gear . . .'

'I'm not the slightest bit afraid,' I said and laughed.

'That's good.'

'Now into top gear.'

I kicked it into top gear.

'Too much juice . . . Now d'you think you could take over the handles from me? Let's change down into second. . . . D'you think you would risk it?'

'Let's try.'

I took over. I balanced perfectly for five solid seconds then I had to turn and began to wobble. Quickly he took over.

'Not so bad, eh?'

'Oh, let me do it again.'

'Here you go.'

This time, before I knew where I was Bombardier Banks and I were both on the ground, a little grazed, the bike angrily spluttering and making violent convulsions with its rear wheel.

'I'm frightfully sorry, Bombardier. Are you hurt?'

'No, are you? It was luck you fell off the way you did. You did it instinctively, I s'pose. You must let both of your feet off, the moment you feel you are falling off, otherwise you break an ankle. Well, we shall see what we can do with you. It's not so bad as you might think. . . . Go and get yourself a cup of tea at Ma Hanson's while I go and see the others.'

I walked into Mrs. Hanson's shop, at the edge of the common. It was really the front part of the living room partitioned by wooden boards into a small shop and there were beer boxes by the small counter on which I saw four or five of the others sitting.

'I thought you broke an ankle or something,' said Pratt as I came in.

'No fear.'

'So you are quite determined to go through with it?'

'I am.'

'All right. We meet in the infirmary next week. And Sergeant Beaman will report "Three in hospital, sir," in the morning.'

'How is the motor-bike?' asked Mother Hanson handing me a nice cup of tea.

'The *bike* is all right.'

'Is that how you feel about it?'

'Well, I am angry. I know I could make a good job of it if I were allowed time.'

'What do you want to learn to ride a motor-bike for?' asked Pratt, 'to chase them girls? I should say by the way you're dolled up on Sunday afternoons, red hat and fancy lanyard and all the rest, you get them free.'

'Don't let them tease you,' said Mrs. Hanson.

'Oh, they are only jealous,' I said.

Mrs. Hanson was an elderly Yorkshire woman with beautiful white hair and deep blue eyes. She and Mr. Hanson, it seemed, kept the shop for their own pleasure. They charged Naafi prices and sometimes less for much better value, and sometimes when Pa Hanson had joined us in the evening (with his shirt sleeves and his pleasant Yorkshire talk, he looked as if he had walked out from among the pages of *The Good Companions*) he sometimes treated us to a glass of port and home-made cakes for nothing.

She told us that when petrol shortage was not so acute they closed the shop for a fortnight every summer and started in their Baby Austin to explore England. They went to Derby, saw the Goose Fair at Nottingham, visited Manchester, Blackpool. They had never yet been to London.

'Bombardier Broom told us you lived in Paris,' she said. 'Is it true Frenchwomen are all very smartly dressed?'

There was something not quite grown up and sweetly unspoiled about the villagers at Hemsworth. They grew old with the eyes of children and without wrinkles. They had a delightful quality of innocence I had so far only come across in a few Canadians and many New Zealanders. And their accent. And some beautiful words they used. I wish I could make a gramophone record of Mrs. Hanson's speech or that of the miner's wife. It is music to me.

The following day the business with motor-bikes was not so easy as the first time. I got confused and could not do things I could do the day before. I did not lose my temper though. But I was unable to hold my balance. Later, during a second shot at it, the thing went a little

easier. I lost my temper a little but I felt the damn thing would be all right in the end. I wouldn't let it defeat me.

French, however, spoilt the game for me. He fell off the bike and hurt himself. It was not a serious injury, just a large blue spot on his thigh the following day, but he went on limping, saw the M.O., and was given 'light duties'. The sergeant, however, looked up. He decided to take all five of us off motor-bikes.

'But, sergeant, I'm certain I shall be all right in the end,' I said.

'I'm sorry. I can't take responsibility for you. You might break an ankle or something and then drop me in the ——'

I was the most depressed man in the whole Battery.

It was small comfort that three days later four others joined our pitiful company, a week later, seven more. It came out that they could not hold their own on the road and the sergeant would not take responsibility for taking them on the final test riding up and down the quarries.

*Extract from my diary. December 23rd.* 'On fatigues all day yesterday and to-day. We spent yesterday morning dry-scrubbing the floor in barrack rooms, quite naturally taking our own time over it. It was not a really unpleasant job, and we were quite looking forward to the same in the afternoon when we were given sudden orders to shovel coal into fuel stores and separate coke. Hard and unpleasant work. Livingstone said we ought to hurry up and get done with it. I was inclined to agree, but French said if we finished soon they would give us another job to do. "That's the Army all over and a —— place this is." So we finished soon after four and knocked off to take a bath. Water was chilly.

'To-day it seems we are more fortunate. We were to dry-scrub the corridors and we took it very easy. It is now 2.40 and I am sitting on top of the staircase, writing these notes, listening to the scrubbing that goes on underneath and to all suspicious noises, ready at any moment to jump up and go on scrubbing. N.C.O. in charge is old Bombardier Mitchell, the Battery policeman, so nothing awful is likely to happen.

'Squad 74 left to-day for a week's leave. We are supposed to go next Tuesday. Thursday is Xmas Eve. I am on guard that night.

'Letter from Patricia. She won't be in town during my leave. Made up my mind to wear uniform during leave, but must get new red and blue flashes for sleeve.

'Re-read Aldous Huxley's essay on *Time and the Machine* after dinner. There is nothing so infuriating for the modern man as being kept waiting. Remember sharing a taxi with Huxley from Mount Royal to Victoria five or six years ago. We got into a frightful traffic

jam. Our taxi could not move for ten minutes. Huxley said: "Here you see a Utopia that is entering the stage of reality. Thousands of people have cars. The end is that they can't move from each other."

'He looked more sorry for the world than usual.

'Now it is 3.15. I have another hour and a half to finish scrubbing the staircase before knocking off.

*December 24th.* 'O'Brien and I were called into Crankshaw's office and were told that our names were being put forward for an O.C.T.U. In his shy, neurotic way he is rather a nice man. Told me he served 18 months in the ranks, and that Artillery Octu was agony. I plucked up courage to ask how much private income a second-lieutenant needs to keep him going. He said none. "I haven't got any private income whatsoever," he said, "and I think an officer can live on his pay."

'My feelings are mixed. I would not mind much serving as a gunner or as an N.C.O. under officers like Belmont or Crankshaw—in fact, under all those I had met so far, but all the same I think I need some scope, more responsibility. I could be more useful as an officer and besides, later I shall, I'm certain to, find that for a man like me serving in the ranks for years destroys sense of values. Very glad to start from the bottom, but there are limits.

'Belmont said last week, intake of Octus is very limited; waiting list long, so I can't see myself as an officer for at least a year. He said I must take a commission. For one thing, there aren't enough writers in England and they ought to be encouraged. Dear Belmont. If he knew . . .

'Spent the whole morning decorating the dining-hall for Xmas. Sergeant-major selected me for purpose. "You ought to make a good job of it." '

I was quite looking forward to Christmas in the Army. I expected it would be simple and without trimmings, as Christmas in my opinion should be. I hated pre-war Christmasses and usually worked all day —if I did not go away.

In the morning I did not fall in with the Anglicans for church parade as I was looking forward to a Nonconformist service. Four of us walked to Wakefield, then found that the Methodist service would not start till 11.30. I left them and walked to the Y.M.C.A. for a cup of tea. It was decorated by garlands of coloured paper.

I was served by Miss Andrassy, a pretty young woman. She was born in Wakefield and so were her father and her uncle. Her uncle was a pork butcher. Her grandfather came from Hungary. Andrassy is the name of one of the best families in Hungary. Not only a very old and

prominent family but a very rich one. How on earth one of them (he was the black sheep—she explained) had got to England and settled down to be a tradesman in Wakefield must be an exciting story. Just try to turn the story round. You visit a small Hungarian town and find that the butcher is called Cavendish-Bentinck.

There were few people in the Y.M., so after having written a letter I walked back.

There was quite a jolly dinner-party. Soup and goose and turkey and plenty of it, and Christmas pudding and beer.

The soup was served by the officers and the rest by the sergeants. The sergeant-major gave me a huge portion of Christmas pudding for making such a good job of the decorations.

Five minutes later the colonel arrived and made a little speech. He looked round the room, shut his eyes, and bared his teeth. 'I'm glad to see you are enjoying yourselves. The decorations are not of the best,' he said. (Everybody looked at me.) 'But we did our best to make you happy. I hope you are enjoying yourselves.' Then he left.

There was a good deal of singing. Sergeants got merry. Our own was muzzy. The fat sergeant-major came up to me in high glee and filled up my tin mug with beer.

'The colonel dinna ken onything about you decorating the 'rroom, de Hegedus, else he wouldnie h' said that. Nivverr mind, laddie.'

I didn't.

I was detailed for church parade with the Anglicans. We often passed the church driving out. It's a beautiful little building. Originally, I suppose, it belonged to the estate. It is called St. John's Parish Church, Hemsworth-cum-Heath. Near the pulpit was a very fine baroque marble memorial with two busts on it, a man and a woman, in the seventeenth century French tradition.

The Vicar was an elderly gentleman, tall, charming and unassuming, with slightly moth-eaten fur trimmings on his hood. I expected a nice, old-worldly sermon: the same sermon he had delivered in 1904 when he was a young curate in St. Leonards-on-Sea, in 1911 in Gibraltar, in 1920 in Mentone and in 1931 at the Girl Guide's Rally in Hong-Kong.

Then came surprise. He began in a beautiful, deep voice to talk about war and Christianity, then suddenly he switched over to talk about democracy. Nothing commonplace and no excursions into politics. Just a Christian discussing democracy. There came a splendid tirade against the enemies of democracy, not so much abroad as in England, a sharp rap on the knuckles for the last five Lord Chancellors. Then he looked sweet again, and holy, as he was coming to the end.

It was one of the best sermons I ever heard in my life. The dear old

gentleman was a dark horse. If there are many like him there can be no anxiety for the future of the Church of England.

Marching back O'Brien said that he expected that at the end the organist would play the Internationale.

## THE GIRL FROM NEWCASTLE

FINALLY SQUAD 75 was inspected by Mr. McCorquodale on the square in full service marching order and had, according to Battery Orders, 'proceeded on seven days' privilege leave with ration cards, ration money and free railway warrant issued.'

There was quite a cheerful fire in my sitting-room and there was a slight, musty, country-house-library smell in it which I never noticed before. The ceiling had been damaged by water (a pipe burst on the second floor a few weeks ago) and I noticed that the railings had gone from my square.

The first night I went to a restaurant in Soho. I had an excellent dinner, but I noticed, with a little alarm, how impatient I became when out of the Army. It was perhaps because one couldn't really complain in the Army. In Civvy Street one could. I was just leaving when an old friend of mine came in, also in uniform. I stayed a bit with him. He said I looked well and very soldierly.

'D'you really mean it?'

'Yes. I expected you would be, with your elastic mind and all that.'

'What d'you mean?'

'That you are playing a part. You are dramatising yourself as a soldier and since you are a good actor you don't overstep the mark, you don't exaggerate the thing, but everything you do and say is the Army all over.'

'Thank you.'

'Don't get me wrong. You took off a nice, wholesome, intelligent soldier. And you took him off well. You look the part. True, you always had a good complexion.'

'You've been drinking.'

'Not more than usual. Have a "Lucky Strike".'

'Where did you get that?'

'At the Canadian Beaver Club from an American serving with the Canadians. You should go to the Beaver. It's a very refreshing and civilised place. The American Eagle is another. Amazing how we simply

can't make a place like those two for our own Service men. The average English canteen stinks of charity and that late nineteenth-century variety of charity which is so awful . . .'

The Beaver and the American Eagle were both refreshing and civilised. During my leave in London I practically lived in them. There was marvellous food for practically nothing, all the American periodicals which I had not seen for six months and coffee that took you back at once to the Sherry-Netherlands or was it just a road-house between Winston-Salem and Atlanta?

It was, of course, a little difficult to get used to Civvy Street and by the time you did, your leave was over. I woke almost every morning between half-past six and seven and got great satisfaction out of the fact that I could turn round and go on sleeping.

Then I would go to the kitchen and have breakfast and read the paper, then I would shave and go out. I called on a number of friends partly to see them and partly to show them my uniform.

'Goering,' the porter at the M.O.I., was so impressed to see me in battledress that he did not ask for my pass. I walked into the Beveridge Hall. It looked deserted. Hans Egli of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* almost dropped the cigarette from his mouth when he caught sight of me. Everybody looked up, everybody thought I wasn't quite real. It seemed incredible, a trifle absurd. Brigadier Neville came up to me and shook my hand warmly without saying a word. The handshake seemed to suggest 'Now victory is just round the corner'.

I called on Admiral Thomson, on Brebner, and on other people in the censorship I knew. As I came out of the Admiral's room I passed Tom Dupree and Osbert Lancaster, standing in the corridor in deep counsel.

'Good morning,' I said.

'Morning,' replied Lancaster, absentmindedly, diplomatically and automatically, then he looked at me and recognised me, his handlebar moustache began to tremble slightly as if seeing a ghost by daylight. That second he looked exactly as a figure in one of his own 'Pocket Cartoons' in the *Express*.

I had not the slightest desire to change into civvies. The novelty of wearing uniform was over; it had a new attraction for me now. I felt that in battledress I was more or less *incognito*, that I was camouflaging my personal identity. The motive behind the act was somewhat confused. It was in a sense a desire for escape; there was, however, a stronger desire in me and that was curiosity. And this time my curiosity was not scientific. Those days when I had dressed myself up in order

to mix with people of the 'lower income groups' on something like their own level, in order to 'investigate' and explore their world with a view to putting it into newspaper articles, were over. I had done my 'investigations' in Boy Scout uniform and in borrowed clothes. The contacts were often successful, mostly because I was young and had a marked foreign accent, two factors which definitely diminish class awareness. Those days I had spent lodging with working-class people in Glasgow, Birmingham, Liverpool, Stoke-on-Trent and London had brought a good deal of journalistically interesting material, a little literary 'copy' and a few 'check-ups' on my theoretical knowledge of social conditions. But there was something else beyond that. I always recall those times when I had entered into the life of the men of the street with a strange nostalgia, a sense of adventure and, on the whole, very pleasant memories. And the desire to repeat the adventure is ever present in me. The fact that I was now in uniform acted as an accomplice, an accessory *before* the fact; the possibilities were there, ready made. At times—in Yorkshire—whether I wanted it or not I was already about to be accepted by ordinary people on their own level. I was already 'chum,' 'mate,' 'kid' and 'lad': just an ordinary soldier, with whom soldiers and civvies conversed without restraint.

In the North and in the Midlands I did not need to make special efforts to be superficially accepted as an equal; the south in general and London in particular were, however, different. People in the North usually say that Southerners, among other things, are snobbish. My personal view is that Southerners on the whole have a more developed sense of class-consciousness and class-awareness. In the South, I felt, uniform was not enough camouflage. The South contained too many 'trained eyes' for social differences. It is a fundamental fact that in the Britain of 1943 the trained eye could, in a very short time, discover social differences, and could more or less spot the proper social background of anyone in uniform. These differences don't lie so much in the actual anthropological features, in height, in the bone structure, in the shape of the face and the hands, as perhaps in the general bearing and gait: in the way a man moves about, walks, looks, sits down and gets up, lights a cigarette, enters a building. All these already would have given many clues to his social identity long before he opened his mouth. When he had uttered a sentence the picture of his social whereabouts was almost complete. There is no other language in which social differences are so brutally clearly marked as in English.

From time to time in Yorkshire I had already played the part of the 'ordinary man', I had already acted the ordinary Tommy; now on leave in London I gave it full rein. It was something like amateur theatricals in the greater and more realistic stage of life. It was, in a

way, 'impersonation' and it gave the excitement a very enthusiastic spy must feel when 'on the job'. It had no element of danger in it but it gave me a good deal of elation and a sense of adventure.

I had thought that I would spend my remaining four or five days in London mixing with 'ordinary people': but just two days before I was due back I suddenly put a stop to it. Something very remarkable, very strange, very beautiful happened, something which very suddenly turned my playful, adventurous mood into a very serious one.

It happened in a dance-hall. I had always liked dancing and because I liked it I always went to 'popular' places where dancing was generally dancing. The place I went to was full of soldiers and women in the Services. It was not overcrowded but it was fairly hot. Some of the soldiers took off their blouses and danced in shirt-sleeves as if putting their shoulders to the wheel. A young gunner, wearing the dark blue trousers with the wide red stripe of our walking-out dress, did the jitter-bug in his shirt-sleeves with as much devotion and as serious an expression on his face as if it were an important strategic operation. Perhaps it was.

I danced with an A.T.S. girl, then with a girl in civvies, then with a Waaf, then with another civvy . . .

Then . . .

I remembered that I had seen her already, standing by a column, a little separated from the other girls; standing alone as if she was waiting for someone, as if she had a date. She looked very independent standing there, tall and wide-shouldered in her Air Force uniform, and she had a workmanlike handsomeness that just escaped being austere.

He must be late, I thought, and I kept wondering who he was. I kept wondering what sort of a man such an attractive girl would have to keep her company. Perhaps she would tell me if I asked her.

'Will you dance this one?'

'I don't mind,' she said. A nice deep voice.

She was light on her feet and had a perfect sense of rhythm. She seemed to sense all my moves and plans on the floor. After the first encore we glided along as smoothly as if we had previously rehearsed our movements. I wondered if she shared my satisfaction.

There was applause.

'A good bund,' she said, 'huve you been here before . . .?'

'Yes. Where d'you come from?' I asked.

'Newcastle . . . I'm on leave . . .'

'And enjoying yourself . . .'

She smiled. She had very good teeth.

The band began to play again and we went on dancing.

I felt as we danced along that her character would match her appearance. That she was courageous, independent, unconventional,

generous. But there was more, something even more attractive: an atmosphere about her, singularly lovely and difficult to describe. I had come across it before and I always found it difficult to describe no matter how keenly and sometimes desperately I tried to. I usually called it 'life'. It was not just her obvious good health and strength and the masculine lines of her uniform that suggested vitality, but there was also something brave, almost heroic and masculine in the spirit. It is the North, I thought. Men and women with hard accents, with heavy bones, irregular features beautified by vitality and zest for life, hard work and hard play, unsophistication perhaps, but a tremendous sincerity and unspoilt sweetness, affection and kindness, romanticism and humour against a bleak, harsh, shivering, grey background.

'No moon to-night
No friendly star to guide me with its light.
Be still my heart
Silent lest my love should be returning
From a world far apart . . .'

As we moved together, she inspiring me to dance better than ever, serious and silent, I reflected that, as so often had been the case, it was the contrast that had got me. She really lived life, feeling rather than thinking. Probably she felt very deeply: but she did not reflect and meditate like me. She was not a spectator seeing 'life'. Because I thought I had so far 'lived' very little, and the war had to come so that I should give up my role of spectator.

'That's all,' crooned the band leader.

'You coom from Lundon, don't you . . .'

'Yes.'

'What's thut budge you are wearing on your arm?'

'Driver M.T. It just means I passed the course . . .'

'Were you a driver in Civvy Street?'

'Yes.'

'In service?'

'No, I worked for a garage.'

'My brother was a mechanic too. He's out East . . . He used to earn good money. It's a cum-down, isn't it, half a crown a day?'

'Yes, it is.'

How easy she made it for me, how beautifully easy. She was giving me the cues almost, the dramatic instructions.

'Keeping through the night . . .
Waiting for the light . . .'

Five swift chords came on the solitary saxophone, repeated eight times, while the melody grew in intensity towards its climax.

I felt my face touching hers. Just a suggestion, just enough to feel,

but quite prolonged. Then I moved my face a little nearer. Her face was hot against mine and I felt as I held her waist a little tighter that she was perspiring slightly under her uniform.

There came the applause.

'It's hot,' she said, 'will you huve a drink?'

'There are only soft drinks,' she said at the bar. 'Will you huve a lemonade?'

'Oh, but let me pay for it.'

'No, no, I huve more money than you . . .'

If she knew . . . if she knew how easily I could have paid for it, and (less easily, though) I could have taken her to supper at the Savoy. And regardless of what it would cost, how much I should like to . . . And how impossible, how hopeless it would be . . .

'Enjoying yourself in London?' I asked. We were sitting at a small table on the balcony.

'Yes. This is my last day though. Three days in London.'

'On your own?'

'Yes.'

'Know anybody in London?'

She shook her head.

'And did you come on your own too?'

'Yes. It's ever so much better on your own. First night I went to another dance at the Y.W.C.A. There was another Waaf from the same station as I coom from. It was a good dance but this is better. Then last night I went to a cinema. I had a free ticket. D'you get those tickets too?'

'I s'pose so. I haven't asked for them yet.'

She searched in her pockets: 'No cigarettes. And you can't get 'em here.'

'I have hundreds.' I pulled out my case in a hurry . . .

'What a smart case.' She took one. 'It lewks like gold . . .'

'Yes . . . isn't it funny?' I laughed in cold sweat. I was asking for trouble. How idiotic it was of me. I had taken it out of the bank that morning to be revalued and did not want to leave it at home.

'May I see it?'

There it was. Oh God, what a fool I am.

'You would be a rich man if it were real gold,' she said. 'So big.' She opened it. I wanted to snatch it from her hands.

'It takes twenty. Really nicely made. What's that word in the corner, Carter or something? . . . Spelt with an "I" . . .'

'That's the place it was made, I s'pose. I don't know.'

'I've got one at home, lewks like this, but it's tarnished now. When it was new everybody thought it was gold.'

She inhaled deep, handling the cigarette like a man.

'I'm the only girl buck home,' she said later. 'All boys. Four of them.'

'Shall we dance? Oh, I say, finish your fag.'

'It's nearly finished, anyhow.'

We got up. The winding dimly-lit staircase was empty as we walked downstairs. I suddenly stopped.

'Do you want to dance this?'

'D'you?'

How hot her face was. Her mouth, big and soft, tasted of smoked strawberries. I felt her frame against me, her big strong hands around my waist, her perspiration mingling with some scent.

There were footsteps approaching. We separated. Two soldiers passed us. One of them smiled. The smile of masculine accompliceship.

There were new footsteps and as a door opened there came the applause from the hall.

'Let's go up,' I said.

We walked up the second floor and we were now in the narrow corridor with its red and gold striped wallpaper and its many doors leading into boxes. We were alone.

Then we stood there together without either of us saying a word. Vaguely, as if we had only imagined it, we heard fragments of dance music, applause, then silence, then music again and laughter suddenly growing in volume, then as suddenly fading out again. Then, after a time the measured allegros of God Save the King.

'You missed the dances.'

'Do you mind?' she said.

'Of course not.'

'I s'pose we moost go.'

'Yes, but kiss me first.'

'Where d'you stay?' I asked as we were going downstairs.

'A long way from here. Must take the Underground. D'you know the Edgware Road? . . .'

'Not half.'

'You live there?'

'No, but I used to,' I said.

'You live with your people?'

'No. They aren't in London. I shall go to a Service club. You staying with people?'

'No. On my own. You get sick of people, girls, if you are with them all the time. I've got a room . . .'

I took her arm as we were walking up the Edgware Road towards one of its little tributaries. I know the street. I had often passed it

when I lived off Baker Street. I remembered the large old-fashioned clock with its faded gold dial jutting out from the profile of a row of houses like a mole on a human face. And the red-brick post office and the archway at the end of the street leading to mews.

Why had these things now suddenly taken on a new and sweet significance? There was something very lovely and exciting about them now.

I felt I was pressing her arm hard to my ribs as if afraid I might lose her. For a moment, with an icy chill around my heart, I anticipated the usual: 'It's too late.' No, she would be more natural than that. She would say a firm 'No.' Would she say 'Sorry'?

Finally she stopped in front of a house and releasing herself gently, she looked for the door. Agony.

'The lock is awkward,' she said. I could have loved her for these four words alone.

It seemed hours for me, waiting while she struggled with the lock. I was too afraid and too helpless to offer any assistance to her. Afraid to call her attention to myself.

But finally the door was opened and it revealed a passage with a dark wallpaper lit by a shaded bulb.

'Here,' she said, and opened the back-room door.

'I must do the black-out first,' she said as I closed the door behind me. 'No, you'd better not . . . don't know your way.'

It was cool in the room and there was a smell, musty and welcoming. She switched on the light. It almost blinded me. A large bed with a heap of unnecessary bedclothes stood in the corner. The door leading to the front room was covered by a dark brown curtain. Under it, a cupboard with china ornaments. Brushes, a bottle of Propert's Brass Polish, a button-stick and a box of powder on the mantelpiece and a pair of Air Force stockings hanging, almost dry. She put her gasmask over a fibre suitcase on the floor. I made her sit on my knees.

'I'm very heavy,' she said.

'Not really.'

'How mooch d'you weigh?' she asked.

'About eleven stones.'

'I thought you were more thun that.'

'I may have put on some in the Army. A few pounds . . .'

'Most folks lose weight in the Army . . .'

'Yes, but some put it on.'

'How old are you?'

'Joost twenty-one. How old are you?

'Oh, much more . . .'

She left it at that. Her face was cool now. She took off her cap

and threw it on the bed. Then as I felt her arm around me and her face on my shoulder, I with my left hand tried to find the buckle of her belt. I found it and with the tip of my fingers I tried to push the end back through the frame. I was no longer timid but I felt very clumsy. It was too tight really. Hell.

She did not react, it seemed, for quite a time while I struggled with my clumsy left hand in the uncomfortable position to undo it, a little angry, and agitated, urgent. Then she withdrew her head from my shoulder, not too quickly and not too slowly, and with a natural, routine movement and without looking at it, she undid the belt.

Now I felt my knees were slightly trembling, because I think she was really heavy. Then we kissed and I felt I wanted to cry.

Her belt fell on the floor.

It was the smell of coal tar soap I was first conscious of when I opened my eyes. She was leaning over me. She was already dressed except for her tunic, the sleeves of her blue shirt tucked up; she looked very neat and clean and fresh.

'A quarter to eight,' she said.

'Oh,' I said, still hazy a little, but I knew already where I was, remembered my dramatic instructions, and rediscovered the old joy which, solidified and made concrete by the light of the morning, seemed all the more fresh and lovable.

'It doesn't really matter,' I said. 'I'm on leave.'

'How muny more days?'

'Two. Till Thursday morning.'

'Huving spent all your money . . .'

I laughed. 'What does it matter?' Yes, what would it have mattered?

'But you must get oop . . .'

'Yes.'

I caught hold of the end of the blanket to throw it off, then stopped halfway. I looked round and saw my clothes neatly arranged on the chair.

'I say, you mind passing me my shirt and . . . the other thing.'

It was when I was lacing my boots I noticed that she had cleaned all the buttons on my greatcoat. What does one do to deserve all this?

Would it be all right if I took her for breakfast to the Cumberland or would the Corner House be better?

'And when shall I see you again?' I asked. I fastened the belt of my blouse.

'I have to go buck this afternoon.'

'But I want to see you . . .' I walked up to her.

'Well, it's no use,' she said and took her hand from my waist and put it on my shoulder. 'This is war . . . I have to go buck and you will huve to go buck too . . . but think of me sometimes . . .'

She disentangled herself. 'Will you . . .?'

God, I shall. I shall remember all my life, always. It is a thing one cannot possibly forget.

'Yes,' I said.

'Lewk,' she said as she went over the to the chair, on the back of which was her tunic with its buttons catching the sunshine. 'I can't give you breakfast . . . I'll huve to go to the Red Rose Club to meet another girl. We are going buck together. Then we go out shopping. She knows Lundon. And I know you huven't got any money. I haven't got mooch now . . . but you got anoother three days to go . . .'

*And she slipped two halfcrowns into my hand.*

. . . No, there were no words. I just could not find them. There are times when I just can't find them, I, whose life had centred so much round words. The right word. No. I couldn't even talk. I couldn't think. I never knew that there are waves of happiness that could be as strong, as sharp, as brutal as despair.

For the rest of my leave I felt drowsy. I was thinking about nothing else and I could not help thinking about it. I remember, the same morning, I ran into a shop in Duke Street to buy a cigarette lighter, the last one they had (I was lucky, the assistant said) then I remember putting it into an envelope with just one word and my Christian name and taking it to the place. She was out and the landlady said she would give it to her. Then I walked home. I thought it would be better for me to read or to go to a cinema, but I just could not do either. Then I thought I would go back to the place and see her again. Then I thought no, it would be painful, more painful and aimless and hopeless. I must be steady. It was possibly the loveliest moment of my life; who knew; and I certainly don't ever want anything lovelier. Life on the whole is bare. But I suppose you must never lose faith because lovely surprises may come when you no longer expect them with the same ardour as when you were very young, and you wait for nothing but the unexpected. But I must be steady. I had arrived at an age when one must be steady and the times in which I lived called for steadiness too. Then I decided I would not get drunk either.

Then the next day the whole thing began all over again. I thought I was a fool not to go and see her off. And that I ought to have given her my cigarette case. She liked it. But I had less desire now to be alone and less desire to cry than the day before. I went to swim and I swam hard for half an hour.

But I was almost glad the last day, knowing I was due back the following morning. There are times when the Army acts as a climatic sanatorium.

## 'C' BATTERY

A FEW HOURS after our return to Hemsworth we were given orders to put all our stuff on the trucks and to proceed to 'C' Battery. 'C' Battery was at East Moulton, quite a long way from any West Riding town. It was a large estate with its buildings widely separated. It was also heavily under snow and as far from 'civilisation' and from the war as it was only possible. An ideal address for a lyric poet of retiring disposition.

We were quartered at the stables again but were told that we would move into Moulton House as soon as another squad would pass out. The house was uninteresting. Wintersett was Adam, and Hemsworth good provincial Georgian: Moulton was late Victorian with Edwardian additions. But it contained a moderate size Recreation Room, there was central heating in the corridors and there were regular film shows and dances at the Village Hall.

The first week we spent there was, I thought, a concession to what must have been traditions of the unit, because Moulton from the very beginning looked a serious place. During that week we were on night duties three times and spent the afternoons doing fatigues. And it was very cold. All this I did not mind much because there was a comforting thought that this week over, we should be doing something vital and interesting. Our initial training was now finished and we would settle down to specialised training: signalling.

The sergeant-major told us on the first day that our sergeant-instructor was away in hospital with gastric trouble.

"E must 'ave heard we were coming,' said Pratt.

'—— good luck we are 'aving all the way,' said Thorne, who had taken a dislike to Bombardier Barnsley, who was deputising for the sick sergeant. Barnsley was an ex-schoolmaster from Yorkshire. He was a small man, business-like, serious, regimental. I liked him from the very beginning but he was more respected than liked by the squad. They liked casual, happy-go-lucky N.C.O's and Barnsley did not conform.

On the third day of our arrival O'Brien and I were called into the major's room. Major Nicholson had been our major in 'A' Battery and on the last day of our leave he was transferred to 'C' Battery,

while Captain Martin was promoted major and became O.C. of 'A' Battery.

'It's about your commission' explained the bombardier who was sent for us. I was to go in first.

Three majors faced me from the other end of the table covered with a dark grey blanket. It looked like the setting for a court-martial.

'Sit down, de Hegedus,' said Major Martin, 'and tell us—have you done any sports in "B" Battery?'

'I'm afraid, sir, we were all so very busy with our work that we could find no time for anything else.'

'Oh, by the way, you had made an application for transfer to the Intelligence Corps. Well, now, would you be prepared to be dropped over Germany in civilian clothes?'

'Yes, sir.'

'I see,' he smiled. 'I merely ask you this because I was asked the same question myself. D'you want to ask any further questions, gentlemen?'

'No.' Major Nicholson smiled his ecclesiastical smile, the other major shook his head.

'Well, that's all, de Hegedus. Send in O'Brien, will you.'

I saluted noisily and left the room. Later O'Brien told me they hardly asked him any questions.

On the whole 'C' Battery was better than the other two. The initial and unnecessary fatigues and guard duties over, one could devote himself to signalling. ('Hardship is at the expense of one's training,' said Minney in the recreation room the first day we met in 'C' Battery, and promptly began to read *Guide to Modern Thought*, by Joad).

We had two or three periods of buzzer sending. To emphasise the character of our training as signallers we had a few periods of the buzzer in the other two batteries, but most of us still did not know the Morse alphabet. It came out that L./Bdr. Price (26 years' service in the R.A. and 'You never get anywhere in the Army unless your face fits in') had taught us opposites; therefore, we had a strong inclination to read 'Ack' as 'Nuts,' 'Freddy ' as 'London' and 'Don' as 'Uncle.'

Besides one did not always hear the difference between dot and dash. Morse, however, quickly improved, especially after we had a few hours extra buzzer reading in the evenings after supper.

Towards the end of January Moulton was almost buried under snow. We saw with relish members of Squad 77 clearing the snow from the square. They had just arrived and were doing their week of fatigues.

The cold was now intense. We had our lectures in one of the six Nissen huts that were erected in the Park. They each had two stoves, but the stoves were grotesquely small and there was a serious shortage of coal. We sat in front of deal tables in our greatcoats, each of us wearing woollen underwear and long pants, but our toes were icy. At times I felt they might break off at a clumsy touch. The room was thick with cigarette smoke and we sat there leaning over pink message-forms (*Army Form C.* 2130. *If liable to be intercepted or fall into enemy hands this message must be sent in CIPHER*) and listened in deadly silence to the shrill notes emanating from the Don Five (Army Field Telephone, D, type Mark V).

The bombardier was sending fairly slowly. 'Six words a minute,' he said, but he was cheating. It was nearer eight. Finally there came di-da-di-da-di, which is 'Ack-Robert' and means end of message.

'Eyes down for the check,' he said. 'Now what about you, Bombardier Murray? Did you get it?'

'It's a washout, mine is.'

'Never mind,' he smiled. 'What about you, Nixon?'

'Didn't get all of it.'

'Livingstone.'

Livingstone began to read, like a top boy.

'*Commas on X type commas off cell is non hyphen chargeable and works on the principle that figure two dissimilar metals together produce electricity full stop. If bearing is less than figures one eight nought degrees we add figures one eight nought to it full stop. Result is commas on back hyphen bearing commas off full stop.*'

'Very good. How many mistakes?'

'Four.'

'Anybody under five mistakes? . . . under ten . . . under fifteen . . . under twenty . . . right. Eyes down! Five seconds to go . . . four . . . three . . . two . . . one . . . READ . . . ! Di-di-di-da-di, di-di, di-di-da-di, da-di-di-di, di, di-da, di . . .'

On the walls of our hut there were various slogans drawn in coloured chalk. '*We R the I's and Ears of the Rtillery.*' '*Get through and Stay through.*' '*Only the Fool is always Right*' and '*Speed Safety and Slack.*'

Then the bombardier would look at O'Brien's watch which he had borrowed from him and say:

'Next period. Lamp reading. Bombardier Murray, will you march them up to the hillside while I fetch the lamp from the stores?'

It was somehow less cold outside, at least it seemed so for a time, while we danced round, jumped into the air a few times and hit our armpits with our gloved hands.

'—— time this is to do lamp-reading,' said Rose.

'That's whot I sy, myte.'

'Niver mind, it would be 'ot on the Burma Road.'

'Fall en,' said Murray, with great uncertainty in his voice. 'Left tern . . . to the right, quick MARCH.'

We raced through the square and up the hill. It was thickly covered with snow. Thorne must have stepped into a hole, his feet sank in up to his knees.

'—— hell!' he said.

'Can you see 'im?'

'Giv'im a chance, 'e's going across the other side of the lyke.'

Finally we caught sight of the bombardier, some fifteen hundred yards away from us on the opposite side. Quickly he established his position. He set up the stand with its three legs in front of a tree. ('Always provide a dark background for the lamp. A tree for example . . . .') He screwed his lamp on it, then we suddenly saw the bright white light.

'Well, get yourself into pairs,' sighed Murray and raised the blue and white flag above his head. He tried to send the letter King for 'proceed.' The result was that the wind blew off the linen bit and he finished the operation with the bare rod in his hands.

'There it goes, Vick Edward . . .'

We sorted ourselves out in eight pairs. There were now only sixteen of us. Edmunds had developed a septic hand in 'B' Battery and was run into hospital; he was still there. Charlie White went sick with gastric ulcers and we heard that he was now in 'B' Battery, and Luke was in hospital with heart trouble awaiting his discharge.

In 'visual pairwork' the 'reading man' faces the distant lamp and the 'writing down man' stands facing him by his left shoulder. The distance between each pair should be at least five yards otherwise 'induction' takes place. Just like in school. I paired up with Jim Robinson. We had already made friends in 'B' Battery. We had been sitting together during the lectures and in 'C' Battery we again shared the same table. Jim was a brightish little man who, unlike the majority of the squad, did not look his age. He was refreshingly naïve and fairly unspoilt. He had the broadest Cockney accent I ever heard. Cockney is the only single one of the British dialects that does not attract me, but Jim's was so magnificently broad and he had such a surprising command of the now almost extinct rhyming slang that I changed my mind. When he was excited he even dropped his 't's.'

'Mar'in, Mar'in,' he would say. 'Just 'ad a le'er from my daugh'er.'

His face was now blue and he was wearing his cap comforter over his ears.

'Toc,' I said, 'William . . . Orange . . . miss . . . Robert . . . Edward . . . Ack . . . Toc . . . miss . . . Edward . . . miss . . . miss . . . Sugar . . . No, it was Ink . . . miss . . . miss . . . Orange . . . George . . . miss . . . miss . . . miss . . . Hell, I can't get get this —— thing."

'Martin, you never swore before.'

'I shall pretty soon learn how to.'

I was fed up. My eyes were red and watering as I was staring at the little flickering light. At times it was impossible for me to distinguish between dot and dash. I felt angry and frustrated. All very well that several people were quite as bad on the lamp as I was, but that was their own funeral. I certainly wouldn't give the thing up. I would find ways to practise the lamp in my spare time. It would be almost impossible to get a lamp out of the stores for practice purposes and even more difficult to find a partner who would come out with me in the cold wind and semi-darkness to 'send' me various letters of the alphabet. But still, I knew I would feel miserable till I mastered it.

A few days before Fourth Week Test we were moved from the stables into the main building. It was a welcome change. We were quartered in proper bedrooms this time and there was central heating in the corridors. The sergeant said we would be split up for a time, till another squad passed out, so some of us would have to live with other squads.

'Is there anybody among you who would not mind sleeping with another squad on his own?'

There was a moment's silence. Then I said I wouldn't mind. I said it as casually as possible, hoping nobody would notice how keen I was to get away from them at least during the night.

'Room Twenty-seven,' said the sergeant. 'You will be with Squad 71.'

I was glad. I knew them: they were a good squad. A very small one. Ten of us in a large bedroom and a cheerful atmosphere. They were thirty-fives like ourselves, but very different people. I had met all of them in the Naafi and at the dances. Cato, who occupied the bunk above me, and Warren, who was above the man next to me, were terrific friends. They got drunk every night, but alcohol only made them more articulate and amusing. There were also two unpaid-acting-lance-bombardiers in the room. One was a tall, lean, disapproving-looking man who looked exactly like a maths. master at one of the lesser public schools, and the other was Pat Sloan, the Communist writer. He was liked by everybody in the Regiment. With Sloan Communism was more than a political orientation, a

*Weltanschauung*, a creed. It was a kind of biological activity, as it is with certain insects who secrete compounds of bright red. He was a Communist day and night. I was inclined to believe he was a Communist even in his sleep. He was honest, intelligent and a fanatic. There was nothing of the drawing-room Communist about him, except his voice and accent, which was unmistakably Repton and Cambridge and thickly underlined as such. Before bedtime he fished out a little bottle from his *valise web* and swallowed a pill or two. I am pretty certain he took the pills against Capitalism. Sloan looked like a good soldier and was one. He was efficient, cheerful and intelligent. I liked him, though I knew he would not really like me, apart from laughing at my jokes. Or at some of them. Like many other Communists of his type, he had decided that I was a Romantic Individualist and that was that. I told him I was interested in the Communist experiment and it was my great regret that I could never visit the U.S.S.R., so I was forced to keep an open mind, except that in my opinion Communism was not entirely scientific, even though perhaps more scientific than Capitalism.

That was the limit. Sloan looked up and said:

'You will end up by becoming a Roman Catholic.'

That was my limit.

In any case Squad 71 were a cheerful, lively lot. And the same applied to Squad 72 with whom two of us were boarded three weeks later, before we were given a separate room and reunited again. They were vital, amusing, at times rough, sometimes quarrelsome, but on the whole, friendly. Nobody disliked anybody. Sloan and the tall lance-bombardier got into a row one night in which Sloan called the other a jealous old man who would do anything to keep his stripe, but the next morning they talked as the best of friends. Another night Cato returned with Warren, in a more muzzy state than usual and as a consequence I found my blankets and some of my clothes soaking wet in the morning. It seemed that Cato with his imagination prompted by alcohol had thought that he had actually got out of bed, left the room, crossed the corridor and entered the lavatory. There was, however, a great difference between imagination and reality. He apologised very profusely and offered to give me his blankets, in exchange.

'Doesn't matter,' I said. 'It all comes out in the wash.'

I meant this as a scientific statement, but much to my surprise, it produced thunders of laughter.

'You are a regular,' said Cato, 'you are. Have a drink with us to-night.'

'But only on condition that I sleep above you.'

Two days later we went out on a 'stunt' during the week-end, connected with the Home Guard as part of the 'invasion' of the north-east coast of Britain. I was very angry, because this week-end I had planned to get Warren to 'send' lamp to me and to revise the procedure. The 'stunt' was our first taste of real hardship. We went in open trucks to a place some fifty miles away from Moulton. Luckily it was now snowing and the cold did not seem so intense as during the previous two or three weeks. We had tea in the open, then with rifles in hand we were shown the positions to take up in the morning. After that we were told we were free till five in the morning. Our party, some fifty of us, were quartered in an old barn. I would have definitely enjoyed the stunt if it had been in the spring or summer or if I had not been feeling that it was at the expense of our training.

We were called at five-thirty in the morning. It was raining hard and so dark that one could not escape the puddles, which were plentiful. After breakfast we had found our dugouts in the fields with some difficulty and took up our positions. All I could do was to pretend that I was not having a very bad time, and to keep my eyes open. I wanted to sleep all the time, sitting on the edge of the dugout. Our gloves got soaking wet so we had to take them off and there was no other protection for one's fingers aching from cold than undoing one's greatcoat—not very easy because of the battle order, the straps of which were very tight—and press them against the warm skin of your neck and back. One thought it would never end. One tried not to look at one's watch, because time had simply stopped and the watch would only prove it with irritating precision. So this was war, I reflected, and the thought gave me a little interest and comfort. So that was part of the thing you might have to do for quite a long time. I tried to concentrate on this, looking at the flat, black and white landscape with the sad orange-coloured sun over it. There was nothing going on, apparently. It was deadly quiet. Waterton was sleeping beside me. The worst of these stunts is that they cannot be made realistic, even though a few months later we saw in the papers that realism had crept in in the form of six officers and a brigadier being accidentally shot dead during a stunt down South.

So this was war, so I was living it now, a unique and interesting experience. I had never felt so conscious of it as now.

So this was war, I reflected, and the idea began to permeate its way through boredom and cold. There was suddenly something very old in the thought, very old, historic, as old as humanity. Only the uniforms were different, the weapons, and perhaps the methods. But the idea was old. So I was playing a tiny part in history as one of millions, just one of the extras, an active part for a change.

So far I had been writing history, or at least chronicling it day by day at the end of a thin bit of wire connected with a newspaper office in Budapest. Now I was to make it. It was a strange, almost interesting. I felt the cold less for a moment. Then I dozed off.

Soon after tea we were told that the stunt had ended with the enemy occupying G.H.Q. and we were to return to Moulton.

Everybody was surprised that the stunt had not claimed any 'casualties.' Nobody reported sick the following morning.

The following day Bombardier Barnsley brought in our sergeant, now out of hospital. He was a tallish young man with fair hair and a fair moustache. He took stock of us, tested us on the buzzer and on the lamp, on procedure and on instruments. He said nothing, but it was clear that he was not satisfied with our standards. The Fourth Week Test was alarmingly near, and it was rumoured that those who failed would be put back a squad or two. Bombardier Barnsley was transferred as instructor to another squad whose sergeant was posted.

A deadly lethargy burrowed itself deep into the squad's mind. They looked more miserable and insipid than usual. The results of the Fourth Week Test were somewhat shocking. It came out that six of us did not know the Morse alphabet at all either on the buzzer or on the lamp. The six included those four who had passed out in 'B' Battery as dispatch riders. This piece of news gave a little malignant satisfaction to those who had failed as Don R's. I shared this feeling for a moment, then I immediately began to think how bad I still was on the lamp. The buzzer was satisfactory. I almost liked it. I caught its rhythm. The lamp, however, at times was still impossible. I knew it was just a question of getting the knack of it. It had a rhythm of its own and all I had to do was to become sensitive to it. There was only one way. I must somehow circumvent orders and get a lamp out of the stores for practice.

It was a galling thing that those of the squad who were also very bad on the lamp did not share my feelings. They did not feel angry at their failure. The prospect that they might not pass did not depress them in the least. They simply did not care. If instructors told them about it they gave half-hearted, sheepish excuses or just said nothing. As the days went by they developed the attitude of least resistance as a means of self-defence. It was only natural that I tried to avoid most of them most of the time because this was a type of 'community feeling' that was decidedly dangerous for me. And what a surprise it was for me to hear from time to time that others regarded our squad as a 'rough lot.' I only wished this reaction were true. But nothing

could have been further removed from reality. Thorne was uncouth and disorderly, all the more now because he discovered that he amused the new sergeant, but there was certainly nobody else who showed any vitality, still less any excess of it. They were dull. I had my suspicions about this before, but now after having lived with them for four months the things seemed clear. They were a dull lot, almost actively dull, sheepish, resentful, bored and generally sorry for themselves. In my moments of despair I tried to find an explanation and there seemed to be none. Apparently they had just got together by accident, the very dullest, most lethargic band of thirty-fives from London. Possibly there was a 'centre of infection' somewhere, some of them who perhaps did not look dull at first blush but who all the same carried the germ, as there are carriers of various contagious diseases who themselves are immune from it. It was clear that the squad's mental climate was infectious. One by one other people were added to us: those who had failed at their tests and were put back, and a boy who had returned from hospital. On their arrival they were quite bright, with life in them, vitality; they brought new or at least little-used swear words. A week later they told me that something was wrong with us. Something mysterious. They did not quite know what. A fortnight later they did not say any more about it. They withered.

At the same time my own personal affairs were not very rosy either. I received a letter from London in which a friend of mine said that he had made inquiries and found that my chances of getting a transfer into the Intelligence Corps were very slight, as the most important qualification, it seemed to him, was British parentage on both sides. He would, however, do what he *could*.

Then one morning the papers announced the fall of Singapore. It created little interest in the Battery. I knew little about Singapore beyond a few facts which I had put into an article some three years earlier. The article appeared in Budapest under the title 'The Impregnable Citadel.' In view of this the fall of Singapore was to a certain extent a private shock to me because I quite sincerely believed that what I had written was true. Besides I had two personal friends serving in Singapore, an airman and a soldier.

True, the place was 'far away', yet it was a surprise to me that the news hardly provoked any reaction from the squad. It just did not interest them. In the end I tried to get a few opinions; a little 'mass observation' in the Battery. Since the squad did not say anything I asked a few of the 'old soldiers' attached to us on a signalling course.

'I've never bin there,' said the first.

'A lot of gin-sodden brass hats,' said the second.

'Too much blancoing and other bullshit, that's what it was, mate.'

'I reckoned we'd lose it by the way the papers began to say Singapore was not so important for us.'

'We got no interest there. It was just a few bloody capitalists who grew fat on it.'

I looked for Minney. What would he say? He wore an I-always-told-you-so-expression. 'We shall never get it back,' he said.

'Why?'

'Because Japan knew what she was fighting for.'

'That's true,' I said, 'and you almost add that we don't quite know what we are fighting for. But don't worry, we'll get it back all the same.'

'Why?'

'The thing is alarmingly simple. The Axis have much clearer war aims than we have. They planned the war, they made long and careful preparations, but they have lost the game already because they believed in the success of a short war, or shall we say a comparatively short war. They gambled on the possibility that we had lost all sense of danger and on the possibility that they might be able to destroy the Air Force at the time of the Battle of Britain. I did not know of course how things would actually work out but I was certain of ultimate victory from the very beginning, because, in my opinion, Germany had overcalled her hand.'

'And the Luftwaffe?'

'The Luftwaffe was no good.'

'You must be mad.'

'I may be mad, the Luftwaffe was still no good. It was perfectly all right against second-rate Continental powers, against countries that could not afford an air force, or countries that could have afforded one but did not build one.'

'You mean France and ourselves?'

'I mean France. We *had* an air force. It was a perfectly good air force, and there was no miracle about its performance. It was a beautiful performance, a dramatic performance, a staggering performance, but not the least miraculous.'

'What on earth do you mean?'

'What I mean is very simple. We won the Battle of Britain for two reasons: (a) because we had made adequate preparations, and (b) because we did not commit a blunder. The adequate preparations were that we had built up a numerically small air force of machines superior to German machines; their speed exceeded the fastest German machines and they were much easier to manœuvre. I tell you this

almost as if it were a closely guarded secret. Nobody ever said anything about it. I don't know why. Everybody was busy praising the splendid courage of the pilots, their self-sacrifice. Well, of course they deserved all praise for their singleness of purpose. What Churchill said about 'never in the field of human conflict' etcetera . . . was technically true, it was an accurate scientific statement, in a beautiful oratorical form, but the result of the Battle of Britain in retrospect was quite logical, obviously dramatic and very moderately miraculous. The R.A.F. to a certain extent had an easier task than the enemy, because they were defending. All they needed was calm courage and devotion to duty, with their far superior machines—not only faster but easier to manœuvre.'

'And the blunder, which we did not commit.'

'That was that the R.A.F. refused to be drawn. The Germans knew we had a small Air Force and they tried to draw it out and destroy it. The choice was (*a*) to sacrifice the Air Force and risk the chance of an invasion, or (*b*) to lay open our towns to aerial bombardment. We chose the latter. That was a piece of genius on our part. Germany was forced to bomb systematically London and Coventry, Southampton and Sheffield and other towns. The Battle of Britain was not a miracle. The actual case was that our fighters were seriously outnumbered by technically inferior machines. If we had had a few hundred more aircraft of the same excellence, casualties would not have been so very high and the performance of the R.A.F. would have appeared less dramatic, less heroic, much less romantic, but the result would have been the same.'

'I can see your point,' said Minney, and looked at his boots as if he saw them for the first time, 'but why did these facts not receive more publicity?'

'Difficult to say, but probably because it was thought that it would be better for morale if they emphasised the human element as being primarily responsible for the Battle or Britain. I think that is the explanation. And I think it was a very sound line. And a very sound line because the performance of the pilots certainly deserved great praise. But it seems to me there are a few more people who ought also to have been praised in connection with the Battle of Britain . . .'

'Who?'

'They forgot to praise the author and the producer, as it were, After we have given our deeply felt thanks and praise for the heroic, young and attractive pilots, let us take off our hats to a few less heroic and, I suspect, less attractive men. I don't know them but, if you compare them with the air crews of the Battle of Britain, they might be found to lack physical attraction. A few brilliant engineers who

had worked feverishly (or perhaps at leisure, who knows? it's not interesting, except for newspaper readers and cinema goers) and had evolved machines that flew faster and were easier to manœuvre. A few brilliant officers and civilians on the Air Ministry general staff, intelligent politicians who had adopted these machines, or insisted on them; and finally, a few high officials in the commands who realised what the Germans were trying to do, negatively refrained from the blunder and organised the defence positively . . .'

'. . . . What are you smiling at?'

'Your metaphors and similes: "actor, author, producer . . ." '

'I agree, I went a little too far . . .'

'Why? Very good similes . . .'

'Yes, but too cynically good. I have to take it back.'

'Why?'

'Because it is cynical to compare the performance of a man risking his life for his country with the performance of an actor, no matter how great an artist he may be. Not only cynical: an unsatisfactory comparison. I used a bad comparison because there is no comparison and substitute for heroism. In any case you got my meaning. Well, so much for the Battle of Britain.'

'This all may be true,' said Minney, apparently a little uneasy because after all his three or four months of brilliant gloomy talk it was not he but circumstances which at times made me depressed, 'but how can you see the end of this war and victory in the end?'

'I hate to simplify things too much because in the end they look childish, but the fact is that we are winning the war not merely because truth is on our side. Truth is there all right, but besides truth, you must have superiority of armaments and superiority of manpower, and my dear Minney, you don't mean to tell me that in the long run Germany and Japan have the ghost of a chance against Britain, the Soviet and America. It is going to be a long war, because Germany and Japan were prepared and we were less prepared, but in the end the Axis will be beaten, in spite of their years of preparations, their military traditions, their inventions, their intelligence, their initiative and their really spectacular successes in the beginning. We shall win because we have quite as much determination, quite as much heroism, quite as much devotion, self-sacrifice, etcetera, plus more raw materials, more armaments, more man power.'

'You are a material optimist.'

'That's the word,' I said and poked my forefinger into his left side. 'I must go now because it's parade in ten minutes and my materialistically optimistic buttons are dirty.'

* * *

Two more were relegated to our squad. They had both failed on buzzer and lamp in their Eighth Week Test. Kington and Ward were two bright young men, but I knew it wouldn't be long till the squad sapped all their vitality.

Field work (that is, outdoor signalling and cable laying) was not the most pleasant pastime. Towards the end of February the cold again became very intense and we were, it seemed, all deficient in vitamins. Hardship, it seemed, did not make us tough. If only there had been a few young, tough enthusiasts among us, it would have boosted us, it would have provided a kind of friendly rivalry between youth and approaching middle age; but all that one saw was sullen, bored, resentful men, who seemed to have lost all interest in life.

It was after Bdr. Barnsley had left us and the sergeant had appeared on the scene that I became quite lethargic at times. I had a great liking, almost an affection, for the little Yorkshire bombardier for his patience, his doggedness, his fundamental good nature and his soldierliness, but gradually, as I got to know the sergeant, I began to dislike him. For quite a week or so it was not clear that he had a strong inferiority complex which he tried, almost successfully, to cover up with a friendly, easy-going, anything-for-you manner. It was his great secret ambition to become an officer (though he would have died rather than admit it) and his failure filled him with a sense of frustration. (He would have made a passable officer). He tried with zeal to be popular, and he succeeded. He was easy-going with the men but violent when he made a reference to officers. It was quite a deep-seated obsession with him. He was a good instructor, painstaking, and like many others, gave up much of his free time to revise the stuff with us, but still I could not get on with him. I think he had made up his mind that O'Brien and I rather looked down on him in view of our recommendation for an Octu. Especially I, because O'Brien noticed the direction of the wind a little more quickly than I, and made a quick left-about turn, switching on his charm almost full. I simply could not be bothered. But he did not like O'Brien either.

I just shrugged my mental shoulders. There were only three weeks before the Eighth Week Test and about four before classification. Such little things ought not to have worried me. If I passed out I would be sent to Depot Battery, where there would be a lot of bullshit and fatigues for a few weeks, then I should be posted to a field regiment, and there I was certain the outlook would be different. Several people had told me warningly that I should regret ever leaving Moulton, that I should wish to be back in 'C' Battery. I didn't think so. I was sure that anything would be better than Moulton.

In any case we were on spud-bashing the same afternoon so I could not go out and practise the lamp.

Three days later I developed a nasty pain all over my face. It was a kind of facial neuralgia, affecting my jawbone, all my teeth, my nose and my ears. I bandaged my face for the night, with the result that pain and sweat kept me awake the whole night, but the pain did not go. It was out of the question to go out and practise the lamp. There were only eighteen days left and I was certain I would fail on the lamp, even if I managed to revise the whole long and complicated wireless procedure. If I did not classify the likelihood was that I would be put back two squads. That would hurt my vanity, which would not matter too much. What, however, *would* matter was that if I didn't classify I could not go on leave when those who classified would go. And I needed leave very badly.

The pain went on for two more days and in the end it became so bad that I had to see the M.O. I tried to avoid him, knowing he was a bored, irritating and irritated old man who saw a potential malingerer in anybody who did not show a broken leg or some other visible infirmity. But the pain was unbearable and cable laying in open trucks against wind and rain in February on Yorkshire moors did not seem to do it much good. He asked me if I had a bad tooth.

'Not to my knowledge, sir.'

'Well, then, I can do nothing for you.'

'Could I stay in bed, sir?'

'No. You haven't got a temperature and you can carry on.'

I tried to comfort myself with the fact that another Army doctor had treated a man for Bright's disease. The man had gonorrhœa.

And two days later the pain went. I looked like a ghost but there was no pain. I had lost five days lamp signalling, there were now sixteen left. I would have to go out again this afternoon. The weather was bright. I, however, could not go out. Just when everybody was busy picking up wireless and practice we had been dragged at two-thirty in the afternoon to do P.T. on a full stomach, and were not allowed to take even a cold bath after it. The effect was dead tiredness and an almost complete lack of interest in the afternoon lectures.

I was sitting in the Naafi drinking a cup of tea and trying to write a letter amidst the bleating of the wireless, when Pratt walked up to me and said we had —— good luck because the sergeant had been suddenly posted and was leaving in the morning for a field regiment. We were to have Bdr. Cartwright as instructor. I suddenly felt much better, I forgot everything about the unpleasantness of the last five days. This was pleasant news indeed. I knew Bdr. Cartwright. Among the many very pleasant and efficient instructor N.C.O.s in 'C' Battery

he was easily one of the most pleasant. He was another Yorkshireman. I had long chats with him in the Toc H at Wakefield and I had a talk with him every Sunday morning as we walked back from the Methodist church. Some five weeks previously he had discovered that I was a Presbyterian. He advised me not to fall in with the C. of E. parade but to wait for the Nonconformist parade under his leadership, walk to the Chapel, where, first of all, we would have a cup of tea and cakes, and then a service in a quiet, friendly atmosphere. I took his advice.

The Methodist services were held in a school building whose walls were decorated by coloured lithographs of holy subjects and little biblical quotations such as '*Till He Comes*' *Luke* 12, *v.* 32, and '*Draw Nigh to God and He will Draw Nigh to You*' *James* 4, *v.* 8. in arty woodwork. The minister was a local business man, beaming with Yorkshire charm and muscular Christianity and social cheeriness. First he distributed generous helpings of tea and Madeira cake, then he asked us a few friendly questions about our varying fortunes, how was the Army, how were the wife and the kids, told us his wife was much better now after pneumonia; then he talked a little about the Rural Council, about the war in general, poured out a second cup of tea, then collected the cups and saucers, made us sing hymns I had never heard before (the schoolmaster 'obliged' by playing the harmonium), then he read a bit of the Bible and gave his sermon. It was reminiscent in tone of a friendly talk about business in the house of a righteous Wakefield business man, it was a little amateurish but it was very sincere and solid. It made me feel good.

So we were to have Cartwright.

The next morning I tried my best to avoid our sergeant. He took his leave from us and I naturally did not want to say how sorry I was to hear he was going because I was not sorry in the least.

Soon after the morning parade Bdr. Cartwright made his entry and delivered a good revision lecture on wireless. Then he tried to find out how much we really knew. He seemed pleased to find that Pratt was startingly good on the buzzer, Livingstone a good second, Gallington third, O'Brien fourth, I fifth, but he was not ruffled by the fact that the others were moderate and about six very bad indeed.

*Extract from Diary. March 4th.* 'Eighth Week Test to-day. Done well, quite unexpectedly, but made a complete mess of map reading and wireless procedure. Mr. Gillow very nice about it. Still feel pretty shaky on the lamp. Sickness last week put me back quite a lot. Cartwright says I am not so very bad.

'Last night two new squads arrived from "B" Battery. Some ten of them were quartered in the room in which I was a visitor.

All young people, all, it seems, from Norfolk. "Froyday," they say, and Sergeant "Whoyte." They don't seem to mind fatigues, guards, regimentalism. All of them passed out as Don R's. They are tough, gay and extremely friendly.

'It was melting and raining hard in the afternoon, but I dragged out Bill Abbot, the Norfolk boy who slept above me, to send me lamp. He came to oblige in his friendly good-natured way, in spite of the elements. I stood him a large glass of bitter and it was impossible to refuse when he tried to stand me one of the same size. But the lamp was improving. In fact I felt I was losing on buzzer. Or was Bdr. Cartwright sending fourteen or possibly fifteen words a minute on pretence of sending twelve? There were rumours.'

## GOOD-BYE TO YORKSHIRE

On Saturday evenings there was usually a dance, a whist drive, or a film show in the Village Hall. This Saturday it was a dance. It must have been quite a well advertised occasion in the neighbouring villages because there was a good turn-out of miners' families and young men and women who worked in factories near by. I was watching out for Jessie, because we had met before and Jessie danced well; and like most of these girls in the West Riding she was sweet. I had two rivals concerning Jessie: Bombardier Black, who was the instructor of Squad 78, and Captain Reed. They were both very keen on her, especially the captain. Reed was a kindly middle-aged man who looked exactly like C. H. Middleton. (Our major in turn looked exactly like Gertrude Jekyll, so gardening, I thought, was well represented in the Battery.)

I gave Jessie up reluctantly to my superior but when he took her to the bar during the encore and saw me in the doorway he stood me a drink.

'How are things?' he asked.

'Not the best, sir. The lamp is still weak.'

'I shouldn't worry. Your record is good . . .'

Jessie introduced me to an uncle of hers, also a miner. He and I lingered at the bar, standing each other drinks, talking about mining and about the Army. Then he said I ought to join the Oddfellows. The Buffaloes are all right too, he said, but the Oddfellows were a more cheery lot. And he added as an afterthought: 'If you are an Oddfellow you get five quid when your wife dies.'

The following Monday I went out again to practise the lamp. It was definitely improving. It was Dewit sending to me this time and he sent fairly fast, about five words a minute, which was still fast for me. You pass out with six words a minute. After dark I returned to our Nissen hut to practise buzzer. I felt quite contented.

'So you're determined to get yourself killed,' said Fox, seeing me returning with lamp and stand.

'I'm determined to pass.'

'And be posted abroad.' He shook his head. 'You know what you're doing. You'll cry to get back to Moulton.'

'I doubt it.'

'D'you know the expectation of life for a signaller in action? Twenty-five minutes. Cousin of mine told me. He came back from Dunkirk. Twenty-five minutes. Makes you think, don't it.'

'I don't know, Foxie. I like living dangerously.'

'You are welcome to it.' Fox said, and the talk, as so often, switched on to the years after the war.

'I've had enough,' said Wormsley (he is a recent addition to the squad) 'I don't want to do any more work.'

'You ought to —— for a living,' said French.

'That's it.'

'There's a job waiting for me in Civvy Street,' from Thorne.

'If you ever get back.'

'And if the job would be wytin' for yer after this —— war is over . . .'

When Bdr. Cartwright came in to send us Morse, in his own free time, the faces looked drawn. He was the only cheerful man in the hut.

Then in the last day or two everything seemed to go better and classification was not so bad as it seemed. It came out that all the instructors were cheating on the buzzer, sending fourteen words a minute when they said it was twelve, and Mr. Gillow was very nice to everybody when it came to theoretical questions on wireless; and it was a clear day and the lamp was all right too. Sergeant Crumb seemed very superior when he examined us on instruments, though people said he was merely shy. But most of us passed, except those four who passed out as Don R's in 'B' Battery, and Sid French, and Paddy and Kington.

They had entered the fact that we were 'classified second year signallers' into our pay-book and we were to go on seven days' leave the following day. So we all went to the *Black Bull* to celebrate our classification.

A great surprise waited for us as we returned to Moulton a week

later for a fortnight's collective training in the fields. We had a lecture in the morning, did fieldwork in the afternoon and reflected with a little dismay that we would be doing fatigues and fire piquets again. Then as I collected my plates and mugs to queue up for tea, the lance-bombardier of Squad 77 came up to me.

'Any idea where you're going?'

'What d'you mean?'

'Oh, I thought you'd seen it. There's a notice on the blackboard: all classified signallers to leave for the Depot Battery to-morrow morning . . .'

'I say, hold my things and keep my place for me, I'll be back in a second . . .'

I raced through the corridors. There was quite a little crowd in front of the notice board. I saw the order.

'It's an overseas draft,' said Pratt.

Murray sighed. He was among those who did not classify.

'The shortest collective on record,' said French. 'One day.'

'You'll get plenty of practice in the regiment you are going to. You are sure to stay in England a couple of weeks, maybe months,' said someone who was working in the Battery office.

'No fire-piquet to-night.'

'And no getting browned off in Depot Battery on fatigues all the time.'

'Did Paddy overstay his leave?'

'No, he's been granted an extra day for going to Ireland.'

'He should stay there if 'e 'as any sense.'

''E did not classify.'

''E *did*.'

'Betcha.'

''E didn't.'

In the dining-hall we had suddenly become the centre of interest. News of the posting brought a piece of concrete and exciting reality into the stagnant life of the Battery. It reminded everybody of the war. Everything had become real all of a sudden.

My reactions to the news were mixed. I was glad I was to leave Moulton and not to waste time and get bored at the Depot Battery. But what did this sudden posting mean? And . . . what about my recommendation to an Octu?

I had the answer in less than three minutes. We were joined by someone from the Battery Office who said that O'Brien was staying behind, because he was recommended for a commission.

So that was that.

We left after an agitated morning. There was a kit check in the

dining-hall and when we arrived at the Depot, which was about half a mile away from Wintersett, we had another kit check. 'In case we lost something on the way,' said Michael Farrer. We met the Depot sergeant-major. He was an old regular with an impressive collection of ribbons and a surprising command of Indian words.

'To-day is Wednesday,' he said when the kit check was over. 'To-morrow you will hand over your best battledress blouse to the *durzi* who will sew up your signaller's badge and clean out the dirt if any. After that you will iron out your best trousers, blanco all your equipment with Pickering Twenty-one, wash your lanyards and parade in full service marching order to-morrow at ten o'clock. You are no longer rookies, you are trained soldiers, so I hope there won't be no trouble about F.S.M.O. Bombardier Archdale will help those who don't know how to put it on and I shall inspect you. Friday morning you will parade on the square at Wintersett and be inspected by the colonel. So you have two clear days to get yourselves into your F.S.M.O. Is that clear? Very well. To-morrow you will parade on the square at ten and then be inspected by the Quack. Hope nobody got no V.D. Any questions?'

'Yes, sir,' we answered, all at once, 'where are we going?'

'You are going to Kent on Saturday morning to be posted to the . . . . Field Regiment, and after that . . .' He made a wide upward gesture with his right hand. 'Out East, East.'

'How soon, sir?'

'I don't know and I wouldn't tell you even if I knew. Maybe a few weeks, maybe a few days. But don't worry, you'll get embarkation leave . . .'

The following morning, after the first F.S.M.O. parade (the sergeant-major was 'disgusted' with our turn-out and said we would have to improve it, even if it took up all our free time) I asked for an interview with the adjutant. The adjutant was unfortunately away. I was seen by the Battery Captain whom I had never seen before. I asked him whether my application for transfer to the Intelligence Corps had gone through, and whether I could be retained till their answer arrived. He said he was sorry, but it was impossible for them to retain me. I should have to go.

I shrugged my shoulders. Maybe it was for the best. I was not particularly looking forward to service abroad, but it did not frighten or depress me. It would, in any case, mean a change of climate, scenery, atmosphere. I hadn't been out of England for two solid years. And it would mean action, real soldiering, unequal and unexpected doses of boredom and horror, in fact, real war. I should see 'the world' for the time being at somebody else's expense and I

should play a part in history, no matter how small and insignificant. Maybe I should be killed, which would be a tragic thing for my father and mother but for no one else. I have never been afraid of the prospect of death. I wondered if it was part of our Protestant tradition of determinism. I had already spent almost as much as half of my normal expectation of life on this earth. It was true that the other half filled me with curiosity, but at this moment I wasn't particularly looking forward to it. It was, of course, unpleasant that from the literary point of view I had not had my season. I wanted to write at least five books, the kind of books I always try to write, messages in a bottle dropped into the sea, waiting for someone, like me, to pick up and read.

As a matter of fact I might be able to gather some material together out East. East it was. I wondered whether it was to be India or Africa. The Far East seemed to be out of the question (Rangoon had been taken six days previously and provoked not the slightest reaction from the squad). But would I have time and energy to observe and note things? That was the question. The older I grow the more I feel that it is impossible to write and to 'live' at the same time. Goethe and Byron were two of the very few people, to my knowledge, who had succeeded in doing this, and a few minor and delightful writers like Beaumarchais. The rest of them only managed to write most of the time. There are writers who, it seems, never 'lived'. Charles Lamb, for example, and Southey.

The 'typical' writer, the schoolbook example, if one had excavated him from under that terrifying aura of legend, anecdote, idiosyncrasy and 'human touch' that cover him like debris, is Proust. His novel can be boring, of course, and repetitive; at times he looks quite dilettantish (I wish Scott-Moncrieff had abbreviated him a little), but Proust was a man who would have given much, perhaps everything, if he could really have 'lived', if he had not been forced to turn inward into his past, to be a mere spectator of Faubourg parties and an audience to Robert de Montesquiou. He was living at second hand . . .

'The colonel is giving a farewell binge for us on Saturday,' said Jim Robinson coming up to me. 'Are you sorry, Mar'in?'

'I don't know,' I said, reflecting that Jim had a wife and a little daughter. 'You and I will be together, in any case, so it won't be so bad.'

'I helped you quite a lot with the lamp, didn't I, Mar'in?'

'You did. I must say that for you . . . If it were not for your help I wouldn't be on this draft.'

'You are not holding that against me, Mar'in?'

'No, no.'

'I know. You are a good kid, Mar'in. I wonder if you and I will be signalling from the Burma Road?'

'But the Japs have taken it.'

'Oh,' said Jim, as if glad to be reminded.

The last F.S.M.O. parade was quite a success. We had five in all in two days. Finally everybody's anti-gas cape was rolled in the correct position, webbing was blancoed to perfection, D-shaped buckle rested exactly over the epaulet. Just before the colonel arrived the sergeant-major came up to us to have a last look and with a pair of scissors he cut off the frayed edges of the cord of the gas-mask, under the knot. No producer of revues would take such a minute interest in the members of his chorus.

Then came the colonel. He inspected us with as much gentle and undisguised curiosity as if he had never seen soldiers before, then for the last time he closed his eyes and bared his teeth and told us we ought to feel honoured because we were going to join the same regiment he had joined as a young subaltern in 1906.

There were twelve of us. Six from Squad 76, two from older squads who had failed at their original classification and finally four of us from Squad 75. Only four of the original nineteen. I wondered where the others would go.

We had the rest of the afternoon off, so we took the bus to Wakefield. I said good-bye to the town.

## FALSE ALARM

THE WEATHER went on improving as the train left the West Riding and raced through Nottingham, Lincoln and Huntingdon. It was the last day in March and King's Cross was bathed in sunshine. There was a large dilapidated khaki bus waiting for us which took us to Charing Cross. I asked Bill Boyce on the way how he liked London.

'Not a lot,' said Bill. He was twenty-one, came from North Shields and had never been to London before.

'London is a dirty town, but then Shields isn't any cleaner,' I said.

'It's not thut,' he said with his Northern superiority and shook his head. It was clear that London did not impress him. I rather admired Bill for his sturdy independence. I knew he made a demonstration of it to a certain extent, but I knew that the show was not necessary because the feeling underneath was genuine.

I hadn't been to Kent since my Boy Scouting days, eight or nine odd years ago, when every other Sunday or so I would undertake a joint hike with the Rangers, some twenty or thirty miles tramping around Knockholt, Sevenoaks, or Westerham. The landscape was familiar: it was what it was always to me, impersonally and sleepily beautiful, and a little unreal, in spite of the clear colouring.

There was another bus waiting for us at Tonbridge which took us with an alarming speed through the main road bordered by trees in full bloom. We reached a famous view: gently undulating meadows seen from the high point of the road. I watched Bill Boyce's face as he caught sight of it. But I did not dig him in the ribs with 'maybe-you-will-think-there's-something-to-be-said-for-the-south'. He was too young not to be enchanted by all this beauty.

Then the lorry turned into a narrow side road and drew up in front of a long line of lorries.

The escorting sergeant handed us over to the sergeant-major of the regiment. He called the roll, then he said we would be split up. Had anyone got any particular friend with whom he would like to go to the three batteries? Finally Harry Barrow, Jim Robinson, Bill Boyce, Michael Farrer, Eric Farrow and I were allotted to 21 Battery. We carried our kit up to the Battery office. As we were waiting for the sergeant-major to take our particulars, someone from one of the old squads from Moulton came up to us. He said four of them from his own squad had already spent three weeks there.

'Not a bad place,' he said, 'there's nothin' doin', a few guards and fatigues. Regiment has been on the move for the past few weeks. Goodness only knows when we'll be going.'

'What are the officers like?'

'All right. Most of 'em been through Dunkirk. The R.S.M. is a bit of a bastard. The Colonel is thirty-five, 21 Battery is a lot better than the others.'

Then it was my turn to go into the S.M.'s office. He was a red-haired young man, and couldn't have been more than twenty-five. He was just entering my particulars into the troop roll when a soldier came into the room interrupting him.

'Here're your fags. One bob to pay,' he threw them on the table, 'cormon, don't —— about, will ya"

I almost fell over with shock and surprise. In our training regiment one couldn't talk like that even to a lance-bombardier. This was apparently a place where they meant business and had dispensed with the outward signs of discipline.

'You will be in battle troop,' said the S.M. 'Try Hut Seven. There's a bed there, a bit shaky, but it'd do, for to-night. You are going on

embarkation leave shortly. Go to the stores and ask for a palliasse and pillow. At five the doctor wants to see you.'

Jim was already in the hut, a little hopeless, but busy making himself comfortable.

'Now we are in for it, Mar'in boy.'

At that moment the door opened and eight men tumbled into the room, in denim overalls, all dirty, noisy, swearing but cheerful. All young people.

'What, two more? Signallers? Hi, Thomson, two more slaves for you. Where did you come from? Training regiment? I'd thought so. You look it. There isn't much bullshit here. You need not burn your boots here and all that. Get your mugs, it's tea-time . . .'

Tea was in a large Nissen hut opposite. There was a tremendous noise inside, everybody seemed to talk all at once.

'What the —— hell. Slingers again. Gimme some jam.'

It was jam, in enormous tins. It was passed round. Anybody could take as much as he wanted. And there were slabs of butter on a plate.

What a change after the Training Regiment . . . everybody apparently cheerful, noisy, rough, but very pleasant. And young faces all over the place, N.C.O.s all young and unselfconscious.

I turned to a particularly young-looking lance-bombardier.

'I see you've been to Palestine. You must have started very early.'

'Aye, I was fifteen,' he grinned.

He had red hair. I noticed that a good many of them had red hair in the Battery.

'What was the Army like in peacetime?'

'A damn sight better than in wartime. France and all.'

The tables were extremely messy, full of broken and rejected pieces of bread, sausage skin, bits of jam. But all this was somehow welcoming and vital. Compared with it the dining-hall at Wintersett looked like a prison dining-hall. And the whole place was warm, intimate, lively, friendly. True, of course, the weather was perfect and we were surrounded by an idyllic landscape and the ease and grace of the day seemed to enter into the soldier's mind.

In our hut everybody had two kitbags, the light-brown or dark-blue ordinary, and a smaller white one for tropical kit. I saw a topee lying on a bed and put it on Jim Robinson's head. It took me straight back to Drury Lane.

We heard that there was no kit inspection on Saturdays. 'We're not —— rookies,' said the old soldier sleeping next to me. He was twenty-five.

And parades seemed to be very cursory affairs too.

We lined up outside the huts, the sergeant called the roll, looked

at our cap badges in a vacant way and when his turn came shouted to the sergeant-major 'All present, sir.' The sergeant-major walked up to the Orderly Officer, saluted, reported, saluted again and the parade was over, in less than three minutes.

I looked at Jim when it was all over. He looked back.

'These people seem to mean business,' I said.

'Not half,' said Jim.

We were put on fatigues. There was a double line of quads, twenty-five pounders, armoured cars and trucks on the side of the roadway and we were to clean them. I drew brushes and wool waste from the stores and started to work along the lines I had been shown in 'B' Battery.

'You needn't go under them,' said the soldier who was working next to me. 'Undercarriage can wait. All the major looks at is the chassis.'

The lance-bombardier who slept next to me came up to me.

'I say, you ought to see an officer about your business.'

'Why?'

'Because you surely don't want to come abroad with us . . .'

I opened my eyes wide.

'You have to tell him you were put down for an Octu. I mean a chap like you surely ought not to stay in the ranks, with your education. How many languages can you speak.'

'Four, but I shall ask for an interview later on.'

'There may be no time. Here, I can see Mr. Blomfield coming, I'll speak to him.'

He went up to a young officer, saluted very cursorily, and I heard the following words: '. . . an educated chap. Was a journalist, speaks four languages . . .'

The officer murmured something.

The lance-bombardier came to me.

'Go and see Mr. Blomfield in the office . . . No, you needn't change. As you are, it'll be O.K.'

The young officer asked a few questions about my past, then he said I must see Captain Mailey.

Captain Mailey was a young man of twenty-seven behind a thirtyish moustache. Later I learnt that he was a schoolmaster in Civvy Street. He opened the dossier and took out my papers: medical, conduct, casualty, dental.

'You say you made an application for transfer to the Intelligence Corps and heard nothing about it. Tell me all about yourself. Here, draw up a chair. It isn't really allowed, but I'm going to write the whole story down for the Colonel, and it takes time, so sit down.'

'I shall be sorry to lose you,' he said later jokingly. 'I'm education officer and I'd want you to teach the men French and German and a good many other things. Have you ever asked for transfer to the Army Education Corps?'

'It was suggested to me, sir, but after all, it's a non-combatant corps . . .'

'You mustn't look at it that way. You are well qualified for it and I think that's your proper place. Unless, of course, you think you would make a gunner.'

'I'm afraid I know nothing about gunnery, sir, having been trained a signaller.'

The major entered the room.

'Oh, Archie, do look at this,' said the captain and gave him the record of my pre-Army life. 'I thought you were out . . .'

'Doctor of Law,' murmured the major reading the paper. He read it, then he said he would see the colonel about it the following morning.

'What did they say?' asked the lance-bombardier who was waiting outside.

'I am to have an interview with the colonel.'

'That's it. You'll have to speak up for yourself in this Army if you want to get somewhere . . .'

'I really must thank you for speaking to the officer.'

'That's all right. I don't want you to waste your life with us. I mean you are cut out for better things.'

I looked up and looked at him. There was obvious sincerity in his voice. But what was this? Why? He was, as I found out later an ex-school teacher from Wales, who wrote a letter every night to his freshly-married wife from whom he would now be separated. They called him Dai. He walked away quickly, pretending he was busy. I knew he wasn't. I went back perplexed, full of wonder and amazement, to clean the lorry where I left off.

Monday morning I saw the colonel. He certainly looked more than thirty-five. His stature, his face, suggested Teleki, the Hungarian Premier. He looked into the captain's report and said that I should have to go and see someone higher up at the Command Headquarters, the same morning.

I was taken by Mr. Mailey, Captain Mailey's brother, also an ex-schoolmaster, a fresh-faced young man who had just received his commission. He told me he had served for well over a year in the ranks. We went to the Command H.Q. by train and saw a major. The major involved me in a conversation in German.

'I think your German would do,' he said later, 'but there is a serious

handicap. Your parents are enemy aliens . . . Matter of fact, you and I would be also regarded as enemy aliens in Hungary.' I smiled too. 'But in any case you should be put down for an Octu . . .'

We went back to camp again. Mr. Mailey reported the interview to the colonel.

'In that case,' said the colonel and tossed his head in a way which I could not interpret: was it relief, pleasure, displeasure, satisfaction? 'I cannot take you abroad. You will be posted to the Home Details of the Regiment, then you will be posted to another regiment . . .'

The same day I was taken out of the Regiment and put on the strength of the Home Details, a smallish detachment, under the command of Mr. Aldous. There were some thirty people in Home Details. Deserters who were still at large somewhere, deserters who were under close arrest, low medical-category men, three or four ex-Italians who had refused to sign the declaration to serve abroad and a few Octu candidates.

The first day we were on fatigues. It was a hot day and we were digging trenches in shirt-sleeves behind the Regimental H.Q.s. The following day we would fill the trenches in again. Just to keep us busy and occupied. Most of the Regiment were also on fatigues. They had nothing else to do. For the past six weeks or two months the Regiment had been ready to leave England at forty-eight hours notice. They were bored but quite cheerful.

After dinner a few people in the digging party decided to go to the cinema in Tunbridge Wells. It was a good idea, I thought.

'But you must have a pass,' they said, 'the town is lousy with red-caps.'

It was thus that I met L/Bdr. Spedding, the clerk in the office. He made out a permanent pass for me, then he asked me if I would like to work in the office. I said I would. Normally it would have been an occupation in the Army which I would have tried to avoid, but as an alternative to digging trenches it seemed promising.

'The point is, you see,' Spedding said two days later when we were alone, sitting at the desk, 'that I'm frankly very bored most of the time. There is not much work, except on Fridays when there is pay and other things. Besides you may not like digging . . .' he added with a smile.

Spedding was an Octu candidate, he was fat and sentimental; an overgrown schoolboy. He looked as if he had just left the playing-field where he played scrum-half not too well and not too badly.

My duty was to look after the passes. I had to enter the names of those going out on after-duty passes into the guard book and to check the book every morning. Spedding concentrated all his energy

on the intricacies of pay and he kept two bulky dossiers for his correspondence with the Army Pay Corps and with the Royal Artillery Records Office. He tilted gently at Army red tape, but on the whole he rather enjoyed it.

For a week or so I still slept with the nine others at Hut Seven. They were a pleasant lot but not more pleasant than the others in 21 Battery, or in the Regiment for that matter. Artillery circles considered the Regiment a crack one. It was old and had a distinguished record, but there was no suffocating 'traditionalism' about these things. This was perhaps because most of the officers and men were young. The average officer was about twenty-four years of age; men about twenty-three. One afternoon, waiting for the typewriter to be untenanted in the R.H.Q. office the clerk showed me the officer's list. There were some thirty-five officers in all. One went to a grammar school, two to London University, practically all the others to Harrow, Wellington, Winchester, Shrewsbury, but mostly to Harrow. There were more old Harrovians among the officers than in Mr. Baldwin's second cabinet. The adjutant, I noted, went to Eton, Heidelberg and Cambridge.

The men were mostly 'old soldiers' of an average age of twenty-three. Some had joined the Army before the war, some had been Territorials, and the Regiment had a distinguished record in France. In our hut there were four who had come back from Dunkirk; one wounded.

Since I was now clerical staff I was excused guards and fatigues and my duties were not arduous. I wondered whether these advantages, coupled with the plentiful and good food, the lovely weather and the beautiful Kentish scenery, coloured my vision whenever I thought of the Regiment. The more time I spent with them, the fonder of them I grew. We all know that one's vision can easily become blurred by outside considerations. One often finds a particular piece of music beautiful and enchanting simply because it brings back memories of happiness connected with it. But I often wondered then and I often wonder still where all these delightful people hid themselves in the years before the war, so that one never had a chance of meeting them. True, of course, that one very rarely meets regular soldiers in the ranks in peacetime. I knew one or two before the war, when a soldier in uniform was a rare sight, but that was all.

In any case I was having a very good time. When I look back on these days in Kent I must say that I enjoyed being in the Army in spite of the fact that I was doing practically nothing, a state which usually infuriates me. This was not the training regiment and the squad from which I was so often forced to take temporary refuge.

On retrospect Squad 75 appears to me a trifle more depressing than it really was. Here, there was no need and no desire for me to escape, though escape was so very easy. There were two fair-sized towns within walking distance and one could get a day pass to London once a week. In fact I preferred the company of the men around me to civilians. They were mostly provincials, with a sprinkling of Welsh and Scottish, and mostly ex-manual workers, civilised and sophisticated in their own way, yet they remained virile. I liked the drivers, the mechanics and the gunners in particular. At times I felt they were much older than I, then I discovered what it was. It was preoccupation with machinery that had matured them beyond their years. There was, for example, little Taff Knowles, who was a full sergeant at twenty-one. He was touchingly serious. He had been through France, but never talked about his experiences. (He might in about ten years' time, but I doubt if he would ever become a bore.)

There was a current of friendship, the sort of thing I could never feel in Squad 75 or in a training regiment in general. A kind of pleasant comradeship, a mutual give and take, concessions to each other's idiosyncrasies, a liberal spirit. Where did it come from? Possibly from hardship, lack of women, lack of responsibility and boredom. There were very few groups and coteries; there were very few men who walked out in pairs and who were particular friends. Everybody got on with everybody. I came to enjoy a respect that was at times a little embarrassing. I tried my very best to be 'chummy' and to demonstrate that I was 'just another soldier'. I did not get away with it, apparently, with old soldiers. I was singled out in a gentle way as someone who was 'different' and was treated accordingly. The treatment was respectful but extremely friendly. One morning Dai almost got into trouble for me. The orderly sergeant came round and found that the piss buckets were not emptied. He got on to Dai. Dai said it was not his duty to detail men, whereupon the sergeant said he would put him on charge and walked out.

'The bastard. He wanted me to detail you or Court for the job, it was clear.'

'Then why didn't you?'

He shrugged his shoulders lightly.

'Because I assure you I have emptied piss buckets before' (it wasn't true) 'and even if I hadn't, I assure you there's nothing in it. Come on, Courty, give me a hand.'

The sergeant did put Dai on charge, but nothing happened. Major Scarsdale was a sensible man.

Then on the second day, when I was put on cleaning an armoured

carrier, the other soldier simply didn't want me to do any cleaning. 'I can do all this and it's dirty work,' he said in the most natural way.

I felt I should be sorry when they eventually left without me.

## INTERLUDE IN THE WEALD

FROM TIME to time the men in Home Details were put through marching and rifle drill exercises. They were profoundly glad of it, because their existence was very boring. I asked Mr. Aldous if I might join in whenever my 'duties' permitted. He smiled. So out we went for an hour a day and brushed up our M. and R., which had certainly become very rusty since 'A' Battery. It was thus that I met Bdr. Snagge and L./Bdr. Eveleigh. They were both in Home Details because they were Octu candidates. Snagge was Yorkshire and Eveleigh was Welsh. They had been shop assistants in Civvy Street and both had strong accents. They were cheerful and efficient, a little bullying perhaps. I felt pleased that they were put forward for commissions. I was sure Snagge would make a splendid officer and Eveleigh a conscientious one.

We were all allowed on the average one day pass a week to go to London, but after my third visit I decided it was not really worth it. In London I felt almost unhappy now. I went up to the American and Canadian Service clubs, then I went to Charing Cross Road to look at new books. In the end I bought nothing and did not renew my subscription for *The New Statesman*. I had plenty of free time and at times I was quite bored doing nothing, yet somehow I was not in the mood for reading anything.

And I had no desire to write either. It had suddenly occurred to me that the last thing I wrote was exactly a year ago, an article in telegraphese called *Good-bye to a Desk*, on the night Britain had broken off diplomatic relations with Hungary. I was just half an hour too late and the article was refused by the post office. It was strange how after having written on the average ten or fifteen hundred words a day for very nearly fifteen years, I could suddenly stop it without any desire to look back.

Spedding noticed I was restless and he quite naturally expected something complicated, metaphysical, among my problems, something that could not be easily tackled satisfactorily by Army authorities.

'No,' I said, 'what I want is quite simple and needs no particular understanding. All I wish is to hear the decision whether I am to be

transferred to the Intelligence Corps, the Army Education Corps or remain in the R.A.'s, so that I can go on and complete my training.'

'Yes,' he said, stifling a yawn, 'I felt the same a year ago when I was made a potential Octu candidate . . .'

'You mean you've been waiting a year?'

'A little over,' he sighed, 'and I was just as impatient as you are now. Since then I've learnt better. I've reached a stage when I simply don't care. Mr. Churchill says it is going to be a long war. Well, it suits me.'

'A year's doing nothing would drive me mad.'

'Or you would get used to it . . .'

'Or take to drinking.'

That afternoon we walked out far into the Weald. The landscape was lovely, but, as always, impersonal. I remember it was always my impression that nothing ever happened in Kent and it always had the air of a week-end, in short, a trifle unreal.

When the following morning Mr. Aldous showed me a communication from the Eastern Command to the effect that the Intelligence Corps refused to have me, on account of my parents being 'enemy aliens', I almost felt relieved. He told me I was to see the second in command—the Colonel being away on leave—and I expected the Major to put me back into the Regiment so that I would go with them after all.

The Major, however, decided to leave me in Home Details.

He told me that the Regiment could not recommend me straight away for an Octu, because they couldn't say they knew me at all. So it was decided to leave me in Home Details. I would be posted to another Regiment and they would decide about my future.

I woke up early in the morning. There were orders being shouted, a great animation all over the place. I got out of bed and looked out of the window. It was quite dark, lorries, guns, squads moving, torches flickering.

When we left the hut at a quarter to eight the landscape on the two sides of the road was changed. All the vehicles gone. There were rumours that the drivers were not coming back, but would meet the Regiment at the port of embarkation.

There was, of course, a great animation among the men. So the Regiment was going after all. They had been waiting for it for a considerable time. They were looking forward to it, partly because they were young and partly because they were fed up with waiting. I have rarely seen so many keen young men in one bunch. Well, of course, for the young the war gives, or at least promises, a chance of self-realisation that normally would belong to someone much older.

I tried to find out about their mental make-up, their attitude towards the war, their war aims, about the things they were supposed to fight

for. I had somewhat unexpected answers. They were fighting because it was compulsory and because we were at war with Germany and vaguely because of a few popular slogans. They regarded the war as a kind of important soccer match that must by all means be won. Not a hopeless attitude at all. They had no political views, they had not even repeated the platitudes they must have heard from their parents and from the officers. They were quite happy.

The older men, of course, were different, they were critical, cautious and a bit uneasy, but being surrounded by enthusiastic young people they never showed signs of the sullen, resentful attitude towards the army, officers, compulsion, discomfort and towards the war in general that had such a bad effect on me in Squad 75.

There was, however, another layer, the 'old soldiers', mostly young men, some with five, six, and a few with ten years' service behind them. Some were children of sergeant-majors and were born, so to speak, in the Army. There was a tremendous enthusiasm among these. These were the people who attracted me most in the Army all the time. One could pick them out from the others in a second. It was not their bearing, it was not the way they walked and talked and dressed, it was an attitude of mind that reflected itself in everything they did and said. I had naturally a great respect for them. They were, in any case, a part of the community I had very rarely come across before. They were the real stuff, the others, including myself, I felt were only civilians in uniform. Long service made them contented, mellow, and at times, quite charming. I tried to find out what made them take up the Army as a career. In a good many cases it was, of course, unemployment, in other cases the fact that they were the children of professional soldiers, but there was a considerably large proportion of men who became soldiers simply because they liked soldiering and fighting. They were the most attractive, the most pleasant, the least regimental, and the most peaceful.

The Regiment stayed on for another fortnight. Very little happened. The weather was beautiful. Spedding and Mr. Aldous and I went on working in the office. There was a little more work now that we were to take over various matters from the Regiment. We went out practically every afternoon to Tonbridge or to Tunbridge Wells, having a cup of 'beastly tea' in the Y.M.C.A. or going to Phil's Café or the Medway Hall to dance. I liked Phil's particularly. It was a small place overlooking that still little backwater the River Medway. Everybody in uniform and everybody well-behaved. I have been to ninepenny dances before, but I never enjoyed myself quite as much as here. It was a warm, intimate, provincial atmosphere. There was a good band; I danced quite a lot with the drummer's wife, who thought I was Frankie Verity's

brother. I said I was. It was an amusing situation. It was Frankie who originally took me to Phil's. He worked in the R.H.A. Office, was twenty-three and was just getting married. I remember when I first saw him. It was one afternoon and I was having tea in the dining-hall. It was very late. (I was sorting text-books to be left behind by the Regiment.) There was one man having tea in the hut. I looked at him quite casually, then I became suddenly startled. The hut was badly lit and against the greenish yellow background I suddenly saw myself, some ten years younger, sitting at a table. I watched him amazed, then he looked up, looked at me and smiled.

'I'll adopt you as my brother,' I said later.

One afternoon I saw 'Citizen Kane' in Tunbridge Wells. What a film, even if one isn't in the 'swim' and does not know that he was portraying W. R. Hearst and—which few people seem to realise, at least I have heard it from nobody else as yet—that he looked very much like the late Lord Rothermere. I don't know whether this was intentional or accidental, but he looked desperately like Rothermere especially in the scenes when he grew old. Here the film came into its own, I felt, an art form on an entirely separate and independent plane from the theatre. Dialogue, treatment, photography, time sequence, all new and exciting. A bit of film history, I thought.

Then what else happened? A young boy from 37 Battery shot himself accidentally. He was playing about with a service revolver trying to do the cowboy trick. The Court of Inquiry was to take place in a few days and Mr. Aldous had to take charge of it.

There was a new man added to Home Details. 'Chalky' White. His right foot had been fractured a few weeks previously at a dance during the 'Limber Gunner's Waltz,' which is one of the rowdiest traditions in the Royal Regiment.

Then I saw the Colonel. He signed, after all, my recommendation for a commission in the Army Education Corps. He said my conduct was 'very good'. (Under three years' service your conduct cannot be 'exemplary' in the Army). My leadership (based on Mr. Aldous' experience) was 'fair'. He recommended me for a stripe in the new unit I was going to, in order to develop leadership.

It was a pity I could not get a stripe here, because Harry Paget gave me an old battledress of his with a stripe on. Harry was a lance-corporal in the Corps of Signals attached to us. He was twenty-two, had spent more than two years in the Army, and had just broken off his engagement. He was a tender, gentle youth with large brown eyes, like a stricken deer. His thirty months in the Army had left no visible marks on him. He remained shy, charming, unspoilt. He was a very good signaller and there was little he did not know about instruments. The

night I went to see 'Citizen Kane' I met Harry coming back from Horsham. He went to visit his school. He was a Bluecoat boy. (That strange uniform—yellow stockings and cassock and leather belt and no hat—I wonder if it will survive the war.)

Finally it was Friday morning. Regimental orders said all A.D. passes cancelled. Reveille was very early. Our office was chock full with exotic rubbish from all the battery offices. We could hardly move. It was also a very hot day. I felt like going swimming.

After dinner the lorries arrived. We had early tea. I went to say good-bye to Jim Robinson and all the others I had met since I arrived, the three boys with whom we played Bridge and Monopoly, Dai Beynon, and Court, and one or two officers. Mr. Mailey said he hoped I would get my commission soon. I knew long in advance that I should feel very sorry to be separated from them. For a moment I thought hang the commission, the A.E.C., and everything else, it may perhaps be possible to go with them. It would sound funny, of course; then I began to reason. I was quite frankly untrained as a signaller, besides the Regiment was 'over-staffed'. It would be fatigues till someone got killed. And the prospect of fatigues in India or Egypt . . .

Still, I felt near crying as I sat alone in the hut that evening, in the hut which had been that same morning still occupied by the signallers. I was on telephone duty. It was quiet, very quiet, in the hut, and no sound came through the open windows. It was gradually getting dark. I sat alone by the dumb instruments and reflected that it would be very interesting to picture the 'ifs'. What would have happened, for example, if I had not passed out in March as a 'classified 2nd yr. signaller'? I would have been put back a couple of squads, would have eventually passed out and been posted to another regiment. What sort of a regiment would it have been? I heard nothing from the other men who did not pass in Squad 75.

What would have been my future if I had gone abroad with this Regiment?

And what would happen to me now?

It was deadly still in the hut, it was getting quite dark and cool. I got up to fix the black-out.

Things were getting very quiet now. Too quiet, too beautiful, almost Arcadian. There were some forty of us in the Home Details and we had the whole camp to ourselves. Food was excellent and plentiful and the weather really lovely.

There was another officer besides Mr. Aldous. His name was Marsden. He had asked for a transfer to the R.A.F. as a pilot and the likelihood was that he would get it. He was twenty-three and inclined

to be serious. He had decided that we would get rusty, so he worked out schemes and stunts with Sergeant White, aiming at our fitness. The trouble, of course, was that the regiment had taken all the equipment away and we only had two rifles—belonging to the two drivers lent to us by a nearby regiment to provide us with transport. He spent a long time discussing the schemes, Commando tricks; I was kept on the telephone one whole morning, ringing various Commands, trying to get ammunition, rifles, Verey lights and other pyrotechnics. The commands, however, were apparently too busy to supply us with anything but rounds of ammunition, and Mr. Marsden's enthusiasm became considerably damped. We went target-shooting down in the hollow and I gained considerable experience in marching drill. A day or two later Mr. Marsden found a stray dog somewhere—an extremely friendly and intelligent animal that showed traces of wire-haired terrier, setter, collie and Dobermann Pincher, and began to take an interest in him in a big way. The dog—grateful for such attention—and delighted to find himself in an Army camp with a nice-smelling cookhouse—behaved as if he had always belonged to Mr. Marsden. He kept exercising his find on the end of a bit of string, and much to the relief of the men and the Ammo sections of the various commands, he found an excellent outlet for his energies.

One morning, to my great surprise, I saw Frankie Verity, returning. Then there were others coming. Another sergeant and a Welsh bombardier back from hospital, and Smith, a young giant from the backwaters of Upton Park, from the 'glasshouse'. He did three months for forging P.O. Savings Books.

There were in fact several criminals in Home Details. If one looked at the conduct sheets of the forty-odd men—which I had to handle every day—quite interesting things came to light. There was Addyman for example. He was twenty-three and had spent five years in the Army. He had three Conduct Sheets absolutely full. He was soon made lance-bombardier and busted for insubordination, made up again, was substantiated and made full bombardier, then busted for insubordination again. Then he absented himself without leave about four times and made a lance-bombardier again but busted for the third time for assaulting and battering a sergeant.

'He was a bastard,' he explained in a casual aside. 'No, I don't want a tape again,' he said, 'too much —— responsibility.'

Addyman was the calmest, most delightful individual and a very good soldier. One would have never guessed his record.

As a matter of fact one would not have guessed that one was living with what the Army termed 'criminals', under the same roof, and in close daily contact. I had been going out to Tonbridge quite a lot

with a boy, a bright-eyed country lad, who told me in the most natural manner that he was in the glasshouse for six months for stealing ration cards.

Then there were the two prisoners who were awaiting court martial for desertion. I had heard a lot about Army deserters. I usually associated them with sullen unshaven looks, insulting behaviour or sneaky, cowardly ways. These two prisoners, Atkins and Eke, were the most unlikely people ever to have become deserters. Both were very quiet and well behaved, soft spoken and gentle in manner. They both came from Lancashire and looked amazingly alike, as if they were brothers. Atkins said he deserted because he had invented a very important device for the Air Force. He had a few interviews with the authorities, but in the end, he said, they did not want to consider his invention and tried to get rid of him by sending him abroad. He was very sorry, he said, that he could not tell me anything about his invention, it was so very secret, but it was nevertheless a great thing and it would, if adapted, shorten the war considerably. I have never yet met an entirely pleasant inventor (the nearest approximation being the Senator Marconi), they were always harbouring resentment against the indifference and apathy of the world, but Atkins was really nice. Some people in Details said that he had only invented one thing: the story of his invention.

Eke was even nicer. He hardly spoke. He would sit or sleep in the guard-room barefoot all day. He had large soft brown eyes and remarkably fair skin.

'You see, Count' (everybody called me Count in Home Details), 'it was like this,' he would say. 'I have flat feet and they always hurt me and I didn't want to kill people. It's no use forcing me. I just can't do it.'

Occasionally the two deserters would go out. According to Army rules they must leave the guard-room at certain periods to walk out for a time, but this must be done under escort. When I saw the two prisoners in Tonbridge one Saturday afternoon, in front of Woolworth's, I almost fainted.

'Hullo, Count, how is everything?' Atkins said.

'I'm well, thanks, er . . . what are you doing here?'

'Oh, just waiting for Bdr. Kennedy.'

What actually happened was that after the shopping expedition they all decided to go to the Roxy and see 'Honky Tonk,' but in the large crowd they lost Bdr. Kennedy and returned without him, as if nothing had happened, to the guard-room. Kennedy said he did not much bother to look for them, as he was sure they would not run away again.

Then there was Purvis. Purvis was very deaf and completely illiterate —the second man I had met in the Army who could not read and write.

I had to read and write all his correspondence. It was extensive. Like most deaf people he shouted all the time and hoped he would have his discharge eventually.

By the way, letter-writing. One day Smith, the giant, had approached me with the request that I should write a letter for him. He was six foot two and weighed thirteen stones and was a boxer apparently quite well known in Upton Park sporting circles.

'See here, Count,' he said, and he pushed five Woodbines into my reluctant hands. 'I met a dame . . . a lady,' he corrected himself, 'on my last leave, and I want to write a letter to her, but I can't do it. Go on, take 'em fags, I don't want it for nothing. She is a lady, a regular, she talks fine, I mean, she talks about the weather.'

There were about six N.C.O.s: Bdr. Norris, a big loose-hung boy whose wife was having fits every now and then back in Manchester, so he was granted compassionate posting; Bdr. Tickell, an old soldier who had been batman to a general for five years and had the gentle manners of old servants in noble households; Bdr. Baker, who was a sergeant, stripped because he had spent three months in 'dock' with duodenal ulcers; then there was Sergeant White who ran the whole show, and Sergeant Maple. There were three lance-bombardier Octu candidates, and the office was now run by Westwood.

And there was Spedding. Later on I found that the men did not like Spedding because they said he was throwing his weight about. I was sorry for the arrangement because I got on well with Spedding. He was a fat boy and like most fat boys, sentimental. When he talked about his girl his voice grew affectionate. He kept showing her photograph to me. He had been so far sent back four times by the Brigadier instead of being sent to his Octu board.

'They are down on me because I want to be in Infantry,' he said. 'In the end I'll give up the whole bloody business. Have some chocolate, Heggie,' and he produced a dilapidated packet from his hip-pocket. He began to munch it and it apparently cheered him up a little.

We were given occasional tickets to the theatre in Tunbridge Wells, where the Command Welfare Officer, Capt. J. Russell Pickering, told us to enjoy ourselves. His charming personality did more than make up for his surname, which is not associated with pleasant thoughts in the average soldier's mind. ('You will blanco all your equipment to-night with Pickering's Number Twenty-two. Is that clear?')

On such occasions it was Fred Hawco who drove us. He was one of the two drivers lent to us by a neighbouring regiment. He was a Newfoundlander, and the first I ever came across. He was five feet by five feet and I loved listening to his speech. (Transatlantic accents fascinate me as much as Northern and Midland). But he did not speak much. He

was magnificently clean, childishly simple and very kind, and friendly towards everybody. He did marvellous work with a nail file, and emery paper on my cap-badge. After the operation it looked as if I had worn it for at least ten years. One evening I took him to a dance to the Assembly Hall. He had never been to a dance before and it was no use trying to get him on the floor. But he enjoyed it. There was something of the eighteenth-century English farmer boy about him, as if the nineteenth century had not touched him at all.

*Extract from Diary.* 'After the rain this morning the weather has become bright and warm. Saunders and Corbett and I are sitting in the office reading. Absolutely nothing else to do. I don't think anybody is doing anything at this moment (including the gaffer). Luker and one of his prisoners and Gardiner are playing Chinese whist sitting out in the open. The other prisoner is sweetly snoring inside, his mouth open, his saliva all over the pillow. They are well-behaved people. On pretence of going to lavatory, looked into cookhouse. Friday says Irish stew to-day and baked jam roll. Very hot in cookhouse, Friday in singlets. Tells Parisi he must wash his hands before peeling potatoes especially if he is coming from lavatory. Parisi used to tell me how early he had to get up in Civvy Street to get ice-cream.

'Now Welsh bombardier comes into office to join us doing nothing. From window you see nothing but green trees and blue sky and there is "scent" in the air. I mean it in the literal sense. There is a place in the Crescent where the trees smell exactly like that Lanvin scent Patsy used to use. *Prétexte*, I think. No exaggeration.

'There is absolutely nothing to do. It is very nearly twelve, and the telephone does not need any attention. Westwood asks whether I had typed out letter to go to DADOS about pamphlets. I say yes, and he knew it, just asked to say something.

'Sergeant White enters. He says he has just heard the Gaffer speak on the telephone to R.A. Records, that the whole Home Detail is to go to Woolwich. Prisoners would stay and the two witnesses, Friday and two slaves in the cookhouse, and Westwood in the office and himself.

' "—— hell," says Saunders.

' "Now we're for it," says Corbett.'

## UNPAID-ACTING-LANCE . . .

Sergeant Hanbury took us to the Depot. It was a blazing hot day and we sweated quite a lot carrying our belongings. He handed us over

to a sergeant and we were left waiting in the square, feeling a little sorry for ourselves in the almost tropical sunshine.

The square was enormous. It was surrounded by the elephant-grey barracks. A long stretch of iron corridor ran the length of the building intersected by iron staircases, very steep and not very safe to climb in hob-nailed boots. So this was 'The Big House' we heard so much about. It was the first time I had seen proper military barracks. There was no mistake about them, they were barracks, they looked it; a period piece among military buildings. It provided a nineteenth-century background for our own grim personal present, intermixed with coloured lithographs of the past: India, Egypt, the Sudan, the Empire, regimental tradition, Lord Milne, 'Greasy Gunners', Ubique and Rudyard Kipling.

Facing us, about a quarter of a mile away—or was it half a mile—there was a huge mirror standing against the wall. It was six feet high. Later I read the words on the board that would cover it up during the night. 'Did I polish my cap-badge?' 'Did I polish my boots?' 'Is my lanyard straight?' There were fourteen points. I thought of President Wilson.

Every now and again a bugle would sound with full, metallic tone. Though it was a gramophone record, amplified by loudspeakers, it was cheerful. It was romantically and cheerfully Army.

Finally we were called into the office and our particulars were taken, then we were told to go to Room 57/B on the Left Half. The room in question had brass letters on its doors and the brass letters said 'HARDY, V.C.' He was an Artillery hero, obviously, but where did he get his V.C.?

There were no beds in the room and the palliasses on the floor did not look too clean. By dusk the heat was quite sultry.

I had never seen so many soldiers in one bunch all my life and I only saw one square. That square never seemed to be empty.

Since it was too late to ask for passes to go to town I walked round Woolwich. There were three soldiers to one civilian in the streets, in the pubs, in the snack bars, in the cinema queues. I walked up to the ferry, and looked at the water and at the other bank with its warehouses, wharves, gasometers, and factory chimneys. What was on the other side? Silvertown? East Ham? It was H. M. Tomlinson's country in any case . . . All Our Yesterdays, Gallions Reach. . . . I wondered why all English ports—London, Liverpool, Newcastle, even Bristol, looked so drab, so very dull compared by the superficial glamour of Genoa, Naples, Marseilles, Toulon, Bordeaux? Was it the climate? The sunshine and heat at this present moment was almost overpowering Woolwich. The sky as blue as over the Mediterranean. Why? What a difference between Marcel Pagnol and H. M. Tomlinson.

Next morning Reveille at 6.15, a great scramble for the washing place. It was cold water. Then a muster parade, then breakfast parade. Long depressing queues waiting in front of the dining-hall. For the first time we were served by the A.T.S. and we did not need to carry our plates. China plates were supplied, but the food was bad. Grey mashed potatoes, plentiful but unappetising. We had been really spoilt in the past.

Then the general parade at nine. N.C.O.s of ten squads calling the roll at the same time. Confusion, shouting, heat, swearing under the breath.

'The whole show is run by lance-jacks,' murmured Bdr. Snagge behind me. 'Just let me have a couple of them under me for a week.'

''Shun . . . As you were . . . 'Shun . . .'

It was getting warm. We perspired, and we waited, it seemed hours and hours on the square. Then finally an order: we were to be on gun-drill.

Three days of this; it was a very short time, one could not say one knew Woolwich. I have since heard stories from various people that it wasn't such a bad place. Some preferred it to a field regiment. But on the third day I was called into the office. I was posted and was to leave on the following day for Nottingham.

'You are lucky,' said one of the old soldiers of twenty or twenty-two, in 'Hardy, V.C.' when I told him the news. 'I've bin there. Nottingham is a place where the policeman wears his trousis buck to front.'

'Because there's so mooch —— in the town,' he said. 'If you aren't careful —— comes down to the billet. It's all private billets, see.'

I had only been to Nottingham once before, when I spent about an hour or so in the town on my way from Lincoln to Stafford. It must have been seven or eight years ago. I remembered the large, white Market Square with its modern council houses, and I remembered that the buses had slips stuck on saying 'To and From Goose Fair.' I had to miss the Fair, though everybody said it was interesting.

It was late in the afternoon when I arrived. I asked a Redcap in the station where the Regiment was. He told me, then seeing me struggling with two kit-bags, took one of them and carried it to the bus stop. That was nice and unexpected.

It was seven o'clock and still very hot. Two middle-aged women, seeing me sweating as I carried my two kit-bags along Forest Road, said, 'Poor kid.' I almost said, 'Thank you, ma'am.'

One can usually judge by one's first impressions about a regiment and my first impressions of the —th Field were very favourable. It was the chief clerk I saw first. He was a young man with a moustache, a gentle smile and a gentle voice. His tone and manner was that of the secretary of a golf club when one goes to pay one's subscription.

'Leave your kit-bags here if you like and I'll tell the Orderly Bombardier to give you a good bed for the night. . . . No, unfortunately there is no place where you can take a bath. Very hot, isn't it? We all get free vouchers to the public bath. You can go to-morrow.'

The bombardier got me a 'good bed.' It was on the third floor of a private house. Again, just as at Woolwich, there were no beds.

I went out to have a cup of tea. It was still very warm though it was already eight o'clock. I decided to walk down to the Market Square. As I left the billets and came down the hill by the Arboretum, I reflected that Nottingham must have had a very literary-minded town council in the 'eighties, when this quarter must have been built. There was Tennyson Street, Byron Street, Southey Street, Keats Street, Chaucer Street, and—unbelievable as it may seem—there was Lamartine Street. The Y.M.C.A. was in Shakespeare Street. It was the most un-Y.M.C.A. looking Y.M. I had ever seen. It was red brick, 'functional' style, with cream walls, light green doors and indirect lighting. It looked young and not the least un-Christian for it. Must young Christianity be inevitably surrounded by fumed oak, fernpots, a colour-print of Sir George Williams and a religious tract or two by C. Woodward Chamberlayne lying on the tables? The 'London Central' is also a progressive, cheerful Y.M.C.A. with a splendid swimming bath.

Then I returned to the billets. Some of the others were already asleep. I had made my bed before I had gone out. It was warm and there was an 'Army smell' in the room. Its contributory odours contained a faint reminder that the walls had been recently painted, then there was the smell of hair oil, the smell of straw from the palliasses, the smell of tobacco. Then there were various body smells, with just a slight suggestion of smell of feet. Collectively it was the smell of young soldiers, masculine and quite inoffensive.

I would have perhaps been more critical of the new Regiment if I had come direct from Home Details. Since it was stationed in a town there were too many parades; then there were no beds and the food was quite bad. The dining-hall was on the first floor of a disused factory building whose walls were distempered about once a fortnight and smelt of a kind of cheese the very poor eat in Italy.

I got to know the dining-hall fairly well, because as soon as I arrived they put me on dining-hall fatigues, dishing out food, sweeping up and carrying large buckets of hot water for the men to wash up their plates. I did this for two days. On the third day Bdr. Garfitt, who was in charge, came up to me and said that I should go to the sergeant-major and ask him to give me a better job. 'You are not the sort of bloke who should do this kind of work . . .'

I looked at him enchanted and amazed. He was a young man, not unlike Dai, except that he was English. He was shy, simple and honest. I was enchanted and amazed. There was no afterthought. He did not want anything out of me, now or later. It was just a case of a possibly idealistic young working man who had recognised . . . recognised what? Dai knew I was a writer. Garfitt did not know anything about my background. All that he saw was a man in uniform, about his own size, just about five foot eleven . . . Well, of course, there were other things. There are things written on all of us. He sensed them and he sensed that I didn't really like dining-hall fatigues, and possibly I looked a little helpless, and there is a kind of father, brother, uncle complex among the older soldiers, when they are separated from women; they have the urge all the same to be good, to be kind, to protect, to take care of people.

I went and saw the sergeant-major and he made an appointment for me with the captain. I told the captain all about the colonel sending me back, about the recommendation for an Octu, and my application for a transfer to the A.E.C. He said I should have to see the major.

I went back to the dining-hall and heard that Major Pollock was a regular. He had spent some forty years in the Army, but he was kind and good. I became a little alarmed. Forty years in the Army! He must be over sixty. Good God. He would be a kind man, but methodical, ponderous, fussy, bureaucratic, sticky. Now I was for it.

I went for the interview the same afternoon with considerable alarm.

Major Pollock was, however, an entirely different man from what I expected. He was a tall, spare gentleman, who certainly did not look his age, but looked a soldier every inch. He presumed that I was frightened of him, so he adopted the conversational technique of the missionary talking to a native. I was expecting that any moment he would give me a piece of chocolate or a copy of the New Testament.

He talked loudly but very slowly.

'You have been recommended by your colonel for an Octu, eh? . . . Are you a little deaf?' he added gently. 'Well, your papers are not here. They have not been forwarded. Well, that takes a long time, and you don't want to waste time, do you? As a matter of fact I am the Chairman of the Octu board in the Regiment . . . there are two more officers on it, but they are young and they do what I tell them to do. So, I shall recommend you again . . . Right. You'll have to make an application to me. Write it to-day. Just a formal application . . . No, wait a second, I'll do it myself . . . Saves time. . . .'

He took a sheet of lined paper and began to write with alarming speed, slowly calling out what he was writing . . . 'Sir, I have the honour to ask for a re-commen-dation for . . . for a com-mission . . . enclosed . . . previous . . . academic qualifications . . . Yes . . . Yes

. . . that would do. . . . I am, Sir, . . . Your obedient servant. . . .Now sign this . . .'

He hit the blotting paper on the sheet so hard that his pen, his clock and other things trembled.

'Right,' he said. 'We will see what we can do . . .'

Half an hour later I was called into the Battery sergeant-major's office.

'Will you go and report to your Troop sergeant-major to-morrow morning. He will give you a job in the office. You will be given a stripe. You won't be paid for it. It's an acting rank. You'll be unpaid acting-lance-bombardier with effect from to-day . . . Yes, yes, you can put it on already. Go and get a pair from the quarter-bloke.'

I ran back to my billet as fast as I could, so as not to waste time, to fish out from the bottom of my kit-bag the battledress that Harry Paget gave me. It had his stripe on. It did not fit me quite because Harry's arms must have been longer than mine, but that was not so important. The important thing was that I was now lance-bombardier. Looking back on that June afternoon in Nottingham I cannot help smiling a little. My raptures over my promotion seem to me childish to a degree, but the thing is easy to understand. The Army to a certain extent alters your age: it turns grown up men into children and matures very young men into adults. And I felt that the 'tape' was the first visible sign of recognition by the Army towards me. I was given authority and I was now entitled to a little official respect. A non-commissioned officer. And there was something eighteenth century and romantic about the rank, the word '*Bombardier*,' something virile and at the same time exclusive: Corporal is drab and international. (Caporal, Káplár, Korporal.)

I felt very happy over it.

There was a great commotion that afternoon. About six hundred men arrived from embarkation leave. Some two hundred were put up in the church hall where I was now sleeping. It was a Victorian Gothic affair, fairly damp and dilapidated with practically no washing accommodation. The Regiment was a kind of emergency depot, it made up drafts, and posted people. The permanent staff was mostly category men and it was small.

I saw the Troop sergeant-major. He said I was to work in the office as a duty N.C.O., part clerical duties and part other duties, such as marching men to various places, contacting people, in short I was to be a kind of superior errand boy. In any case I was to be Troop Orderly N.C.O. the following day. I was to take over at nine and finish off at nine the day after, but it did not involve any actual night duties. The sergeant-major was a soft-spoken and serious little man of about fifty, from Inverness, and he explained my duties to me. I was to stand

opposite him during the parade and take the names of those not accounted for by the sergeants. After that I was to sit in the office and do various clerical duties. At midnight I was to call the roll at all the troop's sleeping quarters and report those not answering their names the following morning.

It was a hard day. Like most people I took off my battledress blouse and worked in my shirt-sleeves. It was important though, I was told, that I should have a stripe showing on the right arm of my shirt. I had to sew one up a few minutes before the parade.

The parade was impressive, and I felt a mixture of self-importance and stage-fright as I was standing by the wall, all by myself, opposite the sergeant-major in the full view of a hundred and fifty men and four officers.

'Markers, markers 'shun. Outward turn,' shouted Sgt.-Major Kerr. 'Six paces to the front, quick march.'

From the corner of my eyes I watched the five sergeants doing their little turn. They were old soldiers and moved like clockwork. After every six steps the sergeant behind touched the one in front of him on the shoulder and shouted 'up,' then made an about turn and jitterbugged into line with the one in front of him.

'Markers steady, stand at EASE.'

The men in their five separate groups still standing at ease, looked up like racehorses before the start.

'Two Troop 'shun. On Parade . . . FALL IN.'

They fell in.

'Two Troop 'shun. Check your roll.'

Then came a fast crescendo of 'stand at ease' and a loud babel in differing voices: the call of a hundred and fifty names.

'Two Troop 'shun. Report M.T.'

'All present, sir.'

' "A" sub.'

'Less two men on duty, sir.'

' "B" sub.'

'One to come in, sir.'

I felt cold round the heart. I must get the man's name. Where the hell is my pencil?

' "C" sub.'

'All pren, sir.'

' "D" sub.'

'Three to come in, sir.'

' "E" sub.'

'All present, sir.'

'Two Troop, 'shun.'

The sergeant-major made an about turn and marched up in the best Terrier tradition to the captain to report. When do I come in? After report he would dismiss the men, they would march off. Then I remembered that in the Training Regiment the Orderly N.C.O. collected the names of absentees before the sergeants reported to the sergeant-major. So I had missed my cue. Damn. Then the impulse came very quickly. As I saw the sergeant-major march off I had already jumped to attention, made an about turn and marched up to the sergeant of 'B' sub. I made such a dramatic performance and demanded the name of the missing man from the sergeant with so much authority that nobody noticed the slip. Then I marched up to the sergeant of 'D' sub and marched back to my place. I marched slowly and with dignity.

The sergeant-major had already finished his 'turn' with the captain and he saw me advancing to my place, head erect, arms swinging, shiny boots making a good deal of noise on the asphalt. He realised I was extemporising, but he was impressed; he waited until I came to a halt, made a half turn and from attention stood at ease. Then he began to roar.

'Two Troop, 'shun. N.C.O.s take charge, march off.'

Two Sergeants and the sergeant-major and I went up to the Troop office.

'Isn't he like an old regular?' said one of the sergeants.

'Aye,' said the other. 'Next you will become a sergeant in them Grenadier Guards. You like bullshit, don't you?'

'Was I very bad?' I asked.

'Don't listen to these boys, bombardier,' said the sergeant-major. 'They are only pulling your leg. I must say the captain looked up when he saw you marching and swinging your arms all by yourself. You have added a bit to the parade routine.'

I had about a quarter of an hour for morning break, but apart from that my whole day was spent running about, passing on orders and contacting people. Since the draft personnel was fairly large, the regiment was spread out. Three sub-sections were housed in an old skating rink which was almost a mile away from the Troop office. I had to run up there twice in the morning.

The usual trouble with a Regiment stationed in a town is that it must by necessity be regimental. There must be several strictly observed parades a day, and because of the close contact with the civilian population the men must always march wherever they go when on duty, and buttons must shine. I fully understood and appreciated all this, but after being in a Regiment tucked away in the Kentish Weald, this new place seemed like the Army. There was a breakfast parade at seven, a

general morning parade at 8.45, a dinner parade at 12.45, a general afternoon parade at 2.0 and a tea parade at 4.45.

After tea, I thought I could take the rest of the afternoon off so I lay down for forty winks. I felt very tired. I was, however, suddenly wakened up by one of the staff. I was to take over a newly-arrived contingent of men from Woolwich, march them down to the dining-hall, get them something to eat, then find them sleeping accommodation.

I put on my battledress blouse in a hurry and ran to the Battery office. The lorry was already there.

'Hullo, bombardier,' there came a chorus. I looked up. There were some five men from Home Details whom I had left at Woolwich a week ago, and ten others.

'I say, you are doing fine; hope you'll use your influence and get us plenty of grub, we are starving. What's the place like?'

I marched them down to the dining-hall, rang up 'the bloke that works in the Q stores' to get them an extra blanket and fixed up their quarters.

After that I returned to the Troop office waiting in case the telephone rang. It was now seven o'clock and it was rather boring. In the cupboard among torn copies of Artillery Training Memoranda, lectures on gas, small arms and health hints for men about to go out East, I found a much torn copy of *The Good Soldier Schweik* by Jaroslav Hasek. I began to read it. I like those few Czech authors I have read: Gustav Meyrink, Frantisek Langer, the two Capeks, Kozik, Jirî Mucha, and I always had a kind of admiration for the Czechs. They are a *bourgeois* race with all the pleasant *bourgeois* virtues and none of the tiresome virtues which make congenial contacts with other *bourgeois* races so difficult at times. I began to like them first because practically all my Hungarian friends were so hotly against them; then I visited Prague, met Czechs now and again and discovered them to be vital, humorous and intelligent.

At midnight, that is at twenty-three fifty-nine hours, I had to call the roll with a torch borrowed from the Stores. I got to bed at half-past twelve.

One must work for one's stripe.

There were pleasant people in the office. There were three tables. One occupied by the captain, one by the sergeant-major and the clerk, and one was shared between Bone and myself. Bone was a full bombardier, he was in charge of the M.T. Section and had two slaves, L/Bdr. Cooper, a young ex-costermonger from Kentish Town, with a splendid complexion and one kidney, and an elderly gunner called Butcher. Every five minutes their names would echo through the corridors.

A few days later a sergeant arrived and was added to the M.T. Section, Sgt. Franklin, but Bone remained head of it. It was the same in the office, which was run by Gunner Charles, who was supposed to be my boss. Charles was a full-blooded Cockney, he had been a bus driver released by the L.P.T.B., an even-tempered, humorous creature. He did all the bloody work and received no bloody thanks for it. His speciality was mis-spelling names, but only ordinary, everyday names. He never mis-spelt mine or that of Gunner Galitzenstein or Przibislavsky, who were two East Enders. But he mis-spelt Ferguson, Cartlidge, Gardiner, Chamberlain, Eyre and Lister, the lance-bombardiers. Bone said once he managed to mis-spell the name of Bdr. Jones, too.

We lance-bombardiers took our turn to be Orderly N.C.O.s. It worked out about once a week. In the meantime I would sit in the office trying to take up gunnery from that grand book *The Artillery Manual*, the Gunner's Bible, and in between times I would run out on various errands.

Then more people arrived from the Home Details via Woolwich —Frankie Verity, who on his first night in Nottingham had discovered a 'marvellous dance-hall' and hastened to let me know which; Smith the giant, and two or three others. They were, however, posted to 'B' Battery.

My sleeping quarters were changed again. I left the melancholy church hall, so reminiscent of the background against which Little Nell died, and was to move into a room in a small private house next to the Troop office. I was to be in charge of nine men. It was then that I met Bdr. Brown.

I was alone in the empty room, busy sorting out my belongings and taking the best place—by the window—when a young N.C.O. entered. He gave the room a quick searching glance with anxiety and despair on his face.

'You seem to have lost something,' I said.

'Oh, it's nothing really . . .' He smiled a painful smile. 'It must have dropped out when they shifted my stuff . . .'

'What was it?'

'Oh, just a cigarette packet . . . But there were no cigarettes in it . . . It really doesn't matter . . .'

'Was it a box that had *Canadian* cigarettes in it by any chance?'

He flushed as I said 'Canadian.' 'Did you find it?'

I walked up to the window and took the box out of my greatcoat pocket.

'I found it on the floor and after I opened it I couldn't very well take it to the Troop office as *lost property* . . .'

'You are really very nice.' He went a deep scarlet. 'I don't know how to thank you.'

'If I may say so it was the worst possible idea to put it into an empty cigarette box.'

'I know it was foolish . . . You must think me foolish.'

'Well, no, except that it's the wrong shade and you don't really need it . . .'

The door was pushed in. Four of my men arrived sweating and swearing under the weight of their kit. They looked at the room then at once made for the corners.

'You been here long?' asked the bombardier.

'About a week.'

'I've been here three months, but I am in Three Troop.' He paused for a second, then he said abruptly : 'Well, thanks again.' He smiled and turned round to go. His shoulders looked wide in the doorway . . . 'And what shoulders, and what art, could twist the sinews of thy heart . . .?'

'That's the M.T. bombardier from Three Troop, isn't it, Bomb?' asked Chapman, who parked his stuff next to mine.

'I've never met him before. They've just moved out of this room.'

'I thought I knew his face. I was in Three Troop before . . . I've never seen a bloke with such long eyelashes . . . A girl would be proud of 'em . . .'

'D'you know his name?'

'Bdr. Brown, I think, yes, Bdr. Brown. He is the best Don R. in the Regiment, does any amount of tricks on them motor-bikes. He is very shy though . . . I thought I recognised him . . . Have you got such a thing as a fag, Bomb?'

At tea, later in the afternoon, I was sitting next to L/Bdr. Armstrong, my opposite number in Three Troop.

'I was shifted into one of your houses,' I said.

'It was originally yours, we only had some of our M.T. men there, but they've all gone to Tennyson Street.'

'Is Bdr. Brown running your M.T.?'

'Yes.'

'I hear he is hot on motor-bikes.'

'He is. Only took it up two years ago. He's very good, but speed-mad. He has already fractured his leg once—last year. That's why he is on the permanent staff, you see his leg makes him temporarily B seven.'

'I met him this morning. Seems a pleasant sort of individual . . .'

'He's all right I s'pose if you get to know him. The men don't like

him, he's a funny bloke. Very independent like. Never chums up with anyone. Always walks out with a Canadian from O.'

The orderly from the Troop office walked up to me.

' 'Scuse me, Bomb. Mr. Selby wants to see you in the Institute after tea.'

'Who on earth is Mr. Selby?'

'He is in "B" Battery. Wears glasses and limps a bit.'

'Oh, yes.'

From the description I recognised the Education Officer of the Regiment whom I met two days previously with Sgt. Burns, the Education Sergeant. He was a charming young man, with a serious belief in education in the Army.

I washed my plates and walked down to the Institute. The room was thick with cigarette smoke. Mr. Selby asked me whether I would like to give a lecture to the draft personnel on any subject I chose. 'You are trying to get a transfer to the A.E.C., aren't you?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Have you got any subjects ready?'

'Well, not really, but I could work out a talk on a few subjects. What about a talk on travel, on economics, or on literature?'

'Travel would be the best . . .'

'A talk on Central Europe?'

'Excellent. Next Tuesday at half past three? That leaves you five days.'

'You don't want any lantern slides?' asked the sergeant.

'No, the bombardier can illustrate it with his words. Well, it's fixed then. Next Tuesday. Talk for about half an hour, then answer questions. Right. I must be going. We'd better return those gramophone records, sergeant. You can't get gunners interested in music if you plunge them into Prokofieff and Debussy. We shall have Mozart, the Unfinished Symphony first and the Grieg Concerto. Right. Good-bye.'

'This is Ross,' said the sergeant when Mr. Selby was gone.

Ross was a young soldier, a painter in Civvy Street, who was attached to the Institute. He was about five foot one and had a large pair of dark brown eyes and a husky, Scottish voice.

'He has also made an application for a transfer,' said the sergeant.

'D'you think we shall get in?' I asked.

'I don't know. My hopes are very faint . . .'

'Are those your paintings?' I asked as the sergeant had gone.

'Yes. Tell me what you think about them.'

I walked up to the wall.

'Be as frank as you like.'

'You bet I shall be. Well, that Modigliani is not bad as Modiglianis go . . .'

'You know I've never seen a Modigliani except in photographs.'

'That I can quite well believe. The colours are your own or shall we say Gauguin. Shall we say Gauguin? . . . I am trying to be quite fair. It's obvious that a young man like you would be under some influence and the fact that a good painter's influence is shown in your work is in itself encouraging. Later on, you will walk alone and let off the hands you are at present clutching. How old are you?'

'Twenty-one.'

'Oh, well. The most natural thing.'

'Bonnington was twenty-five when he died,' said Ross. He said this four hours later. We had walked out and had supper and were now passing the museum in front of which there is a marble statue of Bonnington, who was born in Nottingham.

I put my hand on Ross's shoulder.

'By the time you are twenty-five you might paint as well as Bonnington,' I said. 'I must have sounded awfully grown up when I talked about your pictures. I can't help it. I'm thirty-five, and nothing isolates people as completely as their age.'

'Or neurasthenia,' said Ross.

By then we were friends already. We had talked for four hours about art, literature, the Army, politics, psycho-analysis, the superiority of the Scot over the Sassenach, then again about the Army, the war, foreign travel, snobbery, education, women, and finally about the Army. He told me he had spent six months with the Regiment, was on general duties and almost went mad, then finally Mr. Selby got him a job as an assistant to the Education Sergeant. He took small classes when the sergeant was away and organised discussion groups. He was B2 on account of his flat feet. That was his only chance to get into the A.E.C. The regulations said either low medical category or over the age of thirty-three.

## 'WITHOUT DRAGROPES'

My lecture made me feel good all over. I spent two afternoons preparing it, then I went to the lecture hall after the morning parade for a rehearsal. The hall was large: it was part of a former school building. There were some fifty benches in it, a table, a stand with a map of Europe and another stand on which I would place my notes.

I went through the talk, then I spoke the opening words. Then I went through it again. I decided I should pretend to hesitate before bringing in an unfamiliar operative word. Acoustics were excellent. I decided I would take up my position in front of the dais, but I would not lean on the desk. I must tell Ross not to sit in the front row. He might put me off. And I must write out the chairman's speech for Mr. Kauntze. It should be short.

'Central Europe might play a very important part in the course of this war . . .' Yes, that was the proper line.

'. . . Central Europe might play a very important part in the course of this war,' said Mr. Kauntze with much conviction, three hours later, . . . 'and Mr. de Hegedus has kindly come to give us a talk on it . . .'

'*Mister*,' I thought. Quick promotion. But he did not notice the slip. He turned round and sat down in the front row next to another officer.

The room was full. There were nearly two hundred of them, faces young and old, eager and bored. I did not seem to be conscious that they were all watching me now. I *was* conscious. Slowly I advanced from behind the stand. I knew exactly how far I would walk. I would take my time. When I arrived at the passage between the two rows I would raise my head and in a leisurely manner I would begin to speak. I knew there would be no hitch. I knew all my nervousness would leave me the moment I stepped on the stage. The stage it was.

'Gentlemen of the Royal Artillery,' I said, 'this afternoon we shall leave this country for a short while. We shall travel to a part of Europe which is not well known to us. It is an interesting world; it is colourful, it is passionate. It is a world where people take everything desperately seriously: politics, food, women, even themselves.' I paused here for two seconds. 'A talk like this, you know, usually begins with the following words: "Let-us-look-at-the-map-of-Europe." Well,' I smiled and half turned towards the map behind me, 'let us look at it . . .'

I turned my back and walked up to the map. I heard polite laughter behind me. Timing, so far, was satisfactory, but not as good as it ought to have been. I made a wide gesture on the map with my left hand, turning half-way towards the audience. Then I left the map again and embarked on a few historical facts.

I was still a little too impersonal. I still seemed not to notice that they were there, then little by little I took stock of them. Nobody looked bored, thank goodness, so the contact was there all right. I addressed a sentence to a man in the third row, then I took my eyes off him, very slowly and looked at another. I recognised a few of the

draft N.C.O.s, and one or two of the men I had seen before. It was perfectly all right now. They noticed that I was a pro and they must have felt unconsciously that my line was that lecturing and public speaking is a craft which has its technical tricks and a craft which amateurs ought not to be allowed to indulge in. They must have noticed that I had stage-managed and 'produced' the whole talk, that there was nothing extemporised, nothing left to chance, that this was not an impromptu affair. They must have noticed when I looked at my watch fifteen minutes later that I looked at it as if in obeyance to a dramatic instruction. It was four-fifteen. I gave a summing up of what I had said and as I went through this I saw Bombardier Brown in the last row, intent, interested, looking in my direction, but not looking at me. Then it was over.

I said I would be glad to answer questions. This was a cue to Ross to get up and ask the first question. I almost signalled to him like a conductor 'waving-in' the kettledrum. He sounded timid. I had to repeat his question a little louder. Then came questions shrewd and naïve, one after the other, some thirty of them, officers, N.C.O.s, men. It was long past tea-time. I felt delighted. Finally a beautiful applause.

Ross said as we were having tea that he overheard one of my audience saying to another: 'How does a lance-jack know so much about that sort of thing? Just a lance-jack . . .'

I met Bdr. Brown later in the afternoon as I walked through the Arboretum.

'Thank you for coming,' I said. 'How did you know I was lecturing?'

'I saw it on our notice board. You've done some public speaking before.'

'A certain amount. What did the men think?'

'That it was so different from the average Army lecture.'

'Where are you going?'

'Just anywhere. Lovely day.'

'Let's go down to the grotto and lie in the sun,' I said.

I noticed how spotless his turn-out was: his trousers beautifully ironed, his boots shining, his anklets scrubbed. He wore a peaked cap which suited him very well.

He pulled out a packet of *Sweet Caporals*. 'Try one of these.'

'Thanks. How d'you get them?'

'From a friend.'

'He isn't free this afternoon.'

'No. He's on duty . . . How d'you know?'

'I don't know. But I guessed.'

'Do people talk about me?'

'Yes. They say you are very good on motor-bikes.'

'Is that all?'

'And that you are very reserved. That I fully understand . . .'

'You understand me, don't you?'

'Not as much as I'd really like to.'

'Because I don't quite understand myself either.'

'I don't expect you do.'

'Sometimes all my actions seem so very clear. At other times they are just a jumble. Especially at night. At night I feel funny.'

'It's easy to be hard-boiled in the morning, but at night that's another thing.'

He smiled. 'That's very good.'

'Comes from an American novel.'

'I thought it was your own.'

'No. Hemingway. But I think you are hard-boiled in the morning all the same.'

'Yes. In the morning I'm the bullying N.C.O.'

'That I don't believe.'

'It's true. Ask anybody. I swear a lot.'

'So do I. But most people swear in the Army.'

'No. I'm really tough.'

'Outwardly, yes. It's a very strange thing,' I said looking at a church spire in the distance. 'It somehow does not fit in . . . Your whole appearance . . . all that is visible . . . the most strangely misleading, contradictory . . .'

'It's on purpose.'

'Yes. I believe that. But why? Self defence?'

'What you may not know about me is that I am putting up a terrific fight. I may be beaten in the end, but I'm trying not to give in.'

'You mean you realise that you are made one way and you are struggling against it.'

'Yes. I know that I am different. I have known it ever since I was a kid and I made up my mind that I would fight against it even if it's impossible.'

'Because people think it's ugly?'

'No, because I am frightened of it. It isn't really ugly . . .' He made an impatient movement with his hand then lightly, very lightly, he shrugged one shoulder: 'I don't know. But it frightens me. That is why I took such trouble to be strong in the body. I was a little weed when I was a kid, and I was not keen on games, soccer and cricket and the rest. I forced myself to play them. I hardened my body. I still

get up every morning at six and have a cold shower. Later I took up boxing and wrestling and baseball and I played ice-hockey too. I s'pose you think I am silly . . .'

'Not the least. I begin to understand you. All this is clear and logical. How old are you?'

'Twenty-three.'

'You look older. I s'pose preoccupation with machinery . . .'

'Does that make you look older?'

'It does. Look at all the Air Crews in the R.A.F. They are all matured beyond their years. Pilots chiefly . . .'

'That's what I wanted to be, a pilot.'

'What happened?'

'Turned down on account of my eyesight. Something wrong with my left eye. I didn't know it. I was ever so cut up about it. I wanted so much to become a pilot and I would have made a good pilot too.'

'Yes. And it would have made you happier. All that preoccupation with danger and adventure. You wouldn't have found time to think of your personal problems . . .'

'And it would have been so easy to end my life. Just shot down and finished . . .'

'The beautiful death . . . '

'It isn't that. Sometimes I really wish I was dead.'

'What on earth for? You are twenty-three, a very good athlete, a very good soldier, intelligent, good looking . . .'

'Yes, but just come to think of it. I'm all right while the war is on. I volunteered for two drafts because I want to fight, I want to be in action. I was turned down because I had an accident six months ago, but my leg is getting better. Supposing I come back when the war is over. What am I to do?'

'Can't you go back to your old job? What did you do in Civvy Street?'

'I was a pawnbroker and jeweller.'

'You surely can go back to that.'

'It isn't the job. I'll be all right financially. I'm the only one at home and Father has the business, but . . . no, it's hopeless.'

'Nothing is hopeless. You talk as if you had an incurable disease.'

'Well, isn't it one?'

'A very relative matter . . . a good doctor could do a good deal.'

'You mean psycho-analysis? I don't believe in it . . . I read about it. It's something to do with glands.'

'But surely there is no harm in going to see a doctor.'

'I s'pose not. Now, I think you know everything about me . . .'

'A good deal, but I should still like to know more.'

'Go on. Ask me.'

'Well, it's something very personal. But like so many writers I am curious to the point of tactlessness.'

'What is it?' His voice was intent, earnest.

'The thing I found in the cigarette packet.'

'You think it's silly of me . . .'

'I don't in the least. But it is so unlike what you look like and what you tell me about yourself . . . or perhaps it isn't. Well, I asked a nasty personal question . . .'

I looked at Bombardier Brown. He was playing with his cap-badge.

'Well, if you want to know I use it because I have no colour at all. No matter what a healthy life I lead my face always looks like a plum pudding . . .'

'Matter of fact it doesn't, really. Still, *you* think so. But why should it make a difference? You mean you feel you have to improve your looks . . . because of . . . somebody . . .?'

'No. I feel I must improve my looks, because of myself . . . Because I feel that as long as I look well and attractive I won't fall for anybody . . . You think it's silly . . .'

'I don't. I think it's a case of Narcissism. I s'pose you would be very unhappy if you were ugly or say an accident should spoil your looks.'

'Yes, I would. Three years ago I broke one of my front teeth boxing. I felt awful about it . . . You wouldn't guess I have a false tooth, would you?'

'I don't think anybody would guess. It's very well made.'

I looked at the grotto very intensely.

'So you noticed it.'

'The first time I saw you.' I gazed at the grotto demonstratively. 'It's the upper left central incisor . . . isn't it? But I don't think anyone would notice it . . .'

'The Army dentist didn't. You are very observant.'

'I'm interested in personal features. Part of my stock-in-trade.'

'Now you know everything about me.'

'No, but I won't ask any more embarrassing questions.'

'Oh, carry on. I don't mind.'

'This time it isn't about you.'

'Who then?'

'Your friend. What's he like?'

'Oh, Joe. He's a Canadian. I met him at the Y.M.C.A. soon after I came here. He's older than I am, but not much. You see he's someone who doesn't know anything about himself . . . or anything about me. He's married and he's very fond of his wife and his children.

Whenever we are free we are always together. We walk out. Sometimes we don't say a word for hours. But he would do anything for me, I know. And I would do anything for him too.'

'You like him . . .'

'Yes, very much, but I shall never tell him . . .'

'You mustn't.'

'You see we are both of us very lonely . . .'

'Doesn't he dance? Canadians generally do.'

'No, he says he's too bashful.'

'D'you dance?'

'Not much. I don't like it. Do you?'

'I love dancing.'

'You like music too?'

'Yes, though I am not musical really. Are you?'

'Well, I can play the piano, but I only like to play jazz . . . not serious music.'

'Why not?'

'I don't know.' He went on playing with his cap-badge. 'It makes me sort of afraid. Silly, isn't it?'

'Not in the least,' I looked up. 'Very interesting. It's completely in terms with your character. You hit the nail on the head when you said you were *afraid* of it. I have a friend, a Hungarian writer, who has a theory about the dangers of music. It is a very real danger, or it can be. Music, you see, is like X-rays or infra-red rays. It can cure you, but it can also destroy you. It all depends on you, on your mental state and on the dose. Music can cure a disease in your emotional tissues but it can also cause a malignant tumour there. Music, you see, can explore diseased areas which can never be reached by the surgeon's knife. It can renew a painful wound which has for a long time been numb, quite forgotten under the layers of time. You are afraid of good music because you instinctively feel that it would take you to the deep where there is no law and order, to the deep where there are nothing but facts engaged in an eternal and undecided battle against each other. And you are afraid of music because you cannot argue with it. Music is not like books, literature, you cannot defend yourself against it. What a little *allegro* tells you, you must accept, as if it were a missed moment of your life. You may say: "All I want is to walk out in the Arboretum with Joe." Beethoven, however, roars the meaning of your life with trombones and twelve violins into your ear: he shouts at you what you *really* would like to do. Music is an attack on your mind, a kind of raid against which you cannot put into action the twenty-five pounders of your intellect. The target, you see, is invisible. And Sergeant Moynihan would tell you how important the target in

gunnery is. Cordite and H.E. one . . . one . . . seven . . . . charge three, or even supercharge, is useless against it . . .'

'God, how right you are . . .'

'It's not me. The theory belongs to Alexander Márai. He's a great writer. You see, a writer, a great writer like Márai, knows much more about the mind than a scientist. Science is still in its infancy. It's just feeling its way about, with its primitive "reductions" and simplifications. Most of the symptoms of emotional life are so very tiny and so very slippery that they cannot be caught in the meshes of what science calls "rational recognition." Some are caught, the rest slips away through the meshes, the meshes are too large. Such things can so far be rendered conscious only by the artist. The thing is called "intuition". That is, to my mind, one of the very greatest functions of literature, of good literature: to show the real motives of action . . .' I smiled. 'Now you have heard another lecture by me. Shall we have supper?'

'I'm not really hungry,' said Brown as he got up and tucked his trousers down over his anklets and put his cap on and plucked off pieces of dried grass clinging to his battledress, 'but I'll go with you. You know I'm very glad I met you,' he said, then promptly felt that his statement was somehow inadequate. He added: 'I mean it very seriously.' He looked very serious as he walked down the hill with me, his toes turned sightly inward. 'You understand me more than anybody else . . .'

'I don't know about that. It's my business to understand people, provided that the people in question interest me. You do. I can understand you more or less because of my intellect. Emotionally I can only understand you if I look back into my past, when I was sixteen or seventeen. One's life is then something like a train hesitating between various lines; it bumps and shakes as it goes through the junction, then you take the direction to which the people in the junction-box had set your train. Everybody goes through it. It is a mysterious stage. It is the difficult stage . . . The trouble with me is that I can follow your actions, but my reactions are cold. Almost scientific.' (*Le désert de l'intelligence*, I thought and smiled an inward, bitter smile.) 'You neither repel me, nor do you make me laugh, but that's all. The thing is that I am somehow inhuman. I just can't help it. It sounds awful but I regard you as raw material. Please don't despise me for it. I can't help it. It's now I who am confessing to you. I am to some extent inhuman and cold. Looking for copy all the time. I can't help it . . . And the writer is lonely. The job has gratifications, but it has dreadful drawbacks. The writer, you see, is not allowed to live. I may be wrong about that, I am a beginner, but I'm afraid I

shall be right. The writer is only allowed to write. He is given a key to the House of Life. Or he acquires his key (in my case I might as well tell you that I forged a skeleton key), and he can enter the House of Life, sniff round, look at the furniture, the wallpaper, open the drawers, peep inside the pans in the kitchen, look into the dirty linen box. He can look and peep and sniff round, but he is not allowed to stay there permanently . . .'

We had supper in the Empire Rendezvous over Montague Burton and overlooking the long, meandering Trent Bridge Road. We were joined by Jaromir Blahunka, the Czech pilot. Brown was very silent now. He shook hands solemnly with Jaromir and hardly said a word at the table. I had met Jaromir on the second day after my arrival at Nottingham. Then we had talked about our favourite subject: the new world and a United States of Europe. One night we were so busy discussing the shape of things to come that he missed his last bus and I forgot that I promised Cartlidge I would call the roll for him. Jaromir was the son of a miner from Tabor and he himself had worked for three years in a French coal-mine before the war. He was very intelligent. You could feel his background; the cultural ambitions and aspirations of his race; the finest Slavonic race on earth, that striving against formidable odds to become good Europeans, and good democrats. They did not succeed, but one day they might. Jaromir and I usually talked in French, after his unsuccessful attempts to try to find the correct word in English. His French was very good and his culture had none of the traces of a culture acquired at nights when the heavy work in the mine was done, poring over books under the light in a bare bedroom in Clermont-Ferrand. It had few of the mannerisms of the culture of the self educated: it was the quality of the mind.

I liked Jaromir very much. He read hard and thought hard, but he had no desire to rise out of his class. He liked things of the mind just for their own sake. He was an idealist like so many Czechs.

It was nearly eleven. I was back in the room. It was warm, but there was a slight breeze with the inevitable scent of raw tobacco in it. What was going to be Bdr. Brown's fate? His was a case that could easily become tragic. Time can mend things, yes, but it can also make things worse. And Brown was a singularly honest man. He was beautifully genuine and serious among a type of humanity who are very rarely genuine and seldom serious, simply because they cannot be. Simply because their emotions do not allow it. I admired him for his attitude, but all the same I felt sorry for him, because he was struggling against something which was almost inevitable. Or

was it? Would something, could something give him a sudden push towards what is known as the 'right' direction? To stay at the inter-sexual stage at twenty-three is rare, you might almost take it that the development had stopped and sooner or later he would follow the 'wrong' direction. I shrugged my mental shoulders. Again I was feeling sorry for him. I did not admit to him that he said the terrible truth when he said, 'I'm all right now, but what would happen if I grow older?' Yes, what would happen to him? Inversion is one of the greatest and one of the most attractive mysteries of life. And the most tragic.

Chapman next to me began to snore. His snore was high-pitched and prolonged. He seemed to snore variations on a given theme. Still he wasn't quite as bad as Midwinter who used to sleep next to me in the Church Hall. I always suspected that Midwinter had put a microphone and a loudspeaker under his palliasse to amplify his snoring. I took off my boots by the moonlight, put my trousers under the blanket I was sleeping on, then I went out again barefoot to clean my teeth. I was feeling tired.

I had a very heavy day. Sergeant Moynihan went out to the Firing Camp and the sergeant-major said I was to take Moynihan's sub-section, some twenty-two men, on marching and rifle drill all the morning.

I was a little uneasy about the job. Some of Sergeant Moynihan's men were regular soldiers and I wasn't too certain about my rifle drill.

I made them draw rifles from the Q Stores, then I made them form up in front of the building.

'Take them down to the Goose Fair, bombardier,' said the captain who was looking on. 'I shall come down later.'

'Yes, sir,' I jumped to attention. 'Form up.'

They formed up.

'Party . . . party 'SHUN.'

'Take that grin off your face, you there,' shouted the captain. I felt pleased. He was backing me up. I noticed he always backed up his junior N.C.O.s, when they needed backing.

'Turnings at the halt,' I shouted . . . 'Right TURN.'

They turned like clockwork, feeling the Captain behind them.

'Party will advance . . . to the right . . . quick MARCH.'

They moved.

'Eyyyes LEFT.'

I hurried to my place, some way behind the last rank, and saluted rather stiffly.

'Eyes front, please,' said the Captain.

'Eyes FRONT.'

We marched down Waterloo Road, crossed the roadway and marched through the Park. We passed a group of soldiers standing on the lawn around a Bren gun. I noticed a young officer and shouted 'Eyes Right' so loudly that he jumped to attention as he saluted me back.

Reaching the Goose Fair I told them to fall out and made them place their rifles against the railings then I marched them down. There was a gun lecture going on and I saw a draft officer. I decided to go into the far corner, where there was some shade and few passers-by. I went through all my repertory of marching drill. Luckily there were some half a dozen men who were not quite as good as the bulk of the squad.

'It's quite good,' I said standing them at ease, 'but some of you lag behind the others. Take your time. There is no hurry. When we do "Salute to the Front" again, would somebody count out loud? It makes it easier. Clapham, will you do the counting?'

'Yes, Bomb.'

'Party, 'shun. About Turn. Quick march.'

I was counting their steps, left-right, left-right, because 'Salute to the Front' must come on the left foot. They were now almost outside shouting distance. I roared:

'Salute to the front. Salute.'

'One-two-three,' shouted Clapham. 'One . . . Two . . . Three . . . Four.' They made an about turn. 'One-two-three,' they shouted again and marched on.

'Party, Halt.'

'Well, it's a hundred per cent. better. Stand easy . . . and I really mean it. It's a question of practice. One or two still try to hurry it up, but you'll get into it again. We'll do it again then we will stop for a smoke.'

Clapham came up to me to ask for a light.

'D'you know, Bomb, you gave the order on the wrong foot.'

We stood against the wall. It was cool. There was a bluish haze over the Goose Fair and the slight breeze brought the smell of tobacco from the nearby cigarette factory.

Some distance from us six men were running about a twenty-five pounder. I saw a young sergeant kneeling on his right knee on the ground, and raising his arm from time to time.

'Troop target,' there came the order faintly . . . 'H.E. one one seven, charge three . . .'

The sergeant raised his arm three times and repeated the three orders.

'Zero line four O degrees . . . One four hundred . . . Left ranging.'

The six men turned and switched and played about the lever and the dial sight with gusto. They were old gunners. Some of them saw action in France, like Clapham.

'Fire.'

'Fire,' roared the sergeant.

I heard the metallic thud as they opened the breech and the charge jumped out. I looked at my watch.

'Well, put out your fags. We shall go through the whole show before the morning break. We'll do slow march. Form up.'

'Party will advance. To the right, Quick March.'

I let them advance a little then I began to count their steps, left-right, left-right. 'Party will break into slow time,' I shouted. I was getting husky, 'Slow *March*!'

It was on the correct foot, thank goodness. They halted and began to do the slow march. I hurried up to them.

'Party, halt! . . . Honestly, I thought you wouldn't forget it in such a short time. None of you seem to have any sense of time. Come on, wake yourself up. Stand at ease . . . the whole thing is beautifully simple. It's a question of timing. Look, I shall demonstrate it to you first. Sort yourselves out so that you can see me. Stand easy. Now look here. It's an even, rhythmical step, the simplest thing on earth. You start with your right foot. Look at me.'

I took up my position opposite them.

'You start with your right foot. Kick. Left . . . Right . . . Left . . . Right . . . Left . . . It's really nothing . . .'

I made them do about turn, made them break into quick march, changing step on the march, then I gave them an order to get their rifles. I was a little nervous about rifle drill.

'Slope ARMS!' I shouted. I was losing my voice.

'Again you seem to disagree. There are three distinct movements. You better count again, Clapham. Give me your rifle. Look, this is the simplest thing on earth. Stand easy.'

I went through the movement of the order. I was confident. I knew this. But what about the rest: 'For inspection port arms, on guard, sentry go drill on the march' . . . I was certain I would bugger it up.

I made them repeat slope arms and shoulder arms and to express my satisfaction on the improvement I gave them 'For inspection port arms.'

'As you were. Well, of course it's complicated and easy to forget. Again, you must take your time. And your *middle* finger's got to touch the disc on the butt, Reilly . . . *not* your thumb . . . Clapham, you are very good. Quite an old soldier. Would you like to come out and demonstrate? Say aloud what you're doing.'

His pleasure at being singled out broke through his shyness and it seemed that the twenty men had forgotten I had asked him to demonstrate because I was sure to make a mess of it. I was becoming an old soldier myself.

'Give the order to yourself, that's the best.'

He went through the whole show.

I saw that the men around the gun had packed up for the morning break. I looked at my watch.

'Thank you, Clapham. I say, boys, I'm sorry. I've kept you two minutes too long. It's breaktime. We will make it up on the tail end of it. We go up to the hut on the edge. It's a waste of time to go to the Naafi. Fall out.'

I gave them a good thirty-five minutes. We had tea in jam jars that were hot to hold and the tea was very strong and very sweet. You generally had good tea in Nottingham.

Then I marched them back to the Parade Ground and went through rifle drill. When I thought I had grasped all that I had forgotten, I took over from Clapham.

I saw the captain coming down the lane, playing with his stick. I decided in a hurry to change over to marching drill. There was plenty of time to put the rifles away. He inspected the gun drill first and must have made a funny remark, because there came a loud crescendo of laughter from the guns.

'Look out, boys. The captain is coming. Smarten yourself up. Party will advance. To the right, Quick March. Left, right. Left, right . . . left, right, left, left . . . left . . . Changing step on the march. Change . . . STEP . . . You are jumping it too much in the back row. Take your time from the men in front of you. Change . . . STEP . . . That's a hundred per cent. better . . . Right Wheel. . . . Party will break into slow time. Slow . . . MARCH . . . Now look here'—I ran up to them —'you seem to forget what you've done so well this morning. Take your time. It's all timing. It's got a rhythm. Halt. I'll show it to you again. You must select a point up in the air and fix your eyes on it. Now form a semi-circle round me.'

I ran back about fifteen yards. 'Kick,' I shouted. I raised my head, pushed out my chest and began to slow march, a little like an automaton. I gained confidence by the captain's presence though I was certain it was hard for him not to smile.

'Now,' I said as I came to a halt in front of them. 'D'you think you'd do it?'

'Yes, Bomb.'

'Right. Let's see. Only don't hurry it, else you get into each other's way. Slow March . . .'

I felt quite proud of them. It was only eight months ago I went through all these things myself in Yorkshire.

The captain left. It was nearly noon. As he disappeared round the bend of the hill I fell them out for a smoke.

I could only whisper now. My voice was hoarse. I reflected that I should march them out somewhere in the afternoon and do map reading and orientation. I would see the Q about maps of the district, and compasses. We would go out somewhere outside the town taking our time, and come back just before tea. There was a little breeze. It brought the sounds of traffic from the Mansfield Road.

A few days later Ross came up to me to say that our application had been forwarded to the Command. It would take some time, but in the meantime we could not be posted.

Well, that was something concrete at least. Something was happening, good or evil. I would be either accepted or rejected. The thing reminded me that I was not past caring. I had felt very depressed for the last three days. Weather was bad, too. I'm 'different,' yes. An individualist, yes; an intellectual to some intent and purposes, yes; but all the same my mental outlook had much in common with say Chapman's outlook, who was not 'different', not an individualist, not the slightest bit intellectual. Yet he felt exactly the same sense of frustration. He wanted to be active, 'to get on with the job', and we both felt we were being prevented. We were not allowed any scope. That was the thing that made me browned off.

## 'BLITHE SPIRIT'

THE DRAFT was leaving. I had to call Sergeant Ryan at five in the morning in the Skating Rink. It was quite light over the Mansfield Road; strange, unreal and beautiful.

He smiled up at me. He was five foot two:

'You needn't have troubled, bombardier. I'm up already.'

He was a grand fellow, Ryan. He was twenty-two and had been a full sergeant for over six months already. He was very efficient and cheerful, a trifle too regimental perhaps, and he had a squeaky voice. He loved the Army. He was the type you read about in the papers in connection with 'conspicuous gallantry'.

Bombardiers Galloway and McLeod were angry that they were put off the draft. They wanted to go. Both were old soldiers. They had both started as drummers at the age of fifteen, had served in India, both were

good cricketers, both were tough and bright and keen. They were old friends and somehow they always got posted together.

'You know, Spaghetti,' McLeod would tell me, 'you know nothing about the Army till you get to a place like India.'

'Why?'

'It's different . . . see. It's business. It's real soldiering.'

'What about France?'

'Well, what about it?'

'Wasn't that real soldiering? Dunkirk and the rest?'

'Well, I s'pose it was, but,' he shook his head, 'it's different in India. Och,' he smiled and got a little excited and lapsed into the accents of his early youth, 'It's a grrand life. It's hard, but it's a grrand life, Spaghetti . . .'

'Don't you like living in England?'

'Give me India every time.'

He was a pro, McLeod was, and so was his friend Galloway. Their personalities were incomprehensible and attractive. They were real soldiers, they were both young, but there was something of the 'British Soldier' in them, the regular Tommy, which takes you back quite a long way. They were really mercenaries. Men who sold themselves but sold themselves because they liked soldiering. There was nothing stupid about them, nothing raw and nothing unfeeling. They were in fact quite sentimental, both of them. But they were different, not only from me, but different from all the other civilians in uniform. Our contact was friendly, but all the same I felt as if I were translating my thoughts into their language, as if I were talking a language I was not quite familiar with.

Since the Draft left, there was no further need for more than one man in the office and I was put back into the subsection. We were on gun drill. Standing gun drill is not a very interesting pastime, because it is unreal, yet I was quite glad. My application for transfer to the A.E.C. might fail, for all I knew. It would be a very serious blow to me because by now I realised that this was my real place in the Army. Lectures, talks, discussion groups was the thing I could do and was burning to do —the line along which I could make myself really useful and the line which for the duration could make me really happy. But still, I might fail. I was to go before a board and its members might not take a liking to me. I understood that the interview lasted about five minutes.

It would be a hard blow if I did not succeed; I should feel as if I had been knocked down, but still I should be in the Army, war must go on, life must go on, the guns must fire and there was something about gunnery I liked. Something that appealed to me, appealed to me perhaps because it was not 'my line'. It was 'manual' work, towards

which I always felt a strange, sentimental attraction. Well then, if I failed as an educator I would try to be a gunner. It was a poor alternative, because I knew that the glory would soon wear off and after a time firing a gun would become dull routine like peeling potatoes, and the sense of danger which would brace me in the beginning would become a dull routine too. My interest would flag and I should not be giving myself in gunnery as I would have given myself in lecturing. And it would not have the beauty of piloting a Spitfire with a greater, more dramatic and more romantic danger about it. But still.

As a matter of fact there were gunnery courses going on in the Regiment. They lasted about ten weeks, and if you passed you were given two substantiated stripes, and pay as full bombardier. Two stripes which could not be taken off you except by court martial. Then if they decided that I was a good artillery N.C.O. I might be recommended for a commission in the Artillery.

I took notes all the morning we were out and I went on taking notes as the sergeant took us later to one of the dining-halls in the afternoon and demonstrated the workings of the gun's firing mechanism, taking the striker-body to pieces. It had fourteen parts. I am not technically-minded, but machinery attracts me and though I am not really good I am not so clumsy with machinery as men whose main interest is the workings of a far more complicated machinery: the human mind. My memory helped a lot and when we came to the 'naming of parts' I could reel off about ten out of the fourteen names: body-locking-pin, clasp, firing pin . . . collar, locking-bolt, cocking-pin . . .

Two days later an invitation came for me to go and have tea at T., some fifteen miles from Nottingham. It was through an old friend of mine, who wrote to me about T. and its hostess, Lady M. She wrote that T. was quite a famous house; one of the Dukeries of which, since Clumber was pulled down, only four stood, and she said that Lady M. was a very charming woman, an accomplished painter and though she was English she was a kinswoman of the Roosevelts. I decided I would go. Writing was out of the question, soldiering became a dull routine with very occasional highspots, real friendships in the Regiment were impossible because one never knew when one would be posted at five minutes' notice. I needed 'change' and it seemed, after my friend's letter, that T. might supply it. It did.

I got off the bus at the wrong place and I had to walk through the whole estate, part of which was taken by the Army. I had to walk two miles. Finally I arrived at the house. I saw a boy in tennis shorts sitting on the lawn. 'I say, sonny, which is the proper entrance?' I asked, sweating, angry, but pretending to be cheerful.

'On the left,' he smiled and pointed his hand towards it.

Luckily I was early. Lady M. came down and said everybody was at the tennis-court. We went to the courts. A group of young men were playing tennis or sitting on the lawn, chatting, smoking. I met the host and a married couple, who were friends of mine. They introduced me to a charming old gentleman. He was a Duke.

As we went into the library for tea we were joined by the young man in tennis shorts whom I had addressed as 'sonny.' He was a captain.

After tea the Duke and my friend came up to us; we were sitting at a table with the 'young 'uns.' My friend asked how I was doing in the Army. I told her. The Duke smiled. 'Tell me quite frankly what you think of officers. A good many fools among them, eh . . .'

'I don't know. Those I have met I respected for their knowledge.'

I felt very uneasy but not so uneasy as the five other young men. Their ages varied between twenty-two and twenty-six, but they were all officers of the same Regiment, all very charming, very English, quite intelligent, but all very self-conscious. They all came from good schools and pleasant homes, but it was not their regular custom to go to houses like T. or to meet dukes. I may have been wrong about this but I don't think I was.

'Now don't tell me you don't know.' His voice was like thunder. The young officers wilted. 'I was in the Army myself for years, I was in two wars with my Regiment' (he wore a Guards' tie) 'and I must say some of the officers I met were damn fools. Tell me, whom would you like to serve under, a gentleman or an ex-sergeant-major?'

'A very difficult subject, Duke. I think about it quite a lot myself. My present battery captain is an ex-sergeant-major. He is about the best officer there is. My major at the same time is, technically speaking, an old-school gentleman; forty years in the Artillery. The men love him and he is a splendid man. He knows everything, he is very kind, but no fool. Social background gives you absolutely no indication as to ability. It might give a few clues. And even then you might draw the wrong conclusions. In one of my regiments there was a young captain. He looked weedy, wore his hair long, and had an air of night-clubs around him. He was an old Etonian. He looked the old school tie at its worst and yet his men (and his men were tough old "Greasy Gunners") said he was marvellous in France, concentrated attacks could not upset him, he went on giving orders as cool as a cucumber, he saved the life of two of his men and on top of it he had gunnery in his little finger . . .'

'But was he intelligent?' thundered the Duke. 'Any fool could be brave. Had he brains?'

'He certainly had brains for purposes of war. After the war he might do badly, but he certainly was a fine soldier . . .'

'Mm,' said the Duke and looked round as if his game had been spoilt,

then he suddenly began to smile. 'The trouble with the English gentleman is that he is a dilettante, not a professional. And the future . . . the future is decidedly for the professional . . .'

Lady M. came up to us.

'Would you like to continue tennis?'

They said they would. I asked her to show me her pictures.

'We haven't got many,' she said. 'There's a Romney and a Lawrence in the dining-room and you may like this Benjamin West in here, the rest are not so good . . .'

'But I mean your own pictures . . .'

'I haven't got many up. Some are in the passage. Come with me. I'm only an amateur, you know.'

After such an introduction the guest's duty is, I believe, to look at the picture in question then pick out the good points in it and murmur a few words of praise.

But there was no such need for me. There was no need for conventional remarks and no occasion either. And there was no need to murmur either. I wanted to shout. It was a water-colour of a soldier's camp. It was a reticent picture, just a few outlines, indications, colour patches that were reminiscent of Raoul Duffy. But how that reticence captured atmosphere and how the things that she left unpainted had breathed life into the canvas . . .

'What name are you painting under?'

She told me. I never heard of it before.

'And where do you exhibit?'

'I haven't done any showing for some years. I used to exhibit in the *Grand Salon*. You see I studied at Julien's.'

'Yes, the French tradition is very strong in you. May I see the others . . .'

I almost fell over. She had humour, a native English sense for colour and a thoroughly un-English sense of economy. She said only the important thing, and she said it well. For a moment I thought the picture was by Berthe Morisot or by Lautrec: a man sitting in an armchair reading a paper by the fire. Then surprise after surprise. Draughtsmanship was not her strong point, by which I mean she couldn't draw as well as John but she could draw as well as Sickert or James Pryde and certainly better than Matthew Smith. But her brushwork and tricks! . . .

The trouble with me, of course, is that I don't *know* much about painting. I only 'feel something' when I see a picture and I usually cannot say what. That is why I usually compare one painter's work with another's. I wished I could have discussed her pictures with a man like Clive Bell, who *knows* about painting, apart from feeling.

It was a clear case of marriage and children and responsibilities not exactly ruining an artist, but certainly stunting her. Lady M. was now a woman who painted 'in her spare time,' between running her house, tending the poor, bringing up her children. I suppose she had a certain amount of contentment. She was a woman of forty-five or fifty with culture, deep feeling, natural and beautiful manners and a good deal of affection and charm. She was not a smart woman. Smartness is a whole-time job.

As I walked back to the bus stop I reflected that Toulouse-Lautrec was the only aristocrat, to my knowledge, who had ever made a great painter.

Two days later I went on leave. I saw quite a good many people and showed off my stripe.

An Infantryman I met at the Y.M.C.A. swimming one evening told me that one could get free tickets to the theatres in the information bureau in Trafalgar Square. I queued up one afternoon and I was given a seat to see *Blithe Spirit*. I had heard about the play and its subject and I was looking forward to seeing it, though I had my misgivings, the same misgivings as when I see Molnár's, Henri Bernstein's or George Kaufmann's name on the playbill. I knew the dialogue would be good and that each act would contain at least five epigrams which the average playgoer had never heard before or was looking forward to hearing again. I knew, furthermore, that the acting would be good, that the actors would wear their parts as perfectly tailored garments. Then I would go home and that would be all for the evening.

But one must not be prejudiced and condemn a play before one sees it, especially when one is given a free ticket, and a very good seat at that. Coward was still a youngish man and he had made money so he might have tried a new line and given a little more than entertainment.

The first act was good, built on the solid Wilde-Barrie-Pinero-Bernstein lines with lively dialogue, and Margaret Rutherford was a great actress. Then came the second act, dialogue still exellent, Margaret Rutherford still a great actress, but the architecture of the play no longer solid, bits of sawdust, and other padding materials began to fall and later to shower on the stage. Then came half a dozen lines that made the gallery roar with laughter, but inevitably as death we had arrived at a good commodity article, not a 'new line,' but excellent as commodities go. It was unfortunately not the type of commodity I use. The only reason why I felt disappointed was that Noel Coward had got hold of a subject out of which a serious playwright could have made a good play; now the subject was finished for ten years at least.

It was not I alone who walked out after the second act. My neighbour, a Canadian soldier, followed me into the vestibule.

'Don't you like it?' I asked, greatly surprised.

'No, *sir*. I thought it was a musical show so I feel kinda disappointed. I don't like 'em spooks that walks into the parlour. Another guy in the queue told me there was music in it.'

'But didn't you laugh? I mean some of the lines were very funny.'

'I kinda didn't get what it was all about . . .'

'Don't you go to the play back in . . .'

'Alberta,' he said. 'No. We only got the pictures. Waal, I figure it out pictures are a hun'red puy cent. better.'

'Have you seen any good pictures lately?'

'Sure . . . *Gone with the Wind*, that was reel good.'

'Where are you going?'

'The Beaver . . .'

'So am I. We're just in time for supper.'

He told me that he had worked for the railway back home; before that he had worked for a garage and before that he helped his brother who was a lumberman. It was hard to believe he was only twenty-two; perhaps it was his powerful build that suggested more. He said the Army was not bad and he liked English women because they were 'kinda homely,' unlike the American girls he met when he worked in the States for a spell.

We had supper, then I went up to the Reading Room and buried myself into the supplement of the *Montreal Star* and the *Atlantic Monthly*. He said he was looking for a guy, but he would come back if he couldn't find him.

He couldn't find him. He sat down next to me in an empty chair.

'Say, would you like to buy three gold teeth. They are sulid gold . . . I paid very nearly twenty bucks for 'em back in Edmonton. That's about five poun's. All I want is three pou's. Look . . .' and before I knew where I was he flashed a gold canine and two molars at me.

'But, my dear boy, I haven't got any money. Besides . . .'

'Oh, that's all right. I kinda thought you mighta liked to buy 'em. I'm in what you call a temporary financial embarrassment, see. I've got three more goddamn days to go and no dough. It's alwus the same on leave. I alwus blow the whole ration-money the fuyst day. Well, see you again . . .'

I turned after him as he slowly walked out of the room, a little helpless, a little childish, like people of his physical proportions often are . . . I ought to have given him some money.

'Say, pardon me,' I looked back. Another Canadian soldier walked up to me from across the other side of the room. 'Did he try to sell you his gold teeth?'

'Well, yes . . .'

'Ah thought so. He tried to sell 'em to me this afternoon too. I was stationed with him, see. Comes from Alberta too. Waal, he's a good guy, would do anything for you if he takes a fancy to you. Would give you his shuyt, but I guess he's in a bad way. He's young, see? He's havin' a crush on a dame in town, an' she's just no good. I saw her once and I know she'd go with anyone who'd spend dough on her. Absolutely anyone. Waal, it's a bad thing when a guy gets so cut up about a dame. It does him no good. . . . Say, have you *finished* with the *Mon'real Star*?'

## 'DID HE SMILE HIS WORK TO SEE'

'SOMETHING TOLD me' that I should be Orderly N.C.O. the morning after my return to the Regiment. I walked up to the Troop notice board as I arrived and there it was.

It was raining in the morning and I put on my anti-gas cape as a raincoat. There was a lot to do. Twenty new gunners arrived and I had to take them down to the M.O.'s office, then I had to contact several people, fetch the mail, sort it out and hand it to the sergeants for distribution. The telephone kept on ringing all the time.

Ross and I were called before the major the following day. He told us that the Command had sent word about our application for transfer to the Army Education Corps. It had rejected Ross's application on the ground that his academic qualifications were inadequate. I was accepted for interview and was to present myself in ten days' time.

'I'm sorry, Ross. Good luck, de Hegedus.'

Waistel just could not say a word. We walked on silently for a bit. 'That was the last straw,' he said finally. 'I was hoping against hope, but I knew they wouldn't have me. Now I shall be posted to a Regiment, and painting's finished . . .'

I am very bad at comforting people and the situation was awkward. He was rejected and I was accepted or at least I had a chance of being accepted. It spoilt my joy almost completely. I always felt a fatherly feeling towards Ross. He was very small, very timid, very affectionate and very young, and could never adapt himself to the Army. Now that misfortune had befallen him I felt I must do 'something about it'.

I adopted the tone of the bullying N.C.O.

'It's half past five now,' I said, 'we go and have some tea at the Y.M.C.A. then we go to a cinema near the Trent Bridge. They are showing *H. M. Pulham Esquire* which, I hear, is a film for people of discriminating taste. Could you please, therefore, stop whining and

make your steps longer . . . Flat feet are no excuse. . . . Oh, I met an American soldier yesterday at the Empire Rendezvous. He said he was detailed on church parade and do you know what his impression of a local clergyman was . . .? He said: "*I kinda fell asleep in the god-hoppery . . . the gospelshark was a dim bulb . . .*" '

*H. M. Pulham Esquire* was a good film. It wasn't a masterpiece, in spite of its technical excellence, but it was a really good piece of commodity, like Maxwell House Coffee, a tie by Saks, a tune by Rodgers and Hart or a 'Profile' in *The New Yorker*. I discovered also that Robert Young could act.

The melancholy note of the film, however, had not a good effect on Waistel. I took him to the 'Trip to Jerusalem' and gave him a stiff whisky.

It was a dull day. Gunnery, gunnery and gunnery. We had a lot of standing gun drill, in shirt-sleeves. It was very hot and standing about, listening to things I knew, or thought I knew, or ought to have known by now, made me sleepy.

'Take post,' shouted the sergeant. 'Without dragropes prepare to advance.' There was a scramble on the asphalt, we ran with our hands gripped 'in line with our tits'. I was Number One, and the sergeant acted as Gun Position Officer. I put on knee-pads, a contraption which tries to prevent gunners from getting housemaid's knee.

'Imagine yourself in action,' said Sergeant Bateman. He was a melancholy, soft-spoken man of thirty. He had worked for a house agent. He looked it. 'As if you were in action.' I am fairly imaginative but it would have been a terrific strain on all my faculties to imagine I was in action in Benghazi, in Bizerta, or in Arras. There was a sultriness in the air and the sweet scent of tobacco as usual. We were standing on the roadway of Waterloo Crescent with its genteel suburban architecture, its suburban trees, its suburban passers-by. As I looked into the dial-sight I saw a window with a large aspidistra in it in a brass pot. It must have been the largest aspidistra in Nottingham.

I gave the dial-sight an angry twitch. It brought into view a shop-front with two enamelled plates. 'Cherry Blossom Boot Polish,' said one, *The Nottingham Guardian*, said the other. There came a long toot, meaning noon, from John Player & Sons. Someone higher up in the Crescent switched on the wireless.

> 'The hurdy-gurdy, the birdie, the cop on the beat,
> The candy-maker, the baker, the man in the street,
> The City charmer, the farmer, the Man in the Moon,
> All sing Elmer's Tune.'

No, it was very difficult to imagine you were in action in, say, Mandalay. I imagined something else. In my mind I followed the rhythm of the tune. It isn't a particularly good tune, but it took me back to Kent to the Field Regiment and I remembered Dai, who used to hum it in his deep and husky and beautifully resonant Welsh voice with much sentiment. Where was Dai now? He had not written to me. I suppose he was busy writing to his wife every day. What a nice boy he was. If Major Overstreet had not been such a good man, Dai would have got into serious trouble for not forcing me to empty the piss bucket that morning. . . . And where was Jim Robinson? And the others? . . . It's no use asking me to imagine things. I'm too good at it at the slightest provocation.

'Now come on,' said the sergeant, his voice like a sick wife's nagging her children from her bed. 'It's past twelve. You can knock off soon. Get cracking . . . One-four-hundred . . .'

We get cracking. Elmer's tune fades out or is it that we don't want to hear it? I put the rammer under my arm: Wilkins and Cherryman, the two limber-gunners, wake up. Horsborough is Number Two, he shows the charge to Coldfall, 'Charge three,' Horsborough says. Coldfall nods. The charge is pushed into the breach. 'In,' says Horsborough. Maiden jams the switch so fast that it almost snaps off Horsborough's fingers.

'Hell,' murmurs Horsborough.

'Fire!' shouts the sergeant.

'Fire!' I shout.

And Dunkley, his left hand on the rail, pulls off the firing lever.

Maiden opens the breech and the dummy charge falls on the asphalt with a low thud.

'We'll do it again, then you can run it in,' says the sergeant. I drop the rammer and I am prepared to advance without dragropes.

After dinner we took off our beds and went to sleep till parade. It was hotter now than ever before; and we went to sleep after tea too.

It was half past seven when I woke up. All the others had gone out, except Chapman next to me who, as he did practically every afternoon, was busy embroidering a cushion-cover for his wife.

'You had a good sleep, Bomb?'

'Mm. How is the work?'

'I reckon I finish it up this week. Look . . .'

He showed it to me, it depicted the Regimental Arms in blue and red.

'Good work.'

I got up to have a cold shower. I got out my soap and towel, my walking-out boots, clean lanyard and my red and blue hat.

'Suppose you've heard that a bloke was killed this afternoon . . .'

'No, I haven't. Who was he?'

'Bloke from Three Troop. Ran into a lorry on his motor-bike on the Mansfield Road. Died in dock . . .'

'Poor chap . . . Did you know him?'

'I might have seen 'im, I can't say.'

The shower did me good. I whistled *Chattanooga Chu-Chu* as I dressed.

'Going out, Bomb?' asked Chapman.

'Yah.'

'Dance?'

'Yah. Wouldn't you like to come?'

'No thanks. My dancing days are over . . .'

'Yes, of course, an old man like you.'

He grinned. Nice bloke Chapman.

It was pleasantly warm now. I'd have a cup of tea at the Y.M. before I went to the Regal.

I ran into L/Bdr. Armstrong as I left the house.

'You heard, I s'pose . . .'

'The bloke who was killed in your troop, yes. Who was he?'

'Bombardier Brown.'

'What?' I became frightened at my own voice. I felt a green film descending on my eyes.

'Yes.' He drew in his breath. 'The captain is out on the spot with the police. Nobody knows what happened, but the lorry driver swears that Brown must have seen him coming. It was at the corner of the Mansfield Road and the Gregory Boulevard. He says Brown must have been doing sixty miles. He says it was like suicide. . . . Of course a man in his position would say anything. But Brown was speed-mad, all the same. He broke his leg last year in Derby.'

'Did he die at once?'

'Yes. Wedlake was following him, but he did not see the crash. He said his crash-helmet was smashed to bits. Those helmets are no good. . . . Mind you, I was expecting something. The last week or so he was even more queer than before. He hardly said a word. He got like that sometimes. . . . I must be off. I've got the address of his parents, the major is going to notify them. Awful job. Cheerio.'

I just stood there, dressed up to the nines. I just could not say anything or even think.

'Hullo, Martin.' I turned back. It was Frankie. 'You said you might come to the Regal to-night. You're looking smart. Where did you get these wide flashes?'

'In a shop in the Edgware Road, in town.'

'Yes, Jim told me you been on leave. I'm going next week. Well, are you coming?'

'No, Frankie. I've got to wait for somebody... from the Troop office. We are walking out . . .'

'You look a bit off colour. Well, of course, seven days' leave, ah . . .'

I smiled back at him.

'Well, I am off to the Regal.'

I waited till he disappeared round the corner, then I walked through Waterloo Road. I wanted to be alone.

I wanted to be alone the whole evening, the whole night, the following morning and the rest. I had never before felt the lack of privacy was so awful.

There was a war on, yes, a good many people would die. I might be killed myself too, for all I knew and cared. But I had never seen tragedy happen at such close quarters, I had never felt the impact of it so fully.

And I could not help feeling the beauty of the tragedy. Brown was so young and so very helpless under his reserve, under his toughness. He needed someone to look after him, to help him. And how lovely was his attitude, to keep himself clean, to keep away from something that was strange and attractive and terrible. Something stimulatingly and awe-inspiringly and sordidly beyond our comprehension. The secret he had, at which the most human, the most understanding of us can only gaze—beyond the capacities of sentiment and knowledge—with wonder and inquiry.

Now I felt a kind of nauseating remorse. I felt caddish. I had wormed his greatest secret out of him, out of sheer, bloody curiosity. I made him tell me everything. I went through rare and interesting sensations, rarer and more concrete than aspects of life seen through the medium of art. It was Life, yes, no matter how strange. Oh, how bloody cold-blooded I sounded, how matter-of-fact, when I asked him question after question. And what a thrill I had when he answered, full, honest, clean-breasted. Well, of course, he was confessing; well, of course, he was glad to find relief, to unburden himself to somebody who promised him sympathy and understanding. And did I give him sympathy and understanding? I——well didn't. I muttered something, self complacent, conventional, out of my —— ivory tower. Some bloody commonplace about the writer not being allowed to live.

I gave him nothing in return. I treated him in the most selfish, aspidistra, suburban middle-class fashion. He was obviously hoping I would help him in his beautiful and terrific struggle, and all that he had was 'a few kind, reassuring words'. Then I said, oh, I despise myself for it, I said he was 'my raw material'. What had happened to

me, that by the age of thirty-five I had become such a self-satisfied, self-complacent beast! Such a piece of dirt, such a blot, such a four-letter man. Brown was a pawnbroker and jeweller from a Liverpool suburb. Aspidistra class, yes, and an ugly profession. But he was an aristocrat and something like a saint. I, on the other hand, came from a family, that for three hundred and fifty years, through ups and downs and good marriages and opportunism, had maintained itself, and from time to time—along with others—had ruled over Hungary. Not worse than others, but certainly no better. My grandfather had died of wounds received in 1848, well, yes. My father . . . he is something to look up to, something of an aristocrat, but he is a Puritan, a whimsical and witty Puritan, yes, but with all a Puritan's negations and limitations . . . What on earth had happened to me that I had become so suburban, so self-complacent, by the age of thirty-five? We became poor, yes, and at times I had my seasons of hell in England. Nobody wanted my stuff, editors and publishers treated me with bloody self-satisfied condescension. Possibly, the hardship was too much. It had steadied my father but it had weakened me. There were justifications. Plenty. But none acceptable.

I went to a pub on the Derby Road. I got very drunk. For the first time in my life.

But still, Life must go on and follow its drab time-table, and nothing can stop it, not even miracles like Birth and Death. There was gun drill in the morning and nothing in the afternoon, because Lister, who was orderly, got sick and I was to take his place in the Troop office. I had a thick head but I was all right through gun drill. And I began to see the thing from a more balanced, more sensible and more grown-up angle. I tried to lose myself by taking interest in gun drill. I succeeded. The Army is a strange place. It can destroy your self-confidence and sense of values. Other times it can restore them. And it is easy to be hard-boiled in the morning . . .'

In the afternoon as I walked to the dining-hall for early tea, so as not to keep the clerk waiting long in the office, I saw a couple of civilians waiting in front of the Sergeants' Mess with two sergeants from Three Troop. They were both dressed in black. It was the mother's features that made me realise they were Brown's parents. She had his eyes and mouth. She was a woman in the early forties, kindly, sociable looking, very distressed but keeping a grip on herself, because it was so 'common' to make a show of herself. Her husband was a thin little man with a fixed gaze that must come from looking at hallmarks at close quarters. So these were the parents, so that was the family that gave birth to a young eagle. They knew nothing of their son and would never know.

I wondered if he would have resembled them in the slightest when he grew old, and I doubted it.

I walked on towards the dining-hall, still full of amazement, then I looked at the sky over the tall factory building. It was blue, very blue, with no clouds.

'Did He smile His work to see
Did He who made the Lamb make thee . . .'

There were only a couple of people in the dining-hall. I sat alone. I saw it from another angle again. Yes, it was perfectly timed, no doubt about it. He died just at the critical moment. He remained a masterpiece, no matter how unfinished. There is no doubt that sooner or later a change was bound to occur, the attitude could not have been kept up. Life would have touched him, and sooner or later he would have been forced to look for compensation. Sooner or later he would have been forced to come to terms with himself, and I don't think he was the man who later on would have compromised. Or was he?

'I'm all right while the war is on, but what happens after?' I don't think that was a romantic pose . . . or was it? I don't think so.

'You ready, Bomb?' I looked up and saw Chapman. 'Charlie says could you please come back as soon as you finish, 'cause he wants to get here before tea-time . . .'

'I am ready,' I said, and got up to wash up my plate and mug.

## AS YOU WERE

I HAD noticed during my last leave in London how badly I was sleeping. I had suffered from insomnia before, but I grew to associate it with Civvy Street after I joined up. In the Army I slept well, at least I slept regularly in the first six months. Later on it wasn't so good. I had thought I could not sleep because there was too much on my mind and because in Kent and in Nottingham I had had very little exercise. When the summer came I went to swim. During the first week sleep returned, but after I got used to exercise again, I kept awake tossing and turning on my palliasse. Sleeping on a palliasse was not comfortable, but I knew that had little to do with it. I couldn't sleep in my own comfortable bed in the luxurious silence of my square on the river. And it was not the heat either. Towards St. Swithin's the weather had changed, one night

we had to put our greatcoats over the blankets, it was so cold, and yet I kept my involuntary vigil. In the end I could work out a time-table long in advance for which nights I would sleep and for which I wouldn't. That cynical habit I learned from my mother, who is also a victim of insomnia, and like me refuses to take anything stronger than an occasional dose of adalin, or somnol.

In the end it got much worse and I decided to see the M.O. He was a kind little man. His name was Bernstein and the way he listened to complaints, with a half-smiling gaze of his tired, sympathetic eyes was reassuring in itself. He had the hard job of being an Army doctor, a job which needs more knowledge of human psychology, common sense and sheer hard work than any other branch of the medical profession. (Some of the Army doctors are harder and far more inhuman than one's own commanding officer; some had been very bad doctors before they joined the Army and the Army naturally could not improve them.) The trouble with the average M.O. is that he is overworked and his humanity blunted by the many potential malingerers he comes across. Soldiers, on the whole, develop almost a natural attitude of running to the M.O. with complaints in connection with which they would never dream of seeing a doctor in Civvy Street. The Army is a great place to feel sorry for yourself in. I was the opposite extreme. I had heard from friends in the Army so many tales of horror about kindly but inefficient M.O.s that I felt alarmed at the prospect of falling seriously ill.

Captain Bernstein had a good reputation. He listened with interest to my complaints, he asked a few questions, then he said he would give me sleeping tablets. It was a new stuff he said, synthetic barbituric acid and completely harmless. I should take it every night and if sleeplessness still persisted I should come back in a week's time.

As I came out of the M.O.'s room I saw Pat Sloan waiting in a room overcrowded with sick humanity in uniform. He said he was posted, some time before I left Yorkshire for Kent, to a Regiment in Scotland, then he was returned to the Depot and came to Nottingham two days previously.

We agreed we should meet for supper at the Toc H.

I took the train the following morning. I was to attend the Selection Board for the Army Education Corps. The train was empty and by accident I came across another candidate attending the same Board. He was also a gunner. He told me his name was Jones and he had been a school-teacher near Aberystwyth before he was called up.

'I'm so glad I met you,' I said, 'because education in the Army is a thing which interests me very much. Till recently it was treated like an

orphan child, but now the War Office has realised its importance and has brought about some very sensible, very up-to-date reforms.'

He nodded.

'I am very much looking forward to it,' I said, 'if I have the great luck to be selected. It isn't only that it is a place where I could be really useful, more useful than in any other branch of the Army, but it would be a job which would fill me with satisfaction and interest all over. I am very glad I have now served over eight months in the Army because I have learned so much about my public, about the people I might be expected to teach.'

He nodded and smiled.

'I should like to compare notes with you. How long you been in the Army?'

'Almost two years. Two years too long,' Jones said.

'Tell me, don't you find that the soldier, the average soldier, because he is a cog in a machine, seems to lose contact with realities? What I mean is he is practically all the time thinking in a sort of vacuum. Then I have made another observation and I think it is an important one. Tell me, didn't you notice that the average soldier is on the whole very serious-minded? He goes to the pictures for distraction, yes, but has practically no interest in horse-racing, dog-racing, football pools. And at the same time he is ready and very receptive towards a good talk. He is very keen to learn about things . . .'

'It is so, undoubtedly,' said Jones. 'I have a man in the unit who is thirty and he is very keen on wood-carving. There's another who is keen on basket-work. You see, that's the stuff. If I get in I shall run classes of both. It's pleasant work, see? And if you are good you might be able to make a little extra money . . .'

Later on I asked him about economics.

'It is a realistic subject,' I said, 'towards which there is great interest. True, of course, that soldiers are interested in any intelligently delivered talk, provided that it is neither above their heads, nor below their feet. I was surprised what a good audience I had on economics and how many sensible and interesting questions I had. In fact, you may rise just a tiny tiny shade above their heads, because that, I think, flatters them, but you must not talk down to them because that's insulting . . .'

'That's right. You must be an educated man,' Jones said.

'But economics is the thing, I feel. I've travelled a lot and have been a journalist for over fourteen years so I could give a good many interesting talks on many subjects, but I'm very glad I took economics seriously at the University and that I kept up my reading. It is a burning subject. Every soldier is interested in post-war planning, the shape of the new world to come, why war and what are we going to do

with peace. Difficult subjects, I admit. You must keep a clear head, you must not deliberately or unwittingly mislead people who trust you, who are expecting you to guide them. What are your views on the subject?'

'Well, I can't say I know much about economics, but if you find that the men would like to have a yarn on it you could always read it up. The A.E.C. is not altogether jam. Sometimes you must prepare your yarns. You must read. True, bluff helps. I've been in the Army long enough to know that. You can get away with it . . . fancy you talking about economics. I've just found a book. *Economics for Everyone*, by W. Henry Willis. Have you read it? No? It's a good little book. Just the book to use when you give a yarn. I like books like that. Easy, simple . .'

'I s'pose you are looking forward to being selected. You would, so to speak, return to your old profession: teaching, which must be one of the finest professions on earth . . .'

'Yes, I'm looking forward to it,' he nodded. 'I'm fed up with the Army. I don't like it and the Education Sergeant's job is a cushy job. No parades. You make your own life, no combatant duties. You don't go abroad and you live out. I want to bring down my wife. I'm married, you see. And I think I shall get in. I've got my Teacher's Certificate. . . . A sergeant I know said that the Board is nothing. It is just formality. They know in advance what you are.'

'Oh, that's very relieving, I must say. Have you done much lecturing in the Army?'

He shook his head.

'I can't say I have. I took part in discussion groups. We had one a fortnight ago. "Is Man a Selfish Animal?" that was the subject. It was conducted by our sergeant. He asked me to come in to the education room and lead a class of basket-work. You do basket-work? It's a fine thing you know . . .'

'Yes,' I said. 'It is. I met a man once who told me how much he liked doing it in Broadmoor. He was in for bigamy . . .'

It was raining in the town. Jones and I went to have a meal at a Service Canteen near the station.

There were some ten people in the waiting-room. Mostly people of my own age. I took an empty chair next to yet another gunner. He was a lance-bombardier like myself. He told me he was a schoolmaster at a small public school and that he had volunteered for the Army. He took a Science Degree at Cambridge. We had to wait three hours so he and I had a long talk about the Army and education in general. We both agreed that it was a very healthy and good thing that the War Office was trying to reform education in the Army. He was a most unlikely schoolmaster I met, except perhaps for his glasses. He was neither the athletic nor the scholarly type, but a happy

medium . . . He told me he had missed his blue because of an attack of measles.

He said he had been lecturing for over six months and he found that the men had a great interest in economics.

'I was a little alarmed,' he said, 'because I took people like John Maynard Keynes and thought he, being caviare for the general, would be miles over the head of the average gunner. Then I was surprised to find how much the boys in my Regiment knew of economics, through reading the papers intelligently, through discussions, practical experience and common sense I s'pose, so all I had to do was to give them a blue-print of the economic system, to sum up what they already knew . . .'

He agreed with me that practically everybody was educable.

Towards half past four it was my turn to go in. It was Jones who came to fetch me. 'Good luck,' he said. 'I was accepted.'

'Congratulations,' I murmured.

As I shut the door behind me and saluted I saw three officers sitting in front of a table. A young officer with fine features, behind his glasses a pair of inquiring, intelligent eyes, an old-Wykehamist, I reflected. Then an elderly officer with the light blue band of the A.E.C. around his cap and a major, about fifty.

'Well, sit down,' said the colonel and smiled a charming smile. He bent over my application papers and nodded as he read aloud—Doctor of Law, second class honours, a critical contributor to *The Observer* . . . lectured at King's College, London. Published books in English. 'Ah, you speak four languages . . . very good. Tell me,' he handed the application to the young officer, 'have you done much journalism?'

'Yes, sir. Ever since I left University.'

'And you travelled a good deal.'

'Practically all over Europe, sir. I have given a few talks on my travels to the men already.'

'I am sure they were appreciated,' the colonel said. The young officer who was reading my application looked up with a smile.

'It's a far cry from *Esquire* to *The Observer* isn't it?' he said.

'It is, sir. *Esquire* published translations of mine from the Hungarian . . .'

'You needn't apologise,' he said, tossing his smiling head—a Wykehamist toss, if any—'I'm only commenting on the wide field you covered . . . *London Mercury*, *Evening Standard*, *The Observer*, *Esquire*, *The Slavonic Review* . . .'

Then the colonel asked me about my lectures and my views on lecturing to adult audiences. He waited patiently, he encouraged me

to talk and nodded very often, then when I thought it was time for me to finish I came to a stop . . .

'Yes,' said the Colonel still smiling. 'What you told us is very impressive. You have done some good work and no doubt you will do some good work in the future in the Army, too. We expect you to. You would lecture on your travels, for example, and on a good many other subjects and I am sure you will find your audience very appreciative. The scope of the Army Education Corps, however, is different from the work you have been doing and the work you are prepared to offer. Our task is to select educational N.C.O.s mostly for Infantry Regiments, who must be given talks on the burning questions of to-day. Post-war planning is one of the most important subjects. There are others. And no matter how appreciative we are of your impressive achievements in the past and of your capacities as a speaker in general we are, I'm sorry to say, forced to turn your application down. I'm afraid a man of your calibre would hardly be able to give a talk or lead a discussion on the great social problems that are facing us to-day. You, however, must not be discouraged. From time to time you can give lectures in your own unit. You are an N.C.O. and as such you would find enough time to do so. They would be much appreciated I am sure . . .'

He looked up.

'Excuse me, sir. I have made a study of social problems and I had already led discussion groups on post-war reconstruction . . .'

'I'm sure you did,' he nodded. He beamed with understanding, kindliness; he was obviously a man who would put a timid soldier at ease. And how modest, how humble his tone was as he continued: 'I'm sure you did. If we were in the position to allow ourselves experiments we would grab the opportunity to secure your services, but unfortunately'—here his voice suddenly changed into the tones of heartfelt emotion. He felt he was full of distress as he continued, 'but most unfortunately we have no time for experiments.'

Here he lowered his voice. A broken man.

He looked at me with heartfelt sympathy and understanding. The colonel was a man who had done his great work beyond the limelights of publicity; he received no praise, no public appreciation. He was a man about whom, at the end of a life spent in the service of Army education with devotion, kindness, intelligence, vision and singleness of purpose, the obituary column of *The Times* would print the fit lines of appreciation. I was looking forward to reading those lines.

The major spoke now. He felt it was his loyal duty to come to the help of his distressed superior.

'What ku-ku sports do you do?'

'Lately nothing, sir. But I used to do practically everything. Athletics, swimming, tennis, ski-ing, skating, riding . . .'

'It's clear, ku-ku-ku, he doesn't p-p-play our games?' he turned to the colonel.

'Of our games,' I broke in, careful not to give the word 'our' an ironical stress, 'I played soccer, hockey, and I used to hunt before the war . . .'

'Would you like to ask more questions of the candidate, gentlemen?'

'No, sir.'

'No, sir.'

'Thank you, that's all.' The colonel smiled again. It was amazing how quickly he had recovered from his distress. Elasticity of mind, no doubt.

I saluted and left the room.

'How did you get on?' asked Jones.

'I've been rejected.'

'Why?'

'I don't quite know.'

At the station I met the ex-schoolmaster from Cambridge. He told me he was turned down, too. I looked at him and I was delighted to find he did not try to be exaggeratedly cheerful about it. He was frankly distressed, but he did not say a word. And I did not say a word either. All we wanted was to be alone, like wounded animals. Luckily the train was not very full. I stood in the corridor all the way.

I suppose I shall have to stay in the Artillery, I thought, apply for admission to an N.C.O.'s course and try to make good later. If they thought me fit they might recommend me for a commission. I should be very seriously handicapped, because of my age, health, natural inclinations and the burden of things on my mind. I should try hard to forget that I was not being used on my proper field, and I should never completely succeed. I had enough sense of humour to prevent me feeling that in me they would try to use a race-horse to draw the plough, not a very good race-horse, but still a race-horse, because in a war there is no need for race-horses, and the plough has got to be drawn. Except that one occasionally sees a lucky cart-horse winning the race.

One should be above such things. One should bear no resentment about the fact that in wartime prejudices flourish; and if one at times sneakingly indulges in ancestor-worship, then all the better, one would return to the guns and put one's back into pulling the traversing lever.

Ross was very cut up about my rejection. It made me uneasy.

Then we talked about his affairs. He said his only hope now was Camouflage.

Waistel was posted to a Searchlight Regiment and so was Charles, the clerk. They looked depressed, especially Waistel.

He came up to the room in Forest Road where I was spending a week in charge of the fire-piquet. I promised I would write to him. The fire-piquet was jam and everybody was waiting for his turn to do it. It meant a week's rest. When one was doing fire-piquet, one was excused parades and duties, did not get up till seven, did a few easy fatigues in the regimental quartermaster stores; the snag was, of course, that one was confined to barracks and had to report to the orderly sergeant at eight every evening.

It was amazing what difference that extra hour's sleep made. One woke fresh. True, of course, that lately I had slept badly, in fact could not go to sleep till the small hours in the morning.

The first day we hewed coal, the second we cleaned the windows in the R.Q.M. stores, the third day we were lent to another unit to pick up some barbed wire and other articles of warfare at the Depot and deliver it at another place, ten miles out of town. The last day we were lent again, this time to the A.T.S. We had to help them at their Q stores.

My feminine equivalent, a nice, heavy-weight blonde, all teeth, told us what there was to do. She addressed me as 'Corporal,' a *sottise* for which the average Artillery lance-jack would commit murder, then as we went out she asked if I would like a cup of tea.

'Nice of you, corporal, but couldn't you manage a cup for my men too?'

She sighed deep from her lullaby bosom.

'We are very short of cups. You'll have to wait.'

After tea I took two men on the lorry to shift some of the 'biscuits' on which members of the A.T.S. sleep. I sat in the cabin by the driver. It is the N.C.O.'s privilege to sit by the driver. My men sat behind. The driver was quite pretty, with a terrific ladder in her stocking.

'You *would* notice it,' she said.

'I could even mend it for you.'

She giggled. 'Get away with you.'

'I mend all my socks,' I said.

'Aren't you married?'

'Do I look like a married man?'

'I haven't looked at you yet.'

'Don't look now, because you'll barge into that milk-cart.'

'Are you afraid?'

'Absolutely trembling . . .'

'Can you drive?'

'A little . . .'

'What was you in Civvy Street?'

'A lorry driver . . .'

'You wasn't.'

'I was.'

'Really?'

'Mm . . .'

'Well, fancy Doris telling me you wrote books . . .'

'Who's Doris?'

'Our corporal . . .'

'The big fat one?'

'She is not fat . . .'

'Why did she say I wrote books?'

'I don't know. Maybe Frankie told her.'

'Frankie who?'

'Your brother . . . you were at our dance last Monday. Weren't you?'

I smiled. Frankie and I had gone to an A.T.S. dance the previous week, and there were of course a good many A.T.S. girls. I only remembered two of them.

'Frankie is a liar . . .' I said.

'What was he in Civvy Street?'

'Used to work for an undertaker in Praed Street.'

'He didn't.'

'Well, he doesn't like to talk about it. Why? It's an honest job.'

'Was he a driver too?'

I laughed at the idea of Frankie dressed up in funeral pomp with top hat, driving a hearse with slow dignity.

'Good God, no . . . he was in charge of the embalming side.'

She laughed . . . 'You're pulling my leg.'

'I'd like to . . . I say that wasn't exactly double de-clutch.'

'I know. Why worry?'

The 'biscuits' turned out to be large square, heavy cushions, of which three went on a bed to make a mattress. We packed some two hundred of them into the lorry.

'I say, Bomb,' Wilcocks took me aside as we got back. 'Just look at the stuff we had to sort out.' We went into the store-room. 'Have a look at these. He picked up a pink 'elastic' complete with brassiere.

'Well, you can't expect the girls to buy it for themselves.'

'And these . . .'

'Cami-knickers,' I said. They were of khaki art-silk. True, I have never seen any in khaki . . . Well, there's a war on.

'And these . . .'

He raised yet another article up.

'Put it down,' I said smiling and angry. 'Anybody might come in.'

'I wonder what they say at kit inspection. 'I am wearing one, ma'am, and two's in the washing . . .'

'Shut up, you dirty old man . . .' But I smiled too.

One of the boys, a big Irishman, came in and, apparently influenced by the material he had to handle the whole day, turned to me half smiling . . . 'I say, Bomb . . . where's the little boy's room?'

## OUTSIDE TIME

It was August and the N.C.O.'s course had come to its end. There were about sixteen of them attending it and Frankie Verity was among them. They were mostly young boys. The sergeant-major who instructed them in marching and rifle drill said they were a poor lot. Gunnery is not an easy business. It needs concentration, speed, accuracy and a little mechanical knowledge. General intelligence helps and so does industry, but there is, I think another thing, difficult to define: a sense of gunnery, as there is a sense of horsemanship, and road sense, of which you must have something in your make-up before you try to acquire it. And there were very few among the sixteen boys who could make a good gunnery N.C.O. They were young and bright and cheerful; there was a good deal in them, but it was not gunnery. Besides, from what I heard of them and from what I saw I don't think they were keen. Finally the result was published: two of the sixteen passed and were made full bombardiers, the rest were given one unsubstantiated stripe. Frankie was very angry. He thought it was favouritism to pass Ferrier, 'simply because he worked in R.H.Q.' I personally thought Ferrier was a bright lad, an 'old soldier' with the Army in his blood and possibly the best of a very bad bunch.

From what I saw of the course and what I knew and read about gunnery in the past, it seemed pretty hopeful that I would pass the course, get the two stripes and be eventually recommended to an Artillery Octu. The rest was uncertain, but I felt a strong desire to make good in the Artillery. The sergeant-major said it was certain I would get accepted for the course, but, he said, I must wait because a new course would not start for another three weeks.

In the meantime I was put among the signallers, who would go on refreshing their signalling mostly wireless. It was very dull and very unreal. We did practically nothing all day. The N.C.O. in charge—he was originally trained by my old regiment in Yorkshire —was so bored that I had to give him occasional stimulus, a stimulus of which I, myself, had a very limited supply. 'It's that —— waiting that gets you down,' they said. 'You are getting stale . . .'

*Extract from Diary.* 'Slept quite a lot last night, but feel tired. Came off duty at nine, it is now ten and I am sitting in signal stores with respirator on. We must keep respirators on till one. Room is cool. I wouldn't like to do gun drill outside. Two young men from One Troop are sitting in front of a No. 18 set. Herson and Franklin. Herson is working the set, Franklin is sitting by. He takes his respirator off, rubs the sweat and saliva off from inside with his hanky and watches out for suspicious noises. If it's an officer he must put it on again in a hurry. Quiet boys these, Herson especially. Room is quiet too except for the muffled sounds from the set.

' "Domino . . . domino . . . domino" comes the voice strangely distorted. "Domino . . . domino," it goes on for exactly two minutes, then "Tuning call ENDS . . ."

'Thirty seconds later:

' "Hear netting call. Net NOW . . ."

'Quite a longish silence after this, I can't see them but I know exactly what they are doing: swift as lightning they try to get the highest ammeter reading. Then suddenly Herson speaks into his hand microphone: "Bolo Four answering. Okay over . . ." His accent is B.B.C. or rather an attempt at it. For ordinary purposes Herson has a Midland accent. Comes from Bedford. Quite a bright lad.

'Then I see them fumbling with the set. Something gone wrong. Hope they won't ask my advice, being N.C.O. in charge, because No. 18 is not my speciality. "Gently, gently," says Franklin in gentle voice.

' "Bolo Three was on all the time you know, then they suddenly gave him control . . ."

' "Domino . . . domino . . . domino . . .'

' "Why the hell does he tune in again?"

' "Because of Bolo Five, who is it?"

' "Pullman."

' "Oh," says Franklin and shows his teeth in a grin.

'(Tuning call continues in muffled undertones.)

' "What's he waiting for?"

' "He's the bloke who's at fault."

'(A loud voice from the passage: "Tell the shithouse he can't 'ave it. Who the 'ell 'e thinks 'e is?').

' "He should be touching as much as we do."

' "New control this is . . ."

' "Can't get 'em any better than that . . . Don't touch the modulator for Christ's sake . . . you carry on. I go back to the billet for my laundry . . . New control. I hope it isn't Pullman.

' "Well, this is the best I c'n get, see you later . . ."

' "What's the time, Bomb?"

' "I make it eleven," I say, and leave for a cup of tea.'

* * *

My insomnia was getting worse. I went to see the M.O. again. He looked a little astonished on hearing that the tablets did not give me sleep. He suggested another week on them, then he said if I still couldn't sleep he would try something else.

'Cheer up,' he said.

I felt it was not entirely insomnia that was wrong with me. Lack of sleep is a very bad thing, but there must have been something else as well because I was now feeling very depressed even after I had managed to sleep on certain nights. I felt as if I was losing not only my will power and my critical faculties, but bits of my personal identity. It was just as if I was under gas or under some drug. In my clear moments I tried, rather desperately, to find the reason for it. My surroundings were not uncongenial. The weather was lovely, work not too hard, company very pleasant. I had a certain amount of satisfaction out of the fact that after spending more than three months in the Regiment I was liked by people. It was not only 'getting on' with them, because in this Regiment everybody got on with the other. Everybody was so good-natured, so irresponsible, so friendly and gay, I was liked, I felt. And the thought gave me a satisfaction I had never felt in my life. In Civvy Street, it never mattered to me whether people 'liked' me or not. I could either get on with them or I couldn't. I had few enemies; they were carefully chosen. And very few friends; they just grew. But now I was feeling an overplus, something that was not so far part of my life.

'Of course they like you, Spaghetti,' said McLeod one afternoon —it seemed quite a long time ago—'you never call them bastards, you never borrow money from them, you don't take their girls away and you aren't a slave-driver . . .'

I suppose the truth was that they liked me because they felt I liked them. And I liked them very much.

But now I was feeling I did not like anybody. I felt restless, jumpy, out of sorts and at times quite morbid. And it was not a passing

phase. I no longer felt that life in the Army was helping me as I had felt it had in the beginning. I felt I wanted to get away, run away, go abroad, into battle, get killed or wounded, but get away. At other times I was not particularly looking foward to my leave. Now I was counting the days. After duty I would walk out alone. I just did not want to see anybody, I just did not want to be reminded of the Army, though I did not hate the Army. I *did* hate something, something that was now overpowering me, crushing me, suffocating me. But I just did not know what it was.

One morning I heard there was a job of escort duty going. I asked for it and the sergeant-major said it was all right. I had to take two men to Felixstowe. They were posted to another Regiment. And it meant that I could combine this with the week-end leave for which I had applied. It meant three nights in London. The first night I went to bed early and slept well all night and did not wake up till late in the morning. Then I sat in an arm-chair the whole morning, like very old people, who just want to sit back, doing nothing, just thinking about nothing. But I didn't want to see anybody during my leave. I stayed at home.

It did me no good. I felt violently unhappy as I returned to Nottingham, and I felt worse and worse as the days went on. I began to hate Nottingham, the town I liked so much. I no longer enjoyed walks in the Arboretum, I was no longer looking forward to the N.C.O.s' course. Finally one morning I just went to see the M.O. I believe I missed the sick parade. I did not even tell the Troop office about it. I just walked out of the signal stores. But I don't quite remember.

I remember that I almost ran to his office, as if his assistance was very urgently needed, and delay might be fatal. I felt as if something had snapped in me. Something that was overstretched. It was not painful, but I was as conscious of it as if it had been an actual physical process.

This time the M.O. looked a little alarmed. He gave me what I thought was a very thorough examination. He made me strip, he sounded me, he fired question after question at me. I must have looked funny because he kept on reassuring me. 'Don't be alarmed,' he said. 'These are routine questions . . . I shall send you to a specialist . . .'

There was only one thing that stands out of the visit. At the end of it the M.O. shook hands with me. It was only later that I remembered the handshake, and it was only later it occurred to me that the thing was somehow irregular, unusual, unexpected, out of the ordinary. Why did he do it? Was it just force of habit from his civilian days, when as a matter of course he used to shake hands with his

patients after the visit? Or did he try to reassure me that there was nothing wrong with me that couldn't be put right?

It was also only later it came back to me that at the end of the visit the M.O. said I would have to wait ten days till I could see a specialist. The fact that something was 'done,' that somebody was trying to help me and trying to put things right for me, must have assured me, because I no longer felt so depressed as before but my numbness still continued. I just don't remember what happened during those ten or fourteen days I was waiting to see a specialist. Except that one afternoon it occurred to me that the M.O. didn't say what sort of specialist he was sending me to. What was wrong with me? Then I forgot it. Time stood still. It was as if I had suddenly lost my memory—the sharp, photographic, retentive, reflective memory of the 'Pro,' or most of it. For the whole month there is not a single entry in my diary.

The visit to the specialist stands out as a remarkable and strange experience. He wore a captain's uniform and his glasses were fairly thick. These were two pieces of concrete reality; the rest impressed me as fairly unreal. The specialist somehow gave me the impression that he was not quite of our own world, and during the interview I felt as if I was dreaming. At one moment I felt that I must have died and that he was sitting in judgment over me. But he was gentle, very gentle. I was forgiven, I thought. He seemed to know everything about me, as if he had had access to a very complete record of my life, collected without my knowledge. I felt his first questions were mere routine. He worked with dead certainty, not anticipating the least surprise. Then I felt that though he was still sitting in his chair opposite me resting his hands on the table, he was already working inside me. Inside me, already very, very deep somewhere where the mind must be. It was a kind of exploratory operation and it was painless. There came question after question and he seemed to get nearer and nearer to what he was looking for. Then he suddenly looked up elated. I was expecting him to take it out, to hold it up to the light to see it better, murmuring: 'So that was it . . how typical . . . .' But he only nodded.

At normal times I would have been fascinated to meet a man like him who knew so much about me. I would have liked to ask him a number of questions. But now I felt a strange awe: not because he was a captain but because it was my impression that he was somehow superhuman, like a kind of clairvoyant, a fortune-teller, a wizardly one, a seer before whom there are no secrets. And I felt very tired.

Perhaps it was his voice that helped to give a superhuman impression. Because I remember the voice very clearly. It was a soothing

voice, not deep and not high, it was unemotional and reassuring, yes, but it also had a quality which almost frightened me. He was sitting opposite me at the other side of the table. I saw his lips moving, yet his voice sounded as if it had reached me through the intermediary of a mechanical device: telephone, wireless, sound track. It was just a trifle unreal.

The rest I don't remember. He apparently told me, or I was told by an orderly, or by our own M.O., that I was to leave a certain morning for a hospital somewhere in the North.

'A nervous breakdown, a black-out, or shall we say: a nervous short-circuit like yours is a kind of self-defence on the part of the nervous system . . .' But this I heard much later. About a month later or so. It was the middle of September and Tennyson's 'long, unlovely' Wimpole Street looked very austere from the window. 'A breakdown like this acts as a safety valve, as it were, to warn you that something has been overdone, something has been overstrained and that you must be careful. . . . I shouldn't think it has much to do with the sensitiveness of the writer. Among my patients there are a number of people who are not at all intellectual or the least artistic. It is just the question of mental adjustment to certain conditions. Nor has it much to do with physical health. I have seen people crack who were much more robust than you . . .'

## 'YOU ARE FREE'

THE HOSPITAL was in the building of a high school for girls. It was in Leeds. I had been to Leeds several times before and it usually gave me the impression that I was visiting a German town. A German town with its heavy architecture, with its smells of chicory and cats' urine, its German climate, its German noises, its German Jews, its very German provincial-cosmopolitan atmosphere. I liked Leeds but I preferred Bradford because to me it was more Yorkshire, smaller and uglier if possible, and poorer. ('We are nowt makking money in Brudford.') But it had more bite, gusto, independence and 'personality'. If you like that sort of personality; I do.

But I was not in the mood now to appreciate Leeds or local colour or anything. All I wanted to have was rest.

The hospital was called 'Army Convalescent and Discharging

Centre' and was run by a captain, a fat jovial sergeant-major, and by a small clerical staff. We slept in what used to be class-rooms, leading into a large hall, whose glass roof was now permanently blacked out and the lights had to be kept on all the time.

For an outside observer, most of the eight inmates of my room—or for that matter most of those of the whole building—looked like fit enough soldiers. Most of the people in my room were quite young. Lying on our beds in the afternoon, talk naturally centred round disease. My neighbour—he was a boy of twenty—said he had 'nerves', and 'nerves' seemed to be the trouble with most people in the room except the man by the door—he was well-built, with a healthy complexion and a cheerful, wide smile. His name was Gibbs; a gunner too. He was almost completely deaf.

'Nerves' was the trouble with the little man who slept opposite me—he was gentle, with the gentleness of the downtrodden—with the Highlander who wore a Glengarry, and with the tall ex-schoolmaster from the Tank Corps.

The first few days I did nothing beyond a few easy fatigues in the morning. I was sleeping better and I was feeling better, yet I was very hazy. Then I walked out. I visited Briggate, Houndsgate, the Y.M.C.A. in Albion Street, then somebody told me the Public Library had a very good selection of books. Somebody was another inmate. We met in the wash-room. He was about thirty, with a melancholy charm—a human and affectionate Aldous Huxley for looks. ('Yes,' he smiled, 'I have often been told I look like Huxley.')

The Library was good. It must be, in fact, one of the most up-to-date and enterprising public libraries in England. All the good modern English authors and all the good foreigners in translations.

I wondered if one could find Céline, Montherlant, Kafka, Firbank, Toller, Auden, T. S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, Orwell, Malraux, O'Neil, Rilke and Elmer Rice in such a rich profusion in any L.C.C. Library, or in any other English Public Library.

I finished Montherlant's *Les Célibataires*, a copy of which I took with me when I joined up. The version I took out from the Library was English and it was called *Lament for the Death of an Upper Class*. Montherlant is a good writer if one does not mind that it is practically always the author who does the talking and that he talks like a member of the *Odéon* or *La Comédie Française* when reciting a part by Sardou, Scribe or Edmond Rostand. He does not talk: he is being declamatory. There is dialogue in the book—a kind of necessary evil—but very often he cannot get away from the—perfectly justifiable—knowledge that he is an extremely intelligent, cultured and sensitive person blessed with the gift of beautiful expression, and from the idea that it

would perhaps be a much better thing if he himself were to say what his characters ought to say. The result, of course, is that in the flood of his beautiful diction attractive young girls give the impression of amorous baby elephants.

There was a new arrival in our room. He was a Sapper. He told us that he had spent altogether six weeks in the Army, then his nerves 'went bad'. He looked a quiet, unassuming man of thirty-five. He told me he was expecting his discharge.

'Is it just like that?' I asked.

'Aye,' said the man from the Cheshire Regiment. 'They mostly get their discharge from here . . .'

'Really?'

'Aye. Have you signed the form?'

'What form?'

'The one your M.O. gave you. You know . . . you put down your disease and you signed . . .'

'I think I did sign a form . . .'

'That was it, mate. The form went to the specialist and the specialist examined you again to see if you were genuine, then he put in a recommendation. You get your ticket, don't worry.'

It was now that the procedure became clear to me, that I could connect the threads which appeared to me so loose and disconnected in the last month. I was ill, of course. What he told me had the same effect on me as when a man slowly recovers himself after loss of memory, or when a man wakes up after an operation.

'Don't you worry, mate . . . they know you are no use to them,' he said. 'You get your ticket the same as me.'

'But the Board?'

'The Board only keeps a check, to see there's no hanky-panky going on . . . as if it were so bloody easy to get out of the —— Army . . .'

'You said it, chum. They don't ask you much when you come up to the Board, they have already read your papers.' Then it was a cold afternoon and ten of us were waiting in the corridor on the first floor to take our turn to go before the Board. There were only two officers, a lieut.-colonel and a captain. The colonel bade me sit down in a gentle, bedside voice, then they went through my papers.

'What's this word here, sir?' the captain asked. 'After the word "Calcium" ?'

The colonel took the sheet of paper.

'Mm . . . mm . . . Calcium . . . mm, oh yes, *Calcium deficiency*

. . . . resulting in . . . Yes . . . You have to copy all that out on the form . . .'

Then he looked up. He looked at me.

'Have you a job to go back to?'

'I think I shall find one, sir.'

'Then we think it's better for you to return to civilian life . . .' He smiled and nodded. 'That's all, thank you. Could you please send in . . . Fusilier Redpath . . . Thank you.'

Yes, that was all. That was all. I told Redpath to go in, and I walked down the stairs into the courtyard. There was bright sunshine. In the corner of the yard two young soldiers were playing with a tennis ball. They were 'tackling' each other, full of enthusiasm, excitement, loud laughter and that beautiful glow athletics gives you. The taller one had an artificial leg, the shorter one wore a glengarry with red and white checks; he had his right arm missing. What fun and what enjoyment they had out of trying to throw each other over, like two playful young horses . . .

I walked out into the street. I knew that to-morrow morning I would leave the hospital for London, but it took me quite a long time to realise that I was no longer a soldier. It was a shock, but a delayed-action shock. The bomb had already fallen; the explosion would take place later. And the shock, I knew, would be greater far greater than the one I had received when I had my call-up notice. It would hurt, I knew. I should have to see my doctor in London and he would possibly send me away to rest, and he would talk to me. But it would hurt all the same.

I walked back to the building. I just did not know what to do. I lost my bearing completely. I knew that at night I should want to cry and that tears wouldn't come. It's easy for a bloke to want to cry but when your tears just don't come that's another thing. Hemingway did not say this. It is I who say this. He could cry easily. Maybe his tear ducts function better than mine.

'Got your ticket?' asked the Fusilier.

'Yes,' I nodded.

'What did I tell you.' He seemed revitalised, younger; a changed man. He began to pack.

'We get paid to-morrow,' said someone, 'and I reckon I take one of them Utility suits . . . they aren't bad, mate. Gibbsy's was real good. Did you see 'im yesterday? Dark blue. It's worth more than the three quid you'd get if you don't take it. You get a three piece suit, a collar and tie, and a cap, an' you c'n keep two khaki shirts, two pairs of socks, your underpants, a pair of boots, and your brushes . . .'

'And your clasp-knife.'

'Not your knife. You got to hand it in . . .'

'No, you haven't.'

'Yes, you have.'

'Betcha.'

'You look very sorry for yourself, mate. What's wrong with you? Got your ticket?'

I smiled.

'That's better,' he grinned.

'Anybody want to buy my blue patrols?' said a boy in the doorway.

'You came to the wrong place, mate. No —— soldiering for us . . .'

'It's almost new. Look at it. You c'n always use the trousis.'

'How much you want for it?'

'I dunno. Fifteen bob . . .'

'Get away with you.'

'Cost me thirty . . . You have to give kewpons if you want to buy one of these . . . and it's got nice gun buttons.'

He came nearer.

'Can you leave this place in blue patrols?' I asked.

'You can,' he said eagerly. 'Ask the Kew. That's why I brought it with me, but my sister sent me my civvies . . .'

'Are you sure?'

'Yes, mate. Ask the Kew. You want to buy it?'

'I wouldn't mind if I could leave the place in it.'

'Come down to see the Kew and ask him if you don't believe me. It would suit you. You are about the same build as me. Put it on.'

I put it on.

'Now you look as if you've been ten years in the —— Army,' said Redpath.

Redpath was right. It is amazing what clothes do to you at times. I looked like a long-service gunner, one who had seen much and the Army was almost in his blood. I looked at myself in the shop-windows as I walked through Briggate and Bond Street to Albion Street to have a last cup of tea at the Y.M.C.A. And I saw myself in it again in the train-window against the dark background of the station before it left.

And I was very attached to blue patrols as I arrived at King's Cross. I felt it somehow part of me and the thought that I would have to take it off gave me a painful sensation.

The following morning I opened a suit-case and took out what used to be my favourite suit, a golden-brown cheviot. I put it on. It smelled strongly of moth balls, in fact, my bedroom was full of them as I entered it the previous evening. I looked at myself in the

mirror, then I took off the civvy suit and put on the blue patrols again. Not to-day. Not yet. Another day. Give me a break. I shall clean my buttons with Silvo and if I go out I shall salute every officer. That is silly. Well, it is silly if you like. That's the way I feel. But what about the Redcaps? They can stop you in the street . . . I have my pass. Technically I am still in the Army. Still in the Army for twenty-eight days. That's in the King's Regulations. I am still a soldier and I am entitled to wear uniform. Should they ask me I would say my civvies are packed away in the country and I haven't got them back yet.

And what are you going to do with yourself? You are no longer in the Army. What are you going to do? You must make money. You must go on, you must get back to your place, or find one if you haven't got one . . . Oh leave me alone. Can't you see I just don't want to do anything for a few days. I just want to be alone. I am still giddy. I still don't quite know where I am, and why I am there and what do I want. I am still in a sort of haze. The anæsthetic has just worn off. I have a little pain too, just to remind me.

You like that pain, don't you?

Yes, I do. If you want to know. I do. It makes me feel good.

All right, you are quite crazy.

I *am* crazy. Well, what about it?

In the photograph they took of me in the Edgware Road for three and six, I look very soldierly in my blue patrols. Very soldierly, very solid, very concrete, desperately English, much younger than I really am and full of confidence. As I look against a background of grey with my dark 'cheese-cutter' peaked cap, with my glittering buttons, I have a clearly defined personal identity. I am a bombardier. I generally photograph well, but this three-and-sixpenny one is my most flattering photograph. Flattering? I don't know. I suppose in that moment as I sat in the chair in that hot cubicle and gazed into the camera I really did look like that. But as I paid and took my receipt and walked out into the Edgware Road my expression may have changed.

It is certainly different now that I am looking at the photograph. It has just arrived. I look at it and smile. I am wearing civvies. I am sitting at my writing desk. It is four in the afternoon. I look at it again and smile again. 'Myself when in the Army' . . . 'That's myself when I was in the Army . . . oh, darling, you didn't know I was in the Army in the second World War . . . in the Artillery. No, I had no commission. I was an N.C.O. A lance-bombardier. Well, it seems lovely to me now, but then time, you know, can act as a

flattering painter . . . Then I got sick and got my discharge. . . No, in England all the time. Just after the second anniversary it was that I was called up and I was in for a year . . . Yes, I did write about it . . . No, that little book at the end of the row . . . Certainly, darling, but you must return it . . . well, I don't know. I tried to give a chapter of autobiography with references to other chapters . . . What impact the Army and the War had on someone who to a certain extent was like other men and in other ways very different . . . A kind of personal footnote to the history of the war. . . . Yes, of course you remember but you were too young. You remember the black-out, the air raids, the rationing, and men and women in uniforms. Then you remember Armistice Day and the first night the streets were lit up again. And you remember the broadcast the Duke of Westerham made. In those days you could only hear his voice . . . Now don't argue with me; you're wrong. It's amazing how I always pick on women who like arguing. *Of course* we had telvi before the war, or at least the beginnings of it. We called it 'Television' and it was very funny. A tiny little screen and tiny little figures and, of course, there was no colour to it. It was black and white, like this photograph. And it was expensive as hell, and the range ridiculously limited . . . Well, *of course*, you get a better reception on the expresses because it's a better set and besides think of the height. Just think: the London-New-York goes up to eighteen thousand feet, if not higher . . . Yes, the Duke made a marvellous speech that night. He was a great orator. He made a speech in the beginning of the war: 'We shall fight on the landing grounds, on the beaches, on the seas, in the air, we shall never surrender . . .' Amazing how it does not date at all . . . even to you who don't remember the conditions. And we needed speeches like that in 1940 . . . Oh, I s'pose because he had a great sense of words . . . he was an artist in a way. Yes, of course, but to us the Duke was first and foremost a national leader. We just called him Winston . . . You really like my watch? I bought it a week ago at *Kronos* . . . Not that one . . . the one just at the corner of Roosevelt Street and Piccadilly . . . I like it too. It's in a way, a fake. It has a perpetual balance like yours, and an old-world dial. Roman numerals, just like my old Le Coultre, which needed winding. Oh, it was quite cheap . . . No, you are wrong . . . I paid five dollars, fifty cents for it . . .'

I looked at the photograph again and smiled. Myself when in the Army . . . Then I put it back in its envelope. I was busy now. I had just received a letter from the secretary of the Council for Adult Education in H.M. Forces asking me to call on him in three days'

time. The letter was a sequence to a note from a friend of mine who wrote to say that he had recommended me to the secretary with a view to employment. The secretary was an Oxford don and I knew a good deal about the Council's activities. They provided civilian lecturers for the Forces, who resided in various districts and gave lectures every day to various Army, Navy and Air Force units, and conducted discussion groups as well. My depression had gone as if by magic the moment I received the secretary's letter. It was a winning number. A job almost better than the Education Sergeant's which I had failed to get. It was better in fact. It carried a good salary and you were allowed complete freedom. And it was the very job I wanted. I would have a direct contact with the public such as few writers ever could have. A contact which was a combination of the writer and the actor in one person. It promised to provide an outlet for all the energies frustrated by the fact that I was unable to write for my newspapers any more. I was feeling depressed and uncreatively unhappy. And this was the job which looked as if it were created for me. I knew I would do it well. The fact that it carried a good salary was just an addition. I would have done it for half the money.

While I was walking up Whitehall to call on the secretary I tried a little pessimistic reasoning. Just in case . . . to counteract my tremendous enthusiasm so that if the job did not come off I should not feel so bitter. But it seemed there was no need for it. The secretary had already seen my *Curriculum Vitae* and after a few questions he told me that he hoped the committee would accept me. He told me I needed a green identity card and I had to ask someone in an official position to say that I was a reliable person to be issued with a pass countersigned by the Air Force Security to admit me to camps. Then he asked me whether I had a car, and finding I had one he said it was just the thing, because there were difficulties about transport. Then he said he was very sorry that it was impossible for the present to allot me to the London district, because it was, naturally, full, while at the same time Scotland simply cried out for lecturers. I told him I should really prefer to be in the country.

A week later I received a note from him enclosing the contract. It was for a year and it could be renewed.

I was now almost in raptures. I had my car out. It needed a few minor repairs. As I got inside to try out the brakes I breathed a faint musty smell—a feudal smell, like the smell inside old coaches at Lord's on the day of the Eton-Harrow cricket match—mixed with the more up-to-date odours of internal combustion. The blood of the wounded officer I took to Charing Cross Hospital during the

Blitz was still showing on the floor mat. I reflected that I would not have it cleaned.

Then I went out to buy a few books; came home and went through the scripts of some of the lectures I had prepared during the previous fortnight. It was Thursday and the following day I was to have a minor operation on one of my teeth and on Sunday I would drive up to Nottingham, the place I was appointed to. That is, if my petrol coupons and my car licence arrived in time.

They arrived in time, with a letter from the Regional Secretary at Nottingham saying he was pleased to see that I was appointed and was looking forward to seeing me on Sunday or Monday. I decided I would stay at the County Hotel for a day or two then I would look for lodgings somewhere in the town.

The operation was a success. It was a kind of thing an American dentist would do once a day, but the average Englishman would rather have the tooth out than have an apesectomy performed. I, however, fainted as I was given the injection. 'It has adrenalin in it,' the dentist explained proudly when I came round. 'Have you felt run-down lately?' I said yes, and I reflected that the state of my nerves was perhaps more serious than I had thought and it was only the prospect that I was at last allowed to be really useful that kept me spiritually and mentally alive and had brought me back to normal.

'There should be no pain afterwards . . . or very little,' he added as an afterthought.

There was no pain but I felt very drowsy afterwards. I was sitting at my desk going through one of my lectures when the bell rang. I got up and opened the front door.

'Telegram for Deheges or somethink . . .'

'That's me.'

The boy waited on in case there was an answer. I read the telegram and I think I must have told him there was no answer. I think I did. I don't remember. Apparently I walked back to my room. Then I don't know what I did . . .

I am sitting in the arm-chair by the fire. Between me and the fire there is a small circular table with a white porcelain lamp on it. The lampshade is of lacquered parchment and it is decorated with old maps. The lamp is mine and so is the table and so is the chair I am sitting on. I am in my sitting-room. It is half-past six in the afternoon. Have I been asleep?

Then I catch sight of the yellow envelope of the telegram on the table and it suddenly gives me a feeling of fear, hate, nausea and a

sickening sensation in my stomach. Now I remember everything. Everything.

I am still feeling drowsy and I get up to take a demalgon pill because my gum begins to ache. I am feeling weak . . . perhaps somebody has made a muddle about Nottingham and it is Scotland, after all . . . but that is out of the question. In that case the telegram would not have said, '*Difficulties have arisen regarding appointment*'. No, there is something more serious and disgusting.

I got up and rang up Oxford. The secretary was in.

'I am very, very sorry,' he said in his charming voice—; there is nothing dry and academic about it—'it's the Security . . . We've been at them several times and they refuse to give you a pass. Come and see me Monday . . .'

There was not really much point in going to see him but I should go, I felt, hoping he would be able to give a reason for their decision. It was clear that I was in the greatest crisis of my life. And this was the biggest blow I had received in the course of my life so far. I was sure of that the moment I replaced the receiver, a few hours after the operation and a few weeks after a nervous breakdown. And I am still thinking so five months after, now that I am writing this.

I went to see the Secretary of the Council on the following Monday. As I expected, there was nothing he could tell me. He merely repeated what I had already known, namely, that Security, as usual, had refused to give any reason for their action. Then I left him.

It took me some time—not so much to 'recover' because quite frankly I have not recovered yet—but to take stock of the situation without passion. What had happened, what did the whole thing imply? Not only that I was done out of a job which was already mine by contract, not only that I was prevented from doing a job which would have filled me with more than satisfaction, but I was done out of a particular job in which, I felt, I would have been more useful than anywhere else. It was an important piece of 'war-work'; as an ex-soldier I certainly think it was. And finally, this job going bust I was absolutely certain I should be unable to find any other job regardless of its relative usefulness for the war effort and regardless of whether it would suit me.

But there was something more about it, something more serious. For the first time in my life I was, by implication, officially regarded as a person not trustworthy. That the accusation was unjust would not have been so very galling. 'You see, in wartime we cannot be too careful and we are sometimes forced to make mistakes . . .' I can almost hear a smiling ex-wing commander telling me this at a

dinner-party in, say 1950. But this is not 1950. This is 1942 when wingless wing-commanders are not yet of necessity regarded as dinner-party bores. And this is 1942 when I am eating my heart out in despair and frustration.

What was most galling about the injustice was that I was entirely without legal redress.

This came out a few days later when I called on a friend of mine and told him everything about the affair. He is a lawyer and he agreed that it was a difficult situation because I could not bring an action against the Security. 'But,' he added, 'you know, you ought to bring an action against the people who engaged you and gave you a contract . . .'

'I know I can, but I wouldn't hear of it. They are not responsible for it and I don't want to drag someone into court knowing him to be innocent, simply because the law would be on my side . . .'

'You can't get satisfaction in any other way . . .'

'Then I won't have any satisfaction. I have a weakness for *noblesse oblige*. And being a newcomer to this country I have a similar weakness for such traditions as "playing the game," regardless whether some of the natives regard such things as *vieux jeu* or not. The trouble with converted Englishmen is, I'm afraid, that they take these things very seriously. I for one do.'

# PART THE THIRD

## *MEMOIRS OF A VANDRIVER*

# *MEMOIRS OF A VANDRIVER*

## ARGUMENTS ABOUT ARGUS

'YOU HAVE to watch your step here,' Len said when we drove across Chelsea Bridge, 'because this is a police trap. There are ever so many more on the runs. I'll have to tell you all . . . Straight on for Brixton he added as he saw me hesitating at the corner.

Len is eighteen and a half, had his medical two months ago and expects to be called up any moment. That is how I got the job on the Argus. It was the third place I went to with a green card from the Labour Exchange. I did not like the first place. It was a clerical job in a small and noisy workshop near Fitzroy Square. They told me to ring them up the following week. I did not ring them up. The clerk at the Labour Exchange had clearly made a mistake, because I told him I wanted the job of a driver: car, van lorry, possibly lorry. After that he sent me to a Government department which had asked for a driver to tour the Midlands with a demonstration van. I was glad when I heard of it. It would have meant a great deal of variety. Besides I would have loved to see the Midlands again. But there was nothing doing. I was received by a lady who had 'one look' at me, as the saying goes, then she said she was sorry they had already found the man. I knew that was not the truth, but I never argue with ladies in Government departments. Then three days later I was sent to the Argus Agency in Battersea. It was 'just across the Bridge.' The counter-hand told me that the dispatch manager was sick in hospital, but the general manager would like to see me. His name was Mr. Lockhart. He worked in a largish room partitioned by a glass wall from one of the workrooms. I passed a workshop where young men in the aroma of fresh paint, spraying materials, sawdust, ordinary dust, glue, and Home and Forces Programmes were busy painting large-size display-boards advertising forthcoming attractions for suburban cinemas. Mr. Lockhart was surrounded by furniture of sombre black, like a really first-class undertaker who would give every attention to detail. He was, however, a cheerful little man, with a friendly inquiring expression. Then without asking me who I was and what I did before, he told me all about the job. His conversation was precise and intelligent, and I noticed that he had a sense of humour. (Later, I think it was the counter-hand who told me that Mr. Lockhart was at Cambridge and had been a journalist for some time.) He told me that the

first days of the week were rather slack, there was not too much to do on Wednesdays, but Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays were very busy. Those were the days when most cinemas changed their programmes and there was, of course, Sunday morning when the big display-boards for the front of the Waldorf at Marble Arch had to be delivered. I had Sunday and Monday afternoons free. Pay was three pounds fifteen a week.

'I might get you a boiler suit.' Mr. Lockhart said later when I asked him about uniform and he laughed and said I ought to see the van first. Then he said I must see Mr. Purvis, because Mr. Purvis was the contractor and the owner of the van.

I saw Mr. Purvis. Actually it was Mr. Purvis who looked at me long with curiosity which he could not manage to disguise completely. He tried hard.

'You don't look like a vandriver,' he said.

'Must I?'

'No. I s'pose you needn't,' he smiled. 'But what I mean to say is would you stay in the job? That's the way I look at it. It's clear this is not the type of job you are used to. Mind you,' he added very quickly to dispel any impressions to the contrary, 'I'm not asking questions. I don't want to know where you came from, who you are, what you did before, but you agree it's fair to know whether you would stay. I don't want to engage a man who would stay a few weeks, then find a better job and leave me in the lurch.

'I don't think I will,' I said. 'I don't wish to be a vandriver for the rest of my life but I shall stay on for quite a time, maybe for the duration and in any case I shall give you a fortnight's notice.'

'Have you driven vans before?'

'Well, to be perfectly frank I never drove a van as such, but I have had years of experience in driving cars and in the Army I drove lorries.'

'Hope you don't drive Army-fashion.'

'No.'

'Well,' he said, and gazed at the wall opposite where there was a large board with small print containing the text of the *Factories Act of 1921* with the Amendments and the fire-watchers' rota. He was making up his mind. Mr. Purvis was a young man with close-cropped dark hair, a natural interest in mechanics and machinery and a predisposition for long words. 'Well,' he said and smiled a little, 'I'll give you a trial. You start next Monday. But I'd like to see some of your papers. Your driving licence, your employment card and your Army discharge . . .'

It was Monday now and Len and I were on our first run. We

drove to Brixton first and called at the Plaza, leaving behind a bundle which contained an 'art,' advertising *Heart's Content*, featuring Spencer Tracy with Hedy Lamarr. Then we went to Streatham and left another bundle behind, then to Tooting and finally to Balham. Then we turned back through Clapham Common. Len was silent all the way.

'That's all for to-day,' said Len as we were back at the Argus. 'Monday is jam. Usually there isn't anything on Mondays and the afternoon is your half day off. See you to-morrow morning . . . shouldn't turn up before nine if I was you. There isn't much doing here in the beginning of the week. Only don't tell Mr. Purvis. He wants me to be in by eight every morning . . .'

I went home.

I live in a Victorian square in Pimlico, quite near the river. I have the ground floor. Two rooms and bathroom and kitchen at the back. I have lived there since the Blitz. On my writing desk I found a note on a piece of blue paper. '*A foreign lady called from the agent and saw flat. Would come again at four.*' This was from the housekeeper who lived in the basement.

I reflected that I should have to put up the rent by ten shillings because I could not get anything decent under twenty-five shillings a week either in Pimlico or in Battersea and there might be extras. I had gone round the previous afternoon to see 'apartments' and 'residential chambers.' There was very little variety. Most houses were packed and quite a number had waiting lists of old residents. Then I remembered I must tell the foreign lady when she called again that the curtains in the sitting-room are meant for the bedroom, and that the proper curtains were supposed to arrive the following week.

'I thought so,' said the foreign lady when she came punctually at four. 'They are preety but how do you say *très courts*?'

'*Bien entendu*,' I said. '*Ils sont pour la chambre de lit. Il me semble que . . .*'

'*Ah, vous parlez français*,' and she broke into a torrent of words. 'I like your pictures. My uncle was a *conservateur* in the museum at Lyons . . . That, I presume, is Italian . . .'

'Yes. It has been seen by a few experts and they think it is either a Correggio or "School of . . ." '

'And the one over the mantelpiece?'

'That's my father in his robes . . .'

'*Tiens*, I thought it was a Veronese.'

'It is painted in the Veronese style. It was done by a Hungarian who had thought my father dressed up in his purple velvet and gold and fur and silver beard looked very much like some of Veronese's customers. I s'pose he does, though when I see him in his robes I always smell moth balls.'

'And what are those terrible people doing in that Chinese scroll?'

'That's "The Court of Yama": the punishment of the wicked in the Chinese Hell.'

'Doesn't it give you nightmares?'

'Not since food rationing has been introduced.'

'*En effet*,' she said absent-mindedly. 'What I was going to say: do you think your bed would be large enough for my husband and myself?'

'That depends entirely on your husband's size, Madame . . .'

'*C'est vrai*,' she said, and looked rather helpless.

After she was gone I made myself some tea and it occurred to me that I should have to continue looking for digs again, and I did not feel pleased. I am too old to be fascinated by the inconvenient and uncomfortable. I don't much mind a bare room as long as it contains the essentials. Those furnished rooms, however, I have seen, were far from bare. In fact they contained a good many things except the essentials. They were as a rule crowded with useless but unattractive objects. They had no constant hot water or constant water of any description: they had a washstand, a basin, and a pail. Beds narrow and uncomfortable. And there were water-colours. There was no personality and warmth about them. They were not even sordid. Out of sheer sordidness you occasionally can squeeze a little warmth . . . And the other tenants! I thought, one never sees them, except when one does not want to. I had spent four years in an apartment house in Kensington without knowing any of its inhabitants except one, but she soon left. I had a suspicion that they were perhaps not entirely uninteresting people, but still I never really met them, except in the hall or on the staircase. And one learns so little about people when one meets them on the staircase.

What I would really have liked to do was to board with a working-class family as a lodger sharing their life, but that seemed very difficult in Battersea and still more difficult in Pimlico.

As I was drinking my tea I reflected that it was rather strange that a certain amount of comfort, and my books, were the only considerations that made me a little uneasy when I thought of letting my flat and going in lodgings.

Nothing else seemed to matter. Was it the war with its 'nothing really matters ' attitude which so many of us adopt so very often, that made me change my views towards my flat, or was it my year in the Army? Or the fact that in a way I should be living beyond my means if I stayed on? Or something else? I did not know, but it was clear that I was quite ready to leave, the moment I found a tenant, without any regrets.

It had taken me several years to furnish my flat and at times in the past I thought it was a minor achievement. It was a flat which was planned on a clearly outlined blueprint. Nothing was accidental. There were two guiding principles behind it. One was to have nothing except the most important pieces of furniture. The acquisition of these things took me the best part of three years, because I had decided to have nothing but first-rate period furniture. I had chosen Sheraton because that was the least expensive Georgian. Chippendale, Hepplewhite, Adam, Kent, were far beyond my means. And I had decided on period furniture because of the second principle beyond the blueprint. The second principle was a kind of self-defence. I decided to have a mercilessly and impersonally elegant flat, a knock-you-down flat, because I felt very uncertain about myself as a writer and as a man, very uncertain about my place, position and whereabouts. I did not consider myself a failure yet, but I knew I was failing. The process was not finished yet—I felt—it might lead to success in the end but so far I was failing and I wanted to hide it. It was vitally important to hide it, there could be no argument about it. And I suppose I managed to hide it.

This was the piece of reality behind the decision and this was the principle that went through the whole scheme: the principle that made me choose an impressively large room with a high ceiling for a sitting-room, a Louis XV chandelier with two wall-brackets, the Waterford glass candelabra, the table lamps of white *Capo di Monte*, the Luneville dining-service, the coffee-brown tweed covers with cream stars on the two high-backed wing chairs and settee, the salmon-pink and cream-striped Regency damask curtains. It was the same principle that made me ask my father to lend me the Correggio cherub and his own portrait in the Louis XV frame, and made me have the pictures illuminated by striplights, it was the same principle that made me cut down my expenditure for months on end in order that I should be able to buy 'The Court of Yama' and the picture of the three drunken Chinamen by So Itsuo, my second edition of Johnson and the rest of those attractive 'library editions' of my favourite classics which I could have bought much cheaper in a democratic dress.

There was nothing 'artistic' about my sitting-room, nothing connected with the 'artistic temperament.' Some of the finest artists I know have either very bad or very indifferent taste and have no desire to surround themselves with elegant and attractive things. I find that very natural. Matisse, who is one of the greatest modern artists living, I had found, when I went to see him in Nice, in a good, comfortable, old-fashioned flat of the prosperous French bourgeoisie. True, in his dining-room he had a Seurat, a very large Couture and

a beautiful Sisley, but these things somehow seemed to be connected with his profession. There was nothing to knock you back there. André Gide's flat in the Rue Vaneau was like a bookshop: huge bookshelves that seemed to totter under their weight. Alfred Doeblin —one of Germany's greatest writers—lived very simply.

There was nothing 'artistic' about my sitting-room. And when the production, the *mise-en-scène* was completed and I heard the comments: 'Austere elegance' . . . 'No nonsense about it' . . . 'Expensive simplicity' and 'unhappiness in comfort' I knew I succeeded. That was what I wanted.

But I don't want it now. The world did not change; I did. The world that made me feel so unsure about myself, so self-conscious under a presence that was built up more or less on the same principles as my sitting-room, the world in which I was failing, is still with us. There are hopes that it may change; for the time being it is still with us. But I feel I don't need that self-defence any longer. I see no further need to pretend that I am an ordinary person. In the past I had pretended in practically every way because I had felt the necessity of fitting in and I had thought that if I fitted in the superficial but the most tangible and visible details, such as my appearance and my surroundings, the fact that I am so different in some of the most fundamentals and most essentials might not appear so very striking. Now I feel there is no further need for it. I am different from most people and that difference may have a good deal to do with the fact that I became a writer. And writers are different from people who are not writers. No use pretending. They all have their things 'in common' with other people and a good many of them are busy going round saying, 'I am just an ordinary person like you.' Sometimes they say that with a tongue in their cheek, with an eye on royalties, and sometimes because they are quite genuinely convinced that they are telling the truth. They all have their 'human touches' but they are different from other people. The longer I live the more I am forced to think that writing is not a profession but a special condition of the sympathetic nervous system. They are different whether they are good writers or bad ones, because the only difference between a good writer and a bad one is the quality of his brain.

That is the truth as I see it and I feel I have no further need for camouflage, self-defence, apologies, justifications, escape. My new attitude is: take me or leave me . . .

There were many reasons which made me take up my job as van-driver to the Argus. The first was that I had failed to get a job connected with the war effort. I had made some six or seven applications to various Government departments and I had written to about twenty

people I knew. The result was failure all along the line and a dossier full of 'documentary evidence' supporting the fact that from intellectual aspects I was of no use to the war effort. That dossier is interesting. If ever I should venture to open a school to teach people how to write letters and how not to, I am sure that dossier would become most helpful. Looking at its contents the other day, I felt it would supply schoolbook examples on the art of graceful refusal. I could send out the samples under various headings. How to refuse and how not to. I could say here is the reply you should send to a man when you are an elderly peer, another when you are a young peer. Here is one you should send when you are an ex-Air Minister, here is how you should refuse when you are an Under-Secretary of State, here is what you should write when you are a governor of the B.B.C. Here is an excellent example of how you should write to a man you used to know when you were not yet P.P.S. to a Cabinet Minister or not yet an important person in this Ministry or that. And here are letters, alas, whose tone you must avoid. Then there are other tricks for occasions when you feel you cannot possibly write a letter, because you cannot avoid snubbing your correspondent. In that case you should ask him to lunch and 'explain it with regrets.' But that is conversational technique and should come under a fresh heading. The whole course should be called 'The Art of Refusal in Ten Easy Lessons.'

The contents of the dossier did not make me sick or uneasy. My attitude was that after the treatment I had received from the Security I could withstand a few minor blows quite easily. And I must say I felt absolutely no resentment towards those people I knew who in the beginning of the war had displayed a marvellous instinct for self-preservation, who had muscled into 'safe' jobs connected or unconnected with the war effort. There were a good many worthless people among them, who had done the same, who deserve nothing but contempt. But those I didn't know. I am only speaking about people I know. In the beginning of the war I regarded them with some sympathy. 'I can't be of any use to the Army,' they said with alarm, 'the Services would only get the worst out of me.' They had conviction and belief in themselves, that they were fine, superior, above the average, cut out for finer things; racehorses that must not be made to draw the plough. They were right but it was fascinating to watch them in their great crisis, fascinating to watch what they would do and what they would not do to avoid being called up. It was particularly interesting to watch the fine scholarly type, the artist, the differentiated, the hypersenstitive, the invert. How he would bring into a desperate play all his intelligence, experience, imagination, cunning. How he would not mind any humiliation. How he would

get away to America, how he would muscle into the M.O.I., the B.B.C., the British Council, Red Cross, Censorship, and scores of other places. They were a fascinating sight to watch. Fascinating as it would be to watch Carthusian monks who for long years had never said anything beyond *Memento Mori*, when the monastery is hit during an air raid. How they would suddenly speak again, at first with difficulty, especially those older ones who had not spoken for twenty years; later with ease, with garrulousness, as if to make up for the years of silence.

It was fascinating to watch these contemporaries of mine, how in the first months of the war the sense of their personal danger had suddenly made them multiply their efforts and made them active. To see hypersensitive young men who seemed almost sterile, because of the burden of their culture and learning, sensitive young men who in the years the locust had eaten had felt too tired or too apathetic or too sick to write, to paint, to compose. To see how hard they worked now, how they racked their brains, how they would seek out friends they had neglected for years, relations they used to snub. How they were burning with that creative energy that would have or ought to have gone into a good poem, a novel, an essay, a painting, a good piece of social reform, to find the escape and to get away into safety. It was fascinating to watch these outwardly passive people. How active they suddenly became, as if revitalised by a sudden current of electricity or by a generous dose of hormone extract. I watched them fascinated, without a sense of blame, without a smile, without irony. I watched them with a certain amount of sympathy and with a sense of pity. They were right, I felt. They had to escape, they had to preserve themselves for better things. Their delicate nervous system could not have withstood the strain. I felt a kind of tenderness towards them, a tenderness a man feels when he has no children and would like to have them. I felt I was of different stuff. I felt I would be all right in the Army, because I knew that my body was tough and young, my eyesight excellent, my heart, my lungs, my feet, my teeth, all of them good. I should be all right when it came to physical hardship. Then I was curious and out for experience and I felt I was elastic enough to withstand nervous strain.

I was wrong. I tried to be over generous with a capital I had not possessed.

I felt the job of a lorry-driver would suit me best. I always liked driving and on the day I got the job and looked at the Bedford van I was to drive I reflected that all you needed to satisfy your early ambitions was to wait for thirty years. I wanted to be a driver when I was five, you see. But that was a frivolous thought. The job of a

lorry-driver was the sort of thing, the sort of world, the experience I wanted to have when I was twenty-one. It was impossible then. If I had had this job then, I thought, instead of the life which I was, in a way, forced to lead, I would have perhaps arrived somewhere. Well, it had come somewhat late in life, but perhaps it was not too late. As it was outlined to me the job seemed congenial. It did not need a sustained mental effort and it was not connected with writing in any way. That was good. For that matter I was told I should have to fill in a report form every day about the runs, their length and the time I started and finished work, but you don't call that a literary activity. At the same time it was not a 'dull,' repetitive, uneventful job in a factory or office in which—it is my conviction—only women could be thoroughly happy. And the hours did not look too long. After I put my van back to the shed I would go home and write.

## ADMIRALS ALL

I HAD to wait because the 'banners' were not quite ready for the Commodore, Putney, and the 'vestibule displays' for the Forum, Fulham, were still damp. I knew Len was right when he said it was no use for the van-driver to turn up at eight along with the others because there never was anything doing before half-past nine. In any case the van-driver did not need to clock in. This latter fact peeved me a little because I had never clocked in all my life and I thought it was something missing from my status as a working man.

The dispatch department was on the first floor of the building. The place originally had been a furniture repository. It was a large room but had no windows. Behind the counter it contained the switches of the electric heating plant which accompanied Reg's working hours with a kind of purring noise, except when all the switches were on. Then the accompaniment became very loud and everybody had to shout. In any case everybody shouted all over the Argus, because the wireless was on all the time and the fretwork machines and the carpenters' hammers made ordinary tones difficult to hear. I took to these vocal conventions easily. I had very good training for them in the Artillery, where everybody had had to shout. ('Speak up, Bombardier,' Sergeant-Major Kerr would tell me when I gave orders to my men in the beginning, 'half of your men are old gunners and stone deaf . . .')

One morning, Mrs. Palethorpe, who ran the canteen, asked me to call 'Deafy.'

'Which one do you mean?' I said, 'there are four deaf men here . . .'

'Five,' said Reg, sipping his tea.

'Who's the fifth? There's Johnson, there's the old labourer who always wears dark blue, the boy in the Silk Screen department and the little elderly man.'

'And Mr. Cushion downstairs. He's doing the banners for you.'

'Then which one you call "Deafy"?'

'The one you call the little elderly man.'

I went out to tell him his toast was ready and kept wondering why they would call him 'Deafy' out of five deaf men. He wasn't deafer than any of the others. It was perhaps because he was the sort of man who had no name; the kind of man who had somehow lost it, except for a few official purposes, and his only claim to recognition seemed to be that he was deaf.

If one had ventured to compile statistics on the subject of the various infirmities of the staff of the Argus and one did not know them personally, it would have been easy to think that the Argus was an institution, a kind of Friendly Society to render the infirm useful members of the community. Five were deaf, two were hunchbacks, three lame and one—he was a professional fireguard—was four foot six, though he wore a bowler hat. But that was only the thing on paper. That was only statistical information. In actual life the Argus was a lively and cheerful company. One of the lame young men was a first-class dancer and one of the hunchbacks a champion rifle shot. They were mostly young and though for some reason or other unfit for military service they were full of life and activity.

The bell rang again. It had a shrill note. Even the five deaf men must have known it was the end of the morning break.

I went back to the dispatch counter. Len said that the stuff was ready and we could start straight away.

'Get the old junkshop out,' he said and handed me the ignition key.

I went downstairs. The van I was to drive was a strange article and it frightened me a little at first blush. It made me uneasy, because I felt I would get impatient with it later when the newness of my job wore off, and became more and more conscious of its drawbacks. In many ways I am an unconventional person, at times quite Bohemian, but I somehow cannot extract any fun out of inefficiency whether it is in a machine or a man. I like things to work smoothly, and I hate unnecessary complications and unnecessary disorders. The Bedford—my Bedford—had a wooden upper part added to it, which made it

top-heavy and spoilt its line. This was, however, needed because of the size of some of our bigger boards. Then on top it had a wooden frame with hooks to carry the extra large boards that would go every Sunday morning to be put over the front of two West End cinemas as well as two theatres. These necessities made the Bedford look as if its body had been designed by Heath Robinson. The engine was in working order, but the oil sump was at fault. It was leaking through the gear-box among other places and the sump needed refilling every day. Then the steering was difficult. It needed an effort.

It was very cold and starting up was not easy. I got some warm water from Mrs. Palethorpe, because I had let the water out the previous night. I took off my jacket and began to swing it. The battery was very low, it was no use topping it; the plates were worn. Finally I got it started. Then we loaded the stuff.

'Where shall we go to-day?'

'Putney, Richmond, Twickenham, Hounslow,' said Len, 'then we come back through Hammersmith, Walham Green and Fulham. . . . . I'll tell you the short cuts . . .'

This was the dull round, the south-western suburbs. We drove along pleasant streets with 'desirable residences' and we met pleasant cinema managers and attendants. The places were prosperous, and clean, well-run and efficient but dull. Hammersmith and Walham Green showed a little colour, but I knew them only too well. This was the Thursday run. We would stop in front of a cinema, or rather near a cinema, because there was always a bus stop in front of cinemas. Then Len or I would jump out and take an 'art' or a 'banner' or a display board out of the van and give it to the attendants. If it was early in the day, the man would be wearing his civvy jacket over his emerald green or vermillion red trousers with the gold braid on it and would be busy dusting the mirrors or the circular glass shields surrounding the pay box. He would smile and say thank you for it, then he would fetch the old boards out for us to take them away. As he entered the auditorium the shrill notes of the vacuum cleaners would come through the swing doors.

At some of the cinemas there was nobody about as we arrived. Then Len would tell me where to put our parcels. I made a mental note of the fact that in Putney I had to enter one of the box offices from behind and deposit my parcels there. In Richmond there was a door that was left ajar specially for us among the six front doors of the Majestic.

As we left Richmond and crossed the bridge for Twickenham, the Cinema 'Navy' had already done with the cleaning of their 'ship'

and were already resplendent in their uniforms, epaulets and gold braid and all. Some of them looked like overgrown midshipmen, others looked like seedy admirals from some distant Ruritanian country. In most places you had admirals, because the 'other ranks' had been called up. In some cinemas you had women dressed up as naval officers. In one place a middle-aged woman looked exactly like a commander I knew when you saw her from behind. But only then. When she turned round you saw that she had a thin little moustache. That is not allowed in the Navy.

Finally my overall arrived. It was Friday afternoon. Reg handed me an envelope. It was a small envelope, my name on it and it said £3-15s.-0d., less insurance 1s.-10d., total £3-13s.-2d. It was the first pay envelope I received in my life. Then he told me to call at the stores. The stores were downstairs and Mr. Holmes showed me two boiler suits in dark blue. 'Mr. Lockhart wasn't sure about your size,' he said.

I tried one on over my suit. It fitted me. It smelt new. I decided I wouldn't wear my raincoat any more, because the 'Rear Admiral' in the Empire, Ladbroke Grove, addressed me as 'sir' yesterday when I asked for last week's boards to take back.

It was six o'clock and I walked home in my boiler suit. Friday was a heavy day. We had to start at eight in the morning to take the eight foot by three boards up to the Waldorf at Marble Arch. There were so many that we had to make two runs of them. The streets were almost completely empty, shops not yet open, except the little café round the corner where we found the carpenters. Then they finished their tea and they helped us to unload the stuff and reload us with the old boards advertising the last week's film. 'Sometimes the Waldorf has a good film on,' said Len, 'and keeps it on for two weeks or three then you needn't come up.'

'And needn't get up so early either,' said one of the carpenters.

This morning there was a row about the panels. It came out that 'Deafy' gave us the second load first, not realising that the Waldorf panels were numbered because certain of them had to go up before the others. The carpenters decided to go back to the café and urged us to do the run quickly and tell 'Deafy' to keep his bloody eyes open.

It was nearly ten o'clock when we returned, then Len and I had to go to the West End with the smaller stuff for a firm in Wardour Street, and we bought a brush for one of the painters. Then we crossed the river and called at Waterloo Station to hand in some stuff that had to go by rail. After this we went to have some food at the A.B.C. It was very crowded and Len said there was a café not far away kept by a Greek and the food was better there. Pity he didn't think of it before.

I said yes and made a mental note of the Greek place. The food in our canteen was quite good but there was no place to eat it.

In the afternoon we did our round of the northern suburbs. We called at Charing Cross first to hand in some bundles for a Catford cinema, then Len said he would like to drive so I let him and we went to Kentish Town. These runs were carefully made out by Mr. Purvis, who knew his London well, and I made a list of them in my S.O. Book 135 that had a crown on it and G.R., one of my relics of the Army. On the previous page I found the following: '*C.W. Control. When receiving W.T. (key) it alters note of incoming signals to suit reader's ear and is generally used in conjunction with Crash Level and/or Volume Control . . .*'

Then one more line:

'*Hepburn to report to me at* 18.00 *hrs. to scrub up Bty. Office floor.*'

I drew a line after this and I put down the Friday runs one after the other.

From Kentish Town we went to Holloway and from Holloway to Highgate, then we climbed the hill, went through Hampstead Heath and called at a cinema at Golders Green, then we turned back to Neasden, Kensal Rise, Ladbroke Grove, Harrow Road, and finished up at a small cinema near Paddington Station. This was a much more enjoyable run than the 'respectable' suburbs. The gold braid on the 'admirals' ' uniforms became a little shabby, they were a little like their ships, not so efficient and impersonal but much more friendly and chummy.

'This is the new van-driver,' said Len at Kensal Rise to an 'admiral' who ought to have been on the retired list.

'You want to see the programme?' he asked me.

There was no time, but I thanked him all the same.

These cinemas on the Friday run were more picturesque and interesting. Some of them were Victorian music-halls turned into cinemas and they had something very solid about them. Some were built in the Moorish style like a brothel in Algiers and there was one in the functional *Bauhaus* style like a telephone exchange in Düsseldorf, but their atmosphere was friendly and warm. Some, of course, were very small and were no doubt referred to by corner boys in Kensal Green and in the backwaters of the Harrow Road as the 'local flea pit,' but one felt that was a term of affection.

I did not try any game of false pretences with the Argus. I did not pretend I was a 'working man.' It would not have been easy and I felt in my dealings with Lockhart and Purvis there was no need for it either. The shortage on the labour market was, I found, so very serious that the Argus had little choice. In normal times the thing, of course, would have been absurd and impossible, but now they were forced to swallow

the fact that their 'arts' and banners were delivered by a man who did not even pretend to hide the fact that he had never before done any manual labour for money.

Apart from my two employers the thing was, however, different. The others employed by the firm were mostly young and they did not notice social differences so easily. Besides I wanted to establish friendly relations with them on equal terms.

As I walked home to have a wash and supper I reflected that in the fourth year of the war, clothes still played an important part in social stratification. I naturally put on 'old clothes' when I took up the job. But age of clothes made little difference. Age—especially well preserved age—alone could not devaluate the class value of a suit. When one had paid ten or twelve guineas for a suit before the war, one had not alone bought durability and good outlines that seemed to defy time, one also bought a kind of class uniform.

The Saturday run was complicated. In the morning we would go to the West End and deliver some 'displays' painted on linoleum at the stage door of a theatre, hand in a parcel or two at Charing Cross Station, call at one of the newly-created ministries, then we would be off for the rest of the morning. This first Saturday, however, we had to go back to the theatre because Mr. Graham, the publicity manager had some stuff for us to take away. Len introduced me to Mr. Graham.

'Pleased to meet you,' I said.

'What's your first name?' he asked.

'Martin.'

'Glad to know you, Martin . . . and how is Glasgow?'

'Quite well,' I smiled. 'How did you know I came from Glasgow?'

'Oh, I'm pretty good at spotting Glasgow people. Come from Glasgow myself.'

'Didn't know you was Scotch,' said Len as we carried the boards downstairs.

'I didn't know it either, but I'll stick to it now.'

'That's Mr. Graham, the man I told you about, who gives you tickets for the show, but he won't give you one now because it's a new show on. You have to wait . . .'

After we had our dinner we started the afternoon run. It was known as the 'long run.' It started in Islington, then we drove along the Essex Road up to Stoke Newington where we delivered parcels at two cinemas, then cut through Shucklewell Lane to Clapton, then took the long meandering Lea Bridge Road. We went to the Modern at Leyton, then we called at a house nearby where one of our painters lived who worked at home. We collected the finished stuff from him and left him

a few bundles of paper. Then we drove over to Leytonstone. It was after three and the streets were very crowded with shoppers.

'And now?' I asked Len, as we came out of the Electric Palace.

'We go to Twenty-three Acacia Terrace, Wanstead.'

'What's that?'

'That's where the Boss lives.'

We went by Eastern Avenue and Len had to tell me twice that the speed limit for commercial vehicles was thirty miles an hour and also that there were several actual or reputed police traps in this road. Then we arrived and delivered the Boss's groceries and a dining-room chair repaired by one of our carpenters (it had to be repaired four times a year) then we called at the Coronation, Wanstead.

'We go back now,' Len said. 'Would you let me drive?'

We changed seats and we drove through Ilford, Manor Park, Upton Park, Stratford, and finally we were on the Mile End Road. The Plaza on the Mile End Road was our last port of call. It was black-out time now and we drove through the deserted City.

'D'you think you could do the runs alone?' asked Len.

'I shouldn't think so for a moment.'

'That's all right,' said Len and grinned; 'because then I stay with you another week. Mr. Lockhart said I would have to work in the silk-screen department after you got into your work. And next week I'll have to take the old bus down to Morden to Mr. Purvis . . .'

'Is he going to put the oil sump right?'

'Yes, and he wants the engine rebored and other things done to it and he's got a new van, a Morris Eight, much smaller, and you'll be driving the new one the week after . . . but you'll get much less petrol.'

We made up the daily form on our runs. Start of work, breaks, routes, and the time we finished work.

In the end the French lady agreed to take the flat and one Sunday afternoon I moved into a bed-sitting-room on the opposite side of the square. It took me three days to find accommodation. Finally one evening I came across Mrs. Henretty's house. She was eighty and she had spent thirty years in the square. She submitted me to a careful scrutiny then when we finished with my biographical details she very suddenly told me that back in eighteen-eighty-five a man had shot himself because he had found that she had already been married to Mr. Henretty.

'You can see it for yourself,' she said anxious to prove the case. 'Just go out to the Old Brompton Cemetery and his grave is the first grave on the right-hand side as you come in. His name is on the tombstone: Captain Horace Dunn-Everett. You can see it for yourself. . . . And

you got to be careful running down the stairs, especially downstairs, mind you. A niece of mine, a very pretty girl, fell down the staircase . . . At some club it was. And she was dead, my dear, dead as a doornail, yes. It was *notified* in all the papers. My daughter, Mrs. Woodburn, can tell you. She is living with me . . . I had seven children. Five gals and two boys, then I took stuff to prevent it. I didn't want a baker's dozen, no thank you. Yes, when we moved in here Pimlico was very smart. All private houses, and people had carriages. My father would turn in his grave if he knew that I let rooms. He was a judge and he said I want every member of my family to have enough for bread and cheese. He left us money but we can't touch the capital . . . Careful on the stairs . . .'

I promised to be careful, my hand on the doorknob, but she called me back to show me some photographs of her grandfather.

My room was small and there was no running water and there was an Ascot heater in the bathroom, a contraption with which I am not familiar. I really would have liked to have boarded with a working-class family as a lodger, but the thing seemed impossible. There was hardly anybody in Pimlico or Battersea who would take in lodgers. It was true I was to have my room to myself after working hours but I would have to cook my own breakfast on the gas-ring and I missed the cheerful company of fellow lodgers at breakfast in the kitchen. I was thinking of the five weeks I had spent with Mrs. Hammett off the Uxbridge Road over twelve years ago and those cheerful people who congregated in her house. And those good times we had at the Palais in Hammersmith on Saturday afternoons. True, of course, my Saturday afternoons were not free now.

## DON'T KEEP THE VANMAN WAITING

THE NEW van was a great improvement on the Bedford. It was a pleasure to drive it; gears comfortable, steering easy, the only thing that gave me trouble was the self-starter, which was out of order. This would not have mattered much if Mr. Purvis had not set the petrol jet too narrow. As he did the engine stopped pretty often when I used the brakes too violently and re-starting was difficult. After a few angry attempts to pull out the self-starter, I had to get off—usually in the thickest traffic in front of a traffic lamp—push in the starting handle and swing it.

I was alone now. Len had donned a paint-stained blue overall and was now working in the silk-screen department turning out placards for

cinemas in the lesser provincial towns. He looked sorry for himself and was counting the days till he would join the Marines.

The new van, however, had a great disadvantage. It was very small and the larger boards had to be carried on top of it and unless they were firmly lashed to the wooden rails that the carpenters put up one week-end, they would slip off. One Thursday afternoon between Wimbledon and Richmond I lost one of our biggest boards. It slipped through the ropes and I did not hear it fall down. I offered to pay for it, and I was sure it cost the best part of a pound, but they did not take it off my wages.

Eric said I shouldn't worry because van-drivers are hard to come by these days, besides it wasn't my fault if they gave me a joke of a van like mine.

Eric was seventeen and he worked for another advertising agency which from time to time did some printing for the Argus. He said I should stick up for my rights, not like that barmy Len who would never open his trap. In any case there was nothing doing in Civvy Street and I ought to join the Merchant Navy. He had already been round to see them and was waiting to hear from them. He would let me know.

One could not complain about lack of variety, especially in the beginning of the week. There were a good many unexpected runs, usually in Central London. On such occasions Miss Glasspool, who worked in Mr. Lockhart's office, would ring up the firm and say I would be arriving at such and such an hour and please don't keep the vanman waiting, because we have only one van.

The phrase had been borrowed from the laundry-books on which it was always customary, I believe, to display this request and since Miss Glasspool gave it a new lease of life, it had become current in the Argus. When I would walk up to the spray room waiting for the bigger boards to dry or to the carpenters' room for the panels, the boys would sing it in chorus 'Don't Keep the Vanman Waiting.' It was a kind of jocular hint to the effect that Miss Glasspool was keen on me.

The joke, of course, was on Miss Glasspool and not on me, because Miss Glasspool, like so many efficient women in business, had rarely found time to smile and accordingly was not too popular with the younger generation. In actual fact she was an overworked, fussy and kind-hearted woman of forty-five.

One morning she informed me that a compliment had been passed on to her on the telephone by Mr. Graham, who said that I was a very punctual and reliable driver and would I care to take my lady friend to one of Mr. Graham's shows the following Friday. She gave me two tickets.

There were other buckshee affairs in connection with the job. The 'admirals' and sometimes the managers themselves offered to let me in to see their shows. The unfortunate thing was, of course, that I could never spare the time in the afternoon, and the cinemas were too far away to go to in the evenings.

One morning I had to call at one of the ministries to deliver an urgent parcel personally to an official. He was told what time I would arrive and please don't keep the vanman waiting. He gave me a shilling tip.

'Thank you, sir.'

The slogan about don't keep the vanman had travelled quite a long way. Some of the boys knew some of my 'admirals' and occasionally I heard it as a distant refrain in Upton Park or Kensal Rise.

I felt I was somehow becoming part of the London scene. I felt I had something to do with the life of the metropolis in a way I never had before. It was something concrete and clear-cut; it seemed real. I felt I had spent fifteen years in London without for one single moment becoming part of it. That extra-territorial existence had come to an end. I was now a London transport worker and I was working for the entertainment industry. I had certain privileges that only people who are definite parts of London like policemen, postmen, milkmen, van-drivers, errand boys and the rest of that large legion who do the 'crowd work' on the metropolitan stage, can enjoy. I could walk into the vestibule of cinemas and with a great familiarity I could enter empty rooms and take away parcels and leave other ones. Nobody would stop me. If the 'admirals' saw me entering they would just smile and jerk their heads sideways, and if they were the friendly type like Jim in Islington or Arthur in Upton Park they would ask me how things were. For the second time in my life I felt that I had a clearly-defined personal identity. The first time I was a soldier, now I was a van-driver. There was no doubt about it. I was the man from the Argus, the bloke that-brings-our-posters and I felt for the first time that I was permanently responsible for tangible results. My former life for the time being looked quite unreal. The writer's world is unreal, of course, and the writer's problems would always look unreal, that is a definite drawback of the profession. If I happened to pass the Waldorf at the Marble Arch or the Madison at Leicester Square, resplendent with the over life-size likenesses of Clark Gable, Spencer Tracy and Greer Garson, or the Trocadero Theatre at Charing Cross Road with its large boards on front, I would feel with a certain amount of satisfaction that I had something to do with all this. I could tell that Judy Garland's face was painted by Denis and the rest of the figure by Bob and the lettering by Mr. Watkins. And that the boards were cut on the fretwork machine by

Charlie. And that Greer Garson's dress bore a visible indentation was caused by the fact that I did not put corrugated paper under the ropes when I fastened Greer Garson on to the top of my van.

I would get up at half past seven in the morning, hurry across the river to get to the Argus by eight-thirty, then I would collect the stuff from the various departments, check up my rounds with Reg and start off. I would usually start at the parcels' office at Charing Cross, where there is generally livestock among the parcels: a goat, a greyhound or two tied with a string to a hook in the wall, with a number on a piece of cardboard round their neck. The day before yesterday I saw a llama. It was going to a provincial Zoo. In profile it looked exactly like Hugh Walpole.

From Charing Cross I would drive up to Leicester Square, pick up an order, then I would start out for the suburbs, calling at cinemas smart and shabby with 'admirals' resplendent in bottle-green or vermilion, some the worse for wear, delivering banners, vestibule displays, 'arts,' boards, cut-outs, Greer Garson and Judy Garland and Clark Gable. Then I would have a spot of dinner at one of the little cafés round the corner, and afterwards I would do some more deliveries. It is usually half past five when I knock off, except Monday, which is my half-day off.

I am making friends with 'admirals'. They are nice people to know. I have got a special pal at the Electric Palace, Upton Park. His name is Arthur and he says that if I ever get fed up with the firm he will get me another driving job. They are easy to come by these days. One night Arthur and I went to a dance in Leytonstone and he introduced me to his girl. She is called Doris and she works in an Ordnance Factory and she is trying to persuade Arthur to have all his teeth out. We would dance, Doris and I, and Arthur would look on. Then Doris would dance with his sister on leave from the A.T.S., Arthur and I looking on and then I would ask to dance with her again and Arthur would say: 'Come on, Doris, don't keep the vanman waitin' . . .'

THE END

ORSZ. SZÉCHÉNYI KÖNYVTÁR

DON'T KEEP THE VANMAN WAITING

ADAM DE HEGEDUS

STAPLES