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REMEMBER AND BE GLAD

BY CYNTHIA ASQUITH

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One Sparkling Wave

Short Stories:

What Dreams May Come

For Children:

Everything Easy

I Wish I Were You

The Children's Ship (Editor)

Anthology:

She Walks in Beauty

Play:

No Heaven For Me



The Author—Coming Out

CYNTHIA ASQUITH

REMEMBER AND BE GLAD

“For if the darkness and corruption leave
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,
Better by far you should forget and smile
Than that you should remember and be sad”

Christina Rossetti

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C. A.

LETTER TO A FRIEND

You made me write *Haply I May Remember*, and now you demand more—much more.

Hazlitt said, "To be a writer, you must flay yourself and sell the skin." Please remember that to flay myself is quite outside the scope of my ambition. Another writer, a very different one, has also condemned my book in advance. Ouida declared, "Memories can only be made agreeable to the public by base treason to others as well as want of dignity to oneself." I don't propose to betray anyone; but should you find my book both too praising of others and too reticent about myself, kindly do me the justice to remember that when I undertook this task I made it clear that I would NOT write the story of my life, but merely "recollections of people, places and moods". This book is not intended to be an autobiography; it is merely a scrapbook—or if you prefer it, an anthology—of memories, so naturally I shall choose to dwell on pleasant memories, and shall write about people I liked.

And yet many of the friends in whose company I found most delight may scarcely figure in this volume or the next. Of some there will be no mention at all. This will not be because I have shrunk from remembering the dead, but either because my pen has quailed before the hopelessness of trying to put into words what these friends were like, or simply because they did not happen to fall into whatever pattern this book may weave.

You may perhaps think when I tell you of certain "public figures" that I write flippantly, seeing that the world was then already in a state of ferment. The—mercifully bloodless—revolution through which we have lived had already started, and we were aware of it. The First World War was impending.

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But remember that I don't—to you of all people—attempt to depict these “figures” in their political and sociological aspects; I merely give you my own impressions of them as human beings relaxing for two days in the country after their labours of the week. Some of them were prophets and advocates of revolution: others resisters of any rapid change. All of them were striving to administer the affairs of mankind wisely, humanely, equitably and disinterestedly.

I shall write of them just as I remember them disporting themselves in my parents' home, a No Man's Land on which men as diverse as Arthur Balfour and Sidney Webb, George Wyndham and H. G. Wells frequently met, either temporarily to forget, or amicably to discuss their vast differences of opinion.

Don't expect me to think kindly of you while, conscious of despair, I stare at the unbroken white expanse of paper before me, or after hours of frustration, at an overflowing waste-paper basket.

And yet I realise that I shall be grateful to my taskmaster, for whatever the travail of writing, I know that I shall greatly enjoy remembering—reliving fragments of my life.

In these dark days many of my contemporaries tell me that they find the thought of the past too sad to dwell upon. Survivors of a generation from which death has taken far more than its usual toll of friends, life far more than its natural toll of illusions, they try to forget dead friends, dead hopes—dead selves.

Others, driven by nostalgia to the opposite extreme, live in the past almost entirely to the exclusion of the present. Refusing to accept any further dividend life might declare them, they let the memory of precious friends held in death's dateless night stand between them and any new friends they might make.

*“Better by far you should forget and smile
Than that you should remember and be sad” . . . ?*

I shall take neither alternative. I can't forget and smile:
I won't remember and be sad.

I'll remember and be glad.

C. A.

“MARY ELCHO AT STANWAY”

You tell me that in re-reading H. G. Wells' *New Machiavelli* you came upon his tribute to my mother: “those were the great days of Mary Elcho at Stanway”. Now you want Mary Elcho's daughter to tell you something of those days. Oddly enough, I still think of my mother as “Mary Elcho”. I never became reconciled to her name changing to Wemyss.

Fortunately for me the days to which Wells refers—those of my mother's heyday as a hostess—coincided with my own so-called “growing-up”, so that instead of being limited to the ordinary social fare of a débutante, I had the fun of meeting in my own home various interesting members of the older generation, and of asking my contemporaries to meet them too.

I told you that while I was a child the months spent each year in London seemed but little more than an interruption to my real life. I had very much this same feeling when, still rather a somnambulist, still seeing life through that iridescent haze in which so much of youth is passed, I left London at the end of my first season, an experience which though in many ways it had been an exciting, even an entrancing adventure, had yet never seemed more than an intimation of things still to come. I remember my sense of returning as it were from the merely transitory to the eternal when I came home and the atmosphere of Stanway closed round me once again—that charged atmosphere haunted not by ghosts but by the persisting past. The very timelessness of the place; its memory-stirring unanalysable smell; the anchoring sound of the church clock hourly breaking the silence that was so much more than the mere absence of noise—all these familiar things seemed to unfold me like wings.

One great advantage my friends and I enjoyed—an advan-

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tage our descendants lack—was the ease with which we could meet one another in the pleasantest possible surroundings. It was delightful to be able to ask, at your parents' expense and trouble, anyone you liked to come and stay with you. And it was so simple. I merely had to write invitations, tell my mother at what time I expected my friends, and they would be met at the station and blithely welcomed by both hostess and staff. All I had to do was to show them to the rooms prepared for them, arrange whom they should sit between at dinner, and organise evening games.

I deliberately said at our parents' "trouble" as well as at their expense, because, despite all that is claimed for those days now vaguely described by that much over-worked adjective "spacious", it is a fallacy to suppose that any woman who ran a large and hospitable country house ever had a *light* job. The simplicity of pre-war domestic life has been greatly exaggerated. True, the well-to-do hostess did not need to do any actual housework herself, for servants were easy to find, and so long as the supply still exceeded the demand, comparatively easy to keep. But being human, however efficient and obliging, they always tended to quarrel with one another, so that domestic politics were often inflamed and very preoccupying.

And what a vast amount of organisation keeping "open house" involved! Little did we young people realise—we took so much for granted—how much we were laboured for, what labyrinthine plans were woven for our enjoyment. Morning after morning I would find my mother what we called "coping"—her breakfast tray pushed to one side, her bed littered with sheets and sheets of paper scribbled all over with tangled plans for the day, and I would have to try to help her to comb out some of the worst of these tangles, for though she was not good at delegating, she liked sympathy, and, even if only to reject it, advice. In fact, she dearly loved a family committee.

So many people were always demanding to be conveyed in different directions at the same time. This, combined with our old coachman Prew's rooted objection to his horses—

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whom he looked upon as pets far too fragile for work—going out at all, made the orders for the stables a daily difficulty.

Here is a typical example of the sort of problem my mother would present me with in the mornings. “The So and So’s must leave sharp at two (remind me to order early luncheon)—the dog-cart that takes them to the station can drop Nannie and the babies at the Flower Show on the way there; ‘Ching’ (Chow dog) at the vet’s, and the cook at her nephew’s confirmation. After the So and So’s train leaves, there will be only half an hour to wait for Aunt Emmie’s train from London, so that fits in splendidly; but . . .” she added, suddenly remembering that one of the departing guests was the only member of the party who knew how to drive, “*who* is to drive the dog-cart home? The groom will be out hunting with the children, and the coachman must take Papa to the Bench.

“Couldn’t *you* go in the dog-cart, Cincie, and drive Jumbo home? . . . But there won’t be any room for you on the way there. . . . I know! You can *bicycle* there, and drive back. Yes, that’s it! and mind you remember not to forget to call for the second post.”

“But,” I might demur, having probably made some more attractive plan for my afternoon, “how do I get my bicycle home?”

“Oh, surely if I give you plenty of string it could be slung on somehow or other to the dog-cart? I’m sure the So and So’s won’t mind; but whatever you do, *don’t* forget to call for Ching on the way back!”

The problems of the immediate future thus disposed of, Mamma would precipitate herself, and try to take me with her, right into the middle of next week. The plan of the bedrooms would be pored over until some way of packing fourteen guests into ten spare rooms was devised. Perhaps one might be put in the stables, another in the apple-room, and so forth.

As a hostess, Mamma complicated things by her determination to give her Stanway neighbours the fun of meeting her house-party guests, for this meant that at the very last minute it would often be discovered that several more people were

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coming to dinner than the table could hold. To meet this emergency, chairs would be placed round an improvised extra table, thus wrecking whatever plan I had already made as to who should sit beside whom; added to which directly it was known there was to be a side table every member of the family wanted a place at that instead of at the main table.

Whilst Mamma organised the transport, sleeping and seating arrangements for those visitors already within her gates, a large fraction of her mind would be simultaneously engaged in planning ahead exactly how her next week's party should be occupied during every hour of their stay:—"But, Cynthia, if you and all your friends go to the dance Saturday evening, who will make a fourth at Bridge with Papa and the This and That's? . . . Then, there's Sunday evening when I've promised to hear Professor L. read his lecture, and the D.'s want to listen too, but poor Mrs. B. is much too deaf for either reading aloud or for charades. Who is to talk to her? I *believe* she plays Bézique. Can you think of anyone in the neighbourhood who plays Bézique?"

I remember at a very early age deciding that the ownership of a large country house involved too much organisation, too much thinking-ahead to be compatible with any rhythmic existence of one's own. Mamma never seemed to have her own house to herself, or to be able to enjoy the immediate present unpreoccupied by plans for the future. I knew that she had a remarkable talent for drawing; but what with family, incessant village duties—parochial politics were very complicated—visitors, neighbours and household, how seldom did she have a disengaged hour in which to exercise this talent, and how few books she managed to get through in a year.

Nothing, of course, could be more delightful than to be able to ask the people you liked best to stay with you, but, if you have several spare rooms, then it must follow, as the night the day, that they will often be occupied by "Duties" instead of by friends. Yes, however pleasant and enviable the life of a *châtelaine* might appear to others, my child's mind decided

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that it was nevertheless slavery of a kind. To welcome such an existence you needed to be an altruist, which my mother was, but though her *métier* suited her nature, it did not suit her delicate nervous system. Anyhow, I remember deciding at ten years old that it wasn't the kind of life that would suit me, and therefore hoping that whoever I might want to marry would not be the owner of a large country house. Before long, however, I realised that my mother's nature, far more than her circumstances, was answerable for her overcrowded life. Kindness of heart, combined with total lack of system, made her utterly defenceless. She could no more refuse demands on her time than others can refuse demands on their purse. I used greatly to deplore her want of method, but as I came to realise how inextricably qualities are interwoven, I wondered whether method might not have proved irreconcilable with her special charm. It could scarcely have failed to lessen her delicious spontaneity.

Her ceaseless preoccupation with other people was not pure altruism. Far from it. She had an intense enjoyment of planning for planning's sake, and always wanted to know not only what everyone in the house was doing just at that moment, but also what they would be doing at every hour of the week. The brief unintrospective diary, kept every single day of her life from the age of sixteen onwards, chronicled every other member of the family's doings as well as her own. This diary was for ever falling grievously into arrears—"Do tell me what you did between luncheon and tea the Monday before last, Cincie," she would plead. "*Can't* you remember?"

I used to think that absent as well as present friends took up far too much of my mother's time. She was a copious and delightful letter-writer—the most spontaneous I have ever known—her lovely flowing calligraphy transmitting her thoughts to paper exactly as they streamed through her mind.

Unfortunately stationery was one of her pet economies. She had an inveterate habit of filling in all the margins—the "hinges", we called them, of her double sheets of writing-paper, so that to make sure of not missing some important instruction—perhaps the hour of your train—you had to turn

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each page this way and that. The practical passages of her letter were always written in the most unlikely and easily overlooked of all the "hinges". Lovely designs—leaves, birds, serpents and stars—embellished most of her letters, and since she could not bear to see so inviting an expanse of paper as the outside of an envelope used merely for a name and address, long and often very intimate postscripts gave the postman and the pantry some lively reading. "Caution, MONEY 'INSIDE!'" she wrote on an envelope addressed to me, twenty years after my marriage, as "Miss Cynthia Charteris".

Needless to say I reacted against Mamma's habit of committing plans. Like most young people I hated being asked what I was going to do. I still dislike it. The more overtired Mamma became, the more the future encroached on the present. "Your mother has just asked me—asked me most urgently—whether I shall take a bath before dinner," complained my father early one morning. "Must she know *now*? And anyhow," he added with a chortle, "I don't *take* a bath; I *have* a bath."

Another symptom of over-fatigue was one of her violent outbreaks of "furniture mania". The house would echo with strange rumbling sounds as all manner of heavy furniture was trundled about the rooms; sofas, grand pianos—nothing she would not tackle single-handed. Liable to be called away in the middle of operations, she would sometimes forget that a scheme for the re-arrangement of the furniture in a spare room had been left not fully carried out, so that when some newly-arrived guest was shown into his room, he might not only find it impossible to reach his washing-stand without clambering over the bed, but also be greeted by growls from a furiously resentful Chow, who, having followed Mamma into, but not out of, the room, held the newcomer responsible for his incarceration.

To return to Wells' passage about the "great days at Stanway". What made him call them "great"? Apart from his affection for his hostess, it was, I think, largely because he

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knew that under her auspices he could always rely on lively talk—talk which, however unpretentious and spontaneous, would yet be real discussion; never mere chatter.

I have already told you some of the qualities that made my uncompetitive mother so good a conductor of conversation. Her greatest pleasure was to see those around her at their ease and at their best—a pleasure frequently enjoyed—for her unusual blend of easily ignited enthusiasm and open-mindedness (“maddening impartial” Lady Oxford called her) undoubtedly had a kindling effect on most people; while she, the most completely natural and spontaneous of women, herself contributed, besides charm and sympathy, a random pointfulness, an engaging vagueness—I remember hearing her speak of the “eleventeenth century”—and a wealth of gentle wisdom, for her widely-interested, receptive, everlastingly fresh mind had a rare and delicate intellectual quality all its own.

In the incipient stages of a general conversation she was like one zealously tending a newly-lit fire. Now she would give a little poke; now a gentle puff; now throw on a little faggot of her own, and when the talk burst into a blaze she almost clapped her hands with glee. She always looked her most charming when talk went well.

I have a vivid picture of her, poised on the very edge of her chair. She leans forward as alert for a conversational hit as a fielder in the slips for a catch. Her chiselled, ivory face is alive with interest; her large brown eyes—still the eyes of a young girl—dart delightedly from one talker’s face to another.

Besides the general conversation which H. G. Wells enjoyed as much as he enlivened it, he revelled with boyish glee in any kind of game—indoors or out-of-doors, skilled or unskilled—and games always played a very large part in Stanway life.

Another attraction to him was the chance to meet Arthur Balfour, for whom he had both great admiration and liking. I remember his saying what a “luxury” he found the “brilliance, breadth and charm of mind” of this philosopher-statesman, and also how pleased he was when I told him that “Mr. Evesham”—the name he gave Arthur

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Balfour in *The New Machiavelli*—was a great admirer of *The Time Machine*, *Kipps*, *Tono Bungay* and many of his books.

Partly, no doubt, because Mamma was herself so unopinionated, she enjoyed whatever was positive, not to say fanatical, in other people's minds, a taste that frequently brought about startling juxtapositions; but, fortunately she had a remarkable knack for reconciling potentially explosive elements.

She was the least exclusive person I have ever known, partly because of her kindness, which was as boundless as the sea; still more, I think, because of her insatiable interest—a collector's interest—in any conceivable specimen of the human race. If it was difficult to shock her, it was practically impossible to bore her. I remember only one person achieving that feat, but unfortunately this exception to the rule was a "Duty", and an extremely adhesive one.

Much as she appreciated wit in others, Mamma was far from being dependent on other people's liveliness. She could shine in the dark; was, indeed, particularly good at brightening other people's dullness, for, provided she felt well, there was a dancing gaiety about her which infected all but the irredeemably glum.

Many thought her far too tolerant, too gullible. It is true that she always assumed the best of everyone and that, had she been challenged on this point, she would certainly have said she would much rather be taken in occasionally than always keep on her guard; but it would not be accurate to say she was deceived in people, for the simple reason that she was too conscious of the complexity of human beings ever to pronounce them to be this, that or the other. Understanding her fellow-creatures better than did most others, she labelled them less.

On the rare occasions when her kindness was taken advantage of, her reaction was not to feel any resentment but to laugh at herself.

I used to wonder whether I could possibly have devised any gathering of people which Mamma would not have enjoyed. The merest garden-party sufficed to make her look as excited

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as a child at a performance of Punch and Judy. As for the “Lounge” of any hotel, she couldn’t be in one for two minutes without entering into conversation with several people and trying to involve any member of her family, no matter how morosely disposed, who happened to be at hand.

When she took her children abroad, their inclination was usually to keep the precious days clear of social engagements, but it was impossible to prevent Mamma from making friends with fellow hotel residents. We might just as well have tried to stop a terrier hunting in a rabbit warren.

David Cecil and I were once deploring the gregariousness of our mothers who, though *pretending* that they too wished for “peace” while in France, were in fact hobnobbing with every stranger. We agreed that were we to set those two down in the middle of the Sahara, we should within an hour find them entertaining a large party of Bedouins and vultures with Albert biscuits and tea made on a spirit-lamp.

Besides her delight in making her guests happy, Mamma loved to rediscover and savour afresh through their appreciation the charms of her own home and immediate circle.

If the spare bedrooms at Stanway were on the Spartan side—for Mamma had no more instinct for luxury than for fashion—her solicitude for what she thought the bodily comfort of her guests immediately under her eye was laughably zealous. Interesting conversations were often held up by the talkers being taken for rumbling rides as their hostess propelled their chairs either out of a draught or closer into the charmed circle round the fire.

Her idea of making women visitors comfortable was to relieve them of as many of their garments as possible. About this she was most insistent, literally dragging off hats and shoes. Above all, she loved to make her friends put up their feet. Liking her own to be higher than her head, she assumed that everyone else felt better that way. As I write, I see her with her enviably small feet, crossed at the ankles, cocked up on the mantelpiece.

I would feebly protest that I didn’t want to put my feet up and, as I couldn’t stay for more than ten minutes, would

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prefer to keep my shoes on. No use! . . . I always had to give way, for her gentleness camouflaged a mulish obstinacy. Once she had set her heart on any plan no one was more difficult to deflect. For instance, when it had been arranged that my débutante sister should go to Ascot, but illness prevented Mamma from taking her, and no suitable chaperon could be found at such short notice, rather than that this plan for her daughter's enjoyment should be thwarted, she sent Mary to the races in charge of Aunt Evelyn's somewhat bewildered butler, who waited for her just outside the Royal Enclosure.

Despite my mother's love of general conversation, few of her guests were let off with that exercise alone. They were compelled to play intellectual games, sometimes to the detriment of their digestions even at the dinner-table, particularly that favourite mental torture of hers called "Unwinding", the game in which a long string of words is made, each player in turn adding another word connected by some not too obvious link, a pun if wished, with the preceding one, until after a certain number of rounds you start to "unwind". The words are then repeated in reverse order until the survivors, if any (players who can't remember whichever words fall to their turn drop out of the game), arrive back at the starting-point.

One of the most frequently played after-dinner games was "Clumps", the father and mother of "Twenty Questions". Dividing into two groups, the company "thought of something", and two competitors raced—"Yes" and "No" being the only answers allowed—to guess what it was. Ambitious players despised being given a concrete object to guess and their insistence on something "abstract" led to long and often heated arguments as to what *was* "Abstract", what "Concrete". In fact, Arthur Balfour's despair of making certain players distinguish between the two categories finally obliged us to ban the question "Abstract? or Concrete?" "Is it tangible?" we would ask instead. Among the more difficult things I remember having to guess were "A Tête-à-Tête", "Odd Man Out", "The Last Straw", "The Eleventh Hour", "A Lost Cause" and "The Slip between the Cup and the Lip".

With practice most people could become fairly proficient at

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these games; but to the uninitiated they were extremely difficult. There was one at which I firmly drew the line. This was called “Styles”. All you were asked to do was to compose in a few minutes on some given theme a piece of prose in the style of any well-known author, say, Carlyle, Ruskin or Meredith. The other players had to guess whom you were imitating. I can’t say I ever found this a widely popular game.

One of my favourites was that in which two people, conversing as though they had just met in Hades, impersonated a pair of famous characters, say, Cleopatra and Martin Luther, or Marat and Jane Austen; and any of the audience who guessed their assumed identities joined in the conversation.

But you mustn’t suppose that either being a renowned conversationalist or an expert at these so-called “intellectual” games exempted Stanway guests from bodily indignity. No, the Mistress of the Revels loved to make sages and professors, whatever their sizes and shapes, play preposterous physical as well as intellectual games. They would suddenly find themselves prone on the floor, puffing like grampuses at a feather blown to and fro across a sheet held up to their chins; or two of them, billed to take part in a Cock Fight, would be blindfolded and, armed with a rolled-up *Times*, have to crawl about the room trying to locate one another’s whereabouts by ear. Whoever first succeeded in thwacking his adversary over the head was the winner. Charades were perennially popular; indeed any kind of impromptu tomfoolery.

I remember the amazement of a contemporary of mine—“crabbed youth” the aged called him—the first time he came to Stanway. Very young, and shy, and much afraid that some of “The Souls”, whom he had never met but heard far too much of, would be present, he arrived full of misgivings, expecting to have to listen in silence to high-flown talk or to be made to play impossibly difficult intellectual games. Instead of which, his exuberant elders disported themselves in riotous romping.

Passages from my diary describe the goings-on.

Would that a cinematograph and a dictaphone had recorded the

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sights and sounds of this Friday to Tuesday party, every member of which, except for L. and myself, was over fifty. No young people have ever been half so irrepressible and untiring. As soon as Harry Cust, Whibley and The Professor¹ arrived, they formed a coalition to prevent Uncle George² from taking the bit between his teeth and monopolising the conversation. Sunday evening talk scintillated until well after midnight, when the protagonists "relaxed", and wrote composite sonnets. After an hour of this exercise, one might have expected them to be ready to think of bed. Far from it. Then and then only, the real revels began. The "Stanway Minstrel"³ played the guitar; the carpet was rolled back and a frenzy of song, dance and improvised acting broke out. Uncle George, though really quite sober—as a matter of fact no one had drunk a drop since dinner—had "vine-leaves in his hair" and cut incredible capers, spouting Virgil while he turned unnumbered somersaults on the floor. The Professor, who wore my wreath of roses, was inspired. He looked like something out of a Lear nonsense rhyme drawn by Blake, and we had a great success dancing the Cake-Walk and a Nautch dance together. Climax was impromptu Grand Opera—*Tannhäuser*. The piano was converted into the Venusberg, and of course, my hair was pulled down. The pilgrims, allowed to advance only by rolling, sang lustily. After some two hours' pandemonium we went out of doors and serenaded Arthur Balfour, who had retired at midnight, with "The Lark now Leaves his Watery Nest". He took it extraordinarily well, appearing at his window, his face one large benevolent beam, playfully shaking his fist and tapping his temple.

Besides playing their own games, Stanway guests would often be conscripted to play General Post or Blind Man's Buff at parties given for the Needlework Guild, the Girls' Friendly Society, and so forth. They also had to be appreciative audiences at every sort of entertainment from village concerts and school feasts to local pageants. One of the longest, weirdest days I ever remember was when, in a desperate attempt to revive Merrie England, hundreds of Morris Dancers—each county had sent a team—joggled up and down, all belled and beribboned, on the lawns from dawn to dusk. It was the hottest day of the year; most of the performers

¹ Sir Walter Raleigh.

² George Wyndham.

³ Sir Richard Paget.

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were extremely stout, and like Falstaff they fairly “larded the lean earth”. I thought the jingle-jingle of bells, the dogged stamping of thick-shod feet would never cease. I was reminded of those two very queer lines of George Meredith’s—

“Fair space for signal shakings of the legs”

“What fiddler now commands our joints?”

Mamma used to weave the most elaborate plans for outings. Walkers, drivers and riders would all converge for a meal at some Cotswold inn. As some insisted on riding or walking there, but driving home, and others had to be driven both ways, getting these complicated expeditions under way was no easy task. I had to act as my mother’s sheep-dog and round-up straying members of her flock.

She was delighted by the extended radius brought about by motor cars. Tewkesbury Abbey, hitherto quite a pilgrimage, was now only a short drive; we could easily go to admire the beautiful village of Bibury or the famous stained-glass windows in Fairford Church, and Stratford-on-Avon with its Memorial Theatre, then run by Sir Frank Benson, was within easy reach.

Arthur Balfour was one of the earliest owners of a car. He loved exploring country roads, and was constantly to be seen spread-eagled on the floor, poring over a map. My very first drive was in that museum piece—it was the first car he ever had—in the photograph facing page 32, a small noisy contraption nicknamed, if I remember rightly, “The Hornet”. Before my first drive he tried to explain the internal combustion engine to me—painstakingly but not very successfully, for I was left with the impression that it was a case of *eternal*, not *internal* combustion.

How well I remember that first drive! My heart pounded with excitement when I saw The Hornet standing at the door in a huge puddle of her own petrol. We clambered into the tiny, very high body of the car. The chauffeur tugged and tugged at a rope. For a long time all his efforts to “start” the engine were in vain. At last The Hornet gave a

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convulsive shudder, then a loud stutter followed by a rattling roar. . . . Clouds of steam. Reek of petrol. The onlookers gave a derisive cheer, and off we set, with as great a sense of adventure as though we were bound for the moon.

Cars at that phase in their evolution were justly called "Boneshakers", and once The Hornet really got going, I was so violently shaken that I felt as though every tooth in my head had been loosened. Though the law no longer decreed that a man carrying a red flag must walk in front of each car, progress, however full of sound and fury, was still very slow. To me it seemed unbelievably fast. I had a tremendous impression of whistling through the air, an almost impious sense of defying space.

The natives of the Cotswolds did not take at all kindly to the new invention. In fact they thought it an outrage. As we roared past, wayfarers stood rooted to the ground, with their chins dropped on to their chests. They gaped: they pointed: they stared after us long after we had passed out of sight, and when we honked, chuffed and sputtered through a village, heads popped out of every cottage window.

Owners of horses loathed us. "Road Hogs!" they shouted with clenched fists, and at sight, sound and stench of our approach, drivers and riders, determined to impart their own fears of the new road monsters, would beat their horses until even the most phlegmatic *did* bolt.

The most sensational incident I remember was when a poor old lady, panic-stricken at our approach, actually leapt out of her landau and, swaddled in her rug, rolled over and over until she fell into the ditch!

How, you may well ask, did my father stand my mother's ceaseless hospitality? On the whole remarkably well, for, as you know, he was not always a glad host; besides which, though husband and wife had many friends in common, they did not naturally like, or perhaps rather did not *expect* to like, the same people. When I heard my father being advised of the hour at which some visitor would come, I expected Lady



The Author's Mother



The Author's Father

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Macbeth's question, “And when goes HENCE?” to spring to his lips. That, I knew, was what he wanted to know.

His occasional sultriness affected me like a thunder-cloud; and when he wouldn't, or couldn't, talk, I could never help listening to his silence. His sudden moods were as communicable as they were unpredictable; but however glum he might be, there was always the chance, and a very good chance too, of his suddenly brightening up to become more amused and amusing than all the rest of the company put together.

No one could deny that his tolerance was tried pretty hard, for it was often he who had to pay in physical or mental discomfort for kindnesses for which my mother received all the credit. For instance, when owing to some domestic emergency a friend of hers—a man of exceedingly progressive views—had nowhere to put his children, she invited them all three to sleep at 62 Cadogan Square. Having improvised beds on the floor of her husband's sitting-room, she then forgot to tell him that she had turned his sitting-room into a doss-house.

It was one of the many nights on which the newly-installed electric light fused, and on his return from a dinner-party Papa, all unconscious that he was playing the part of a host, stumbled candle in hand into his room. He had quite a nasty shock. “I trod on a whole litter of little socialists!” he complained. But by the time this came to be told he was already more glad of a new story against my mother than resentful of any temporary inconvenience.

In another access of vicarious hospitality she invited to stay at Cadogan Square a celebrated Mahatma, whom Papa found squatting on the hall floor in a loin-cloth, demanding the most peculiar nourishment at outrageous hours.

Like many other fathers, mine became more and more mellow with the advancing years. As a grandfather he was wonderfully tolerant of whatever disturbances children chose to make, and even quicker to laugh at himself after one of those temporary suspensions to which his admirable sense of humour was liable.

One day when my two sons were making an infernal row just outside his door, he burst out of his room exclaiming,

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“For heaven’s sake be quiet! Can’t you see I’m working like Hell!”

I never heard him laugh more loudly than when he realised that, despite this attempt to stand on his dignity, the boys had seen exactly how urgent his work was; for in his hand he still held the book he was reading. It was a novel by P. G. Wodehouse.

Though we could not have wished her any different, there is no doubt that other members of the family besides Papa at times suffered from Mamma’s general availability. For one thing she constantly allowed herself to be so much overtired by other people that, having squandered her vitality on mere acquaintances, she was left too depleted to be at her best with her family. Scorning discrimination, she never would save herself up for those who thought they should have first claim on her time.

I shared her liking for most of our fellow-creatures, but being at the age when one wants plenty of time kept free for books and best friends, I often inwardly rebelled at having my days devoured by chance acquaintances, particularly when, exhausted and sated by social life, I came back to Stanway at the end of my first season. Those of our neighbours who were real friends—Eliza Wedgwood, the Barnards, the De Navarros, the Smiths, the Chapins, the Coxes, and others—I was, of course, delighted to see, but I resented being made to spend hours and hours of my time entertaining just anyone who happened to turn up. It wasn’t that I disliked the people or their company, but they did so fritter the precious days away.

Yes, I admit there were times when I wished my mother either rather less charming, or much less amiable. Surely, I said to myself, her sense of duty to her neighbour *is* over-developed? Besides, is it not rather often discharged by proxy?

For example, her uncontrollable, at times almost irresponsible desire to give pleasure would often prompt her quite

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gratuitously to urge luncheon guests to stay on to tea. Then, as likely as not, she would explain that she must lie down after lunch, and leave me—very probably, after a morning’s cub-hunting, a mere chain-yawner—to entertain her visitors throughout the long, long afternoon. Nor could she ever resist asking any passers-by she might see admiring the Inigo Jones gateway to come through and be shown all over the grounds. I remember once having to take—I was still in the riding-habit in which I had been out hunting since six a.m.—seven relays of tourists up to the top of the hill.

Mamma’s constitutional unpunctuality greatly complicated life, particularly in the early days of motoring when, as cars had neither hoods nor even windscreens, and nothing had yet been done to lay the dust on the roads, one made as much preparation for a drive as if one were going deep-sea-diving. She would tell me to be ready sharp at some very precise hour, say forty-six minutes past three; then, all veiled, scarfed and begoggled, I might have to wait, scarcely able to breathe, for an hour or more. Perhaps in despair I would leave the hall to fetch a book or to snatch a breath of air, during which brief absence Mamma, swathed like a mummy, would at last appear, bundle herself, several Chows and innumerable reticules into the car with as much haste as though it were the last train just due to leave, and declare that *I* had kept *her* waiting!

Oddly enough, except when trying to catch a train, I am by nature very punctual, but thanks to my having been associated first with a fabulously unpunctual mother and then with a husband who in this respect ran her very close, this virtue of mine—what a heavily penalised virtue it is by the way!—has not always been fully recognised.

Papa, as I have already told you, was as excessively punctual as his wife was the reverse; an incompatibility which caused me more nervous agitation than anything else in my home life.

No, I won’t attempt a full-length three-dimensional portrait

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of my mother. Remember, please, that when you made me embark on this book I stipulated that I was not to be expected to analyse my nearest and dearest. Not that in my mother's case there is anything I should be afraid to reveal, but I don't believe it possible—anyhow not without great over-simplification—to portray in detail anyone with whom one has been in very close touch. The very closeness blurs the outline. Neither do I like the assumption of omniscience of some people who, summing up fellow-creatures, categorically state them to be this or that. Rather than attempt any exhaustive analysis of my mother, I prefer the more oblique method of giving you glimpses of her in her relations with others.

Having sketched her as the *châtelaine* of Stanway, one of her chief facets, I will now glance—merely glance, mind you—at her as a mother. In this relationship, perhaps her greatest merit was combining with the maximum of fondness the minimum of possessiveness. Her unintrusive love for her sons and daughters never put fetters on them. She was indeed so unexacting that though her ceaseless concern for her children was touchingly evident, she did not even expect—far less demand—their confidences. She longed to know, but she never asked.

You will, no doubt, have inferred that she was not very strict. The one thing she was rather intolerant of was intolerance. Perhaps what annoyed her most in her children was any visible failure on their part to enjoy themselves. We used to say it was lucky we weren't puppies instead of children, for had we been, Mamma would have wanted us to wag our tails without ceasing in company, and that would have been too much of a strain.

Although when we were children she had always talked to us as if we were contemporaries, Mamma, like most parents, found it hard later on to remember that we had grown up. She still expected us to be as excited as ever over any childish treat. "Ices! Cincie, *Strawberry Ices!*" she would exclaim when I was far advanced in middle age, in the exact tone of voice in which one says "Din Din" or "Walkies!" to a dog.

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Or she would hiss into my ear the most elementary manners-drill: “Say How do you do? Cincie. Your *right* hand.”

Mamma revelled in most of the emergencies of family life. We used to tell her that she was never quite so happy as when, with rolled-up sleeves and sparkling eyes, she danced attendance on the doctor while one of us had an operation or a baby. We felt we ought to draw lots as to which of us should next provide her with such a treat.

Naturally she was just as eager to apply First Aid and After Care in emotional as in physical crises, but in this respect—and it is one of the sins of omission for which I feel most remorse—I stinted her most ungenerously. Because of my tiresome reserve—I have only recently cracked my own shell—and my mother’s resolve never to extort confidences, I kept her on very short commons.

“You *do* consume your own cat, don’t you?” she said to me one day, jumbling together, as she so often did, two phrases; this time, I suppose, “the cat that walks by itself”, and “consuming one’s own smoke”.

My reserve was not a fortress, for the bars were all on the wrong side of the door—it was a prison. I didn’t even tell my mother that I considered myself to be engaged; reticence all the more unfair because the paternal storms which periodically blew up at rumours of this engagement always broke over her, not my own, head. Papa never so much as mentioned the subject to me, but continually upbraided his wife for not preventing his daughter from “getting herself talked about” by sitting out ten dances running with his future son-in-law.

There was a queer, not-too-comfortable phase in which I wore my engagement ring when my father was out, but not when he was in. Oddly enough—or rather typically enough—the growing tension was finally shattered by a roar of laughter from the would-be Heavy Father himself. After we had been engaged for a long time, Beb, suddenly reverting to Victorianism, formally presented himself at Cadogan Square to ask my father for his daughter’s hand. This alarming

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interview was opened by Papa handing Beb a huge cigar, at which he puffed appreciatively. "You like doing yourself well?" remarked his host, interrogatively. Beb, suspecting a snare, but not knowing what to say for the best, sheepishly mumbled that he supposed he did.

"Well, you won't be able to do yourself well if you marry Cynthia!" triumphantly declared Papa. . . .

Meanwhile my mother and I were cowering upstairs. At long last we heard the front door bang behind the departing suitor. We listened to the tingling silence. . . . Suddenly it was broken by a loud Ha! Ha! and stumping up the stairs, Papa shouted, "What *do* you think that fellow's gone and done now, Mary? He has taken my new hat and left me one I wouldn't be seen dead in a ditch in!" . . . The crisis was over.

Mamma's delight in other people's happiness—she really had an amazing capacity for vicarious enjoyment—scarcely qualified her to sabotage an engagement. Far from it. Her glee when she thought—the wish being father to the thought—that any two people entertained an exaggerated liking for one another was at times made embarrassingly evident. "I shan't be back for twenty minutes" she would whisper, tiptoeing with raised eyebrows and a roguish, conspiratorial smile from some room in which she had contrived to maroon a highly self-conscious couple.

"She's in the garden" she would blithely inform some man whom she suspected, as likely as not erroneously, for she often paired people off wrongly—couples got as much mixed up at Stanway as in the forest of the *Midsummer Night's Dream*—of a romantic passion for that particular She. Assuredly, had my mother got hold of that magical juice with which Oberon equipped Puck, no one within her reach would have known one moment's ease of heart.

To come back to her as a mother, her children could always rely on her understanding and support; they could not possibly have told her of any sin or crime she would not have forgiven them, nor have found themselves in any state of mind or predicament, either of Fate's or of their own contrivance, with which she would not have been able to sympathise.

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I know some people consider a very happy and sheltered childhood as harmful as physical molly-coddling. They say it makes children morally delicate, so that when they have to leave home they shrivel up like greenhouse-reared plants too suddenly exposed to unconditioned air. I believe, on the contrary, that to be lapped in love throughout the first formative years is as harmlessly protective as the straw swathed around the roots of young trees; that to be given deeply-imbued confidence is to be given strength; that to be cherished—made to feel valuable—quickens in all but the utterly graceless a sense of obligation: above all I believe that early happiness, natural, taken-for-granted happiness, instils an expectancy, indeed a habit of happiness, a predisposition which creates a kind of loyalty to life, a loyalty that not all the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune—not even two World Wars—can ever utterly abolish or destroy.

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I'LL try now to give you my youthful impressions of some of my mother's guests during what H. G. Wells called the "great days of Mary Elcho at Stanway".

I'll begin with Arthur Balfour, whom I called—don't ask me why, for I really can't remember the origin of the absurd nickname—"Mr. Rabbit". Many people told me what an exciting experience they had found it to meet him for the first time, but since I can't remember not knowing him, that was an experience I never, consciously, had.

As I think of him now, various very early visual impressions come back. I see a tall figure moving with cool effortless grace, a large domed forehead, a very small nose and lambent brown eyes that beam when he smiles. I remember noticing how springy and elastic is his step, and what a funny trick he has of literally rocking in his chair with laughter. When he stops rocking, I see him lean forward to listen very, very intently to whoever is speaking. From time to time he pauses in his talk to take off his eyeglasses and wipe them, or to puff some mysterious thing—a cold preventive I suppose—up first one and then the other nostril. Now I see him fondling my mother's Chow dog, Cymru—plunging long tapering fingers deep down into its golden fluff.

In one specially vivid picture of Arthur Balfour, his large head is encircled all askew by a crown of crimson ramblers; for that gentle tyrant, my mother, made every guest at her children's birthday teas wear an honorary birthday wreath.

At first "Mr. Rabbit" wears his roses with a deprecating, almost sheepish air, but, growing interested in the talk, he soon becomes so unself-conscious that when they slip off his

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head, he doesn't even seem to notice that his wreath has now become a chinstrap.

Besides crimson ramblers, I associate A. J. B.—as I always heard Arthur Balfour called—with Norfolk jackets and large canvas bags stuffed full with golf clubs. I used to be given sixpences to caddy for him on the Stanway garden golf-links, and I remember being much puzzled and alarmed when my mother told me I must take great care never, never to get into the Tail of his Eye. For some time I supposed this mysterious prohibited area to be some extra feature peculiar to himself alone.

My early memory must be almost exclusively visual. It is like a photograph album crammed with snapshots. Many of these snapshots are of Mr. Balfour playing golf. In one, craning right forward and shading his eyes, he stares after the ball he has just driven off the tee; in another, straddled in the sandy depth of a bunker, he waggles an immense niblick; a third shows him on the green, beamingly applauding his opponent's approach shot; a fourth, gravely deliberating a critical putt.

In one picture of a much later date, I see him stop short in the middle of his swing to open a telegram which when he has read it, he hands to my mother. This was the telegram that brought him the news of the death of Lord Salisbury, the uncle whom he so much loved and revered.

To turn from visual memories to budding appraisals, though still only feelings rather than opinions, I must now confess that though my young eyes always saw Arthur Balfour robed in the charm he had for others—I noticed that everyone else seemed enchanted to see him—I, my silly little self, did not at first really like him.

Why?

Because, by a curious irony—he who so supremely possessed the attribute of *politesse du cœur*, had inadvertently hurt my baby feelings by one of those ill-chosen remarks we are all so apt to make when straining to please a child.

Elated one day at being invited to play cricket with my brothers and the footmen, I passed, bursting with self-import-

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ance, carrying a borrowed bat (full-sized) through the Clouds¹ hall where the grown-ups sat over their tea. At sight of the podgy, knob-nosed, four-year-old little girl, Arthur Balfour's innate courtesy impelled him to pay her obvious self-consciousness some attention.

"Why!" he exclaimed, benevolently patting my straw-coloured head, "I declare Cincie has got hold of a bat twice as large as herself!" At this my high-blown pride—for I hoped I was looking as big as I felt—broke under me, and I burst into tears. Hating to be called a "cry-baby", I always bore a grudge against anyone who made me cry—no difficult matter—in public; so this mortification rankled long in my childish heart. Then, unfortunately before my resentment had quite faded, Arthur Balfour discomfited me a second time.

One day my mother, who was fond of setting her guests problems, put a question to a luncheon-party. "Suppose," she said, blithely addressing the whole table, "Suppose you were told that one of this present company had committed a murder, who would you guess it to be?"

"Cincie, of course," promptly replied Arthur Balfour.

"Why?" asked my mother.

"Because, since we none of us have the slightest idea *what* she is like, she might be anything!"

This verdict gave me no fear that I might commit a murder—I already knew my limitations too well—but it did upset me by giving me that discomfiting sense probably known to most of us of having no definite identity.

Though it took me some time to recover from these two hurts, I soon found myself greatly flattered by the intent ear "Mr. Rabbit" lent to me whenever he could succeed in coaxing me to talk; before long I began to delight in his company, even to take mental notes of things worth remembering to tell to him the next time he came—things I thought would amuse him—because it was such fun to make him rock with laughter. Nevertheless, thanks to the strength of first associations, his presence still tended to shunt me back into my childhood, and I can't claim to have achieved an adult relationship with him

¹ Home of Author's grandparents.

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until I was quite middle-aged and he was old. Perhaps, indeed, I never really achieved it?

Still, whatever one's age, what a luxury it was to talk to him! Besides the charm, subtlety, range and lucency of his own mind, his radiant courtesy and gracious deference in listening conferred on all who came within his rays something of his own great gift of ease, and lifted them high above their usual level.

Enough—too much—has been both said and written about Arthur Balfour's famous charm, his grace of mind and manner. No point in adding another pebble or two to that lofty cairn.

Who am I to dream of attempting to assess his intellect, or how could I possibly have anything new to say about him either as statesman or philosopher? My purpose is merely to give my own impressions of him as a human being, stressing those which are perhaps most at variance with the generally accepted view of him.

To begin with, I feel sure his aloofness has been much exaggerated. Dazzled though Mrs. Sidney Webb was by his charm, I remember hearing her allege him to be "too unconcerned and sceptical to be more than negatively beneficial". There I disagree. Though in Parliamentary debate he undeniably shone most in opposition, I can never think of him as a "negative" man. I too often heard him speak with enthusiasm; saw his eyes glow with it too.

It is however true that enthusiasm was a quality he distrusted in others; "It is sad," he said, "that enthusiasts should have more influence than anyone else, for few enthusiasts tell the truth."

As for his being devoid of moral indignation, I often saw him—I assure you—white with anger. Any personal injustice enraged him. I shall never forget his white-lipped, impassioned defence of Lord Haldane when that statesman was so much maligned as Minister of War in 1915. Another thing that shocked him terribly was irresponsible gossip—an offence which he declared should be "certifiable"—so much so that once in protest against the dinner-table talk he left the room

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and fluttered the doves by prematurely joining the ladies.

Some people complained that the façade of Arthur Balfour's manner and the impartiality of his attentiveness made it impossible to know where perfunctory courtesy ended and genuine interest began. I have even heard it suggested that he was "quite impersonal". This was very wide of the mark, for though so unusually appreciative, he was very far from indiscriminating. I came to be able to recognise the physical symptoms of his social sufferings, and so to realise that, however courteously he may have suffered them, he did not suffer fools gladly. By "fools" I do not, of course, mean the unintellectual; for no conversation could be too unambitious, too personal, or indeed too frivolous for his taste. Still less could it be too technical. No one equalled him at drawing out by intelligent cross-examination experts on their own subjects, whatever they might be—gunnery, chemistry, medicine, golf—what you will. He genuinely delighted in shop of any kind. Provided people talked to him of what they were interested in and knew something about, I don't believe it was possible to bore him. He was perfectly happy discussing motor cars with a mechanic, crops with a farmer, corns with a chiropodist, but could be excruciatingly bored when pretentious people with opinions stronger than their brains warranted held forth on politics or philosophy.

What he could not endure was being lionised, particularly by the kind of woman who, thinking "special bowling" incumbent, would persist in sending wide after wide at what she supposed to be his wicket. On such occasions—and they weren't uncommon—I have seen him turn quite pale from boredom. It must, however, be admitted that he took no precautions to avoid running the risk of being bored, for I think I can truthfully say that whether he accepted or refused an invitation depended only on whether or not he had a previous engagement.

As neither good talk nor bad Bridge was any strain to him,

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“going out” rested instead of tired him, so he was willing to dine with almost anyone who asked him, and wherever he went he made himself superlatively agreeable. Did he like being liked? I hope so. If not, what a waste! Still more, I hope he was aware of, and enjoyed, his remarkable gift for making others appreciate themselves.

No doubt you have heard the story of Frank Harris, who, hoping to startle the company, declared that Christianity and Journalism had been the two great curses of Humanity, only to have all the wind taken out of his conversational sails by Arthur Balfour’s bland half-concession, “Christianity, of course, but why Journalism?” Not to my mind a characteristic story; for the last thing Arthur Balfour ever wanted to do was to spoil a hoped-for effect. Never in private life did I once hear him make use of the deadly irony he could command in political controversy. No one was less ruthless, more courteous, in argument. In a clash of opinions he reminded me of a duellist who, when his adversary’s sword is knocked from his hand, stoops to lift it from the ground and returns it to him with a courtly bow.

It seems strangely ironic that such a master of courtesy should have been the victim of the only direct cut I’ve ever had the discomfort of witnessing. This was the occasion. George Wyndham, knowing that a certain distinguished but disgruntled Irish Professor bore a grudge against Arthur Balfour, then Prime Minister, for not having conferred upon him some coveted Chair, was so eager to bring about a reconciliation between these two that he arranged for them to meet at Clouds. I and others of the house-party were assembled round the fire ready to go in to dinner when Arthur Balfour entered the room, and advancing in his most urbane manner smilingly extended his hand to the Professor. Then it was that the unbelievable happened. Ignoring the feelings of his unfortunate hostess at whose side he stood, that barbarian Professor actually refused the Prime Minister’s proffered hand, and deliberately turned his back on him! I hope never to have to live through a more embarrassing moment. The very

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house seemed to shudder. As for the incredulity and consternation on Arthur Balfour's conciliatory countenance, I shall never forget it.

The only times I ever saw his own shining courtesy in the least impaired were at lawn-tennis or at golf, of both of which he was a keen and highly competitive player. I don't mean that he ever used unparliamentary language or cursed his partner, but that he couldn't conceal his distress when he was off his game. This produced tension which grew much more frequent in later life when he began to fear a bungled shot was a symptom of old age and so to become appreciably depressed. Being his partner at lawn-tennis used then to make me very nervous, partly because he so obviously minded losing, which I so often helped him to do, but still more because I knew he ought not to stoop, but feared he would be offended if I didn't let him pick up the balls.

Arthur Balfour was blessed in having all through his life as wide a range of enjoyments as of interests. He loved music, books, pictures and conversation, and delighted in either watching or playing practically all games.

Music, I suppose, was his most intense pleasure. I used to think he looked happiest of all while listening to Handel. His taste in books was definite. When I was still too young really to appreciate any poetry not of the Romantic School, I remember being almost shocked by his passion for Pope. Who were his other favourites? He told me he scarcely ever went away without taking with him a volume of Jane Austen, and that Sainte-Beuve was another constant travelling-companion. Like my father-in-law, he hated anything what he called, "unpleasant" in fiction, and would never embark on a new novel unless assured that it had a happy ending.

As undidactic with the young on matters of taste as on matters of principle, he maintained that the only important thing was that they should *enjoy* what they read, and never, never read with the deliberate object of improving their minds. The only axiom I remember his trying to instil into me was

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the necessity of learning to skip in reading—a practice my governess had always told me was highly immoral. This habit, he told me most emphatically, I must acquire at once.

No public man can ever have spent less time in reading newspapers. He ignored the Press. When it was suggested to him by Winston Churchill that Press comments might sometimes be of value, he replied, "I have never put myself to the trouble of rummaging through an immense rubbish-heap on the problematical chance of discovering a cigar-end." I suppose that was the kind of remark that made people label him "aloof".

It was said of Arthur Balfour, by whom I don't remember, that he was as difficult to know as he was easy to love; yet for all the subtlety of his complex mind, the strongest impression he left on *me* was of a certain simplicity. His feelings seemed so much more direct, less divided than those of most of the other people I knew. I am quite sure that in many ways he *was* very much simpler than many men, with intellects far less subtle than his own, could easily have guessed.

For one thing, he was quite the least introspective man I have known. When I said that he would have excelled at drawing-out any expert on his own subject, I should have qualified this statement, for I believe a psycho-analyst might have proved the one exception to this rule. I shall never forget in what difficulty I found myself when he overheard me use certain jargon words new to my own vocabulary and unknown to his, and demanded a definition of a Complex, a Fixation, an Inhibition and so forth. It was the first time I had ever seen him look baffled. His eyes, usually so bright with understanding, positively clouded over with almost shocked bewilderment.

Above all, there was such a surety about his values. He had an unswerving love and loyalty for his own family (I'll tell you about him in his own home later on), as well as for his own country. As for his devotion to his old school and its every tradition, this was scarcely rational.

So far as he ever divulged it, his belief in God—"A God", as he defined Him, "whom men can love, a God to whom men

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may pray"—never faltered, his religious sense being no mere hope, conjecture or intermittent revelation, but an absolute conviction. He was one of the very, very few people I have known who professed never to have suffered an instant's uncertainty about personal immortality. "For myself," he wrote to a bereaved friend, "I entertain no doubt whatever about a future life. . . . The bitterness lies not in the thought that they are really dead, still less in the thought that I have parted with them for ever, for I think neither of these things. The bitterness lies in the thought that until I also die I shall never again see them smile or hear their voices. This pain is indeed hard to bear. Yet measured in the scale of things it is but brief."

Since you say you like jottings from my diary, here in chronological order, though leaping across the years, are some about Arthur Balfour.

3rd May 1915. A.J.B. read the last of his Gifford lectures aloud to Mamma and me in the boudoir. He looked so benign with the lamplight falling on his silver head and the parallels in Wisdom's brow, and was wonderfully tolerant of the almost ceaseless dog interruptions. Scarcely two consecutive moments without one of them having to be let either in or out of the room. However, perhaps this was just as well, for, but for these "Noises Off" Mamma would certainly have gone to sleep. Not that he would have minded that either.

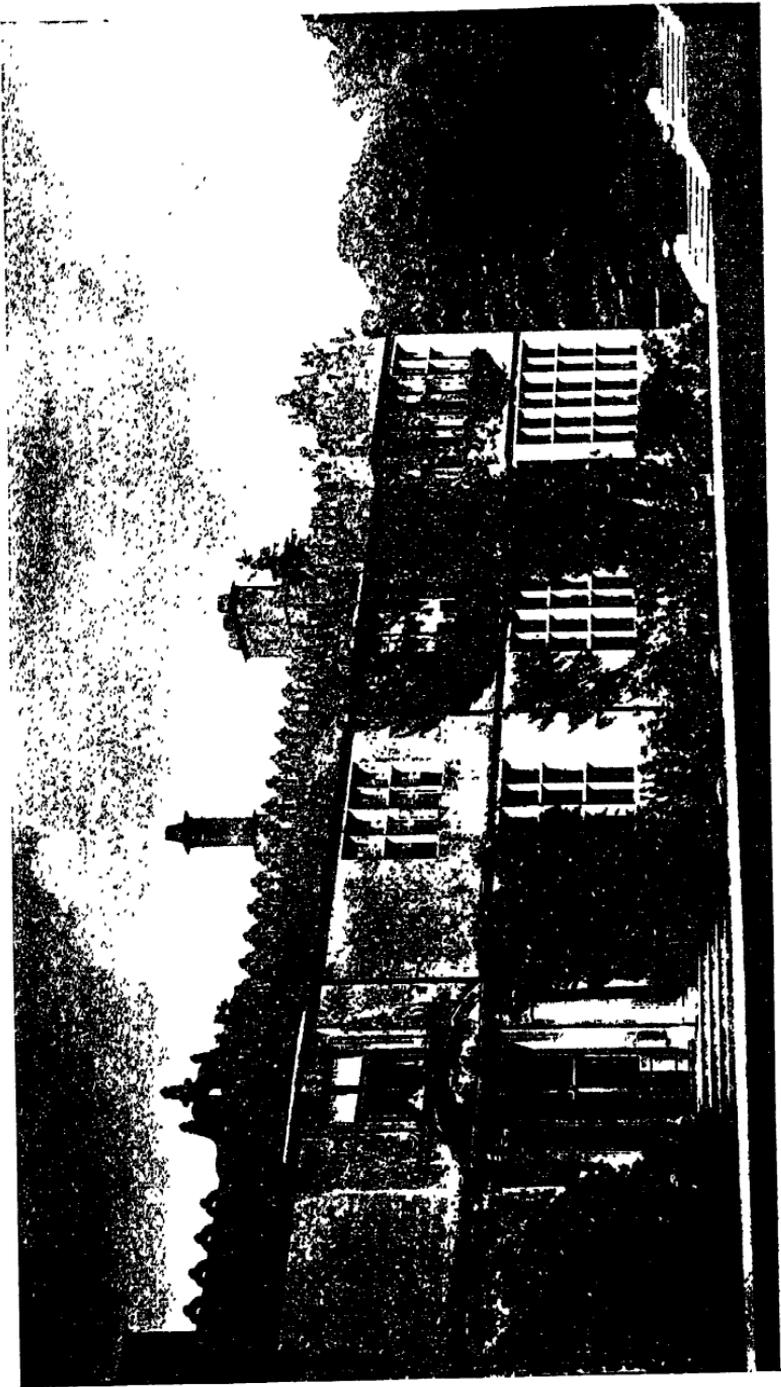
25th May 1915. A.J.B. radiated the full beam of his courtesy and concentration on the very mixed company Mamma had assembled for dinner. He said that succeeding Winston at the Admiralty made him feel like Cincinnatus "exit ardent youth and enter the venerable". (Dash and Sagacity?)

2nd November 1918. Talking of how the Germans should be treated after their defeat, Evan Charteris suggested that the Berlin *Sieges Allee* should be destroyed. "No," said A.J.B. "We want to mete out justice, not mercy." . . .

2nd November 1929. A.J.B. is convalescing here. He looks sadly frail, but is extremely difficult to curb. Deputed to take him for a saunter, I found it almost impossible to restrain him from walking



Arthur Balfour in his First Motor Car



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up to the top of the "pyramid". He was like a pulling horse . . .

15th January 1930. Mamma came back from Fisher's Hill,¹ where she has been to see Arthur Balfour who is very ill, and evidently knows that he will not recover. She told me that when she rose to leave he spoke more urgently than she had ever heard him speak. "Tell me, *please* tell me," he pleaded, "how, how am I to shuffle off this mortal coil?"

* * *

I vividly remember H. G. Wells' first visit to Stanway—though I couldn't put a date to it. Never having met him before, I could scarcely wait to see him, for I had gobbled all his books, including, when I was far too young for it, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, which had given me quite the worst nightmare of my life.

What do I remember of my first impression? Large, very bright blue eyes in a chubby, genial, startlingly intelligent, but otherwise unremarkable face; the famous squeaky voice which became so much less noticeable in later years; my own delight (and relief) at finding him so easy to talk to and such fun; the contagious zest with which he threw himself into every kind of game—many of them of his own invention. (He was the only croquet player I ever met who had a special outfit for that game—"Now I must go and change for croquet," he would say, soon to reappear in shorts, zebra shirt and a blue beret.)

His eyes seemed to sparkle with mischief, but it was the quite unmalicious mischief of an exuberant, greedy boy, for whom no day could possibly be long enough for all the larks he wanted to cram into its far too few hours.

Years and years later I was reminded of this first impression when at the dinner in honour of his seventieth birthday, the Birthday Boy, still avid for life, told us in a very moving speech that, despite the number of his years, he felt he was only just beginning to know how to live. He couldn't bear, he said, to think how near bedtime was drawing. "Time to put your

¹ Lord Balfour's house.

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toys away, Master Bertie," he seemed, so he told us, to hear a kindly but firm Nannie say to him.

Though Wells at the time of his first visit to Stanway had already written much about War in the Air and other amenities progress was before long to bring, he was, I think, still admired much more for his imagination and amazing inventive power than for his ability literally to foretell the future. People did not yet realise that he did actually see further ahead than other men.

H. G. Wells came to Stanway very often in the years just before the First World War. I particularly remember two of his visits; the first because of the twinkling-eyed impish delight he took in the family crisis then raging over my wish to accept an, as I thought, dazzling offer to play the leading part in a play called *Princess Priscilla Runs Away* which was about to be produced at the Haymarket Theatre. Can you imagine any daughter being allowed to *refuse* such an offer today? But my father wouldn't hear of my accepting it. Wells, thrilled by this situation, spurred me on to mutiny against my obstructionist parent.

The second visit was after there had been such an extraordinary, and now quite unbelievable, to-do over the publication of *Ann Veronica*—Wells had actually been cut at a country house party! This time, for all his buoyancy, he looked pathetically bewildered and his blue eyes held a hurt expression.

I find it difficult to believe that anyone who met Wells did not find him disarming. It was so obvious that beneath his mockery—his impudence, if you like—sprang a fount of kindness as inexhaustible as his fount of ideas.

I am not ignoring his faults, I know perfectly well that, unable to respect other people's sanctities, he trampled on thousands of toes; that he could be prickly, truculently aggressive, even offensive. I don't deny that he could be, often was, all this; but these defects were so inextricably entangled with his good qualities. When he offended it was only because he was angry, and his anger never arose from mere irritability or personal animosity, but always from indignation—exasperation, because he knew, and could seldom

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forget, how different life on this planet might be made from the scramble it had become, and had no patience with anyone who impeded him in his unflagging determination to do all he could to free his fellow-creatures from squalor, physical or mental superstition, cruelty and fear. To quote the fine tribute paid to him after his death by J. B. Priestley, "At his worst he never diminished or hurt us. At his best, he made us feel, as he did, that we live on a star."

Like most would-be healers of the world's sickness, Wells struck me as much better at diagnosis than at prescription. I can't say that I should have wanted to take any but a return ticket to the Utopia of his conception. Yet it was impossible ever to think of him as a mere rationalist. Despite his absorption in science and sociology, and his contemptuous dismissal of all revealed religion, a sense of mystery was never far below the surface of his mind—that sense so finely expressed in the passage: "There are no exclusive limitations . . . There are times and seasons, there are moods of exaltation—moments as it were of revelation, when the whole universe about us seems bright with the presence of unimagined things."

Gibe as he might, it was obvious that Wells had never lost an intensely aware, almost awed sense of wonder—"I realise that Being is surrounded east, south, north and west, above and below, by wonder. Within that frame, like a little house in the midst of a strange, cold, vast and beautiful scenery, is life upon this planet."

Here from my diary are some passages about Wells at a certain Stanway party, when Mamma had outdone even herself as a mixer of men; one of the other guests being an unctuous, worldly prelate whom she would call the "Arch-beacon".

Sat between Wells and Mamma's "Archbeacon" at dinner. Wells told me that the book of his own for which he had most affection was *The Sea Lady*. He praised many younger authors, but said of Henry James, of whom he spoke as "an elephant without a hide", that "he had no humour, none at all".

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He took a most kindly interest in my impending novel, catechising me about its theme and characters, and suggesting that it would be fun, if we were each to publish our forthcoming book under the other's name. . . . Fun for whom?

When I told him what a strong resemblance I saw between him and Leslie Hartley, he looked long and consideringly at Leslie's face, and then handsomely conceded, "Yes, there is a certain sweetness in the eyes!"

When my getting up from the dinner-table left Wells cheek by jowl with the not over-spiritual-looking "Archbeacon", a brilliant line of his last novel shot into my mind—the one about an ambitious dignitary of the Church—"He thought of gaiters, though he talked of wings."

* * *

Of all my elders who came to Stanway when I was a girl the one I found the greatest "treat" was that mine of wisdom and fountain of fun, "The Professor", as Sir Walter Raleigh—I suppose because he seemed so unprofessorial—was always called. I don't know how many people have told me that this extraordinarily lovable man was their favourite of all talkers. Profound, playful, above all surprising, one of his best qualities was that with him conversation always became an exciting adventure, for unlike other great talkers, Belloc, for instance, who enter into discussion with their minds already fully made up so that you are never allowed to take any part in the processes of their deliberation but are given only the results, he always invited you to share with him the pleasures of the chase from the very first drawing of the covert to the end.

Desmond MacCarthy has described his talk so well—particularly that delightful way he had of making it seem to be a collaboration—that I must quote a passage from his *Portraits*.

"Raleigh's talk was vehement and subtle, full of quips, cranks and candid exaggerations. It raced and tossed and sparkled, but you could hear the stones of thought knocking against each other under the surface of that wasteful river . . . No one's spirits could be less daunting. There was nothing dismaying in his exuberance or

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his wit; you never left his company sighing 'how slow, how tame am I'. His delight in his own wit and energy of expression was so infectious. It was not, 'Look, I've hit it', that he seemed to be saying when he stepped back for appreciation on your face, or clutched you in his eagerness; such gestures were rather equivalent to a shout of joy—'You've got it! Yes? No? You *have*! That's it; that's the point!'"

This description reminds me of how I used to look forward to a walk with The Professor with just the same sort of eagerness as at that age—I was seventeen when he first came to Stanway—I would look forward to hunting, bathing in the sea, or going on the switchback at Earl's Court.

I enjoyed both his sense and his nonsense more than anyone else's.

Prodigiously tall, loose-limbed and owing to some physical condition very shaky (it took him both hands to raise his glass to his lips), Walter Raleigh was a spectacular figure. His sagacious face, solemn in repose, but quick to kindle, was immensely long, and so Elizabethan that he looked as though he had forgotten to put on a large white ruff; an impression which, I assure you, owed nothing whatever to the associations with his name—I remember some stranger asking "Who is that 'Elizabethan-looking man with a giggle in his eye'?" Moods, chased one another across his long countenance, and the smile which began in his eyes broke very suddenly.

At a social gathering he tended, if entirely surrounded by strangers, to wear a look of distress which used to bring to my mind his own verse:

"I wish I loved the human race,
I wish I loved its silly face;
I wish I liked the way it walks,
I wish I liked the way it talks,
And when I'm introduced to one
I wish I thought what jolly fun!"

But at sight of any other guest whom he considered what he called a "fellow-creature", delighted recognition leapt Jack-in-the-Box-like into his grey eyes. "Talk to me. Give me a

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theme", they signalled as unmistakably as the eyes of a dog plead for a stick to be thrown; and the instant he was thrown any kind of stick, helter-skelter, away scampered his thoughts and words in pursuit.

So explosive was his immensely hilarious laughter that at each outburst his hand flew up to hold in his insecure teeth. In acclamation of a good phrase, were it his own or someone else's, he would clap his hands, almost crow with delight.

He talked equally well to a small or to a large number of people, yet, much as he enjoyed an audience, I think he was happiest alone with one fellow-creature on whom he would lavish enough wisdom and wit to furnish a hundred lectures—but what could have been less like a lecture than his company!

Besides being such a star performer himself, The Professor was so pre-eminently the cause of good talk in others that when he was at Stanway, instead of leaving such things to chance, as naturally we usually did, we would deliberately pre-arrange general conversation, perhaps as we separated after breakfast agreeing to meet again at eleven. In preparation for these deliberate orgies of talk my mother would set a circle of chairs round the fire, or in hot weather under the tulip tree.

Illuminatingly though The Professor spoke of books, and he was an inspired praiser and expounder of his favourite writers, he was always anxious—if anything over-anxious—to convince one that he liked life far more than books. Bemoaning his own job, which he called "parasitic literature", he would wincingly quote Tennyson's devastating description of a certain critic as "a louse on the locks of literature". According to his own values, the highest praise he could possibly give a book was that it could have been written just as well had its author never read a single word. This he declared to be the great quality of W. H. Hudson, a writer for whom he had an intense admiration.

However arbitrary the distinction between Men of Action and Men of Letters may seem to us, it was one of which The Professor was very conscious—almost morbidly so, and to his admiration for Doers as opposed to Writers—particularly for the men at the Front during the war—he added a kind of tremulous, almost apologetic humility.

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Though when The Professor first came to Stanway he must have been well over forty, bursts of infectious high spirits made him still enjoy the kind of frolics appropriate to my own "teens"—playing lawn-tennis by moonlight, dancing the Highland Fling along the high-road, dressing-up and so forth. I have a vivid recollection of a party of us serenading him late one night with a home-made carol which began :

"Professor, Professor,
Untimely Undresser!"

but what escapes my memory and baffles my powers of conjecture is why he, of all people, had gone to bed so long as anyone else was still up. What *could* have made him do such a thing? I can only assume that he must have been ill. Not that he looks it, as my inward eye still sees him standing in zebra-striped pyjamas at the open window armed with a wet sponge to throw at us.

The Professor's letters—shrewd, rich in wisdom, wit and nonsense—were wonderfully like himself; and in these, writing not for publication, he could, after the restraint he had to impose on his lecturing self, gleefully let off steam by allowing himself to indulge in violent judgments.

Looking through some of his letters to me I find those written from the Athenaeum Club are all headed "Bishop's Mortuary". Many are enlivened by improvised verses. Here for example is one written on the spur of the moment just after a much-counted-on Sunday afternoon respite from the consciously "cultured" had been shattered by a party of gate-crashers.

"I blinked on my perch like a vulture,
When they crept up the hill unawares,
To talk of the progress of culture,
And deposit their bodies on chairs."

Lucie Raleigh, The Professor's delightful wife—I can remember no marriage which struck me as more unalloyedly happy—always came to Stanway with him; sometimes, too, one of his three sons, and often his daughter Philippa.

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I remember his glee when one morning at breakfast this little girl, whom he adored, addressed him as a "disrespectable old owl", and how almost awed as well as approving he was when she declared "the goodest thing one can do is to be happy". Fortunate children to be taught their table manners by verses written for them by their own father—verses like:

"Eat slowly; only men in rags,
And gluttons old in sin,
Mistake themselves for carpet bags,
And tumble victuals in."

Here are a few passages from my diary that tell of one of The Professor's visits to Stanway.

Morning walk with The Professor, who, wearing a carriage rug instead of a coat, capered along the Stanton road looking quite fabulous. Weaving fantastic arabesques round every theme, he gambolled as much in his talk as in his gait. Then he became comparatively serious, launching himself on immensely long sentences with no apparent notion whither the gales of thought might bear him, but always coming safely into port. He talked of Tolstoy the man, not the writer, with great distaste; of Dickens with fervour; of depression, laughter and death. He said he knew no lines more beautiful both in sentiment and in expression, than George Meredith's couplet

"Love that so desires would fain keep her changeless.
Fain would fling the net and fain have her free."

Finally he talked of personal friends, particularly of those whom he found "restful"—apparently his highest praise, anyhow of a woman. What, I wonder, did he mean by saying when I denied that I was "natural", "No, you are not natural. You are Nature"?

Mamma's annual tea for the Needlework Guild was greatly enlivened by The Professor's nobly making a Roman holiday by entering the lists as a "cock-fighter" against Blanche, the brisk, quick-turning little nursery-maid. For some seconds after we had blindfolded him with a napkin, he lay quite still, stretched out all his unending length; then, scuttling for cover, entrenched as much of himself as would go under a large table. When Blanche had located him by ear—no difficult matter for he breathed like a

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dragon—she attacked him furiously, flailing with her furled-up newspaper the yards and yards of protruding leg that overlapped his fortress. . . .

General conversation after dinner. The Professor again rhapsodised over Dickens, but declared that no one should read him for the *first* time between the ages of fourteen and thirty. He spoke of his “glorious exuberance” and “Homeric quality” so surprisingly combined with “a heavenly homeliness”; said that he had “Eternity”, and that compared with him, Sterne was “thin”; Meredith “nowhere”; Thackeray “*pour rire*”. He pronounced the so often brought charge of “unreality” to be “superficial and utterly false”, and maintained that even for sheer style, the description of the marshes at the beginning of *Great Expectations* was as good as anything in English. He said the reaction against Dickens had been produced not so much by overpraise as by mispraise; that the inevitable reaction had been followed by a counter-reaction, but that now “the tide of true appreciation had thrown him right up amongst the giants”. After this panegyric he read, or rather acted, *Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings* to us.

Mamma, who was in one of her best jumbling veins, told me to “put two bits of Professor on the fire”, and then confusing him with G. who had to catch the breadwinner's train, detailed to him exactly what she had ordered for his seven-thirty breakfast. At this—for he had neither any need nor any wish to leave before the afternoon—he looked peculiarly pathetic. “*Am I going at eight?*” he meekly asked.

I wonder if you know the poem The Professor wrote to his wife called *My Last Will*? Both where it is grave and where it is gay, it is so wonderfully characteristic of him. Here are four of its verses:

“When I am safely laid away
Out of work and out of play,
Sheltered by the kindly ground
From the world of sight and sound,
One or two of those I leave
Will remember me and grieve,
Thinking how I made them gay
By the things I used to say;
But the crown of their distress
Will be my untidiness.

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What a nuisance then will be
All that shall remain of me!
Shelves of books I never read,
Piles of bills, undocketed,
Shaving-brushes, razors, strops,
Bottles that have lost their tops,
Boxes full of odds and ends,
Letters from departed friends,
Faded ties and broken braces
Tucked away in secret places,

Baggy trousers, ragged coats,
Stacks of ancient lecture notes,
And that ghostliest of shows,
Boots and shoes in horrid rows.
Though they are of cheerful mind,
My lovers whom I leave behind,
When they find these in my stead
Will be sorry I am dead . . .

When at heart you shall be sad
Pondering the joys we had,
Listen and keep very still.
If the lowing from the hill
Or the tolling of a bell
Do not serve to break the spell,
Listen; you may be allowed
To hear my laughter from a cloud."

* * *

It surprises me that I should not remember which year it was that two such out-of-the-way guests as the Sidney Webbs first came to Stanway, but I don't. I do, however, remember my mother coming home late one night with the shining eyes which meeting new people who especially interested her always gave her, and telling us what fun she had had dining for the first time in the Sidney Webbs' house with H. G. Wells and Bernard Shaw as fellow-guests; and how her new friends, the Fabians, had promised her that should their policy of "Gradualness" fail and Red Revolution break out, they would exert

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whatever influence they might have—which I should think would have been precious little—to save her from the tumbrils.

“I suppose you are going to ask the creatures to Stanway,” said my father resignedly; and of course she did, and of course they came, “not once and again, but again and again”; and as it turned out my father greatly enjoyed Mrs. Sidney Webb’s bracing company, and so did nearly everyone else, for even those—and they were very few—who could not abide Beatrice Webb personally, enjoyed disliking her; notably Charles Whibley, who thought her and everything she stood for a deadly menace to humanity.

Though that remark of Mrs. Sidney Webb’s I quoted to you in *Haply I May Remember*, “Don’t you agree with me, Mr. Balfour, that the only excuse for a dinner-party is that it should end in a committee?” may be characteristic, it is nevertheless misleading; for, herself an agreeable as well as clever talker, and a good listener too, she really took great pleasure in conversation as an end in itself. Nor was she nearly so specialised or limited in range as might have been expected. Vital, remarkably lucid and fluent, not to say glib, she was very persuasive to any potential disciples, while her rooted convictions and stimulating personality acted as a challenge to those with views opposed to her own. To the belligerent Charles Whibley she was a positive bugle-call to arms.

Far from being in the least masculine, Beatrice Webb was not only a very good-looking woman with a pleasant voice and an agreeable manner, but also obviously—and this was a very disarming trait—highly susceptible to much in life, in atmospheres and in people which her judgment told her she ought to condemn. For instance, though she must surely have included Arthur Balfour in the category of those whose lives she pronounced—I quote her own words—to be “so rounded off with culture and charm, comfort and power, that the misery of the destitute in their own country is as far off from them as the savagery of Central Africa”, yet she could never conceal—nor indeed did she ever attempt to conceal—how

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completely dazzled, in fact subjugated, she was by his charm and conversational brilliance.

I did not at first take to Beatrice Webb's own brand of brilliance. It struck me as somehow bleak, like a bright light that has no warmth. She seemed to me too deliberately, unruffably urbane, as well as far, far too rational. As for the creed which obsessed her, wasn't it too much an end in itself, and inspired more by an uncontrollable itch for order and a passion for organisation than by compassion and love? At that time I was quite ready to suppose myself a Socialist, but not being much of a thinker, preferred to the Webbs the more unbalanced, impassioned, less statistical reformers like Shelley. Beatrice reminded me too much of bee-hives and ant-heaps. In fact, as in my "teens" was only natural, I over-simplified her. Added to which she gave me the uncomfortable feeling that she couldn't possibly think I was justifying my existence. Any moment I feared she would ask, as well she might, "And what are *you* doing with your life, Child?"

So to begin with, I fancied that of the two I preferred her amiable, comparatively silent, and, but for his ugliness, unimpressive little husband. "Yes," I said to myself, "Sidney is the more human", whatever I meant by that rather inane adjective. I had been told, as perhaps you have, of the famous remark made by Sidney Webb the first time he saw Hampton Court. Blinking at its mellowed widespread beauty, he bleated, "Grite whyste of spice", and that was his only comment. But if he thought that on its comparatively modest scale Stanway, too, was a "grite whyste of spice" he had the good manners not to express his opinion, and also to appear greatly to enjoy his own temporary occupation of a share of that "whyste".

I soon realised how much my callow self had over-simplified Beatrice Webb, "whom I discovered to be not only human"—very much so—but also to have a much less one-track mind than I had at first discredited her with. Nor was her personality by any means all of one piece. Though she had her obvious limitations—limitations recognised by herself ("I am

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poetry-blind," she declared, "just as some people are colour-blind") yet she was by no means impervious to art. She delighted in architecture, and had such a love of music that one of the standing temptations of her life was to give to its enjoyment more of her dedicated time than she thought should be spared from her mission. Another besetting temptation was the great love of walking, which made her long to spend many more hours out-of-doors than her conscience could approve. Then again, despite her attempt to justify dinner-parties by their potentiality of blossoming into committees, she really thoroughly enjoyed talking for talking's sake, and appreciated people as individuals, liking to please as well as to interest them, even—so she accused herself—to "order them about in a motherly way".

"I catch myself playing the personality note", she once shamefacedly confessed. In fact, admitting how much she liked "brilliant little parties and interesting folk versed in great affairs", she often suffered severe conscience qualms over what she called her "dabbling in Society", for Society with a capital S was a lure which she thought she ought to resist; partly because she feared what she called the "vain restlessness of tickled vanity", but more because of the inevitable drain on her vitality it involved, and on her purse as well, for she suffered from unsuitable hankering after unnecessarily pretty and therefore costly clothes. I also soon gathered that though seemingly so positive and definite—even cock-sure—she was far from being without a certain wistful wonder. Enlisted under the banner of Rationality—signed on for the duration of her life—she was yet subject to yearnings after the Unseen. Probably few people suspected her of a regular habit of prayer; but she did have it, for though she rejected dogmas, she had faith in a "spiritual force". Without this she said she could not have "gone on"; she needed "some communing of the soul with a Righteousness that she felt to be quite outside and far above herself".

It must often have been far more difficult for her to "go on" than she ever allowed it to appear. One has a tendency to soothe self-esteem by assuming any woman who gets through

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a phenomenal amount of work to be endowed with unusual physical strength, but this was an advantage Mrs. Webb never enjoyed. It was not health that enabled her to do all she did, but sheer indomitable will-power—will-power, according to her own telling, induced by prayer. In point of fact, she was so delicate that she often nearly fainted while lecturing; besides which she was grievously handicapped by being a bad sleeper.

The first time I saw Beatrice Webb I was struck by her very bright, rather bird-like brown eyes and their quick, eager, unlingering glance which never seemed to settle long enough to become a gaze. I don't think they were penetrating eyes. I doubt if she saw very deep into other people. Some of her judgments were certainly hasty. The first time she saw Winston Churchill she described him as a Little Englander.

She was an inveterate categoriser, one of her set conversational pieces—I must have heard it a dozen times but never thought it had much point—was dividing humanity into what she called the "A's" and "B's". The A's comprised Aristocrats, Artists and Anarchists; the "B's" the Bourgeois, Bureaucrats and Benevolents, the implication being that though, admittedly, she found the company of the "A's" more enjoyable, the world would have to learn to do without the luxury of their existence.

Another very often delivered thesis was explaining how much she and her Fabian followers preferred the Conservatives to the Liberals. The Conservatives, she said, did at least represent something which, however much she might disagree with it, she could understand and respect, whereas the Liberals, so she declared, were merely postponing Utopia by a futile tinkering at what ought to be scrapped.

Though she made me fear she might ask me what I intended to do with my life, Beatrice Webb was always very nice to me. I assure you, I never intentionally misled her, yet I must none-the-less somehow have given her a false impression of myself, for under the delusion that I would make her a good Child Wife, not only did she conceive a plan for a marriage between me and a certain prominent politician in whom she

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was interested, but she did her very active best to bring this about.

Had she searched the world she could scarcely have hit on two people more unsuited to one another. Such mismatch could only have resulted in murder or suicide. She was, however, as persistent in matchmaking as in social reform; and quite undiscouraged by her candidate's obvious indifference to me, doggedly went on placing me beside him at dinner. But to make that politician propose to me would have taken vast quantities of the wine which she and her husband had the commendable strength of mind never to provide at their own table.

What really impressed me most about the Sidney Webbs—even more than their amazing industry—was their mutual devotion. This was really touching. It was derisively alleged that they had fallen in love with one another's newspaper articles on the Poor Law, but whatever its inception, there can be no doubt that theirs was a deep and lasting love-affair. I remember her telling me she would consider herself an entirely happy woman were it not for her haunting fear that she might lose her husband. "Every time Sidney leaves the house," she wailed, "I feel he may be run over by a bus." The tearful intensity with which she voiced her fears returned to my memory when after her death I came on the following passage in her book *Our Partnership*: "the sleepless hours of the night are haunted, not by the fear of death, but by the dread of life without him. . . . Apart we each of us have only half a life, together we have a double life."

Though Beatrice Webb knew herself to be the figurehead of their remarkable partnership, she fully recognised how indispensably her husband supplemented her, and constantly declared that "Sidney", who was as unself-seeking as he was unself-sparing, "was the backbone of the Webb Firm".

Another confidence I remember her making was that, despite the closeness of their relationship and the extent to which they shared one another's every thought, she had yet never dared show her husband her first impression of him as recorded at the time in her diary. Perhaps this was scarcely

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surprising, for I suppose her Sidney was the most grotesque-looking man I have ever seen. His ugliness, in fact, was disarming—indeed almost, if not quite, endearing. How well I remember my first sight of that gnome-like figure with the huge head, goatee beard, thickly-lensed goggles and tiny legs in immensely baggy knickerbockers.

Expatriating one day on how her husband was the “backbone of the Webb Firm”, Beatrice Webb told me why she needed to be its figurehead. The reason was that “Sidney lacked ‘Presence’. Yes,” she declared, “in a crowd my Sidney would pass unnoticed”—a masterly understatement, for surely in his own line he was as noticeable as Helen of Troy in hers?

My only reason for harping on Sidney Webb’s mere appearance is to introduce a very favourite story in the annals of Stanway. One day when my mother and I were sitting with Mrs. Webb, my four-year-old sister who had just been badly frightened at a circus by what she shudderingly called a “*DWART*” (a dwarf) crept into the room looking very pale and scared.

Desperately anxious to attract attention, she tugged at my mother’s skirts.

“Mamma! Mamma!” she whimpered pleadingly.

“Wait a minute, darling,” temporised my mother, deeply engaged in playing the attentive hostess to her voluble guest.

But the frightened child was not to be put off.

“Mamma! Mamma!” she insisted, her face distorted with terror.

“Well, what is it, darling?” my mother had to ask.

Then out spurted the curdling words.

“There’s a *Dwart* in the house, Mamma! A *Dwart* with a nanny-goat’s beard!”

I can still see the drowning look in my mother’s eyes. It was one of those appalling situations from which there is no possible escape. There was just nothing to say—nothing whatever. Even had there been anyone else in the house sufficiently undersized for a child to mistake him for a professional dwarf, there was no other man with a beard of any description, let alone a nanny-goat’s. Yet it wasn’t nearly so bad as you



The Professor (Sir Walter Raleigh)



Drawing of the Author's Husband by Lucy Graham Smith

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might imagine, for after all, we both knew that Mrs. Webb knew exactly how ugly her husband was.

I must say no one could possibly have behaved better than did the "dwarf's" wife. "He's a very kind Dwarf," she said promptly and authoritatively.

* * *

No guest added more to Stanway fun than Lord Hugh Cecil, who though invariably his never-disappointing, delightfully idiosyncratic self, yet somehow always contrives to surprise one.

What peculiar quality of personality gives his every remark, no matter how casual, such a tang of its own? Why has he merely to comment on the weather to make one laugh? He is incapable of putting ten words together without producing a memorable phrase, either startlingly pointed or irresistibly ludicrous.

Liabile though he once was to be roused to frenzy by disputes in the House of Commons, I have never seen him anything but temperate, judicious and courteous in private discussion; not even when provoked by Whibley at his most aggressive. As for the so-called "crankiness" with which, according to taste, he is credited or discredited, I could never have enough of it.

I know no one who can expound things with such lucidity. Just for a few seconds at a time he has given me glimmerings of understanding on subjects otherwise wrapped in impenetrable obscurity.

The first time I sat beside "Linky", as all his friends call Hugh Cecil, I thought I was going to be frightened. A certain angularity, an expression of distress—each smile seemed wrung from his rather wry countenance—made me think I might find him a little crabbed, perhaps even cantankerous; but I was at once captivated by his personality, his point of view and the wonderful precision of his speech. Added to which, everything he says is so indescribably enhanced by his appearance, voice and delivery. However much he may be making you laugh his own eyes still keep their troubled look.

His first remark to me was perhaps a little startling; "I am

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sure you are very acid. So am I," he rapped out, very staccato. It was a relief to gather that this was not a diagnosis of our dispositions, but only of our chemistry. He next expatiated on the striking resemblance he saw between me and Dean Inge, a resemblance to which he always reverts whenever we meet, but which as yet no one else has been able to see.

After this opening I was much interested to hear of his daily need to restore his vitality by a boiling-hot bath; of how he liked to see young women dressed in lively colours—red for choice; and what a help he found it when obliged to make conversation after dinner, tightly to hug a bright-coloured cushion—again red for choice. Having regaled me with these fascinating disclosures, he talked illuminatingly of books, enthrallingly of the Reformation, and amusingly of likes and dislikes.

Certain particularly characteristic utterances of "Linky's" still ring in my ears. Let me give you a few examples. "No, you mustn't go to Church. Devotions are very bad for invalids" . . .

"Kissing is a highly unhygienic practice" . . .

"I am eating my potatoes slowly, but with great resolution" . . .

One arctic night at Stanway I asked him if I should tell the housemaid to put a hot-water bottle in his bed. "No," he snapped out. "No, No! it would disturb the privacy of my couch!" Another time, when I importuned him to admire a specially beautiful sunset, he conceded, "Yes, extremely tasteful."

Would anyone else in the world have applied the word "tasteful" to a sunset?

That same evening I told him I had decided to shingle my head, on which without a second's hesitation he snapped out, "A fool and her hair are soon parted!"

My visual memory holds two specially vivid pictures of Hugh Cecil at Stanway. In one he is playing venomous lawn-tennis in someone else's patent-leather pumps secured to his feet by several elastic bands. Preparing to serve a ball, he

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looks as though he were hatching some elaborately malevolent plot.

In my other picture he carefully carries on a leaf laid on the palm of his hand an uprearing green caterpillar which, for fear that it might be run over, he has picked up off the road. Having transported the caterpillar a mile or so, he became greatly exercised as to what to do for the best. Where, he asked me, could the creature safely be set down? Did I think that owing to his meddling it might never be able to rejoin its family, and if so would that be a sadder fate than being squashed on the road?

I can think of few finer examples of adaptability—of literally rising to the occasion—than when Hugh Cecil, though already at the outbreak of the 1914-1918 War forty-five years old, trained to become a Pilot in the R.A.F. Has anyone ever received a higher compliment than was paid him by the mechanic at the aerodrome, who extolling his prowess as a novice in the air, devoutly ejaculated, “That ’ere Lord ’Ugh Cecil. ’E’s a regular ’Ell ’Ound!”

* * *

Of all my mother’s women friends the most closely bound-up with my happiest memories of these long-ago parties at Stanway is that radiant being, Lady Desborough, of whom I have heard it said that she possesses a genius for life itself and for human relationships.

Her mere presence created an occasion. Always at concert pitch herself, she never failed to key everyone else up high above their usual level.

What besides charm, intellect and immense vitality makes her personality so compelling? An enigmatic, inveigling face, a wonderfully accomplished voice like a stringed musical instrument played with great artistry, inflexibility of will, enthralled interest in human beings combined with both the power and the desire to dominate them. But what catalogue

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of qualities can ever begin to explain the mystery of personal magnetism?

One of Lady Desborough's remarkable social gifts is her ability to galvanise others. A rapt listener as well as a stimulating talker, she always makes whomsoever she converses with feel that something important is at stake. Equally expert whether presiding over a roomful of people all talking together or engrossed in a tête-à-tête, and always able to pass without any perceptible change of gear from the profoundly grave to sparkling levity, she invariably brings to bear, on the most trivial as well as on the most tremendous topic, the same intent concentration.

This power of concentration has always been one of her outstanding qualities. No one can ever have had a greater number of friends, yet she is without a rival at making whoever is with her at the moment feel the only person in the world. Possibly her extreme shortsightedness contributes to this flattering impression. Suffering as I do at dinner-parties from a wandering eye, I have sometimes wondered whether a pair of blinkers might not help me to concentrate on the person immediately beside me.

A penetrating student of character, Lady Desborough can discuss a friend for hours and hold you enthralled, yet for all her searchlight scrutiny and discernment, it has occurred to me that she can seldom really know what other people are like—that is what they are like when not under her influence—for, acting as she invariably does, as a tuning-fork, she is probably unaware how much she stimulates people into being something quite different from their usual selves, and so has no idea how much they subside—not to say “flop”, the moment she leaves the room and they revert to normal. I doubt whether any of the dominantly vital beings—those who always, so to speak, call the tune—ever really know other people.

For example, I have heard Lady Desborough pronounce certain friends to be immune from depression—friends whom, it so happened, I had seen near suicide from it; the explanation being that while they were with her she invariably

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bestowed on them, even if only on short loan, her own conviction of the immense worthwhileness, not to say glory of life.

Had she not confided to me that for many years she herself had needed to battle against acute attacks of depression, I should never have suspected her of any such tendency. Perhaps the most self-disciplined being I have ever known, she has brought self-control to such a pitch that she appears able to bluff herself as well as everyone else. No doubt it was her resolve to overcome, or at least to conceal, this intermittent depression which she would condemn as a kind of blasphemy against life, that developed in her the determination, exerted to excess, as some think, to enjoy every moment of her life however adverse the circumstances. I have even known her carry subjectivity to the point of refusing to admit so incontrovertible a fact as bad weather. But if even her will failed either to control the climate or to bluff her companions into the belief that a wet day was a fine day, she could at least always make them agree that summer rain might add pleasure to a walk.

Though Lady Desborough was old enough in years to be my mother, I remember how in my youth her unflinching zest—a zest rooted in a kind of gospel of happiness—had the effect of making me think my own contemporaries prematurely disenchanted with life. I remember, too, how some people, ashamed of their own comparative listlessness, attempted to explain away her radiance by maintaining that besides being blessed with exceptionally good health, she had never suffered any real sorrow. But when the death of her three splendid sons had lifted her on to the plane of a Greek Tragedy, it could no longer be said that her unflinching faith owed anything to such immunity.

Extremity of sorrow left her loyalty to life unshaken. And how many others were inspired by the example of her unconquerable courage and resolution never to allow sorrow to degenerate into self-pity, but to reinvest their love and interest, so that the tragedies of one generation should not darken the childhood of the next.

Her power to transmute grief into a kind of glory made her

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seem the embodiment of Shakespeare's grand line—"I will instruct my sorrow to be proud."

Now that illness has long been endured with the same iron courage as bereavement, her spirit is still undefeated; her interest in life and in people undiminished. It is always from her, be the occasion one of joy or sorrow, that the very first letter of sympathy comes—and what sympathy!

Her love for her friends, her passionate concern in everything that is theirs, is carried forward from one generation to the second and third; so much so that she really seems to be as vitally concerned with one's children—and grandchildren too—as if they were her own.

* * *

A great—far too rare—delight at Stanway was a visit from Max Beerbohm. In talk, as in writing, this flawless artist's every word is infallibly the right word; but I could never have guessed how much gravity and quaintness of countenance would add to that delicious drollery. What can it be like to be thus trebly-endowed—pen, pencil and speech?

I remember your telling me you had only met Max Beerbohm once, and that in his later life, when you were charmed by the exquisite, uncondescending courtesy with which he talked to the younger generation. He seemed, you said, so eager to know what it was doing and thinking, that his manner almost gave the impression that, instead of conferring an honour, he was grateful to the young men for their tolerance of him.

I, too, was struck by that gentle—seemingly so kindly—interest, which might well have lulled even the most heaven-sent butt for a caricaturist into false confidence. Yes, he quite put people off their guard. I particularly remember his effect one day at Stanway on two very shy, wholly undistinguished undergraduates. Obviously the encouraging, coaxing appreciation—almost deference—with which he listened to their every word, made them begin to fancy that they, too, were budding "Maxes".

Nevertheless, I do remember wondering whether those large,

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mild, wide-open blue eyes always considered a new face from the angle of what it might offer for caricature, and how once on a walk I was suddenly struck dumb with paralysing self-consciousness as a devastating essay of his shot into my mind—that in which he enumerates all the worst conversational inanities to which on a country walk acquaintances are sometimes reduced, for instance, reading aloud the names on the sign-posts! . . . Of how many of these imbecilities had I myself been guilty . . .? Had I actually read the sign-posts aloud to him . . .?

Another favourite visitor was Professor L. P. Jacks. With his white hair, ruddy, sagacious countenance and fine eyes—extraordinarily blue eyes—still quite unbleached by the years, this remarkable writer always reminded me of my idea of a Roman shepherd. This impression had nothing to do with his being the author of *Mad Shepherds*. Somehow, he looked as though he lived out of doors, and his mellowed serenity inspired such immediate confidence that I felt sure he would be exactly right with lost sheep and orphaned lambs.

I wish L. P. Jacks had been able to put me in touch with the ghost of whose presence in the Old Library he was himself at times so painfully aware; but, though in all other ways an irreproachable guest, as a liaison officer between the dead and the living denizens of Stanway he was a complete failure.

Jack¹ and Margaret Mackail, of whom I told you in *Haply I May Remember*, were two very frequent guests always eagerly welcomed by my mother, both because they were admirable company and such old and cherished friends. Uncle Evan² too, I have already described at length, but no honours list of Stanwayites can omit mention of his name. Both for her own and her guests' sake there was no one Mamma was more glad to have in the house.

Re-reading Walter Raleigh's letters to myself, I have just come upon one in which he attempts to analyse what it was that made him like Evan so much: "It is odd how utterly

¹ Professor J. Mackail.

² The Hon. Sir Evan Charteris, K.C.

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delightful your Uncle Evan is. Why does my heart leap up when I behold him? I can't say what it is he does, it's something subtle and unanalysable. It must be partly sympathy, but there's nothing very obvious about this. I've got it! It's the heavenly sense of security that you can't say anything that he won't understand. You had been getting along all right and had forgotten how stupid people are until you met him."

Charles Whibley was another of my mother's favourite guests, but he was such a great friend of mine, and you have asked so much about him, that he demands a chapter to himself.

Readers of this particular chapter will, no doubt, accuse me of over-praise; but remember the Stanway guests I have chosen to write of have been carefully selected—are in fact what, were they goods in a grocer's catalogue, would be described as "Best Assorted".

And don't think I fail to realise that I was unusually fortunate in meeting so many delightful people. At least I suppose it *was* fortunate, or—disquieting thought—was The Professor right when he wrote to me, "Do you think it can be good for you not to see more *nasty* people?"

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I PROMISED to try to give you some idea of that now almost legendary being, an Edwardian débutante. It won't be easy, for that phase of my life is full of blurs, blanks and inconsistencies. I can't see Cynthia Charteris as a girl nearly as distinctly as I see her as a child.

In this chapter I'll just describe the actual experience quaintly called "Coming Out", an expression which aptly implies a violently sudden change as though at a word of command a butterfly had to break her chrysalis and instantaneously spread her wings.

Now that the old as well as the young can wear both their skirts and their hair either short or long, and cosmetics conceal the bloom of youth no less than the ravages of age, it is not always easy at first glance to distinguish between the girl of fifteen and the woman of fifty, but in Edwardian days, fashion had as yet done nothing to diminish the age gulf. The visible signs of transition from one phase of womanhood to another were still very evident.

The transformation of a child into a young woman was dramatically sudden: yesterday her golden hair was hanging down her back; today it was "up", coiled into what she called a Grecian knot, and her brothers called a tea-pot handle. Simultaneously the hem of her skirt fell to the ground. I still remember the thrill of hearing the whisper of my first long dress pursuing my heels down the stairs, and the queerness of suddenly no longer being able to see my own feet. I remember too, the pang of saying goodbye to that badge of irresponsibility, my pigtail; the long earnest family confabulations—for mothers then had ample leisure to discuss really important matters—as to how my long heavy refractory hair

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should be dressed, and the ensuing anxiety as to whether it would stay up, which despite some fifty hairpins it very seldom did. I was saddened—was this morbid?—as well as excited by these outward signs of promotion, for though in some steeple of my soul the bells rang merrily enough for the future, yet through their chime I distinctly heard a knell for the past.

Unlike most girls, I was in no hurry to “come out”. I knew I was well off as I was; guessed that in the different life awaiting me, though, of course, there would be much to enjoy, there would also be much that would irk me. You can’t blame Barrie for this—I hadn’t been to *Peter Pan* yet—but I assure you I never wanted to grow up. Poised tiptoe in the wings of the stage on to which they were so impatient to rush, other girls told me my present existence was merely the prelude to the Real Thing; but their eagerness failed to kindle mine.

Stage Fright? No, not really. I admit I was excessively shy and already only too well aware of the truth of Samuel Butler’s saying, “Life is like playing a violin solo in public, and learning the instrument as you go on”; yet what made me hang back was not so much timidity as the fact that I was so much enjoying the “prelude” that I could not bear it to end. The future, however fair, could very well wait. Had I not all eternity before me?

However, at the age of seventeen I did “come out”, but—so most people thought, in a deplorably unconventional way, for instead of diving with one clean plunge into the social stream, I came out, so to speak, in instalments. Why? Because my mother, constitutionally incapable of saying “No”, had promised to present someone else’s daughter, a girl who being several years older than myself, could not, in her parents’ dreadful phrase, “afford to wait”. So I was taken to Court a year sooner than had been planned and then promptly withdrawn from circulation to go, for the first time in my life, to school.

At the beginning of the following season I reappeared in London ballrooms. Heads were shaken. “Very badly bungled production”, pronounced the worldly-wise.

The metamorphosis called Coming Out was supposed to be

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effected when you were presented at Court, where the wand was officially waved over your head. The picturesque rites of this social baptism were preceded by weeks of trepidation—weeks busied with long lessons in deportment from Mr. D'Egville, the Mr. Turveydrop of the day, and panic-stricken rehearsals of my curtsy. (Why couldn't I curtsy as I had so often seen it done on the stage? Would the King hear how loudly my wretched knees cracked—snapping like dry twigs when I bent them?) Then there were endless wearisome hours of trying-on. Shifting my weight from one foot to another, I stood twitching with boredom while portentously solemn women, with their mouths full of pins, and tape-measures slung round their necks, knelt at my feet, conferring with one another and from time to time appealing to the not wholly attentive lady of the house.

"Yes it *is* too tight," pronounced my undecided mother with unwonted conviction.

"Too tight?" mumbled the affronted dressmaker through the pins in her mouth. "I was just saying it was too loose!"

The discovery that "Moddam" was concerned, not with her daughter's presentation dress, but with her Chow dog's harness, did not soothe the distinguished modiste.

At last the long-dreaded evening came; an imposing-looking foreigner called "Monsieur Auguste" bowed himself in, and soon a horrid smell of tonged hair filled the room. When three stiff white ostrich feathers had been stuck into my newly corrugated head, the cook and her acolytes shuffled in to exclaim, "My! don't Miss Cincie look different!" They watched while I was laced—yes, literally laced—into my billowing white crêpe-de-chine dress, and the immensely long and unmanageable train was affixed to my wide shoulders. "What a pity she must wear those very unbecoming feathers!" remarked someone uncomfortably. Then came the ambush of Grandpapa Wemyss' unexpected visit of inspection, his vehement disapproval and drastic disarrangement of my hair and head-dress of feathers. This was very unnerving.

The drive from Cadogan Square to Buckingham Palace

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seemed eternity. One of an endless line of conveyances, our hired coupé crawled through the unbroken avenue of sight-seers, many of whom actually pressed their noses against the glass just as though we were a shop-window display, and made personal remarks rich in cockney wit.

At length we arrived at the Palace. Then came the long suspense of waiting wedged into two gold chairs for our own turn to be ushered into the Royal Presence. Ghoulish dowagers froze my young blood by reciting disasters that had befallen débutantes. They did not even spare us the story of the wretched girl who from extremity of nerves had been sick in her *шОЕ* (what commendable presence of mind to take it off!) on the very footsteps of the throne.

At last I find myself one of a long single file slowly moving forward. . . . Flourish of music; blaze of uniforms; backward-stepping, white-wanded courtiers; dazzle of light. . . . Suddenly I seem to be all by myself in that fierce light. A small floodlit, isolated figure, I am advancing towards Their Majesties. Of course I forget everything Mr. Turveydrop has taught me. Heaven knows what my feet do, but the voluminous folds of my dress conceal their fumbings. At least I don't topple over, and however loudly my knees may crack, the strains of the orchestra prevail. . . . I have passed into, through, and out of the Royal Presence. . . . King Edward and Queen Alexandra have both smiled most graciously, giving me—even if only for one split second after all those long, long hours of pebble-on-the-beach deflation—the lovely illusion that the whole magnificent ceremony has been for—*ME!* . . .

So that's over. "Cincie", officially now quite a new person called Miss Charteris, has been launched like a ship. However, the next morning she feels very much the same.

Before I recrossed the Rubicon to go—a happy, never-to-be-regretted anticlimax—to school, I was taken to a great ball at Apsley House. By cruel mischance I awoke that morning with an attack of what is called "Pinkeye". This meant a feverishly anxious day dabbing on Pond's Extract and perpetually questioning the mirror, but to my infinite relief, my eyes had practically recovered by dressing-time. Despite my

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hankering after black velvet, I wore the traditional white dress of a *débutante*, and—this was not usual, but I had been told I had a “wreath face”—green leaves in my hair.

The ball was given by the Duke of Wellington for Eileen Wellesley, the great-great-granddaughter of the Iron Duke. Because the “Princess of Waterloo” (Eileen’s title in Spain) was one of my best friends, I was invited to the dinner-party before the ball. At this, by a curious coincidence I was placed between Aubrey Herbert, who was to marry my cousin and greatest girl friend, Mary Vesey, and Herbert (always called “Beb”) Asquith, whom I was myself to marry. I really couldn’t tell you which of the two young men I thought the more peculiar; both of their opening questions were so startling.

“Have you ever had a needle stuck into your eye?” asked Aubrey, making me wince at what I took to be a reference to my own affliction. But I wronged Aubrey’s innate courtesy. An oculist had just subjected him to this horrid experience. That was what prompted his question.

“Have you ever seen a pig killed?” asked Beb. Why, I still don’t know. I can’t remember how my unpractised self coped with either of these conversational gambits, but I was told afterwards that to give an example of my social ineptitude, Beb complained to his sister that in my conversation I “roamed inexperiencedly from the Royal Academy to the New English Art Club!”

Except that a waiter deluged my white dress with scarlet soup—no wonder I have never been able to appreciate Bortsch—that is all I remember of my first dinner-party, but the ball—a veritable Cinderella’s dream—is still a shining memory. Electric light had not yet been installed in Apsley House, so the vast rooms were entirely lit by great chandeliers of wax candles, greatly to the advantage of the guests, for that soft glimmering light was wonderfully kind to both old and young.

I entered the ballroom with a great sense of expectancy and heightened awareness, but mercifully feeling much more excited than shy—irradiatingly shy.

“Who’s that tall new Thing in the green wreath, like a mixture of Undine, Millie Sutherland and Evelyn Guinness?”

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I overheard someone ask. I didn't much care for the comparison to Undine. Mightn't I almost as well be likened to a hake or a halibut? (Unfortunately I had just read Leigh Hunt's devastating description of fish—"Legless, loveless, infamously chaste;") but if I knew only too much about the luckless Undine, you may be sure I couldn't rest until the two mortal ladies had been pointed out to me.

That first ball was rapture. I felt in a golden dream. I had come beset with fears of being a wallflower, but thanks to Eileen's sister, Lady Evelyn James, so kindly introducing young men to me, I danced every dance. Naturally I was delighted when a partner asked me for a second dance, as despite his complaints of my conversational shortcomings, Beb Asquith did.

I stayed till the very end, but bliss is seldom unmitigated, and I was not to escape some moments of sharp mortification. Eileen Wellesley, herself by this time quite an experienced denizen of the ballroom—she had come out at the beginning of the season then nearing its end—was amiably anxious to initiate her neophyte friend. I can see her now—her brilliant complexion flushed, her green eyes ashine with excitement, as, pointing with her fan she whispered, "Do you see that tall good-looking man there? That's Paul Phipps, the best dancer in London. No girl is really 'out' until he has danced with her."

Awestruck, I raised my eyes to this ballroom king. Had I known he was destined to be the father of Joyce Grenfell I should have gazed with even deeper respect. Was it possible that so august a being would ever ask *me* for a dance? Or must I permanently remain not really "out"—a mere undergraduate of society? Terrified lest he should suspect that so presumptuous an aspiration had so much as crossed my mind, I quickly turned my head away from Paul Phipps and gazed intently in the opposite direction. Imagine my feelings when I overheard him ask Eileen's sister to introduce him to the something-or-other tall girl in the green wreath, for my green wreath was the only one in the room. Had I then won my ballroom spurs at this my very first engagement? Was everybody in the room staring at ME?

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The tall slender figure approached. "May I have the pleasure?"

A feather-light hand was laid on my shoulder. Surreptitiously gliding, deftly twirling his course through the maze of revolving couples, he swirled me away. Eileen was right. Dancing with this paragon *was* a wholly new experience. Obviously neither of us weighed anything at all. No longer on the floor, we floated on a cloud somewhere in space. I was entranced. But alas my partner soon shattered my ecstasy. "It's rather hot," he coolly remarked after perhaps some twenty twirls. "Shall we sit down?"

Evidently this peerless performer did not intend to waste his pre-eminence on so inexperienced a dancer—still a mere flumper—as my now crestfallen self. Poor "Miss Charteris"! Instead of revelling in the very poetry of motion—so easy and flattering too, for like all experts this supreme dancer gave others the illusion that they shared his mastery—she had now to struggle to make conversation. I hope I wasn't reduced to further ramblings between the Royal Academy and the New English. I forget what we did talk about—probably just the floor, the band, the impending Eton and Harrow cricket match; but I remember how, feigning heat, I violently fanned myself. I wanted to look as if I believed that the temperature of the room was really what had made Paul Phipps stop dancing.

* * *

The following May I came out again, this time to embark on an entire season. Did I enjoy it? Did I have fine weather, you might as well ask. I see-sawed between extreme happiness and extreme dissatisfaction, and whatever the mood of the moment, it invariably carried such conviction that I could not believe in the possibility of any other.

There were many days—iridescent days—when "living seemed a laugh" and, looking through a golden haze, I saw only what I wanted to see. At such times the mere pursuit of enjoyment was in itself enough to give me a lovely, almost

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votive feeling. By just dancing myself dizzy, looking as nice as I could, or exploring myself anew through some fresh pair of eyes, I felt I was furthering some momentous, indeed, some almost devout purpose. At other times, probably simply because I was overtired, the whole business—and my goodness, what a business it was!—would suddenly appear futile beyond words.

Then I would have a violent revulsion—a dreadful “down” with myself as well as with social life.

But who cares about the moods of one particular girl? What interests you is how we spent our time in that era of peace, leisure and superfluity, an era that though, at the moment, we took most of its conditions more or less for granted, must seem almost unbelievable to the young of today. Looked back upon through the dust of a world disrupted, our way of life does indeed appear to belong to an almost mythological existence.

What *do* I remember of that first season? Suppose I literally shut my eyes on the present, and think myself back in that queer phase of life, what pictures rise in that “spangly gloom”—Keats’ name for it—that replaces vision when you shut your eyes and press their lids . . . ?

What random “flash-backs” come? . . . What do I see . . . ?

I see striped awnings, linkmen with flaring torches; powdered, liveried footmen; soaring marble staircases; tiaras, smiling hostesses; azaleas in gilt baskets; white waistcoats, violins, elbows sawing the air, names on pasteboard cards, quails in aspic, macédoine, strawberries and cream, tired faces of cloakroom attendants, washed streets in blue dawns, sparrows pecking about the empty pavements, my bedroom curtains being drawn apart to let in the late morning light; a breakfast tray approaching my bedside; handboxes, tissue paper. . . .

Now I see faces, most of them pretty; some beautiful; some—very few—plain; but all young. Not that at the time I gave much thought to that fleeting bloom like the sheen on a plum. Till you no longer see it either in the mirror or on the faces of contemporaries, you don’t particularly notice that look of youth as a positive quality. Taking it for granted, I



The Author—in early twentieth century hat

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scarcely gave it a thought, except when I missed it. Age was what used to startle me in a face.

But now as I repicture the girls who thronged the ballrooms of my first season, what strikes me so poignantly is their one common denominator—that shining dewy look of youth on all their faces—those expectant faces I was so soon—for we were dancing close to the brink—to see frozen into grief or, cruel turn of the screw, blank from the too early realisation that grief, like life itself, comes to an end—“O last regret, regret can die!”

As I write, sounds, as well as images, rise out of the long ago. I hear the tender, yearning strains of the Viennese vales to which we danced. Especially insistent, irresistibly inviting, the billowing lilt of the Merry Widow surges in my ears. Is this, of all vales, to me the most evocative of early youth? Even more dominantly, I hear tearing at my heart the strong, triumphant swing of the Blue Danube, at whose imperious command lovers of so many generations, impelled rather than consciously moving, have swirled, swooped, glided and revolved. I hear the whisper of their shuffling feet, and through the defiant strains of the music, thread-like but relentlessly clear, I seem to hear the words,

“All lovers young, all lovers must
Consign to thee and come to dust.”

Now, leaving random impressions, I'll try to recapture some of my own sensations as a *débutante*. At first the chief obstacle to my enjoyment was of course shyness, that terrible affliction, so difficult even to remember once you've outgrown it; and all the more inconvenient when combined with a great craving for personal success, particularly as in its grip I rather suspect that I tended to look not so much scared as sullen; so that only the discerning could diagnose what others probably mistook for something quite different. My shyness was intermittent. At times it left me entirely; at others it was like suffocation.

Naturally I was at my most shy in my own home. Here my

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sufferings were much aggravated by my mother's constitutional unpunctuality. Having to introduce strangers to one another always threw me into an absolute panic, and this ordeal devolved on me whenever my mother was late, as she nearly always was, for a dinner-party in her own house. After this initial embarrassment, my fate was worsened by my excessively punctual father's refusal to wait for tardy guests, which meant that the dinner-party began, not only handicapped by the absence of the hostess—a born ice-breaker—but with unbridgeably wide gaps at the table. Evening after evening I used to put the clocks half an hour forward, in the hope that this would make my mother begin to dress earlier. No good!

Another trouble was that Mamma, herself too long since released from the fetters of self-consciousness even to remember how it affects the young, had a disconcerting way of drawing attention to her daughter.

“What do you think of Cincie's new dress?” she might airily ask some highly embarrassed young man. Bad enough. Far worse, she might exclaim, “Too much powder on your nose, darling,” and actually dust my nose with her pocket handkerchief! Needless to say she had no idea what torture this inflicted, but I assure you I had far rather have been beaten in private than pilloried in this fashion.

Being painfully aware that silence ranked as the greatest offence—it was considered better to say anything, anything at all, rather than nothing—I was always specially anxious to keep up some sort of conversation while under parental observation. Occasionally I was reduced to asking mere questions—questions as inane as, I scarcely exaggerate, “Which do you like best, red or blue? Schiller or Goethe? Croquet or Tennis?” Anything rather than remain silent! Never myself a match to strike against any surface, how I envied girls able to chatter equally brightly to everyone. I was absurdly prone to take alike the blame and the credit, whichever was due. Sitting next to a bore I positively wilted. Seated next to a wit I glowed, almost purred with unwarranted self-approval.

I told you that I expected to find other things, beside shyness—no new enemy—that would irk me in my new existence

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(I use the word "irk" deliberately, because whenever I enjoy some suspension of ordinary life, two lines of Christina Rossetti's swim into my mind:

"Hushed in and curtained with a blessed dearth
Of all that irked me from the hour of birth.")

My presentiment was right; I did find many things irksome. To begin with, social engagements made too tight a mosaic of each day. There was no time to stand and stare. However much I might enjoy parties while at them, I resented my life being mortgaged in advance, and so much of it nibbled away by chance acquaintances. The days were so terribly splintered. I long had had a quarrel set with time; now it became fiercer than ever.

I hated, too, the idea of being expected to treat all young men impartially. Girls had to try to make themselves—I never could—equally agreeable to any potential dancing partner. The humiliating fact was that in a ballroom any man *was* better than no man. If she had no partner for a dance a girl felt for all the world like Andromeda chained to a rock; so much so that any man, no matter how little personally prepossessing, or how brainless, who rescued her from this predicament, was as welcome as Perseus. So great, indeed, was the stigma attached to being a wallflower that rather than be seen standing out, wretched girls would brave the sneers of its attendants by repeatedly returning to the cloakroom for repairs to their obviously intact dresses, or to repowder their already over-whitened noses.

I remember a very narrow escape of my own from this public humiliation. One evening I happened to find myself at a ball where I knew no one. The Merry Widow valse was already in its full enticing swing, and I could scarcely keep my feet still, but as yet no one had asked me to dance. I was beginning to despair, when a complete stranger presented himself with the mumbled recommendation, "I am a member of the Bath Club. Will you dance with me?" On the strength of this startling credential I did dance with him most gratefully.

Then, as now, making a new friend was an enthralling

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adventure to me, and fortunately I like most people. There were however a few whom I found total non-conductors, and to these I simply could not talk. Either it was something in their voices, or they had wholly different wavelengths from my own to which I couldn't tune in. Whatever the cause, the effect was appalling. A sense of actual physical exhaustion came over me. It was as though all the air had been pumped out of the room. I felt like a moth at its very last flaps in a killing-bottle. And what on earth—for the idea of any ulterior motive in going out always revolted me—was the *point* of suffering like this for the sake of mere frivolity? Unless I enjoyed parties, surely they were sheer waste of life—"an expense of spirit in a waste of shame?" There was always one human being at a time on whose presence I depended. If he was not there my vitality fell.

As often as I was dejected by failure to enjoy myself, I would become violently disapproving of the whole social system—guiltily worried by the thought of the scullery-maids who would have to wash up after the innumerable courses of our dinners, but directly I began to enjoy myself I became a carefree hedonist again, and the inequalities of life escaped my memory.

An occasional embarrassment was being sent in to dinner with what was odiously called a "Parti"—an eligible young man. This made me painfully conscious of being the subject of speculation—"Is she making any headway?" I seemed to overhear.

The converse of an eligible was called a "detrimental". Nearly all my friends were "detrimentals".

Sometimes the row of chaperons round the wall at dances got badly on my nerves. Provided I was enjoying myself, I was oblivious of their presence, but in disenchanting moments I would become heavily oppressed by these onlookers with their fender tiaras, diamond dog-collars, bristling aigrettes, long kid gloves, and uplifted, appraising lorgnettes. Many of these "Old Ladies", as in the unconscious arrogance of youth I labelled them, had capitulated to age so gracefully that even my callow eyes could recognise their autumnal beauty. The

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lines on their faces had clearly been made by smiles rather than by frowns, and though to me they appeared infinitely remote, I could see that their eyes, misted, I assumed, with memories of their own far-off youth, looked benignly on the generation now in its dancing years.

In contrast to them certain Ex-Beauties (who was it said "You could still see how ugly she had been"?) were so obviously fighting a stubborn rearguard action against time that they gave me a painful sense of strain.

Then there were some distressingly worried-looking women with tight lips—evidently frowns, not smiles had furrowed *their* faces—who seemed to watch their own daughters with the anxious eyes of the trainers of performing animals, and other people's daughters with a vague hostility. In ill-at-ease moments I used to feel that these Mammās, so unlike my own Mamma, were eyeing "that Charteris girl" with disapproval. "What a pity," I would hear—or fancy I heard—one remark to another; and I would wonder whether the pity was that my hair was so unfashionably parted in the middle, that I had put my foot through my dress, or that I was yet again dancing with the same young man with whom I had already danced thrice—a young man "with no money and no prospects". This type of woman I condemned as a "mondaine", then my most derogatory label—a label I could never with any conviction attach to my own mother. Occasionally, bestirring herself to collect a few "eligibles" for a dinner-party, Mamma would make a sudden, rather touching, effort to be worldly-wise, but try as she might, this was a part for which she was hopelessly miscast. I remember my father's half-shocked amusement when, in the middle of a yawn, she once casually asked, "Who is Lord So and So?"

"Call yourself the mother of a *débutante*, and not know the name of the eldest son of the Duke of —!" he chortled indignantly.

One of the great differences between my parents was that, though Mamma liked her children to be liked, her own opinion of them was wholly unaffected by other people's, whereas on the contrary Papa was so much influenced that I

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could tell by the expression on his face as he looked at me whether he had recently heard me well or ill spoken of.

Somnambulist though I was, and little given to self-analysis, I did realise, not without occasional twinges of moral discomfort, that the life I led, a life which according to my mood appeared one day a poem, the next a treadmill, might well be described as "doing nothing". Yet in a sense this description would have been misleading. It may have been a preposterous mode of life; it may have been reprehensible—that depends on the point of view. It certainly was not a lotus-eating existence, but in its own queer way quite arduous, and full of stresses and strains. However tired you might feel after dancing five nights running until four in the morning, you had to keep going and be bright and animated. To look as if you weren't enjoying yourself was considered very rude to your hostess.

And don't forget there were then no artificial stimulants. Cocktails didn't exist. A glass of champagne was permissible, but, if I remember rightly, unusual. (My own extreme measure in the stimulant line was a dose of Sal Volatile.) Remember too that we were unsupported by the wonderfully autosuggestive effect of make-up—"face physic" as Sir Thomas Overbury called it. If I was pale, I was told so, not only by the mirror but by other women. "You look tired, dear," they would remark, well-meaningly, I daresay; but mightn't they just as well have said, "You look plain"?

I found it humiliating to have to admit myself exhausted by that very idleness of which at times I felt so bitterly ashamed. Undoubtedly, considerable stamina was needed to stay the course of an entire season. Neither was it then a case of having to keep up for one season only, and then withdrawing from the arena to equip yourself for a job. Girls were put over the same stiff course again and again, until they married, or, after an untold number of years, officially became Old Maids.

It could not be said that my social campaign was conducted from a pamperingly comfortable base. The schoolroom of my girlhood, owing to its position the main corridor of the house,

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had been converted into my bed-sitter, its conversion consisting merely in some bed-clothes—I had no mattress—being superimposed upon a hard slippery sofa. Off this room, which some hundred steps separated from the nearest bathroom, a glorified cupboard, containing a sink, housed my small, inadequately-lit dressing-table. Because of this sink, all the flowers for the house were “done” in my dressing-cupboard, and it was in my passage bed-sitter that my mother set the informal suppers with which she liked to sustain dinner guests before they left the house after midnight; thus, on my return in the small hours from some dance to a room dense with cigar fumes, I had to make my bed, which during my absence had reverted to a sofa.

When I became engaged to a “detrimental”, Papa, much to the amusement of his family, roused himself to write a Heavy-Father-letter warning me of the privations and discomforts I should incur did I persist in my folly. When years later I showed him this letter it was a great pleasure to be able to assure him that in no vicissitude of peace or war had I ever suffered so much discomfort as in his large house in Cadogan Square. He shouted with laughter over his own letter.

But at that age what cared I for physical discomforts? It is only in retrospect that I so much as recognise them.

Much nervous strain in my home life arose from the newly-installed telephone, a source of perpetual embarrassment. Its having only one extension placed me in a continual dilemma. Every time I wanted to ring up a friend I had to decide whether at that moment it would be more judicious to invade my father’s sitting-room or the butler’s bedroom, and if I needed privacy in a talk I had to go out to the nearest Post Office. Incoming calls were a problem too. Whenever Papa was at home he had the telephone switched through to his room, and as he intercepted every call, naturally he got very bored by being perpetually charged with messages for all the other inmates of the house. For instance one morning when he was feverishly anxious to consult his stockbroker, to whom he had just “got through”, he was cut off by a strange woman’s voice:

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"Who's that speaking?" he barked, fuming with impatience.

"Hold on, my man, while I get a pencil and paper," a voice imperiously charged him, "and then tell me where it is Mr. Horniblower goes for his teeth." (Mr. Horniblower was Alfred the footman.)

You can imagine how much Papa's monopolising of the telephone complicated my life. Suppose he happened not to feel in the mood to give me some message, he was liable, no matter how wildly unsuitable the hour, just to bark down the mouthpiece "Cynthia's asleep." Sometimes he would even declare—the wish no doubt being father to the thought—that I had left London for good, thereby greatly upsetting some hostess who had just succeeded in balancing the number of girls and young men at her dinner-table.

Whatever difference the plunge of Coming Out made to me, there were many girls to whom it made far more. To some, indeed, it meant the reversal of almost every code of behaviour that had governed their childhood. For example, whereas I had always been encouraged to talk as much, or more, than I felt inclined, they, poor things, had been brought up not to speak unless spoken to. Imagine what a shock it must have been for them suddenly to find silence regarded as the one unforgivable social sin!

Neither had I ever been told that one's appearance didn't matter—I had never had any doubt that it mattered enormously—but many girls *had* been told this. They had even been told it was wrong to look in the glass. Then, all of a sudden, they seemed to be expected to make their looks the main preoccupation of their lives.

There was no doubt that our enjoyment did often largely depend on whether or not we happened to be "in good face", as we called looking well.

Springing each morning from my bed right into the middle of the room, I would first rush to look into the mirror. "How are you today?" I would ask anxiously and yet detachedly, as though the reflection I scanned were not my own but someone else's—someone, however, with whom I was very closely concerned. Next, I would rush to the window to see

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what kind of a day awaited the two of us—that face and me.

Having a colour that came and went, I was uneasily aware of being very *journalière*. When I knew I was too pale I would pinch my cheeks to make them pink—a measure temporarily successful, but betrayed only a few minutes later by two tell-tale patches of red standing out in the surrounding whiteness. I used to rub my lips too until they were quite sore. Another besetting anxiety was whether my nose was shiny, for at that date a girl would no more have openly powdered her face in public than you would lather yours for shaving. Squinting at my reflection in a spoon, I sometimes furtively applied a leaf of papier poudré—a not very effective makeshift which I could conceal in my pocket handkerchief. Once when I particularly wanted to look my best and knew I was dead pale, desperation drove me to dab pink tooth-powder on my cheeks. Another time I borrowed someone else's red lipstick (my own was white) and bedizened my face.

But if I harp on my trials I shall give you a very misleading idea of my *débutante* days, of which, after all, my prevailing memory is of great enjoyment. A dip just taken into a diary kept at that time bears this out. Here is a passage that sums up my first season.

“I look back on a long, long vista of balls from beginning of May to end of July, and remember that Violet Asquith and her brother or brothers, and myself and my brother or brothers, were ‘swept out’ of every single one. Not once was it of any consequence that I had, as I invariably do, lost my cloakroom ticket, for my pink rag was always practically the only cloak left. ‘No need to give *you* a ticket,’ an attendant once said to me. ‘You’re a blooming Dervish! That’s what you are.’”

Often, I would feel deadly tired at about midnight, but later on a sort of second wind usually enabled me to go on and on to any hour; and mind you, in those days dancing was real exercise. Faces crimsoned. Some dancers were classified as “Two collar” or “Three collar men”. Balls usually began very sedately, but as the room thinned, the dancing became wildly Corybantic. Elaborate variations were improvised.

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Disengaging ourselves from our partners in the Merry Widow valse fashion, we would sway round the room in fantastic *pas seuls*; now rippling our arms like—so we flattered ourselves—Maud Allan; now flinging ourselves about like Apaches, or dancing the Cake-Walk. Threading their separate ways through the maze of dancers, disunited partners would put the utmost possible distance between one another; then converging from the opposite ends of the ballroom, join up together again to spin furiously round and round until at long last the two halves of the teetotum reeled apart. Kitchen lancers (why Kitchen?) were riotously rowdy—in fact positively dangerous. Our favourite figure—Ladies to the Centre—converted us into a living Giant's Stride. The girls were all lifted right off their feet and swung by their four partners who with arms interlocked revolved in a ring. Higher and higher we were swirled, until our legs hurtled through the air on a level with our partners' shoulders. I once saw the tiara knocked clean off an onlooker's head by the whirring heels of a swung girl; another time my own hefty feet caught an unfortunate man in the diaphragm, so completely winding him that he was obliged to lie on the floor for several minutes.

The most Marathon-like dancing I ever enjoyed was in Commemoration Week at Oxford, where for four nights in succession we danced in vast tents on floors swung on chains. One night we kept it up till six in the morning, and then went on the river until it was time to attend a breakfast-party given by some kindly don. You blotted your escutcheon if you ever stopped dancing for a single bar. I remember how dashed I was—for it was one of the evenings when dancing made me feel exalted—by a remark made by a member of the Chinese Legation. Mournfully contemplating the revolving couples, he sighed out "*We* gave up that sort of thing thousands of years ago."

Clothes suffered catastrophic damage at dances. I would recognise some wisp of material swathed round a pair of feet at the other side of the room as a fragment torn off my own frock, and with a gasp of terror picture the expression on my maid's face next morning. My MAID . . . ? Yes, I *did* have a

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personal maid, and what with perpetually making, mending, washing, darning and packing—packing was then a terrific business—she was, I assure you, no idle woman. She also played the part of duenna and took me about London, for no well-looking-after girl was supposed to stir from her home unescorted.

Most girls had their hair done by their maids; vigorously back-combed, then piled high in an elaborate precariously-built edifice either of sausage curls or of long banana-like rolls. I always “did” my own hair myself, but was supposed—a pitched battle—to have it well brushed every day.

In one respect we were all humiliatingly dependent on help, most of the dresses we were for ever changing being so constructed that it was a physical impossibility to get in or out of them unassisted. Either they laced up at the back, or they fastened with quite un-get-at-able intricacies of hooks and eyes. One way or another, dressmakers seemed bent on setting their customers insoluble problems. I can think of no invention that would have eased my life so much as zip-fasteners.

When I came out, I was given a cheque and a dress allowance of one hundred a year. On this, of course, I at first felt illimitably—indeed quite objectionably—rich, but I was soon chronically overdrawn. So many different kinds of clothes were considered necessary, and my hunting outfit made a large extra. To my seventeen-year-old self, clothes represented the extremes of both boredom and delight. I hated “trying-on” in the dreary embryonic pin and holland-foundation stage, but revelled in the excitement of an all-but-finished new dress, and the thrill of buying something ready to wear.

Far my favourite shop—but shop is too unworthy a word for such a shrine!—was the glamorous Maison St. Louis, where Miss Louise Piers plied her art, “creating” (in this connection the word is fully justified) the lovely original hats for which she was famed—fascinating veiled Tricornes, small close-fitting helmets called “Mercurys”, and my own favourites, wide-winged hats like that strange pride of mine facing page 64.

I remember the anticipatory thrill with which, three steps

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at a time, we ran up the stairs of Maison St. Louis, the agonies of temptation and indecision suffered in front of its enhancing mirrors, before, rapturously transfigured—for at that age the alchemic effect of a new hat was to be born anew—we finally emerged from that enchanted shop “plumed like ostridges that wing the wind, more full of spirit than the month of May”.

“Our hats have gone to our heads! Our hats have gone to our heads!” we used to sing as we came out.

Besides hats, Miss Louise Piers made lovely Botticelli wreaths, one of which I nearly always wore in the evenings. She also designed our bridesmaids’ head-dresses, and Violet, her deft-fingered second in command, came to our homes to adjust our wedding veils.

Like most young people, I liked my clothes to be “exciting” or “amusing” rather than correct or fashionable. I had an abiding love for golden and silver materials imbued, I expect, by descriptions in fairy tales of the raiment worn by Princesses. It was some time before I learnt to appreciate the merits of perfectly plain tailormade clothes which I condemned as dull—just as well for my overdraft, for then as now, they were very expensive.

My favourite dressmaker was Madame Marte, who specialised in the sheening ball-gowns we called our “fish-dresses”—lovely skin-tight sheaths of gold, silver or sea-coloured tissue.

Not even my clothes escaped my mother’s kindness of heart, for unfortunately for me a charming sometime lady’s maid of hers had set up as a dressmaker—the kind of dressmaker whom, whatever her size and bulk, one always calls—in the hope, I suppose, that her *bills* will be little—a “Little Woman”.

Needless to say a large proportion of my clothes had to be made by this “Little Woman” who had no models, but only paper patterns. Even my seventeen-year-old unsophisticated eye could see that her clothes were not “right”. For old sake’s sake it was, however, decreed that she must make my going-away dress—a failure denounced by my stepmother-in-law, Margot, with that scathing eloquence of which she alone had command.

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Many of our clothes were far from comfortable or convenient. Country tweeds were long and trammelling. Imagine the discomfort of a walk in the rain in a sodden skirt that wound its wetness round your legs and chapped your ankles. Even our lawn-tennis dresses, usually, like nurserymaid's wear, made of white piqué, were so long that it was impossible to take a step back without treading on them. Walking about the London streets trailing clouds of dust was horrid. I once found I had carried into the house a banana skin which had got caught up in the unstitched hem of my dress! I hated the veils that, worn twisted into a squiggle under my chin, dotted my vision with huge black spots like symptoms of liver trouble. They flattened even my short eyelashes. Our vast hats which took the wind like sails were painfully skewered to our heads by huge ornamental hatpins, greatly to the peril of other people's eyes.

I couldn't endure the high choking collars with boned supports that dug red dints in my neck, so I wore low square-necked blouses long before these became the fashion—a non-conformity for which I was severely criticised.

I can't remember when we first began to carry handbags. We certainly did not when I first came out—very inconvenient, though of course, in those pre-cosmetic days, we did not need to take nearly so much about with us. My purse, a partitioned leather affair, resided with my handkerchief in a pocket in a mysterious region called the placket-hole, whence it was most difficult to extricate them.

My opaque stockings, never other than black, brown or white, were darned, darned, darned. My underclothes were unglamorously sensible. I seem to remember some terribly grim inherited nightgowns made, squalor of squalor, of flannel—with pockets! Cardigans, a crying need in the then arctic climate of most country houses, had not yet been introduced, and to keep your tweed jacket on indoors was considered an uncivil reflection on the temperature in which you were being entertained. Most girls wore flannel shirts, but, condemning flannel as too unredeemably dull, I insisted on having mine made of some more romantic material.

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Though, thank goodness, the days of tight-lacing were over, it still behoved one to have a small waist, so even at the cost of bulging hips, nearly every girl *did* have a small, if no longer a wasp-like, waist.

Feather boas were regrettably in fashion, and in these if you couldn't afford a new one you soon looked like poultry in very poor condition. The alternative neckwear was a still more perishable tulle ruffle. In the country I and other members of the so-called "Set", for belonging to which, though myself unaware of its very existence, I was soon much criticised, wore coloured sunbonnets. Critics hostile to the "Set" condemned these as "dreadfully Musical Comedyish".

What, you ask, were the conventions and rules at the time when I came out? Needless to say, vastly stricter than they are today when it is difficult to discover any; but however arbitrary and absurd many of them seemed, and some of them were, I can't remember that they ever gave us any real inconvenience or impeded our fun. On the contrary, I think we derived no little enjoyment from these very rules, which supplied the excitements of an obstacle race. The docile could enjoy being obedient; while those who liked occasionally to disobey could do so without needing to break either a law or a commandment. Have not the wholly emancipated been deprived of the fun of harmless forbidden fruit?

The chief convention was the indispensability of a chaperon in any public place. To be seen at a theatre, a picture gallery, a restaurant or in a hansom cab alone with a young man was tantamount to announcing your engagement to him, or openly advertising that you had decided to throw your cap over the windmill.

The qualifications that constituted a chaperon always seemed to me comically arbitrary. No spinster, however mature and sober, counted as one, whereas any flighty chit of eighteen years of age automatically acquired this status directly a gold ring encircled her fourth finger.

Some *débutantes* were not even allowed to have a young

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man to tea unchaperoned. My friends and I were, but quite a few mothers considered the practice definitely what was then called "fast". Is that quaint word "fast" ever used today? I suppose not. Imagination boggles as to what sort of behaviour could earn it. But any Edwardian girl who coveted a reputation for being mildly fast, or, as it was more flatteringly put, "dashing", could easily indulge this simple taste without laying any heavy burden on her conscience. Just to be seen smoking a cigarette or out alone with a young man was quite enough.

At the time I supposed that all these queer rules had been made for the protection of girls. I now see other reasons for them. It was realised that the challenge of a certain inaccessibility—a kind of moral yashmak—confers charm, and enhances value. Moreover it occurs to me now that probably many of the rules laid down by Mammias were really originally intended for the protection, not of the girls, but of the young men. Did not the conventions that shackled other people's daughters safeguard their own sons? Now that Jill is emancipated, and that every year is virtually Leap Year, Jack has no protection but his own strength of mind; and while we are as yet only at the transitional phase in the readjustment of the relationship between the sexes, it is still, whatever may be said and thought to the contrary, much more difficult for Jack to say "No" to Jill than for Jill to say "No" to Jack.

However old-fashioned our ways may appear to our descendants, *we* did not, of course, see ourselves as unprogressive. On the contrary, like our mothers and grandmothers in their time, we thought ourselves very up-to-date, not to say "advanced". No generation has ever lacked its "Modern Girl". Do you know these verses of Raymond Asquith's in praise of young girls, written, it is true, after my first season, but still before the First World War?

"Attend my Muse, and, if you can, approve
While I proclaim the 'speeding up' of Love;
For Love and Commerce hold a common creed—
The scale of business varies with the speed;
For Queen of Beauty or for Sausage King,
The customer is always on the wing—

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Then praise the nymph who regularly earns
Small profits (if you please) but quick returns.
Our modish Venus is a bustling minx,
But who can spare the time to woo a sphinx?
When Mona Lisa posed with rustic guile
The stale enigma of her simple smile,
Her leisured lovers raised a pious cheer
While the slow mischief crept from ear to ear.
Poor listless Lombard, you would ne'er engage
The brisker beaux of our mercurial age,
Whose lively mettle can as easy brook
An epic poem as a lingering look—
Our modern maiden smears the twig with lime
For twice as many hearts in half the time.
Long ere the circle of that staid grimace
Has wheeled your weary dimples into place,
Our little Chloe (mark the nimble fiend!)
Has raised a laugh against her bosom friend,
Melted a marquis, mollified a Jew,
Kissed every member of the Eton crew,
Ogled a Bishop, quizzed an aged peer,
Has danced a tango and has dropped a tear.
Fresh from the schoolroom, pink and plump and pert,
Bedizened, bouncing, artful and alert,
No victim she of vapours and of moods.
Though the sky falls she's 'ready with the goods' . . .
Polite or gothic, libertine or chaste,
Supply a waspish tongue, a waspish waist,
Astarte's breast or Atalanta's leg,
Love ready-made, or glamour off the peg—
Do you prefer: 'a thing of dew and air'?
Or is your type Poppaea or Polaire?
The crystal casket of a maiden's dreams,
Or the last fancy in cosmetic creams?
The dark and tender or the fierce and bright,
Youth's rosy blush or Passion's pearly bite?
You hardly know perhaps; but Chloe knows,
And pours you out the necessary dose,
Meticulously measuring to scale
The cup of Circe or the Holy Grail—
An actress she at home in every rôle,
Can flout or flatter, bully or cajole,



Clementine Hozier (Mrs. Winston Churchill)

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And on occasion by a stretch of art
Can even speak the language of the heart,
Can lisp and sigh and make confused replies,
With baby lips and complicated eyes,
Indifferently apt to weep or wink,
Primly pursue, provocatively shrink,
Brazen or bashful, as the case require,
Coax the faint baron, curb the bold esquire,
Deride restraint, but deprecate desire,
Unbridled yet unloving, loose but limp,
Voluptuary, virgin, prude and pimp."

To go back to my first season. Near its end my brothers and I went to a huge country house party given to celebrate the coming of age of the most dazzling "parti" of the year—a young man so cautious in bestowing his attentions, so wary of compromising himself, that though innumerable lynx-eyed chaperons kept him under the closest observation all through the season, not one of them could report that she had seen him so much as dance twice with any one girl.

That remarkably immature and unintrospective diary of mine—I certainly was no budding Marie Bashkirtsev—describes this mammoth party. Just as a Period Piece, some of it may amuse you. I had quite forgotten, for instance, that we used then to call motor cars "automobiles". The lavish scale of the hospitality and the non-stop programme of entertainment will also give you some idea of the seriousness with which enjoyment was organised and the ardour with which we pursued it. It shows, too, how easy it then was for girls who liked to "get themselves talked about" to gratify this modest ambition. Here it is as written, but not as spelt. Spelling came to me very slowly.

Tuesday. Arrived at station just in time to catch the Special. Nearly the entire party—over fifty, all under twenty-five, were assembled on the platform. I was delighted to see several friends, only a few "non-conductors", and plenty of complete strangers. We were met by several enormous brakes, into which we were packed like bank-holiday-makers. Arrival at this extremely "stately Home of England" somewhat alarming. Descending in hordes, we

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were greeted by the Birthday Boy and our excellent host, his father, who at once made us the first of his many well-turned speeches, welcoming us under his roof, and charging us all to enjoy ourselves as heartily as he intended to enjoy himself. He then introduced us to the two official chaperons imported for the occasion, both of whom, poor things, already looked like weary Atlases. Iced coffee under the trees. Before long I wanted to be shown my room, to have time to "rest my face" before dressing for dinner. No such luck. We all paced the superb gardens in THREES. At long last the butler—a retainer of some forty years' standing—looked up my name on a mile-long list, and I was conducted to a magnificent apartment called THE STATE SITTING-ROOM.

There were ten tables for dinner. Neither free will nor organisation as to who sat beside whom! Slips of paper bearing the names of the girls were drawn by the men. Much grumbling. My unhappy fate was So and So, for which even having R. on my other side could not compensate. I felt as though violently blown between two contrary winds. To the ballroom immediately after dinner. As soon as the men joined us, our affable host made yet another little speech telling us that because of the inevitable fatigues of the formidable programme before us, he proposed that on this first night we should not dance later than one o'clock, and that on pain of being locked out, no young lady must be in the garden after midnight.

Lovely moon. Out of doors between each dance. Great fun. All exceedingly displeased when the glorious, galvanising band left off playing at half-past twelve. After buffet refreshments, we were supposed to disperse. Unfortunately Violet Asquith and I, who had not noticed that all the other girls had meekly drifted away, stayed on in the ballroom for a few minutes, each talking to a MAN! Suddenly becoming aware that we were "making ourselves conspicuous", we fled upstairs, but not before we overheard the two chaperons' stage-whisper, "most annoying, most annoying".

Unable to get to sleep for hours. The heavy feet of the night watchman, who for fifty years has patrolled the house every half-hour through the night, slowly crunched the gravel.

Wednesday. At half past nine a ladysmaid appeared with invitation from Violet Asquith and Hilda Lyttelton¹ to have breakfast with them. Relieved at chance to escape ordeal of public breakfast, I accepted with alacrity. Ushered down labyrinthine corridors and

¹ Now Mrs. Arthur Grenfell.

COMING OUT

up several flights of stairs into Violet's vast bedroom. Soon three "lackeys" staggered in, each bearing an enormous tray laden with good things—eggs, crisp curly bacon, hot scones in napkins, peaches, white grapes. Venetia Stanley¹ and Clementine Hozier² came up from dining-room breakfast and gave us all the news. . . . Watched several games of golf. Went with Oc,³ Ego⁴ and Guy⁵ to see accommodation improvised for the men of the party—lovely tents far more luxurious than most bedrooms, each hung with tapestry and rigged up with electric light. Occupant's name emblazoned on door.

Automobile races (very leisurely. Street speed limit scarcely exceeded) for two, so far as I was concerned, very sleepy hours after luncheon. Then we were photographed, all looking ever so brave, sitting in automobiles! Tea out of doors. . . . Beb took me in to dinner. Garden and front of house illuminated with fairy lights in honour of the ball for the neighbours. . . . Huge sit-down supper. We danced until half past four. Bliss. Violet and I very careful to be amongst the first to go upstairs. Unhappy Duennas much incensed by clandestine 5 a.m. automobile party "mixed" and unchaperoned!

Thursday. Same breakfast party at eleven o'clock, plus Venetia Stanley and Barbara Jekyll. . . . Photographed again after luncheon. Hosts of tenants arrived. Speeches and generously long out-of-doors entertainment—very good glee-singers and an extremely hard-working Funny Man. Melodramatic thunderstorm extinguished all the fairy lights before dinner. Sat beside Constantine Benckendorff⁶ at dinner. He was in splendid form, and sang songs in Russian, French and German.

Danced like Dervishes. Everybody went rather mad, dressed up, and to annoyance of the professional band made hideous noises on improvised musical instruments—dinner-gongs, tin kettles and papered combs. Authorities anxious for relatively early break-up, but though they could send us upstairs, they could not send us to sleep, and uproar raged for hours. It started when Venetia and I looked out of a window, and some men in the garden below began to serenade us. It was too dark for them to recognise us, so we hurled anonymous sponges. Gradually all the men mustered out-

¹ Later Hon. Mrs. Edwin Montagu.

² Now Mrs. Winston Churchill.

³ Brigadier Arthur Asquith.

⁴ Author's brother, Lord Elcho.

⁵ Author's brother, Hon. Guy Charteris.

⁶ Son of the then Russian Ambassador, Count Benckendorff.

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side and all the girls leaned out of the windows. Thunderous singing, the Pilgrims' Chorus and the Venusberg music from *Tannhäuser* being the most popular encores. Silly enough, but great fun, and no occasion for conscience qualms, because our host was heading the riot himself. He danced a cake-walk in his shirt sleeves. To sleep at about five.

Friday. Same breakfast party. Ransacked kitchen garden for gooseberries, but failing to find any were obliged to help ourselves to peaches, and to raid the greenhouse for delicious white grapes. . . . After lunch yet another house-party photograph, and then furious bear-fighting. My rubber sponge, thrown out of the window the night before, was torn into a thousand shreds; amateur wrestlers hurled one another to the ground; finally the water-hose was turned on to us. More speeches and reappearance of Funny Man. Oc and I fled, and went on the river. . . . Dancing again after dinner. Sat out in churchyard with Oc. Bitter cold. To general disgust the band—*why* on our last night?—began to play the final posthorn gallop at half past two. None of us in the least ready to go to bed. In fact we refused to go. Birthday Boy was hoisted, and "He's a jolly good fellow" sung at least twenty times. Then we started Musical Chairs, at which defiance the Duennas grew really furious and swept all the girls upstairs, but not to bed. Letting down our hair and donning kimonos, we climbed out of the window of Violet's room on to the roof. The men mustered in full force below and serenaded us for half an hour. After that Venetia, Violet and I foolishly went on talking until nearly six o'clock. So exhausted that I could scarcely stagger up to my room, and collapsed on the stairs. . . . After two hours' sleep, descended, bleary-eyed, to extremely gloomy dining-room breakfast. Up to London by the special train. Violet, Beb, Oc and I, all feeling much the worse for wear, travelled together.

Shortly after that party, the London season ended, and those who during its three months had danced so many miles together, scattered to go their several ways; some of them, however, very soon to meet again in "Another Part of the Forest".

BEAUTIES

You once asked me to write about the reigning Beauties, the "Lovelies"—as we now call them—of my ballroom days. I'll put myself at this fence now, try to tell you of the impression certain faces made on my young eyes, and of the thoughts and images their beauty invoked.

I remember how often our elders annoyed us by saying that our generation had no beauties to compare with theirs—"Not a patch on her Mother!" That parrot phrase maddened me. They disparaged our partners too. "What a pity there are no remarkable young men about now!" they would say; and mark you, my generation was the doomed generation later to be enskied as the "New Elizabethans".

When I came to read books of Memoirs and Letters I was amused and relieved to find these very same allegations brought against every generation in turn. In vain did the writers of each age look about them for any really beautiful young woman or brilliant young man. They could see none.

What inspires this allegiance to our own contemporaries at the expense of the next generation? Is it not that we remain so permanently dazzled by whatsoever stars first swim into our ken, that those we see with older eyes can never compare with their remembered brilliance? But the difference is not really in the stars. It is in ourselves.

I don't believe the girls of today are less beautiful than their mothers and grandmothers but I do think it has become much more difficult for individual beauties to stand out. The great advances in both hairdressing and cosmetics have had such a levelling effect. Natural advantages count for much less now. For instance, in my day we needs had to content ourselves with whatever colour scheme nature had provided—to call in art

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and dye our hair would have been tantamount to hoisting the Jolly Roger—whereas today no spirited girl need resign herself to “mousy” hair. Nor to a sallow skin. Hair that curled naturally was another great asset, but today who can tell which is nature’s, which the hairdresser’s permanent wave? Fashion in clothes, too, far less despotic than it used to be, allows girls to dress more to suit their own individuality.

Women of the generation before mine had to rely even more on their natural advantages. The severe style in which hair was then worn was a great test of features. Probably that was largely why their era was the heyday of the so-called “Professional Beauties”, such as—to give two famous examples—Lady Randolph Churchill, and the “Jersey Lily”, Mrs. Langtry, both legendary figures of whom it was said that, like the Miss Gunnings, they were mobbed in the Park. I was rather a heretic about some of these Professional Beauties, but probably only from irritation at hearing my own contemporaries depreciated.

The “Lovelines” I’m going to try to describe to you, all possessed something more enduring than that brief, butterfly beauty which, even while you admire it, plucks at your heart-strings because you realise that it cannot last, since it is not supported by any real beauty of bone structure, nor has its possessor either the mind or the heart to contribute the “beauty wrought out from within”. This fleeting kind of loveliness—a loveliness for which its owner is not responsible, is only on loan:

“Oh you who are so glorious, beware!
Your youth is like a water-wetted stone,
Bright with a beauty which is not its own.”

The faces I have most loved to look upon have all had the kind of beauty that seems to intimate more than it actually says. From time to time they are mysteriously illumined as though by some moonlight from within, and their original loveliness is gradually enhanced by that flickering beauty of expression which delicate sensibility gives—“and Beauty born of murmuring sound shall pass into her face”.

BEAUTIES

Beauty in the full sense of the word is thus far more than an endowment; it is an achievement.

Do you remember the "throughshine" extolled by Donne, that quality which persuaded him that Time may sometimes confer as much beauty as he takes away—

"Nor Spring nor Summer hath such grace
As I have seen in one autumnal face."

Even wrinkles—other people's wrinkles—can be beautiful; anyhow those that come from sorrow, not discontent. After a certain age, faces devoid of any lines suggest insensibility, or make me think their owners haven't dared let themselves feel or smile.

No poet has been kinder to wrinkles than Francis Thompson when he wrote of Time:—

"And every line he labours to impress
Turns added beauty like the veins that run
Athwart a leaf that dances in the sun."

But how far I have digressed from my purpose, which was neither to pelt you with quotations, nor to attempt—as if one could!—to console women for the depredations of time, but to summon back certain faces in the first freshness of their unforgotten April beauty.

How do I set about it? . . . Let me imagine myself back at my very first ball. . . . Which of the girls at Apsley House strike me so much that the question, "Who is she?" springs to my lips.

Three instantly flash upon my inward eye. Here they are, like the characters in a play, in the order of their appearance. First Clementine Hozier¹; classical, statuesque; yet full of animation. A Queen she should have been; her superbly sculptured features would have looked so splendid on a coin. "There's a face that will LAST," said everyone. How right they were! . . .

Next, brilliantly vivid, I see the lovely triangle of Ruby

¹ Now Mrs. Winston Churchill.

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Lindsay's woodland visage. Did she actually wear grapes in her tawny hair, a leopard skin slung across her shoulders? The memory of her Bacchante face makes me almost fancy that she did.

Now, "Goonie"¹ gleams upon my sight. Her alluring mermaid beauty has a strange translucent quality; her wide-opened eyes are like blue flowers. "Queen Queer" we called her, in homage to an enigmatic loveliness that cast so subtle and so lasting a spell. A gift for making whatsoever she might choose to wear seem exactly right was part of Goonie's magic. In my first and abiding vision of her she is in an austere-cut gown of white satin that leaves her sloping shoulders bare, and her glinting hair, swept off her forehead, is twisted into a Grecian knot.

A year later Mary Vesey's² beauty glowed in the ballroom—blazed, I might say, for I have seen no other eyes of the same jewel-like lustre. Emerald green, yet deeply grey, they flashed—fiercely at times—beneath thick black eyebrows. Her brilliant colour came and went; her superb neck rounded like the shaft of a column was of a dazzling whiteness. Aquiline, strikingly tall, untamed-looking, she was the very antithesis of the trivial, fluffy, white-tulle variety of débutante. An almost Roman splendour of feature proclaimed an inescapable nobleness of nature. Goddess-like . . .? Perhaps, but if she prefers something less Olympian, it might be said that she was like a magnificent youth, who might be shy but would never know fear. I always picture Mary under an open sky. Bare-headed, untrammelled, windswept, she is striding up a steep hill.

Who else walked in beauty—uncloying beauty? Tall, slender, starry-eyed, with a countenance of rare and changeable loveliness, Katharine Horner³ was a living poem. I have never seen any eyes like hers. "Too expressive to be blue, too lovely to be grey", flecked with lilac, they had a rapt, considering, intent, yet far-off gaze. The unusually pointed arches of her black eyebrows were like two inverted "V's" in the narrow

¹ Lady Gwendeline Bertie, afterwards Lady Gwendeline Churchill.

² Afterwards Hon. Mrs. Aubrey Herbert.

³ Afterwards Mrs. Raymond Asquith.

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white band of her forehead on which the hair grew so unusually low; her skin was magnolia-white, and blue-veined.

Katharine's was a remarkably varying beauty, sometimes going into abeyance, only to break out afresh, or to take your breath away by seeming to surpass even the loveliness that you remembered. "Irregular" a novelist would have called her features; any jury of critics could have pointed out imperfections; but more than any other face hers reminded me of Meredith's line "Beauty that makes holy earth and air may have faults from head to feet!"

It was said of both Katharine and Goonie that when they entered a ballroom with that remote mystified gaze of theirs, they looked as though they were wandering lost in some enchanted forest and had no great wish to find their way back to our world.

Whom do I see next? Dazzlingly golden, white and rose, with eyes of sapphire—dark sapphire blue—Mary Curzon¹ was manifestly, indisputably beautiful. She positively glittered. She was in fact the pattern of a Queen of Beauty at a Tournament; whereas fragile, ethereally fair, Hilda Lyttelton² was a Fra Angelico angel. I see the exquisite line of her pensive, delicately-drawn profile, and her gentle drooping head with its lovely nimbus of separate spun-gold hairs.

Who was the most graceful dancer of my day? Horatia Seymour, I think. Dark-haired, gardenia-pale, grey-eyed with "a romantic tale on her eyelashes" and a beautiful straight nose, Horatia had glamour as well as grace, and extraordinary distinction.

My next three "Lovelines" were all girls of much later vintage than my own. They were not Edwardians.

Laura Lister³ in the first faint rose of her Aurora loveliness was an unforgettable apparition. Glistening like Botticelli's Venus newly-risen from the sea, she shimmered with a pearly gleam. Willow-slender, undulating, immensely tall, but every inch of her height imbued with a lovely liquid grace, she seemed to walk, rippling as she moved, to unheard music. Her

¹ Afterwards Countess Howe.

² Afterwards Mrs. Arthur Grenfell.

³ Afterwards Lady Lovat.

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hair was a mist; her lovely inveigling face long and narrow; it had a gradual smile; her eyes laughed; her long curved hands spoke.

Kathleen Tennant¹ was another unforgettable vision of radiant youth; beautifully modelled face, black satin head, golden-brown eyes—eyes that seemed to claim happiness, to see all things in their brightest aspect. When I think of “Kakoo”—for so she was called, and the name suited her—it is always her lovely profile that I see. It was so distinctly drawn. I remember, too, her fluttering expression—eager yet tentative, and strangely, startlingly sweet. Kakoo’s was a springtide beauty; her presence brought memories of wild flowers, and dew on the grass, of “buds and bells and stars without a name”.

My first sight of Diana Manners² is a vivid memory. I was visiting her elder sisters when a girl of fifteen came into the room, literally making me jump by the astonishing quality of her fairness. Hair the colour of honey; complexion pure orchard-blossom; throat like the sheath of an arum lily. Her shining looks expressed the brightness of her mind. Evidently this dazzling being found it immense fun to be alive, and would make others find it so. Even at that age Diana’s beauty already had that festal quality which was soon to make any occasion she graced a gala. “Lights Up” was the stage direction at her entry, and when she left the room “brightness fell from the air”.

An anthology of Beauty should not be long, or I could try to tell you of many other well-remembered faces. As you can imagine, it was not easy to make my selection. To confess the truth I wrote down twenty names and drew lots. I have tried to be as objective as possible, and I can at least promise you that in no single case have I deliberately “touched up” a memory. Never have I felt such powerlessness to describe, but the labour has not been wholly vain, for even if I have failed to give you any idea of what these girls looked like, at least the attempt has brought their faces back to my own eyes; vividly, and in all their first loveliness. . . .

¹ Afterwards Duchess of Rutland.

² Now Lady Diana Duff Cooper.

CHARLES WHIBLEY

EVER since we first met you have enjoined me to write about Charles Whibley, whose legend you say is still potent at the Beefsteak and various other clubs, where he is remembered as so virile a talker that you think he must in some strange way have been the nineteenth-twentieth-century child of Dr. Johnson. I do remember hearing him described as the Dr. Johnson of his day, but I can't say that I myself ever saw the slightest resemblance. There was no "big Bow-Wow" strain in Whibley who was much more the terrier breed. Nor, to change the metaphor, violent though he could be, did he ever bludgeon others into squashed silence. Even when he was rude it was impossible to imagine him, like Dr. Johnson, "blowing with high disdain". Besides, he was often the cause of wit in others.

Can you usually remember your first meeting with a great friend? I shall have no difficulty whatever in telling you when and where Charles Whibley and I first collided—collided so literally that I smashed his eyeglasses to smithereens.

When I was very young—seventeen I think—I went to stay with Lord and Lady Plymouth at Hewell. Among the guests star-scattered in the vast hall, I noticed, the moment I arrived, a short funny-looking man. With his pendulous, very long upper lip, several subsidiary chins and obviously myopic eyes, he was a strictly ugly little man—yet there was something about him that reminded me of a lovable, if unlovely, nursery plaything called, I think, a "Billykin"; and though he was some distance away, I could see that he was talking with immense zest and that those about him were shaken with laughter.

"Who's that little man?" I asked a fellow-guest—a journalist, though I didn't know it.

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"Why, Charles, of course!" he answered in a tone that implied amazement at my ignorance. "You know, 'Musings without Method'!"

I didn't know. I gave what I hoped was an appropriately deferential murmur, but I hadn't the faintest notion what he meant. I was soon enlightened. "Billykin" was the redoubtable Charles Whibley, whose "Musings without Method" and "Letters of an Englishman" in *Blackwood's* were then so much read. Strange that his resemblance to a comic plaything should have been my first impression of a friend in whom I was to find so much both to like and to admire.

When I read Mr. John Connell's extremely interesting and fair-minded biography of Henley, I was surprised to come on certain passages about Whibley. Had I ransacked the dictionary, I could scarcely have found words more utterly at variance with my own idea of Whibley than "cold", "cautious", "full of countless affectations". To his friends, he always seemed the most warm-hearted, the most natural, impulsive and sincere of human beings. But, I gather, Mr. Connell never met Whibley, whose letters to Henley may well have been misleading.

The evening of my first sight of Whibley I was placed beside him at dinner. During the soup and fish courses I had to struggle to talk to a young man who, never initiating any topic himself, returned a bare "Yes" or "No" to my every remark. It was like playing tennis against an opponent who drives every ball you serve straight back into the net.

This non-conductor neighbour had made me feel so sad a failure that the prospect of having next to try and entertain Whibley—a distinguished and, it seemed to me then, an elderly man, dismayed me. So you can imagine what an intoxicating relief it was, when he turned to me, to find myself instantaneously engaged in the liveliest conversation. Besides being so amusing himself, he was stimulating enough to loosen even my own seventeen-year-old tightly-tied tongue. So much so that I was very sorry when in the middle of one of his most extravagant diatribes my hostess gave the signal for the ladies to leave the room.

CHARLES WHIBLEY

Not only had I found this funny-looking stranger's company as enlivening as bracing air, but we had made friends over a shared enthusiasm both for Charles Dickens and my uncle George Wyndham, and a shared *distaste* for that schoolroom fare so dear to German governesses, Goethe's *Hermann und Dorothea*.

I don't think any ice was left unbroken, but had there been, it could scarcely have survived my smashing of poor Whibley's spectacles. This happened in an after-dinner outburst of what Father Vaughan used to denounce as "Bearfighting in Country Houses". Reclining on a couch supposed to represent a rock, I was impersonating the Lorelei while to the bellowed-out strains of that song, various fellow-guests, including, I remember, Harry Cust and George Street, enacted the doomed mariners, propelling themselves along an immense length of parquet floor in a frantic and very close race to the fatal rocks. Whibley won, but paid dearly for his victory, for as the Lorelei stretched out her arms to grasp her prey, her hand collided with the leading mariner's nose, dislodging from its inadequate bridge his precious eyeglasses, and they were ground to powder under the knees of Harry Cust, the runner-up at the winning-post. Whibley, though blinder than a bat without his glasses, took this calamity seraphically, and from that evening until his death, some twenty years later, we were great friends.

He became perhaps Stanway's most regular visitor, and one of the few the news of whose advent there was never any need to break gently to my father. My mother was devoted to him, and delighted in his talk, particularly enjoying a "set piece" of his wherein he maintained that her famous so-called "tolerance" was really founded on profound cynicism. Expecting so very little of her fellow-creatures, she could not resent their shortcomings, as idealists do. That, he asserted, was why she was so uncritical, and my mother, who was so tired of being labelled indiscriminating and over-kind, loved this banter.

She revelled, too, in his explosive belligerence, so foreign to her own mind. But naturally so positive, vituperative—admittedly at times almost venomous—a talker as Whibley could be, was not to everyone's taste. Though few could fail

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to admire his vigour of mind, wit and intellectual honesty, some found his vehemence offensive, and, indeed, though he was in reality hopelessly humane, those who did not know him might well have supposed from some of his conversational extravagances that he would have liked to see the population of his country drastically reduced by the most violent measures.

There was no stopping him in general conversation when one of the more persistent of the various bees his bonnet hived started to buzz. Two of the most persistent buzzers were the Jews and the alleged corruption of politicians.

Perhaps because I am myself of so indeterminate a mind, I greatly enjoyed—even if only to react against it—Whibley's passionate positivity. Moreover, it was so obvious that his fierce debunking of whatever he considered spurious either in literature or in public affairs was never actuated by envy or spite, but always by his passionate concern for the sterling. He was like a gardener savagely tearing up weeds lest flowers should be choked.

Rightly or wrongly, according to your point of view, he was terrified by the advance of what he called the "New Spirit", of which in sombre prophecy he wrote in a characteristically fine piece of prose: "The New Spirit is invading. Literature and art will soon be pegs on which to hang moralities, and nothing more. The Arts and Crafts will share with the New Journalism the sceptre of the world. Socialism and bleat will be gloriously triumphant. Humour and enjoyment will perish for lack of opportunity. We shall be all equal and all stupid, and we shall all drink nothing but the New Spirit."

If Whibley happened to be heated himself, it was amusing to see how much he could be irritated by the cool, dispassionate fair-mindedness of others. One day, during the 1914-1918 War when he was in the kind of mood in which to find solace in believing the very worst possible of the enemy, I remember him being infuriated by a judicious mind's endeavour scrupulously to sift the evidence for German atrocities. "But I don't want *truth!*" he fulminated, spluttering with fury. "I'm not looking for truth! I'm looking for hate, which for most Englishmen is at the bottom of a far deeper well than truth!"

CHARLES WHIBLEY

To my mind one of Whibley's great social merits was that his presence invariably promoted general conversation. He may have put up a few backs, but what of that? At least, in his presence talk could never languish, nor be tedious or perfunctory. Either it livened into a veritable tournament of argument in which sparks flew from the clash of wits, or else, equally welcome, it became just riotously ribald.

A discerning, sympathetic and tireless friend, Whibley was as well-balanced, reasonable and gentle in private converse, as he could be unbalanced, unreasonable and, indeed, rude in public. Possibly I never saw him at his reputed "worst", for I was fortunate in usually meeting him only in the company of those whom he liked, and who delighted in him. He was perhaps at his best with his great friend, my uncle George Wyndham. With the possible exception of Hilaire Belloc, I suppose Uncle George surpassed all contemporary talkers in sheer output of words. As I told you, whenever I stayed at Clouds I used to hear his voice long long after I had gone to bed booming up through the floor of my room from the smoking-room below, and I can assure you that on those nights when Whibley was sharing the decanter and the talk, I was kept awake even longer than usual. I don't think those two kindred spirits would have found all eternity long enough to say all they had to say to one another about Ronsard and the *Pléiade*, Shakespeare's sonnets, Charles Dickens, the wines of France, and divers other sacred themes.

Needless to say of so soft-hearted a man as Whibley, his notoriously reactionary politics denoted no indifference to the sufferings of the under-dog. His extreme Conservatism sprang partly from his deep love of tradition—a love which, however exaggerated many may think it, was rooted in a profound study of history—and largely from his detestation of politicians who gulled the electorate with glib panaceas, and from his great fear of hasty, ill-considered legislation. It was while he was decrying the type of politician who cadges votes by making promises he knows, or should know, he has no power to fulfil, and was therefore upholding the desirability of some Governing Body which does not have to court re-election, that in an

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extravagant mood he one day parodied himself by saying: "Only peers should have votes." This was, of course, a fantastic jest, yet, unbelievable though it seems, I have actually heard more than one humourless person quote it against him as a serious expression of opinion!

Whibley, from the first moment I met him, appointed himself my literary mentor, a favour for which, being a deferential girl, I was most grateful. He gave me books—fortunately for me he had a passion for first editions—and kindled life-long allegiances. At that time I was walking the earth drunk on George Meredith, so it was something of a shock to be told by Whibley that compared with Thomas Hardy, Meredith was but as Ben Jonson to Shakespeare. However, as soon as I embarked on Hardy I was enthralled, if a little sobered. Other books I specially remember Whibley making me read were Sir Thomas Browne's *Urn Burial*, Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, *The Broad Stone of Honour*, Congreve's comedies, Balzac's *Illusions Perdues*, and all the novels of Turgenev.

The distinction he drew between real, or rather, *supreme*, poetry and the "Also-Rans", was that real poetry always had what he called the "alcoholic" quality—and to him alcoholic was a very holy word. As a perfect example of what he meant by "alcoholic poetry" he would gloatingly spout this passage from *Samson Agonistes*:

"But who is this, what thing of sea or land?
Female of sex it seems,
That so bedecked, ornate, and gay,
Comes this way sailing
Like a stately ship
Of Tarsus, bound for the isles
Of Javan or Gadire,
With all her bravery on, and tackle trim,
Sails filled, and streamers waving,
Courtied by all the winds that hold them play:
An amber scent of odorous perfume
Her harbinger, a damsel train behind?"



Charles Whibley, from a painting by Sir Gerald Kelly, P.R.A.

CHARLES WHIBLEY

I remember, too, his maintaining—and in this George Wyndham and Harry Cust both agreed with him—that the most beautiful lines in all Shakespeare were :

“Injurious time now, with a robber’s haste,
Crams his rich thievery up, he knows not how;
As many farewells as be stars in heaven,
With distinct breath and consigned kisses to them,
He fumbles up into a loose adieu;
And scants us with a single famished kiss,
Distasted with the salt of broken tears.”

You say people’s literary verdicts interest you. Here are a few more of Whibley’s—Shakespeare and Congreve were by far the greatest masters of English prose, *Troilus and Cressida* almost the finest of Shakespeare’s plays; taken as a whole, *Great Expectations* Dickens’ best novel; amongst moderns, Synge was almost the only one with a real sense of cadence; Barrie the only “natural” writer he had ever known—the only writer, that is, who had not had to learn his craft by the sweat of his brow. (Barrie, of whom, as I promised, I will tell you when I write of a later phase of my life, would not have confirmed this.)

At the time Whibley himself had the reputation of writing the best English of the day, but of course his style, to the highest degree “pure”, not to say austere, was not to the taste of every good judge. (I heard Desmond MacCarthy complain that “you didn’t hear the human voice in it enough”.) He seldom spoke of his own work, and I remember his amazement at learning that letters of his were being sold in Paris for £5 apiece.

Amused by my elation at finding almost my only memorable forebear, a certain Colonel Francis Charteris, celebrated in a book called *Twelve Bad Men*, Whibley promised to write a portrait of this outstanding man, who seemed a suitably infamous subject for the pen of the author of *The Book of Scoundrels*; but when, to my disappointment, research revealed that the Colonel was not quite so black as political prejudice had painted him, this project was abandoned.

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To return to the spoken word. For all Whibley's combative-ness, he was not, however truculent, what I should call a bad-tempered or *touchy* talker. For one thing I can scarcely remember more than two consecutive minutes when the controversy was not interrupted by his own as well as his opponent's laughter.

I think the most ludicrously violent discussion I ever enjoyed took place one evening in 1915, when my mother entertained in my bed-sitter at 62 Cadogan Square a supper-party which included Whibley and Lord Hugh Cecil. One of the other guests was an immense bludgeon of a bishop—the kind of heroic-sized prelate you can picture standing up in his stirrups with a great mace uplifted to strike. His mind seemed as enviably simple as it was forcible.

"What is the Government doing and why is it so slow?" he kept rhetorically asking the company, besides emphatically reiterating with the air of one who makes a startling discovery, "What we want is Organisation"—about as constructively helpful as when Lord Rosebery—do you remember?—so sensationally declared, "What we want is EFFICIENCY."

Newly returned from a visit to the troops at the Front, this strong, unsilent bishop was seething with indignation at what he thought the gross injustice of the voluntary system. Conscription was just then the burning question, Whibley was passionately persuaded of its painful necessity, so he and the massive bishop joined forces and, two guns of very different calibre, fired volley after volley against Lord Hugh, who, clinging to the voluntary system, defended it with Cecilian lucidity and conviction. After some minutes of debate, Lord Hugh said, "There is nothing fine in killing, but there *is* something fine in being killed, and conscription takes that away."

"Epicure!" hissed Whibley. "Do you want boys of eighteen slaughtered to satisfy your aesthetic greed?"

Lord Hugh then maintained the practical superiority of voluntary troops. The "willing spirit", he contended, was so valuable. Why, the other two asked, should our nation be supposed to require treatment different from any other? "No, the voluntary system was a Tin God—a fetish."

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Lord Hugh spoke eloquently of English freedom.

"Freedom?" jeered Whibley. "I have never seen freedom! Nor have you, nor has anyone else! When freedom pretends to exist, it is nearly always anarchy dressed up, or idleness naked and unashamed!"

The battle raged. "But, you see, you *will* overlook the fact that we're at war," chorused Whibley and his echo the bishop, an accusation for which, I must admit, I could see no justification whatever.

Unruffled, Lord Hugh stuck to his steady guns until Whibley, loudly stuttering—a slight impediment in his speech often hampered him just when he was most in a hurry to interrupt—at last managed to get out the words: "You're a damned bloodless radical of 1880!"

"No, of 1884, I think," Lord Hugh corrected with commendable and characteristic dignity.

"You're the ghost of John Stuart Mill!" spluttered Whibley, from whose lips, according to his own way of thinking, no greater insult could possibly have issued. The comic climax to this controversy came when the mighty bishop, towering over Whibley from behind, muzzled him by lacing a few sausage fingers across his spluttering mouth.

Why?

Because, though they were arguing on the same side, he had come to the conclusion that his ally's over-violence was proving bad advocacy of their common cause. At this unexpected intervention—civil war, Lord Hugh called it—all three protagonists exploded into laughter.

It often struck me that in so irascible a man, Whibley's capacity to refrain from swearing in mixed company showed remarkable self-control. I can remember only two other occasions—both most extenuating—when he emitted even so mild an expletive as "damn". The first was when, while lunching with me at the Carlton, he sat down on what he described as "the business end" of a nail; the second when I, disguised as a parlourmaid, waited at table all through a dinner-party in Barrie's flat and, as a sort of signature tune to my practical joke, took deliberate aim at Whibley with a siphon

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while he was engrossed in denouncing President Wilson. As I soused him with soda-water, his leap from the chair carried him almost to the ceiling. "The oath which came to my tongue didn't pass the barrier of my teeth!" he hastily explained, as though apologising for the insipidity of his vocabulary.

My husband and I often stayed with Whibley at Great Brickhill, the pleasant house near Bletchley built for him by Detmar Blow. It was delightful to see his joy in the very fine library of some four thousand books which his earnings as a writer had enabled him to collect. To enshrine these treasures he had had designed a long room broken up into bays by several walls with shelves on either side. No housemaid was ever allowed to dust or so much as touch his small, very unassuming writing-table. Whatever litter this may have held was always concealed—he was exceedingly orderly—by the dust sheet spread over the table the moment he laid down the quill pen with which he invariably wrote.

Dinner at Brickhill was a ritual at which superb vintages were devoutly served. No domestic was ever allowed to be cup-bearer. Descending into a cellar designed as lovingly as his library, the host would reappear bearing with befitting reverence a wicker cradle in which reposed some precious bottle still festooned in cobwebs. To add savour to what he was about to drink, he would quote, bottle of wine in hand :

"Pure water is the best of drinks that man to man can bring :

But who am I that I should have the best of anything?
Let Princes revel at the pump, Peers with the pond
make free ;

But whisky, wine or even beer is good enough for me."

It behoved guests at Brickhill to ingratiate themselves with their host's dog. Even A. E. Housman, for whom Whibley had the greatest admiration, received no second invitation to

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stay because on his first visit he had treated that cherished animal with a marked lack of respect.

Whibley, though never a rich man, was extremely generous with his money. As well as procuring a grant from the Literary Fund for D. H. Lawrence, in whom he took immense interest, he gave me a sum of money to give to him anonymously.

Besides his conviviality, sense of fun, irony, and his great gift for friendship, I think what impressed me most in Whibley was his indomitable courage, a quality that, alas, did not escape the severest possible test. Many years before his death he was overtaken by a cruel affliction—acute inflammation of a nerve in the head. For the remainder of his life he was scarcely ever free from great pain. His doctor told me that it was the worst pain anyone could suffer. Whenever, as occasionally it did, the agony temporarily subsided, Whibley's naturally sanguine temperament would make him confident that a complete cure had at last been effected. His spirits would rocket up. But these respites were never long. For years he was tortured—literally tortured. I often saw him nearly faint from sheer pain. Yet valiantly determined still to be the hammer, not the anvil, he tenaciously persisted in fighting, or rather working, with broken tools, and always wrote whenever it was humanly possible.

The only treatment that gave him temporary relief was the injection of alcohol into the afflicted nerve. This was done over and over again, until his "crumpet", as he disrespectfully called his head, was, so he told me, as "full of holes as any old watering-can".

So painfully conscious were all Charles' friends of his suffering and of the stoicism with which it was endured, that at times they found it difficult not to quote to him a certain much overworked line by another Titan of courage whom it is now the fashion to deride, his great friend W. E. Henley. (In his youth Whibley had been one of the most prominent of what used to be called the "Henley Regatta", and as you said the other day, it was easy to see why those two were so much attracted to one another.) I was very glad I *had* refrained

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from that Henley quotation when I saw the expression that came into poor Whibley's face the day someone *did* say to him "Your head is bloody but unbowed."

Despite much suffering, the last years of Whibley's life—he was only seventy when he died—were made happy by his marriage to his godchild, Philippa Raleigh, The Professor's daughter.

Inevitably so definite, extreme and challenging a man had, and still has, his detractors; but whatever Charles Whibley's faults, real or imputed, I know that for those friends—and they were many—who delighted, indeed revelled in his company, life has been very much less lively since his gay and gallant spirit left this planet.

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You say that in the chapter called "Coming Out" I have not told you enough of what I remember of the customs, conventions, pastimes and taboos of the social world as I knew it before the shattering years. So I have rummaged in my memory, peered back into my teens, asked myself what, suppose a girl of today could see us as we were at her age, would strike her as most peculiar in our way of life?

To begin with, she would be astonished by our lack of independence. For instance, no well-looked-after girl was supposed to go to a dance except under the wing of her own mother, or of some appointed substitute. She was even expected to elbow her way back to her chaperon between each dance, a duty the crowded rooms often made a physical impossibility.

In the ballroom, as elsewhere, I enjoyed more freedom than most other girls, for, after the first few weeks, my brothers were considered an adequate escort, which was almost as good as having none, for not only had they their own preoccupations in the ballroom, but quite often, forgetting all about their sister, they went home without her. But if I was sometimes left to my own devices at parties and had to find my way home, I was never, never allowed to go in a train alone—I travelled as irresponsibly as a piece of luggage—or to walk in London by myself. When not with my mother I was always supposed to be taken about—I might as well have been a Pekingese puppy—by my maid, Polly Cliffe, a "lone, lorn crittur" with an unrivalled capacity for falling on the thorns of life. Irked by this lugubrious bodyguard, I would quite often, so to speak, slip my collar and chain, and hailing a hansom cab spring into that most exhilarating of vehicles. I

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loved its clip-clop-clop, jingle-jingle-jingle, and the way a little square window overhead would suddenly open to reveal a rubicund face while a hoarse voice spoke to the crown of my hat.

My spirits invariably soared as I bowled along in a hansom cab, but to be seen thus framed all by myself against its dark background was to incur disapproval.

It is strange to think oneself back in those hansom-cab, fresh-paint, spick-and-span days, and then to walk out into the London of today—flaking houses, vanished landmarks, large areas of the town still looking like a disused quarry.

The result of my always being taken about was that I learnt nothing whatsoever of the geography of London; very inconvenient later on, particularly as with this ignorance went a constitutional incapacity to listen to the answer when I asked the way.

Our helplessness equalled our want of independence; one engendered the other. Everything was done for us. I was never so much as taught how to mend or wash—let alone make—my clothes. I couldn't even pack for myself. Of cooking I knew no more than of the art of navigation. Absurd upbringing, for even had conditions remained as they were, how can you criticise a cook if you know nothing of her craft? A woman who can't cook is a hopeless cripple at the mercy of anyone who can. Domestic service is now so much scorned, that despite that noblest of the King's titles—the "Chief Servant of the People"—the very word servant has come to be considered derogatory. To my mind the real humiliation lies not in service but in being dependent on the service of others. In this I find ignominy as well as inconvenience.

Much as Edwardian girls may have taken for granted, it must not be supposed that they were undisturbed by qualms. In what sort of a social system, we wondered, were we allowed to be the drones, while other young girls, many of them much prettier than ourselves, spent all their youth attending on us—preparing ourselves and our rooms for pleasures in which they would not share?

Whether it be inherently wrong that some human beings

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should wait on their fellow-creatures and others be waited upon, is endlessly arguable. On the face of things it seems preposterous. Yet, the question arises, how is service of this kind entirely to be obviated? Are not the Dictators of Communist countries especially given to holding State banquets, and without waiters can a banquet be a State banquet? Perhaps a solution will be found in a further extension of conscription under which every citizen will be compelled to serve so many months in the pantry.

Personally, except at a large formal party, I hate being waited upon at table; I find it unnatural, embarrassing and very oppressive.

Whatever the rights or wrongs of domestic service, there was never, as some employers seemed to suppose, any virtue other than necessity in keeping only one instead of several servants. Unlike a single servant, each member of a large household, in itself a world in microcosm, did at least see plenty of life, for the large staff, socially a self-supporting community, gave abundant scope for ambition, rivalry, love-affairs—all human drama. Then there was the pleasure—as many found it—in the hierarchy of the Room and the Servants' Hall, the two-way satisfaction of looking up to those above and down on those below you; the chance to rise to the top of what seemed a very high tree; and, as a general rule, for those who stayed long in one situation, good provision for old age.

We are shocked now, and rightly so, at the thought of the wretched quarters into which servants used to be crowded, and such treatment now seems as shortsighted as it was inconsiderate. Yet The Counsel for the Defence, or if you will, The Counsel for the Prosecution of the Victorians could with truth point out that the children of the house were very little better lodged than its staff. At that time there was no idea that the nursery should be one of the best rooms in the house; no talk of a "southern aspect". The standards of hygiene and comfort by which living conditions are judged today simply didn't exist, nor, I think, was there much consciousness of discomfort. Nowadays we pity anyone unfortunate enough to have to do without hot water, easy chairs, cooking facilities,

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electric light and so forth, but how slow were the rich to avail themselves of these amenities even when they had been invented! Owners of large houses continued to be purple with cold long after there was no further need to put up with this and other hardships; some of them, no doubt, from a dunder-headed distrust of the "new-fangled", but most of them, I think, because they were perfectly content with their uncomfortable homes as they were.

"No, thank Heaven, I'm none so dirty as that!" tartly replied one wealthy Victorian lady to another when asked whether she intended to install a bathroom in her house.

To revert to Edwardian days and such of its features as are likely to strike our descendants as most quaint. One obvious difference in convention was that young men and girls called each other by their surnames until they were friends of long standing. In this I don't think we were the losers. Intended to put people on easy terms, the modern universal immediate use of Christian names can promote only the most perfunctory and superficial familiarity; while an attractive nuance has thereby undoubtedly been flattened out of life. "Getting on to Christian name terms", as it was called, gave one a pleasurable sense of entering a new phase in a relationship. Yes, it was quite an appreciable thrill when a young man said, "May I drop the Miss, Miss Cynthia?"

Some were of course much quicker than others at putting this question—so far as I was concerned, I admit, a purely rhetorical question, for however little I might have wished to say "Yes", I could not possibly have said "No". The "nicest" men, in the old sense of that ruined word, called one Cynthia to one's face, but still spoke of one as Miss Charteris. Others did exactly the reverse.

This formality of address was just one symptom of the then far more strongly drawn line of demarcation between the sexes, a line particularly evident in country houses where the frontier between the drawing-room and the smoking-room was still very much up; only a one-way frontier though, for the men

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could always sit in the drawing-room as much as they liked, and whenever they chose entrench themselves in their own inviolable precincts. In some old-fashioned houses the smoking-room was the only room where smoking was allowed, but even after the whole house had become what used rather roguishly to be called "Liberty Hall", this room with its blazing fire, leather-covered fender, deep shabby armchairs, profusion of ashtrays and newspapers, tobacco-laden fug, was still much frequented, and it took a very bold girl to invade so masculine a stronghold. "She sits with the men in the smoking-room," I heard a chaperon say in a shocked whisper of a girl denounced as a "brazen hussy".

One Sunday evening, to show me a picture, my host himself took me across this closely-guarded "frontier". Raymond Asquith happened to be one of the party, and since at that time his pet extravagance was to bombard his friends with joke telegrams, to my great embarrassment next day I was handed six telegrams in succession while I sat at a large London luncheon-party. The first was "Where there is smoke there is fire"; the other five were brilliant variations on the same theme.

You asked me to tell you the kind of things we used to talk about. What I'm sure would astonish the young is the number of things we did *not* talk about. Were certain topics explicitly banned, or did it just not occur to anyone to touch on them in what used to be called "mixed company"? Whatever the reason, I assure you that certain subjects now discussed with no more embarrassment than the weather, were literally never so much as mentioned in my presence. For example, any kind of homosexuality. I became vaguely aware of some sinister mystery, any approach to which made grown-up people drop their voices and look acutely uncomfortable; but apart from that I remained unenlightened.

One comic result of this conspiracy of silence was that, because of its ill-starred bearer, the very name "Oscar" had become a source of violent embarrassment. Without knowing

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the reason for it, I gathered this fact because one of the Stanway vicars happened to be so named, and I noticed the poor man could never be mentioned without—according to the speaker—a titter, a guffaw or a blush. For the same absurd reason several dogs had to be given new names.

Needless to say this sense of some unmentionable, unsurmisable mystery had a much greater effect on the imagination than any complete knowledge, just as the dash used by Victorian novelists to represent an “unmentionable oath” was far more curdling than any possible combination of letters could ever be.

In my circle, these taboos were rapidly crumbling before 1914; by 1918 few, if any, survived. At first the effect of this new freedom of speech was perhaps to vitiate the palate for any topics but those so newly released. Do you remember the bewildered father who said, “My daughter talks about anything. In fact she hardly talks about anything else.”

What did we talk about before the sometime “restricted areas” were thrown open?

Besides talking about ourselves, we had all the obvious, well-worn, but never quite threadbare subjects.

We debated the rights and wrongs of blood sports, votes for women, monogamy, vivisection, bull-fights and censorship; we argued over vaccination, divorce-law reform, and euthanasia; we questioned whether the Man made the Century, or the Century made the Man, whether suicide was justifiable, Free Love to be advocated, Vegetarianism feasible; we discussed endlessly and inconclusively the Problem of Evil, the Omnipotence of God, the Immortality of the Soul, and Free Will; we compared Queen Elizabeth with Mary, Queen of Scots, Charles the First with Cromwell, Dickens with Thackeray, Keats with Shelley; we tried to define the distinction between Genius and Talent, Happiness and Pleasure, Intellect and Intelligence, Beauty and Prettiness; we asked one another where good manners left off, and insincerity began; whether we would choose to be widely popular or caviare to the general, whether we believed in Love at First Sight, Affinities, and Table-Turning; whether, if we could, we would, abolish pain. And of course, over and over again, we tried to decide which

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six friends, six books and six pictures we would take to a desert island.

“You and your contemporaries must have been much happier than we are, weren’t you?” a girl asked me the other day. To answer this question would be to make an impossible generalisation. Obviously we had much that our descendants lack. Our lives were well-cushioned; our background and our futures seemed secure; but since enjoyment depends so much more on appetite than on the bill of fare, personal happiness, then as now, was far more a question of whether or not you were happy-hearted and enjoyed good health—in most cases one and the same thing—than of circumstances.

I expect the young of today think of our young selves as privileged beings basking in the last rays of a setting sun—utterly useless creatures with nothing to do but endeavour to please and be pleased, amuse and be amused. Needless to say this was not how we saw ourselves, and since we did not know our sun was setting we did not consciously bask.

For my own part, still filled with rapture at the wonder of the world, still without so much as the tip of one toe on the ground, I was an utterly discontinuous being; now deliriously happy; now deeply miserable. One day life shimmered; the next it glowered. My immediate frame of mind coloured everything. Provided I had a sense of well-being I looked forward to whatever the day might hold. What fun it was all going to be! In such a mood merely to dance seemed almost an act of worship.

Then suddenly the melancholy fit would fall, whereupon, overcome with a sense of *toiling* pleasures, I would stare with shame as well as distaste at my engagement-book, and hating the unworthwhileness of it all, yearn for some real purpose in life instead of this everlasting frittering away of time. In retrospect it seems to me that I had no objectivity whatsoever. Seeing everything through my own aura, all things appeared to me either through a golden haze or a black mist.

Whatever my mood of the moment, I existed on two planes,

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happily or unhappily alive to my present existence, yet conscious all the while that it was merely provisional—a rehearsal rather than a performance.

Apart from moods of depression, shyness and self-dissatisfaction—like all young things I was full of vague aspirations and haunted by my own shortcomings—I *was* happy, happy with a sense of mystery all around me, mystery and impending magic. My conception of the universe and of love was, I think, very Tennysonian. I had the “I have been here before” conviction, felt “I knew it all of yore”; was sure that some day “some veil would fall”. I believed in an Affinity—a kindred soul, and that, together, he and I would “rise on stepping-stones of our dead selves to higher things”. Yes, I was pretty sure that “somehow”—useful word “somehow”—good *would* be the “final goal of ill”. In fact there seemed to be some quotation to reconcile me to almost anything that might befall.

Other influences besides youth and circumstances conspired to make me happy. Nearly all poets—anyhow those I read—were still unashamedly romantic; writing mostly of legends, moonlight and idealised love; and, as debunking had not yet become the fashion in biography, I, not being critical enough to be put off by overpraise, was allowed the heady pleasure of hero-worship.

Perhaps by no means the least of our blessings lay in our not being modern psychology-ridden. Acutely as we might at times suffer from depression and self-dissatisfaction, we had not yet been taught how to be unhappy in any of the myriad new ways this branch of science has discovered for us. Thus, for us, many distresses of the mind which, had we been born later, might well have become “fixations”, were merely transient because, unable—blessed ignorance—to put a name to them, we could not give them permanence by conferring on them the rank of a “Complex”, a “Repression”, an “Inhibition”, a “Phobia”, a “Trauma”, or any other impressive title in the new peerage of pathology.

I know—*don't* I know!—the analogy of drawing-out by cross-examination the poison from the wounds to the psyche. I'm not questioning the good done by experts, but deploring

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the fact that, equipped with a smattering of knowledge and a copious jargon, nearly every thinking young person is nowadays an amateur psychologist. In what other realm has a little learning proved quite so dangerous a thing? Faulty self-diagnosis, inducing, as it so often does, fatalistic resignation to some fault, instead of the determination to overcome it, can have so disastrously maiming an effect.

Self-absorption seldom leads to self-knowledge, nor when it does, is it necessarily salutary to know one's faults. As Robert Louis Stevenson said, "To the strong a fault known is a fault cured, but to the weak it is a fetter riveted."

I could scream when I hear the young busily, not to say pompously, forging their own fetters. To give one relatively trivial example, some young man declares, "I can't write letters, I have a 'Thing' about it", his tone implying that some mysterious injury to his nervous system makes it impossible for him even to attempt to overcome what in nine cases out of ten is no more than a perfectly natural disinclination common to most of us. You are however expected to take it from him that this mysterious "Thing" is as definite and exonerating an affliction as bodily paralysis. Thus he excuses to himself what is really only want of sufficient consideration for others—in other words, good manners—to rouse him to overcome his indolence.

The tenth case—a psychopath—is a victim of some genuine maladjustment. To blame him would be an injustice, and early diagnosis may result in a cure. So much to the good. On the debit side of the balance sheet, nine other young people released from all sense of moral responsibility, instead of exerting will-power to break themselves of a mere bad habit, not only allow, but positively encourage, themselves to become chronic moral invalids.

"The strongest poison ever grown
Came from Caesar's laurel crown."

The poison of self-administered psycho-analysis looks like running it close.

You must not suppose that because we were not amateur

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psychiatrists we weren't interested in mind and character. Far from it. Most of us were extremely introspective, and greatly given to analysing one another; but our interest was personal, not pathological.

One of the most salient characteristics of life as I remember it before 1914 was, indeed, the tremendous interest taken in individuals, the vast importance attached to their private concerns, and the endless consultations they occasioned. A family would, as it were, go into Committee for days at a time when some decision affecting one of its members had to be made, say, the choice of a school or of a profession.

While divorce still scarcely existed it was natural that an engagement should be thought a momentous matter, but every step in life seemed taken with the same widely-shared sense of its importance. Nothing ever seemed to happen casually. I suppose this was partly because we lived in a much more leisured world and one that gave plenty of opportunities for conferences—today there are so few family meeting-places—and partly because in more stable, less cataclysmic times the individual was less dwarfed against the background of the world. Moreover in a society still mainly based on the rewards of individual endeavour, the future of each young man seemed to lie more in his own hands. With income tax so low—I remember the lamentations when it rose to a shilling in the pound—and the purchasing power of money so high, it was still very much worth while, as today it scarcely seems, to make a large rather than a moderate income. How best to equip a son to do this was therefore a matter for serious deliberation. Whatever the size of the carrot dangled before his nose, every young man had the double incentive—to make money for himself and to enable his children to start where he left off. Like the heroes of fairy stories, spirited boys set out to make their fortunes, and quite often fairy stories came true, for fortunes could still be honestly made. The bells that beckoned Dick Whittington on might ring in the ears of any village lad. With this independent Open-Sesame spirit went an innate, but quite unsanctimonious, wish to serve, rather than to be supported by, your country. In most homes,

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whatever their size, one heard some talk of obligations, very little of "rights".

I am not looking back through veils of illusion on an epoch in many ways shocking with its violent contrasts of extreme luxury and extreme poverty. Superfluity and want were jarringly juxtaposed; the seething disgrace of the slums shamed even the most thoughtless hedonist, and numerous other evils were recognised and deplored. Nevertheless HOPE was in the air, at least so it seemed to me, and this, I need not remind you, is a book not of theories but of impressions; I think most of us, sharing as we did the more or less general belief in a benevolent civilisation, felt a confident certainty in the inevitability of Progress. It might be, indeed was, deplorably slow, but it was assumed to be sure. Thus our world appeared to be at the same time improving and yet stable. Above all, peace had come to seem the natural state between the great nations. Yes, military music spoke to me only of the past—of "old, unhappy far-off things, and battles long ago". Surely, surely never again would social progress be retarded by a great war?

True, invention had made startling strides since Charles Lamb forebodingly wrote, "There is a march of science, but who shall beat the drums for its retreat?" Yet though H. G. Wells was shrilly prophesying war in the air, I doubt whether many of us took him literally, or were able to imagine vividly enough the uses to which science might be put to feel any pressing need to beat the drums for its retreat.

The bread-winning girls of today may well wonder how their grandmothers, who had neither jobs nor housework to do, spent their time. With the cinema still only in its flickering, jerking infancy, no night clubs, no wireless; how, they ask, did we even amuse our idle waited-upon selves? I can only assure them, that though I sometimes shied—occasionally even jibbed—at organised enjoyment, I never found spare time hang heavy on my hands. I can't remember ever wanting to kill a single hour of time. Had I nothing else to do, I could always

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slough, like a snake its skin, my very identity to become only a pair of very rapidly and almost quite uncritically reading eyes.

No doubt some of our simple ways of amusing ourselves would seem very tame to the present generation. For example, reading aloud, a practice that wireless and television have now probably all but killed, was still very much in vogue. Do you remember Florence Nightingale's indictment of this pastime? "What is it to be read aloud to? The most miserable exercise of the human intellect. It is like lying on one's back and having liquid poured down one's throat." I see what she means, but I don't agree.

When only one person read aloud, nearly all the Shes of the party plied their needles, for embroidery was then the almost universal "work" of the idle.

A favourite entertainment was for several friends to read a Shakespeare play in parts. Sometimes, leaving things to chance, each of us read a speech in rotation, but this method did not conduce to concentration, those readers who liked the sound of their own voices being prone to become so much preoccupied in wondering whether the next good speech would fall to their turn, that, busily counting ahead, they missed their cue. Nor was cheating unknown. To misappropriate an impending purple patch, a greedy reader would skip some paltry line such as "Hola, without!" Sometimes the culprit was hoist with his own petard. Miscalculating, he did himself out of the very speech he coveted, which had he not upset the order would have been his by rights. In my eagerness to annex the part of Hamlet I once read out of my turn, only to find that by filching the miserable line "I shall in all my best obey you, Madam", I had forfeited the whole of the gorgeous speech beginning, "O that this too too solid flesh would melt!" my rendering of which—I was very slender at the time—I particularly fancied. An alternative way of reading a play was to allot the parts before we began, rather an invidious method.

Beb never tired of reminding his in-laws of the reception they gave him the first time he ever came to 62 Cadogan Square where he had been invited to tea. "We've finished tea," announced Guy and Cynthia (so Beb's story went), "and we're

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just going to read *Richard II*. One of us two must be Richard and the other Bolingbroke." (Beb said our tone implied acceptance of some uncontrovertible decree of Fate.) "You," we added handsomely, "can be Bushy, Bagot and Green." To "be Bushy, Bagot and Green" became an idiom in our family language.

Our use of divergent editions of Shakespeare confused matters. I read out of a Bowdler, from whose chaste pages various words such as "bed", "bastard" and "strumpet" were sternly expurgated, so you can imagine how often other readers protested, "But, Cynthia, you've missed out something!"

Besides reading aloud, we were much addicted to learning poetry by heart. "Self-adornment", sneered carpers, but this was unfair. I enjoyed the gentle exercise entailed; besides which, because of my habit of reading too fast, I never gave myself a chance really to know a poem unless I learnt it by heart.

Many of us kept Commonplace books, large albums bound in white vellum or Florentine paper, into which in laboured script we reverently wrote out our best-loved poems. Most of the same favourites were enshrined in each of these private anthologies—all the obvious Shakespeare, Keats, Shelley, Tennyson and Browning lyrics.

Other great spell-binders of my teens were Rossetti, William Morris, Yeats, Francis Thompson, Flecker, Villon, Ronsard and Verlaine. Almost every single poem in *The Shropshire Lad* found its way into my Commonplace book, and most of Meredith's *Modern Love*.

Who, you will want to know too, were our favourite prose writers? I for one constantly read the whole of Dickens, and then started on him again, but at that time among those who took themselves seriously it was the fashion to underrate him, an obtuseness—they called it fastidiousness—which wounded me terribly. For years I used Dickens as my touchstone. Terrified lest the answer might not be what I hoped, I sometimes scarcely dared ask some new friend, one whom I wanted to like, the crucial question, "Do you like Charles Dickens?"

We loved, and perpetually quoted, George Meredith. His

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Clara Middleton was my favourite heroine, until I transferred my allegiance from Meredith to Hardy, whereupon I wanted everyone I liked to love Tess more than any other woman in fiction. To the best of my remembrance, few of us ever took Thackeray out of his shelf. Anthony Trollope I don't remember hearing so much as mentioned in my girlhood. He was a delight saved up to be a solace through the First World War and returned to in the Second. Should it interest you to hear more of the temporary taste of a middlebrow Edwardian, three of my favourite novels were *Middlemarch*, *Prince Otto* and *Trilby*.

I had a very special love for both Maeterlinck and Rostand, deep respect for Anatole France, and a passionate admiration for Tolstoy and Turgenev. Dostoevsky I did not realise until much later. . . .

Contemporary writers? I devoured everything by Arnold Bennett, Wells and Chesterton. I was entranced by Maurice Hewlett's romances—*The Forest Lovers*, *Richard Yea-and-Nay*, and *The Queen's Quair*. Did you ever meet that now I suppose almost forgotten author? He was curiously Spanish-looking. I have never seen anyone whose appearance so cried out for fancy dress.

I remember A. E. W. Mason's sudden, sensational success, and how one day Arthur Balfour excused himself for a hyena-yawn by telling us that he had had to go on reading *The Four Feathers* until he finished it at three o'clock in the morning. Shortly afterwards the author, with his eyeglass and swash-buckler laugh, came to luncheon at 62 Cadogan Square to meet him.

Sir Walter Raleigh, The Professor, was our favourite literary critic. If you have never read his book on Wordsworth, do so at once.

Other contemporaries who opened magic casements for my young self were W. H. Hudson—the beauty of *Green Mansions* pierced me like an arrow—and Brewster, whose book *The Prison* stirred something in me, I know not what, that no other book did.

Except for the Sherlock Holmes stories, which every young

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man seemed to know by heart as soon as they came out in the *Strand Magazine*, I don't remember reading any detective stories. Of course I cried myself to sleep over *The Prisoner of Zenda*. The cloak-and-sword books I liked best were Stanley Weyman's *Under the Red Robe* and *A Gentleman of France*.

By far my favourite writer of the literature of awe was Arthur Machen. I thought him matchless at conveying by suggestion the sense of mystery at the heart of things. How he thrilled me by his power of hinting at the existence of something that lurked behind life—something undefinable but ineffably evil! He frightened me so much more than, for all his great technical skill, did M. R. James whose *Elementals* were too clearly defined to disturb me. We adopted for our own use a coinage of Arthur Machen's, the word "voor", a word with a shiver in it, meaning something that is beautiful in a strange sinister moonlight way.

Besides Machen's "voor" works, I liked his book of criticisms called *Hieroglyphics*, in which he declares his literary creed, maintaining that unless a writer has that inspiration which enables him to convey the sense of mystery and thereby to induce a kind of "ecstasy", his writing, however great its artistry, is not "Literature". "Better", contended Machen, "a badly constructed temple, than the most perfected tub: one is for worship, the other for washing." Therefore, in Machen's provocatively arbitrary use of the word, Jane Austen, however flawless her technique on her "two inches of ivory", was not—can't I hear your yell at such blasphemy—Literature.

Needless to say, at the blessed time of life of which I write, I remembered everything I read; whereas now, in common with most others of my age, however much I may enjoy a novel this week, I shall by the next in all probability have forgotten its title, its theme and its characters, a melancholy fact not wholly due to impaired memory. In youth one chewed the cud, so to speak, of whatever books one read so much more than the preoccupations of later life allow. Each book I read and liked left a clear-cut, separate imprint on my mind, which now becomes more and more like a room whose walls have been repapered over and over again.

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I think most of us read newspapers less than do the young of today. I remember wondering how on earth, even with a cigar in his mouth, my father could daily spend a whole hour on end entrenched behind *The Times*.

Games? Fear of my partner kept me from playing Bridge unless press-ganged by three other players; nor did I fall under the spell of Poker until after I married.

I have already told you about what card-players sneeringly called "intellectual games". Our nearest equivalent to the yet unborn Crossword Puzzle was a pencil game for two played with quotations, written down not in letters, but in dots, with dividing strokes between the words. I won't describe how "Gibbets" was played. Nothing is more difficult to write—or to read—than an explanation of a game. You must just take my word for it that this is an entrancing one, ideal for train journeys, nothing being required but scraps of paper, pencil and a scribbled drawing, no matter how bad, to represent the gibbet or gallows whereon the player who fails to discover the quotation before he has lost six lives is hung. Gibbets was one of my most enduring crazes, and I've had quite a few. We played it for hours on end, in and, many thought, out of season—even sometimes to the general disapproval in the ballroom. We even had special little gibbeting books made with our names and a little gallows printed on them. As a variant we would sometimes give one another a "dewdrop" instead of a quotation to guess. A "dewdrop" is a compliment retailed to you by some third person. We trafficked in dewdrops, bartering one for another. "Please give me a dewdrop," we would plead when particularly thirsty for praise. "I've got a lovely one for you." The opposite of a dewdrop was called a "spike". Some people were notable purveyors of "dewdrops"; others—unforgivable crime—made mischief by repeating "spikes". "Dewdrops" and "spikes" are just two examples of the large vocabulary of words of our own, which like all people who see much of one another, we were in the habit of using. Great fun for ourselves,

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but, I can't doubt, at times boring for the stranger within the gate.

Another popular pastime was dabbling in what was vaguely described as the "occult"—table-turning, planchette, and an absurd, supposedly telepathic performance which we called "Willing".

The pronoun "we", so recurrent in this chapter, means of course myself and the closest friends of my girlhood. An attempt to tell you who these were proved too long. Compressed, it read too much like a catalogue; so both versions have gone into the waste-paper basket. My cousin Mary Vesey, the companion of my childhood, was the girl friend with whom I kept in most intimate touch, and her mother's house was always a second home to me.

In girlhood, as in childhood, play-going was my greatest delight, and I was blessed with ample opportunity to indulge this passion. One might—I invariably did—travel third-class, have very little to spend on clothes and lack pocket money, but there was never any boggling over theatre tickets; indeed, the giving of large play-parties, preceded by an early dinner, was one of the most popular forms of entertainment. True, tickets were then comparatively cheap and there was no need to "eat out"—I hardly remember ever dining in a restaurant—nevertheless it seems to me that it was laudably lavish of our parents to encourage us to invite as many of our friends as we chose to dinner and the theatre. There was usually a conflict between keen play-goers and devout diners, which made me suffer agonies from fear of being made late. Though these before-theatre dinners were abbreviated, they would seem long enough today: (1) Soup. (2) Fish. (3) Bird or meat. (4) Sweet. (5) Savoury. (It is oppressive even to remember the number of courses considered indispensable at a full dinner: (1) Soup. (2) Fish. (3) Entrée. (4) Bird. (5) Meat. (6) Sweet. (7) Savoury.)

As I think of those far-off theatre-going days the past surges

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up; rapturous memories throng. Once again Mrs. Patrick Campbell's voice sends thrills down my spine; my eyes fill with tears as I hear the Students' Song in *Old Heidelberg*; I gape at Beerbohm Tree's spectacular productions—woods with real live rabbits scuttling about, chariots drawn by live horses, thunderstorms that outdid Nature—Lewis Waller declaiming blank verse stirs me like a bugle call, and I hear the huge gusts of laughter that swept the theatre in the great days of the Follies, days when some of their devotees used to book rows of stalls for each performance.

Our house in Cadogan Square was excitingly close to the Court Theatre, where the Vedrenne-Barker productions were making theatrical history. There, before I came out, I saw the first performances of *John Bull's Other Island* and *You Never Can Tell*. I have never forgotten Granville Barker's acting of Dube-dat in *The Doctor's Dilemma*, and the extraordinarily individual quality of his voice. There, too, I saw his productions of Gilbert Murray's translations of Euripides; also the incomparable Irish Players. To this day I can never pass through Sloane Square without my pulse quickening at the memory of the ecstasies my stage-struck young self enjoyed in its now defunct little theatre.

Besides my emotions as a spectator, I have other vivid memories of the Court Theatre, memories associated with terror. For I was not always on the right—or do I still think it the wrong?—side of its curtain. There, pinnacle of girlhood excitement, I myself "trod the boards". To raise money for some cause in which she was interested, Mrs. Alfred Lyttelton wrote a play in which she strung together the Carpaccio series of pictures of St. Ursula, and I was given the part of that ill-starred saint. Eleven other girls represented the eleven thousand virgins who followed me to martyrdom, and Mrs. Patrick Campbell played the angel who came to tell me of my fate as I lay in a little four-poster bed, exactly copied from the one in Carpaccio's picture.

In the last scene I and my attendant virgins were all brutally, not to say messily, murdered—no Greek off-stage restraint about this production—while our respective lady's-maids, each

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holding a halo, stood tiptoe in the wings, ready the instant the curtain fell to rush on to the stage in time to clamp our haloes on to our heads before the curtain rose again on the final tableau. They never were in time. Scurry as they might, two or three retreating black forms were always seen scuttling like blackbeetles off the stage.

Philip Carr produced this play. He was kind, patient and sorely tried. Besides having to teach amateurs to act, he had to cope with pandemonium in the dressing-rooms, where the mother of each particular virgin held erroneous but quite undislodgeable ideas as to the make-up best suited to her own daughter's style of beauty.

Such was my stage fright that I completely lost my voice before each of the four performances, and had to hang over a steaming kettle, which of course made the grease-paint on my face run.

The original plan was that the audience should see St. Ursula getting into bed, but since our play was not intended to be a farce, it was in course of rehearsal prudently decided that I should instead be what is called "discovered" in bed. "They didn't dare risk it," declared Mr. Asquith, giving one of his loudest sniffs, as the curtain rose on his future daughter-in-law reclining in bed, and I overheard his orator's whisper. Very unnerving.

Another bad moment at that first performance was when through the blinding glare of the footlights I discerned the white gleam of Grandpapa Wemyss' whiskers. Only the day before he had told me, much more in anger than in sorrow, that one of my shoulders was noticeably higher than the other. Was it the right or the left? In the preoccupation of trying to remember which shoulder to hitch up, I all but missed my next cue. I soon wished I *had* missed it, for it was the cue to quite my worst line—that which always got the loudest fraternal laugh—"O Lord, let me not fall into the mire of earthly love!" Sure enough, my brothers guffawed until the theatre echoed, but even that didn't distract me from my fears as to what Grandpapa might do. Suppose, drill-sergeant-like, he bawled out some injunction?

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Just as I had begun to recover my nerve and lose myself in my part again, I had another horrid set-back. The candle which I had to blow out to bring about a desired effect of darkness had been placed too high. It defied all my puffs. Leap into the air as I might, that horrid little flame continued to shine like a good deed in a naughty world. Again my family were audibly as well as visibly amused.

Although my performance made such a Roman holiday for my brothers—never had I seen Ego so convulsed with laughter as while I was being very slowly massacred (he had to lie down on the floor of the box)—I myself was completely carried away by my own acting, and deeply moved throughout, and long, long after, each performance. In fact I worked myself up into a fine frenzy.

A fan mail encouraged my always latent, now flaming, ambition to become a professional actress. Hoping my brothers might be impressed, I showed them a letter from a stranger who wrote, "Your performance as Saint Ursula has made me believe in God", at which they laughed more heartily than ever. A letter from Maeterlinck's wife, inviting me to come to Belgium to be trained at her expense to play her husband's heroines, made them a shade less disrespectful. But as always when one attempts to break new ground, I found strangers much more encouraging than friends and relations.

This brief sally on to the stage led to that offer over which blew up the family crisis so much enjoyed by H. G. Wells. This came in the following telegram from the poet Herbert Trench, who was then producing at the Haymarket Theatre, "Will you play lead in new play at Haymarket, without your name and at your own terms?"

Had my father been dramatically obstructive, stormed and threatened to turn me out into the snow, I might have defied him, but the shrivelling disdain with which he treated the question revived all my natural want of self-confidence. He was abroad at the time (I think shame at my public appearance even as an amateur had driven him out of the country), so my mother, who quite liked the idea of my going on the stage,

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had to write to ask his consent. We both wrote again and again; our letters remained unanswered.

At last came the devastatingly effective cold water of his telegram, "I think you must both be quite dotty". Utterly deflated, I gave up. It was quite a little time before I could forgive my father for saving me—probably saving me—from making a fool of myself

Thus I flung away dramatic ambition; not that it did not often flare up again—for the last time (I *hope*) during the late war, when one of the very first Air Raid Warnings went just as the curtain fell on a performance of *Thunder Rock*, and to pass the time until it was safe for us to leave the theatre, Michael Redgrave had the happy idea of inviting any members of the audience who liked acting to come up on the stage and join in a charade. Dragging with me a protesting son, I leapt on to the boards. Three other reluctant volunteers followed me, and I organised a charade, but alas only to be frustrated again, for just as I opened my mouth for the first time, the All Clear went, and my entire audience joyfully stampeded out of the theatre.

Only yesterday a girl was cross-questioning me about the, to her, prehistoric days when I was young.

"As you didn't smoke, drink, go to films or night clubs; were led about like a pet dog, and taken to the theatre; what *did* you spend your money on?"

I was able to assure her that not knowing how to get rid of my money is one of the few difficulties I have as yet been spared.

One extravagance of my teens was "having my fortune told". I constantly had recourse to palmists. Yes, I must confess to having squandered innumerable guineas on these twentieth-century witches. It was not so much that I wanted to be told the future, as that I liked someone to talk about me, and me only, for half an hour on end. The only other person who would do this for money was the doctor, and naturally I was more interested in my character and mind

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than in my health. I knew whether I felt well or ill, but at that age had little idea what sort of a person I was, and so for the time being could accept whatever verdicts a palmist gave. And how skilfully they probed—watching your face till you rose like a fish at a deftly-cast fly. Then by quickly passing from the subjunctive to the indicative, they converted a query into a statement. How accomplished they were too in flattery! No client was ever told she was thoroughly deserving, hardworking, but ungifted. To make the best of a bad job may be highly commendable, but no one appreciates praise of that kind. On the contrary, this was their kind of patter—“You are not making the best of yourself. You *could* excel in anything. What a pity just a little indolence, a tendency to flutter in all directions rather than to fly in one, and above all, want of self-confidence, have so far stood between you and attainment. But surely these amiable weaknesses will soon be overcome. Then, all you need to do is to decide to which particular art you will devote your remarkable gifts, and brilliant success is assured.”

Needless to say they also told us that besides being much too sensitive, we were not appreciated at home. “As yet no one has properly understood you”: “How can a plant not in the right soil come to full bloom?” “Your family must be made to realise that though you can be led, you cannot be driven”—so flowed the soothing syrup.

I assure you we emerged from these occult, vaguely Egyptian premises positively walking on air, perhaps a little wistful at being so sadly misunderstood, but confident that one day we should “astonish them all”. It used to be quite half an hour before with a rush sanity returned and deflation set in.

I said I was not concerned with my “Fate”, but only with what is now called my “make-up”. I must admit, however, to having been twice badly frightened by predictions. One day a renowned fortune-teller melodramatically warned me to be very careful about riding. “Please, never; never get on a *grey* horse,” she implored, with tears in her eyes, as though with terrible distinctness she saw some disaster too horrible to contemplate.

That same afternoon I went to stay at a country house where I was to be mounted to hunt the following day.

"What am I going to ride tomorrow?" I asked at tea.

"Our new grey mare, Griselda."

"How nice!" I exclaimed with a fervour I was very far from feeling. "I love grey horses."

Dismay surged over me. I gave myself up for lost, and found it difficult to attend at dinner and games. When I went to bed I tried to console myself by enumerating all my old arguments in favour of early death; but though still inclined to think twenty-five a seemly age at which to leave my friends inconsolable, I had no wish—none at all—to be cut off at nineteen. Besides, perhaps I should not be killed, but hideously injured and have to live on maimed or disfigured. . . . Could I pretend to be ill in the morning? I would have been a coward had I dared, but I didn't.

Imagine my relief next morning when I opened my eyes on a world turned white with frost, and looking out of my window saw my thwarted host ruefully thumping the iron lawn with a poker.

I flattered myself that my assumed disappointment was wholly convincing.

The second prophecy was that I should shortly become the wife of a "very eminent Liberal statesman whose initials were C. B.". By a startling coincidence, as I drove home I saw a newspaper placard bearing in huge type the words DEATH OF LADY CAMPBELL-BANNERMAN. . . . Obviously I was destined to become the second wife of her widower, the eminent Liberal statesman. I had nothing whatever against Campbell-Bannerman, but he was seventy-four years old, and though I had always been told a woman should be some years younger than her husband, in this case the gap seemed rather too wide. Besides, I had already made other plans for myself. In spite of his not being quite sound on the subject of Dickens—he had to become so later—I had decided to marry Beb, who was now a budding barrister, and our engagement, for so long an underground movement, was at last about to be announced.

For some time nearly every hostess, knowing my father to

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be opposed to my "entanglement", had left off asking us to the same parties either in London or in country houses. Earth after earth had been stopped. We had in fact been reduced to secret meetings either in the garden of Cavendish Square of which Beb as a resident had a key, or in Bedford Square of which my future sister-in-law Katharine Asquith hospitably lent us hers. In defiance of a hackneyed proverb I had even been extradited—sent to Canada for a whole winter.

Finally Beb after many frustrated efforts contrived to waylay his latterly noticeably elusive father. Lurking outside the door of the Cabinet Room, he pounced on the poor hunted man just as he emerged from a very crucial meeting.

Once cornered by his son, the badgered Prime Minister—who Heaven knows had enough on his mind at that time—was as benign and helpful as possible, and on the strength of his goodwill, the news of my engagement was broken to Grand-papa Wemyss, who also accepted the inevitable with characteristic courtesy and generosity. Just at that juncture—it was 1910—the year of the constitutional crisis—party politics were for the first time in my memory fiercely inflamed. So much indeed was a kind of Montagu and Capulet feeling abroad, that one of my friends was actually forbidden by her father to be my bridesmaid!

Needless to say, political feeling, as always, was far fiercer, and prejudice much more personal, below than above stairs. I can still see the expression on our butler's face as, addressing my mother, he said with great pain, "If you please, My Lady. A hobject has just arrived from—er—Mr. Lloyd George. Would Her Ladyship wish it to be brought upstairs?"

The "hobject" was a handsome china umbrella-stand.

Wedding presents were magnificent at that time, and thanks to the bridegroom's father being then Prime Minister, we had hundreds from strangers as well as from friends.

No sooner was my engagement announced than, as though determined to have all I could do at my father's expense, I had my appendix out, then no light matter, for instead of being made, as patients now are, to sit up immediately after the operation and leave my bed in a few days, I was kept as

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flat as a fish for six weeks, so naturally I still felt extremely feeble when only a few days after my resurrection my father gave me away on 10th July 1910 at Holy Trinity Church, Sloane Square. Aubrey Herbert was best man. The formidable retinue—twelve bridesmaids and two pages—that followed me up the aisle made me feel I must look a very inadequate kite to have so long a tail. The bridesmaids' dresses had had to be redesigned at the eleventh hour because of Margot's fully justified and forcibly expressed disapproval: "Do you want your bridesmaids to look like twelve loaves of bread?"

So crackling with party politics was the atmosphere of July 1910 that I told the ushers to substitute for the usual query "Bride or Bridegroom?" the words, "Conservative or Liberal?"

Every wedding I had ever attended had made me cry. My own was no exception to this rule.

Why, I wonder, are weddings less tearful than they used to be? In Edwardian days so much nose-blowing went on throughout the service that one might have supposed oneself in the audience at a very sad play rather than in the congregation at what was supposed to be a happy occasion.

It is years since I have seen the Bride's Mother weep. In my youth, unless memory deceives me, she was invariably in floods of tears. *Lacrimae Rerum . . .*? What is the explanation? Have we been given so many bitter tears to shed that we are no longer able to indulge in "tears—idle tears"?

SALAD-DAYS LETTERS

You say that though I have told you something about Edwardian girlhood in general, I have told you very little about Cynthia Charteris in particular. I should have thought I had told you more than enough, and to tell you the truth I don't really know very much about that nebulous, embryonic creature. I'm not implying that she was not self-conscious; but an inward-looking is not necessarily an inward-seeing eye, and though egocentric, she was not introspective; that is to say that, everlastingly asking herself what others thought of her, she made little attempt to discover what she was like for herself. However, if you really want further evidence of her absurdity I'll expose it by giving you three samples of her letters.

The first of these letters was written in answer to one from my mother accusing me of being "cliquey", a charge which, since I was ashamed of my tendency to like almost anyone—that is, anyone who liked me—struck me as ironic in the extreme. True, I was accused of belonging to a "Set"—"The Slips" we were labelled, because some of us were the children of members of that remarkable group of friends who used to be called "The Souls"—but in so far as it existed, my membership was almost unconscious and quite undeliberate. Here is my letter in self-defence:

I'm sorry you thought I was being "cliquey" at the ball. Of course I'm not "prejudiced against the Guards". You might as well accuse me of being prejudiced in favour of barristers. I don't see human beings in categories. Nor is it fair to say that I like only "clever men". I only mind the intolerant, aggressively stupid, who consider reading a vice and whose idea of damning someone is to say, "He thinks he's clever."



The Author with her Sisters

SALAD-DAYS LETTERS

Anyhow, even suppose, which I deny, my circle were narrow, why should you assume this to be my fault? I don't take the initiative. You don't call a taxicab-driver "exclusive" because every wayfarer doesn't hail him. Perhaps on this analogy you think that at parties I sometimes look as though my flag were down, instead of up. Maybe. If so, it is only because I am so afraid of appearing to expect to be asked to dance that from sheer nerves I sometimes cut someone I know quite well. I'm sorry you thought I wasn't taking trouble at dinner, but you know everyone finds D.S. difficult to talk to. Every topic I attempted proved like bathing in very shallow water. Even so, and despite my having been told that he had said my eyes were so far apart that I looked like a crab, I had quite got to like him by the end of dinner, which meant the loss of yet another prejudice, a very serious bereavement, I assure you, to one with so very, very few. I find the world only too full of people I like. You don't want me to become a sort of social glutton who likes absolutely *everybody*, do you? As for my other neighbour at dinner, even you must admit that he is a singularly funless person with about as much personality as a parsnip. However, easily pleased as I am, I could no doubt come to like even His Supreme Dullness *if he liked me*. But he doesn't, not one little bit. How right Rochefoucauld was—"We can always forgive those who bore us, but we cannot forgive those we bore." But honestly I *promise* you that you are barking up the wrong tree when you accuse me of being "cliquey". It isn't in the least a spontaneous bark either—don't think I don't know who put you up to it!—nor does it come well from one who for all her famous catholicity *was* herself labelled a "Soul". Haven't you yourself always told me—truthfully I'm sure—that there was nothing in the least deliberate, self-conscious, exclusive or superior about the "Souls"—who were merely a group of very intelligent, articulate people who happened to be friends and to share a love of good talk; and that in so far as they were a "charmed circle", the line was drawn by those outside, not inside, the circle.

The irony of my situation is that my friends deride me for my lack of discrimination. And they are right. If one sees too many people life becomes so over-crowded. I know one must sample before one selects, but—enough of this.

Now to carry the war into the enemy's country, I do wish you would REST more—not your body—I know you lie down for hours, but your nerves. Must you hold yourself responsible for all of the family all of the time? When I come home I'll turn the tables and

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scold you for your put-on-able-ness. Yes, you incorrigible forgiver, I'll *make* the worm turn!

The other two letters will show you that I have not exaggerated my moodiness. They were written to Beb. Why after such evidence of instability he should voluntarily have become my husband, I can't imagine. He could not say he had not been warned. (Because of the meaning of my name, Cynthia, he called my occasional lapses into misery "eclipses of the Moon".)

Seventh Hell Hall.

Sunday Morning.

Oh my prophetic soul! I knew I should be miserable at this shooting-party. Nobody loves me, and I have to stand for hours and hours in sodden woods watching gloomy men kill happy birds. All the other girls are brisk, and bright, with every hair of their heads always in place. I've no idea what sort of clothes could seem right for the occasion, but surely it is in the worst possible taste to wear pitiable bits and pieces of the very birds about to be slaughtered? One girl sports an entire pheasant's tail in her hat; another a head, all complete with beak and glass eyes.

They take immense pride in the number of birds the particular "Gun" by whom they stand brings down. I find each drive a horrid dilemma—either a holocaust of birds, or else a disgruntled man. Besides, being both bored and disgusted, I don't know what is expected of me. Ought I to talk to my "Gun", or not? The loader shouts "Coming over", and all that sort of thing, so there's nothing helpful left for me to say. Perhaps, however, I ought, as the case may be, to congratulate or condole. But how am I to know *which*? I can't estimate the velocity—isn't that the word?—of the flight of whatever bird my "Gun" has brought down, or missed, so often have no idea whether he has disgraced or distinguished himself. Once I said "Bad luck!" This seemed to give offence. Another time when a bird escaped with the loss of only a few tail feathers, I said, "Well tried!" as if my "Gun" had missed a shot at tennis. It didn't sound right. It *can't* have been right, yet silence seems so unsympathetic.

I suffered agonies of cold—rainbow face, rainbow hands—yet I was expected to stand stock still. However, I enjoyed the luncheon, and talking to the delightful keepers and the dogs. . . .

SALAD-DAYS LETTERS

The hunt ball was Friday. Dinner beforehand was awful. Not only did I find no echo in another's mind, but I had such a pain that I thought I was in for appendicitis. I could scarcely have talked even to a kindred spirit, and whom had I beside me? The myopic, throttled-looking equerry of the German princeling, and that monosyllabic young man who looks like a piece of sucked asparagus!

I'm afraid my face must have shown I was in pain, because from time to time our host jerked himself out of his habitual coma to bark jocularly across the table, "A penny for your thoughts, Fair Maid?" . . .

Twenty-mile-drive in a packed car. Acute sore throat joined the pain in my side. By the time we arrived at the ball I could scarcely speak. Imagine what fun I had. Too hoarse to talk. Unable to eat. One of my partners had no ear for time; another, so it seemed, was a centipede. As for the German Count, dancing with him was such an agonising experience that I wished my failure with him at dinner had been more decisive, and like all the worst dancers, he's mad keen and won't miss a single bar.

Never shall I forget my despair when as I heard the clock strike one, I remembered that the first carriage wasn't ordered till three!

Saturday. Shooting again in drizzle of sleet. . . . After dinner we danced amongst ourselves to one piano thumped by a doleful spinster with hair like a loofah.

Though our hostess looked like Life's tired-out guest she would not go to bed. By one o'clock even the beefiest girls were exhausted. To look at it, the dancing might have been some ingeniously devised purgatorial torment, each couple condemned like Paolo and Francesca to an eternity of togetherness, yet still the piano crashed on for ever and ever world without end.

Now it is Sunday morning. What shall we do all day? Besides feeling so ill, I've got a bad attack of social nausea. Intense distaste for self and others. Can scarcely suppress a scream when spoken to. The prospect of being nailed to the Merry-Go-Round of another Season makes me feel positively giddy. That awful *bustling* idleness! I know I shall do absolutely nothing; yet have less time to myself than a Prime Minister.

Sorry to inflict such a Jeremiad on you, but I am so utterly miserable—literally weeping with self-pity. I don't feel able to cope with life; yet death doesn't seem worth dying. I am losing my mirages without finding reality. At this moment there seems

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nothing to be sure of—nothing to look forward to—nothing to want—except to want. Oh, how I want to want!

I wish I didn't fall such a flop between two stools. Why can't I be either a fanatic or else a contented vegetable? I wish I were a Roman Catholic, or, failing that, a suffragette—anything *compelling*.

The one thing I am grateful for is my great gift of tears—a gift which I suppose is denied to you. How awful to be a man!

The third letter written only two days later shows the absurd see-saw of my spirits:

You *were* sympathetic about my wail, but of course by the time your letter came, I had completely forgotten my purely transitory sufferings. You must realise that I am a quite unconservative being. Remember that whenever I am depressed and therefore in a self-depreciatory mood, it means that something is chemically wrong. Provided I feel well, I defy you, bar physical pain, to devise any Hell which I couldn't enjoy. I don't mind monotony. I don't even mind what Byron called "the monotony of endless variety" and I like almost everybody.

Today I am positively bubbling with happiness; yes, like water just before it boils. I could walk and talk for ever. I could dance all night. I did dance till four last night, and made everyone paddle in the sea on our way home. Have you ever paddled in a chain of moonbeams at a quarter past four on a cold and frosty morning? The cold made one yelp, but it was heaven.

I'm afraid I must have sent you an awful letter. I can't even remember what I wrote. Did I really say I wished I were dead? So sorry, but I must have been very ill. Absurd to be so changeable, but still it cuts both ways, for each mood disbelieves in the other. Today I can't imagine ever feeling less hen-a-hoop. Christina Rossetti wasn't in it with her "glad heart". But how apposite—"My heart is like a rainbow shell that *paddles* in a halcyon sea."

Don't look sapient, shake your head and talk of "reaction". I admit it will be bad luck for you if tomorrow you happen to come in for the reaction. But meantime, please rejoice to know I am happy and seeing everything through that lovely golden mist again.

D. H. LAWRENCE

HEAVEN knows enough—too much—ink has been shed over D. H. Lawrence. More has been written about him than any other English author since Byron, yet you want me to add some thousands more to these millions of words. I shall make no attempt to “pluck out the heart of his mystery”. Too many have done this; but I will try to give you the impressions left on me by his actual presence and his letters.

Since, contrary to my own expectation, this volume is turning out to be all about my girlhood, in writing of Lawrence now instead of later, I go a little, though not very much, forward in my life.

My memory of the first time I ever saw him is very vivid. It was in the summer of 1913 that Eddie Marsh¹ brought him to visit Beb and me at Kingsgate, near Broadstairs, where we had taken a small house for some months.

Except the mere facts that he wrote poetry, was the son of a coal-miner, and had a tendency to consumption, we at that time knew nothing whatever about Lawrence; but the moment a slender, lithe figure stepped lightly into the room, we both realised almost with the shock of a collision that something new and startling had come into our lives.

I don't believe anyone could have been in Lawrence's presence for two minutes without being struck by his difference from other people. It was not a difference of degree; it was a difference of kind. Some electric, elemental quality gave him a flickering radiance. Apart from this strange otherness, one could see at once that he was preternaturally alive.

¹ Sir Edward Marsh, K.C.V.O., C.B.

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With his broad, jutting brow, and clear, sensitive, extremely blue eyes—very wide apart—he looked half faun, half prophet, and very young. He had not yet grown the tawny beard with which most people remember him.

He wasted no time—he never did—on small talk, but dived with a clean plunge into some subject that interested him, and he could not fail to make it interest everyone else. Words welled out of him. He spoke in flashing phrases; at times colloquially, almost challengingly so, but often with a startling beauty of utterance. His voice was now harsh, now soft. One moment he was lyrically, contagiously joyous; the next sardonic, gibing.

Lawrence and Frieda stayed at Kingsgate for some weeks, during which they spent much of their time with us. He loved to stroll on the sands under the white chalk cliffs, watching the gulls swinging, as he said, “like a half-born thought between the sky and the shore”.

You couldn't possibly be out of doors with Lawrence without becoming aware of the astonishing acuteness of his senses, and realising that he belonged to an intenser existence. Yet to some degree—and this was your great debt to him—he enabled you temporarily to share that intensified existence; for his faculty for communicating to others something of his own perceptiveness made a walk with him a wonderfully enhanced experience. In fact it made me feel that hitherto I had to all intents and purposes walked the earth with my eyes blind-folded and my ears plugged.

So receptive, so alert was he to every outdoor sight and sound, that I had the impression that he must know what it was like to be a bird or a wild animal—could feel himself inside the skin of anything living. I felt sure, too, that he would be able to see in the dark; would know the instant the wind changed; feel the turn of the tide and be affected by the moon.

I had not at that time yet read any of Lawrence's poetry, but when years later I came on the following verses, I remembered how much the moonlight on the sea had excited him at Kingsgate.

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“What can I do but dance alone,
Dance to the sliding sea and the moon,
For the moon on my breast and the air on my limbs,
And the foam on my feet?

For surely this earnest man has none
Of the night in his soul, and none of the tune
Of the waters within him, only the world's old
wisdom to bleat.

I wish a wild sea-fellow would come down the
glittering shingle,
A soulless neckar with winking seas in his eyes,
And falling waves in his arms, and the lost soul's kiss
On his lips; I long to be soulless, I tingle
To touch the sea in a last surprise
Of fiery coldness, to be gone in a last soul's bliss.”

and again :

“Give me the moon at my feet,
Put my feet upon the crescent, like a Lord,
O let my ankles be bathed in moonlight, that I may go,
Sure and moon-shod, cool and bright-footed
Toward my goal.”

It was obvious that Lawrence could, indeed, *had* to share the anguish of any living thing. Do you know his poem on the snared rabbit which gives such excruciating utterance to this power to identify himself—or rather inability *not* to identify himself—with any sentient creature?

“The rabbit presses back her ears,
Turns back her liquid anguished eyes
And crouches low; then with wild spring
Spurts from the terror of his oncoming
To be choked back, the wire ring
Her frantic effort throttling.
Piteous brown ball of quivering fears,
Ah, soon in his large, hard hands she dies,
And swings all loose from the swing of his walk.”

Of the almost uncanny awareness this poem reveals I had vivid evidence at Kingsgate when we found on the beach a

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gull with a broken wing. While Lawrence looked at that bird, he *was* that bird.

From first to last I very much liked Frieda. Exuberant, warm, burgeoning, she radiated health, strength and generosity of nature. While she and "Lorenzo", as she always called him, were at Kingsgate, it struck me that The Professor would like to meet—or rather that I should like him to meet—these new friends; so knowing him to be no great stickler for physical comfort, I invited him to stay in our rather primitive temporary home. "Yes, indeed, I'll come," he answered, in holiday mood, "I'll bring paper boats to sail. I'll even skim pebbles, if required." He did more than that. He bathed—a most spectacular sight, his sea-serpent length seeming to fill up the whole of Kingsgate bay.

This meeting was a great success. The Poet and The Professor were mutually fascinated. Even while they bathed they talked and talked; not all the waters of the rough, rude sea could silence them. In his "Collins" The Professor wrote, "How very, very much I liked that poet and his wife—a first-rate poet's wife", and how right he was, despite all that has been parroted and written to the effect that Frieda was not the "right" woman for Lawrence. To my mind one of the best sentences in Richard Aldington's book on Lawrence is "Whoever thinks he was not in love with Frieda is crazy."

About a year after my first meeting with Lawrence the war of 1914-1918 began. I had a letter from him in which he wrote, "The outbreak of war finished me, it was the spear through the side of all sorrows and hopes."

When I next saw him he really was visibly changed. At times he looked like one in acute physical pain. He spoke of the war as a "colossal and deliberate horror". Gusts of rage alternated with bitter grief. "My soul is fizzling savagely," he hissed, "it is sending me MAD!" and, in truth, ever afterwards he did seem to me to have, though of course with radiant lucid intervals, a touch of delirium—to talk and write like one whose temperature is several degrees above normal.

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A passionate subjectivist, now more than ever at odds with the nightmare facts of an objective world that impinged upon him on every side, he was reduced to gnashing, impotent misery. To him the war was not only the immediate horror it was to all of us; he had the despair of prevision as well. Convinced as he was that one war must always breed another, he saw it as a suicide-pact between the nations, as the beginning of the end—in his own words, “the end of democracy, the end of the idea of liberty and freedom, the end of the brotherhood of man, the end of the belief in the reign of love, the end of the belief that man desires peace, harmony, tranquillity, love and loving kindness. The end of Christianity . . . the end, the end, the end.” Because to him “the world on top was all torture and a flounder of stupidity”, he conceived the idea of founding that small ideal community on which from now on he set his heart and for which he was to search the world in vain. He repeatedly urged us to join this community, not a very practical suggestion as Beb was in the Army.

Despite his loathing and denunciation of the war, Lawrence could not fail to recognise—and this fact obsessed him—that it did at least bring about what he called “a slump in trifling”, and trifling was what he detested. But that human beings should find in war an inspiration and fulfilment nothing else seemed able to give them, that this should be so, was to him a confession of failure; a blasphemy that filled him with despair. Some other moral equivalent must be found; new values proclaimed; a wholly different idea of life conceived.

The sense of separatedness to which Lawrence now felt himself condemned by his attitude to the war made him bitterly unhappy. He could not bear to feel that what he called the “oneness of mankind” was broken in him. “Believe me,” he wrote to me, “I am infinitely hurt by being torn off from the body of my fellow-creatures . . . but so it is . . . and all heaven and hell lies in the chasm between.”

Rail, too, as he might, against his country and her values; crave, as he genuinely supposed himself to crave, for an entirely new life in some distant land; yet his aching love for his own country was inextinguishable. “I am English,” he insisted,

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“English in the teeth of all the world—even in the teeth of England!” Thus, though he tried hard to steel himself to exile by insisting that “our epoch was ended”, that what he called “the poor dear old ship of Christian Democracy” was scuttled at last, yet he could not bear the severance. “My life is one repeated, tortured *vale, vale, vale*”, he moaned.

“I am so sad”, he wrote to me in 1915, “for my country, for this great wave of civilisation, 2000 years, which is now collapsing, that it is hard to live. So much beauty and pathos of old things passing away and no new things coming. My God, it breaks my soul . . . the elm trees, the blue distance, the past, the great past, crumbling down, breaking down, not under the weight of the coming birds, but under the weight of many exhausted yellow leaves, that drift over the lawn, and over the pond, like the soldiers, passing away into the darkness of winter. I can’t bear it. For the winter stretches away, where all vision is lost and all memory dies out . . .”

Despite the yoke of inauspicious stars, it was, of course, not possible for anyone with so strongly springing a fount of vitality as Lawrence had, to be unhappy all the time. For one thing the countryside, which, as Aldous Huxley truly points out, is “at once the background and the principal personage of all his novels”, was a perpetual and enthralling distraction. Then, too, he did have spasms of hope. “Oh God!” he exclaimed, “what timid, tender hopes one has. Then again the cruel blackening frost!”

He even had moods of shoulder-shrugging—though only very brief moods. Why not wash his hands of a lunatic world? In 1916 he wrote to me, “When I see the lambs skip up from the grass in the sharp air and flick their hind legs friskily at the sky, then really I see how absurd it is to grieve and persist in melancholy”; . . . and in another letter: “The sun shines brilliantly, and the sea ruffles its shoulders and doesn’t care, so why should I or anybody care? So many worlds have passed—but there is only one of each of us”; and again: “One has a certain order inviolable in one’s soul. There one sits as in a crow’s nest, out of it all. Whatever happens I can sit in my crow’s nest of a soul and grin.”

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But to sit in his crow's nest of a soul and grin was of course precisely what Lawrence, obsessed as he was by the conviction that he was the prophet of a new Gospel of life, could never, never do. "My head feels like a hammer, that must keep on hammering at a nail", he exclaimed. "But the only thing I know is that in the long run the hammer is tougher than the nail." . . . Was it . . . ?

Obsessed though Lawrence was by the thought of war, his letters were not all on the same subject. In 1915 I had one from him about his project of starting a paper which was to be read by "people who care about the real living truth of things". This paper, to which the other main contributors were to be Katherine Mansfield and Middleton Murry, came into brief existence under the name of *The Signature*. Lawrence made desperate efforts to interest people in his venture. "If you really do care about affirmation in this life of negation," he wrote, "please do get the other people who care to subscribe for the paper; yes, even if you have to make yourself a bit of a nuisance. It is really *something*; the seed, I hope, of a great change in life: the beginning of a new religious era, from my point. I hope to God the new religious era is starting into being also at other points, and that soon there will be a body of believers in this howling desert of unbelief and sensation."

I did make myself quite a "bit of a nuisance" to friends and acquaintances, most of whom were at that time far too painfully preoccupied with the present to turn their thoughts to a visionary future, but my efforts were vain. As might have been expected, the poor little "seed" fell on very stony ground, and perished after the third number came out, a bitter disappointment to its instigator, who touchingly enough had really seemed naïvely to hope that it might prove the salvation of the world.

The following passages from my diary tell of an afternoon spent at that time with the Lawrences:

Littlehampton, 21st June 1915. The Lawrences came for the day. I wanted Beb and D.H. to have a talk, so to begin with I strolled with Frieda, leaving the two men together on the beach. She poured out to me about the difficulties of her life as the wife of a

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"genius". People, she complained, particularly women—particularly one woman—treat her as a mere appendage and will insist on "explaining" her own husband to her, telling her that he is a "being dropped straight from the sky".

Later we all four sat on the sands. Lawrence talking, as he always does, with his entire body, railed against the war. He seems to have an obsession that to the minds of most soldiers destruction is an end, not the means to an end, a delusion which Beb—hard that by soldiering he of all people should be accused of indulging in an orgy!—in vain tried to dislodge.

In a discussion on the Germans, Frieda admitted that her countrymen had no sense of what the English mean by "Fair Play". Lawrence maintained that the German theory of war, though "filthy", was perfectly logical, and that if all nations waged it in the same way, some conclusion might at least be arrived at, which with the present lunatic compromise between utter barbarism and half-hearted humanitarianism, could never be.

Then, with one of his sudden changes of gear, he became blithe and amusing, complaining how—small wonder—strangers always talked to him in the train, particularly colonels and curates, and imitating—he is a marvellous mimic—their faces, voices and vocabularies.

Many of Lawrence's letters to me gave brilliantly expressed, uncannily discerning character sketches of people he had just met. Richard Aldington is right when he says, "It was strange and a little frightening even to those whom he loved and who loved him to realise that he possessed not only an intense appreciation of the living passing moment but an uncanny awareness of people and a habit of making intuitive guesses about the secret lives and thoughts of others." In one letter he wrote, "your showing me that detestable sketch of yourself" (I have no idea to what work of art this refers) "reminded me that I had done a rather good word-sketch of you in a story. I think it good. Anyway I bet in words it is better than anything Sargent or anyone has done in paint." He was quite right; the "word-sketch" in this story, one that has never been published in this country, was very good.

Nearly all Lawrence's letters contained wonderful descriptive passages of birds, trees, sky or animals. How he saw things! And with his incomparable gift of expression made

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you see them too. I had often wondered of what matter-of-fact object the sight of a bat on the wing reminded me. When I read "wings like bits of umbrella", at last I knew.

However much Lawrence theoretically longed to set out in search of a new way of life, it was, of course, not possible for him to leave England until the war ended. For some time he rented for five pounds a year a cottage in Cornwall, from which, seized by a sudden desire for a city, he would occasionally make a dart to London. At other times he simply couldn't endure to see his fellow-creatures in the mass. "I couldn't be in London long," he said to me one day as though marvelling at my own amoeba-like insensitivity. "I should want to tie tin cans to people's coat-tails."

On the whole, he was very well content with his Cornish retreat. In letters written to me from there he makes no complaint, except smilingly, of certain neighbours. "There are near us some herb-eating occultists; they fast, or eat nettles; they descend naked into old mine shafts, and there meditate for hours and hours, upon their own transcendent infinitude; they descend on us like a swarm of locusts, and devour all the food on shelf or board; they even gave a concert, and made the most fearful fools of themselves."

Before long there came a terrible blow. Because poor Frieda was a German, Lawrence was ordered to leave Cornwall in three days. Strange irony that he who, though he knew less than nothing about military or naval matters, had once been arrested in Germany as an English spy, should now be suspected of being a German spy! The shock of this expulsion order affected Lawrence terribly. Like the suppression of *The Rainbow*, it was one of what he called his "deaths in belief". In Frieda's moving book, *Not I But the Wind*, she wrote, "When we were turned out of Cornwall something changed in Lawrence for ever." A passage from my diary describes Lawrence immediately after this shock.

Portman Mansions, 16th Oct. 1917. D.H. came to see me. He and Frieda have just been expelled from Cornwall. He was in

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intense distress, not only terribly hurt, but utterly at a loss to know what to do next. London is very bad for his health, which Cornwall suited; he doesn't know where to go, and all the money he now has in the world is the prospect of an advance of £18 on the little book of poems that he intends to dedicate to me.

In his tortured state of mind he inveighed against quite a few of his fellow-creatures. He told me he always knew the instant he met people whether they could ever be possible to him as companions, and that, just as others fell in love, so he not seldom "fell in hate". (I remembered this when I came on his passage about the "grating of people with their presence gnawing".) He looks terribly ill—as though every nerve in his body were exposed.

Still quivering from this shock, Lawrence stayed in London for some time. The one thing which seemed able temporarily to take his mind off the war was going to the opera, to which—Lady Cunard had just lent me a box at Covent Garden for one night a week—he and Frieda came with me several times. I especially remember one evening when Augustus John came with us—never before had I sat between two red beards, nor have I since—and also a very young Guardsman who showed pained surprise when Frieda, looking every inch a Richthofen, told him how very much smarter she thought the Prussian Guards than the Household Brigade! Another time Robert Nichols came, looking unbelievably strained and taut. Between the first and second acts of *Aida* he whispered to me, "I think Lawrence writes like an archangel, but I deplore his obsession and occasional obscurity." He also said how immensely he felt what he called Lawrence's "strange charm", adding, "But I am afraid he would disapprove of my own poems and accuse me of 'glorifying war'."

I remember expecting that should Lawrence read Beb's poems they too would be condemned on precisely the same grounds, but he asked me to give them to him, saying, "I feel a vivid sympathy with your husband just now; though probably I shall hate some of his poems, as I'm sure he hates some of mine."

"I am very glad to have read Beb's poems", he wrote. "At

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any rate he is not a poet of death like Rupert Brooke: one can smell death in Rupert: but thank heaven not really here: only the sniff of curiosity, not the great inhalation of desire. (You won't mind what I say?) I think Herbert Asquith is a poet—which is after all the most valuable thing on earth. But he is not really writing himself at all here—not his own realities. Still it is the writing of a poet, thank God. Only let him burst through the dry old self that is on him like a snake, come out his fresh real self: and he is a poet and a leader."

Despite Lawrence's saying, and believing, that to be a poet was "the most valuable thing in the world", it was obvious that what he particularly disliked was to be himself regarded primarily as a poet—a mere dreamer—instead of as a serious thinker. "Don't think of me as a raving impracticable person", he begged.

But I'm sure you will agree that it was a little difficult *not* to regard primarily as a poet the man from whom at the most critical juncture of the war I had a letter with the following lovely, but not exactly practical, passage: "It is much better for you to go to Stanway. The Spring is here, the cuckoo is heard, primroses and daffodils are out in the wood. It is very lovely. I feel that the buds as they unfold are really stronger than the armies and all the war. I feel as if the young grass growing would upset all the cannon on the face of the earth, and that Man with his evil stupidity is after all nothing; the leaves just brush him away."

Yes, whatever he might discuss, however much he might mock, rail, theorise and denounce, it always seemed to me, from the first time I saw him, crystal clear that the essence of Lawrence's nature *was* poetry. Indeed I often had the impression that he thought, so to speak, with his solar plexus rather than with his brain. This was deliberate, of course, because—as in his, to my mind perfect, preface to the published Letters, Aldous Huxley makes clear—Lawrence was a *clever* man as well as a genius. He had even been a great passer of examinations. The fact was that he disapproved of too much knowledge. To his way of thinking, it diminished Man's sense of wonder—obscured his intuitive perception of some great

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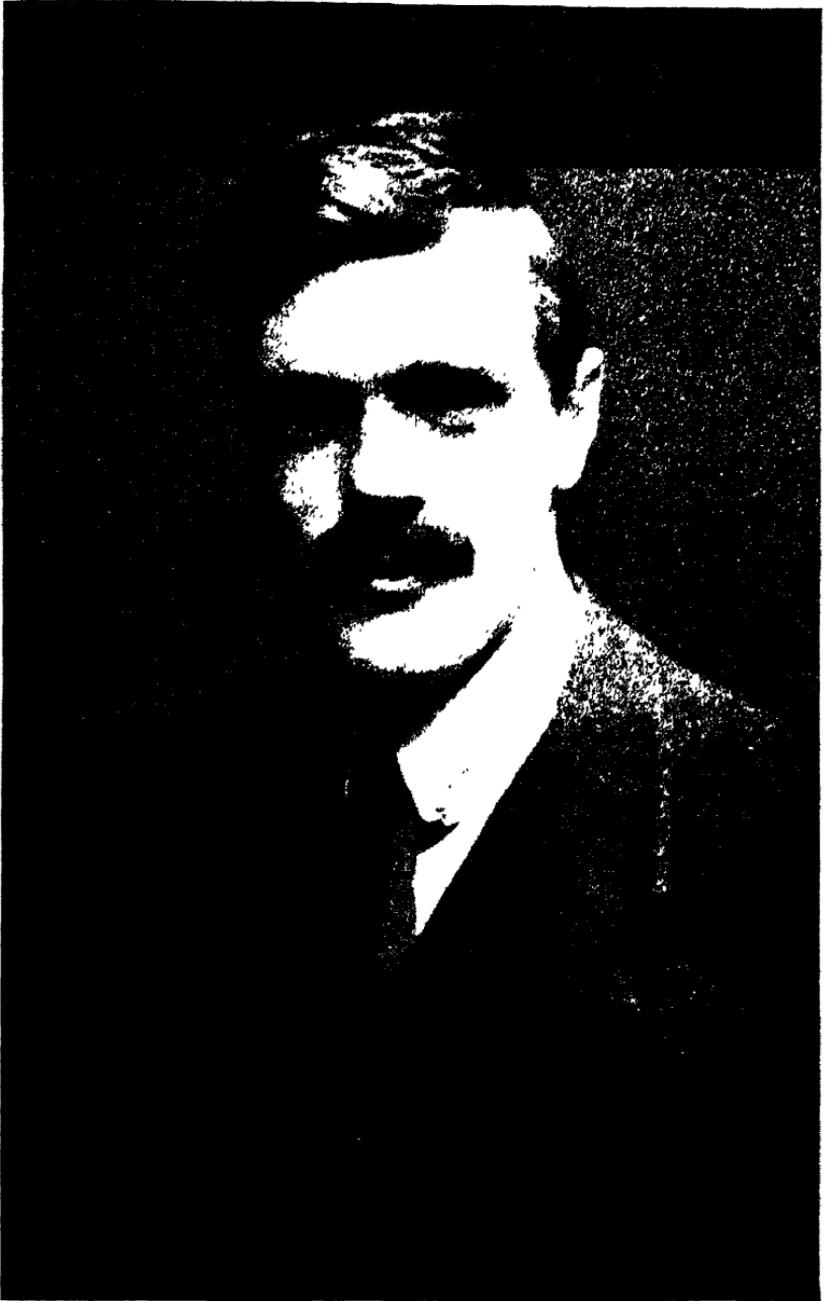
mystery. That was why he especially detested science. Like Keats, he would fervently have drunk destruction to Newton for having explained the rainbow!

On certain points it was utterly futile for anyone to reason with him. If he did not *feel* a truth, he simply would not listen to the evidence. Often, I think, he did not even reason with himself, but just gave utterance to convictions arrived at without any conscious process of thought.

“Not I but the wind that blows through me!
A fine wind is blowing the new direction of Time.
If only I could let it bear me, carry me,
If only it carry me!
If only I am sensitive, subtle, delicate, a winged gift!
If only, most lovely of all, I yield myself and am borrowed
By the fine, fine wind.”

He would passionately denounce the wrongness of things—wrongnesses obvious enough for anyone to see—without offering any coherent plan as to how they were to be righted. His mind was too cosmic to concern itself with practical politics. If “Stanway was a jewel on a leper’s body”, he had less than no faith in those who attempted to prescribe any practical cure for this leprosy. If Balfour was dismissed as an “old poodle”, Lloyd George was something very much less harmless than an “old poodle”. “Oh, do not think I blame the Government”, he wrote to me in 1916. “The fools who howl at the Government make my blood boil. I respect the Prime Minister because I believe in his essential decency and I think Lloyd George etc. are toads. As for the people—Labour itself—it is hopeless, as hopeless as Lloyd George or Balfour—just the green half of the same poisonous apple. . . . We MUST not have Labour in power any more than Capital.”

But I said I would not attempt a diagnosis of Lawrence. Let me keep to first-hand impressions. I told you in *Haply I May Remember* of his curious behaviour when he invaded Augustus John’s studio. Two other incidents stand out clearly in my memory. One hot afternoon at Littlehampton when Beb, newly home from the Front on short leave, was lying



D. H. Lawrence, 1914

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blissfully relaxed on the beach, he idly began to throw pebbles at a bottle that was bobbing about on the ripples of a calm sea. Lawrence, seeing a soldier thus harmlessly employed, balefully accused him of the will to destroy. Why? Because he was obsessed by the idea that the real cause of war was the terrible nullity of people's lives; and that this nullity induced an unconscious craving for any intensity of experience, no matter how hideous it might be. Yes, even the languid pastime of throwing pebbles was evidence, he contended, of this latent craving to destroy, the craving that found satisfaction in war.

Fighting, I assure you, was very far from being a self-indulgence to Beb (few men can ever less have needed its stimulus to make them fully appreciate the advantages of peace), but it was in vain for him to protest that he had not the faintest desire for the destruction of anything—not even of a medicine-bottle. Although during the course of the argument Lawrence did laugh—for whatever may be thought to the contrary, he scarcely ever betrayed lack of humour in talk—yet he remained not wholly convinced.

The second incident was after the war, when Beb and I had just returned to our own house which had been let for four years. Striding up and down our small drawing-room, Lawrence, in one of his moments of sudden tension, took a violent aversion to one piece of furniture. It was a not-very-good but fairly harmless little French table. Temporarily, however, it became to Lawrence the symbol of what he called the "Would be", the self-consciously pretentious. And, indeed, such was the persuasive force of his eloquence, that whilst he inveighed against the offending object, it did begin to look terribly trivial and strainedly elegant. We never liked that poor little table again. In fact before long we sold it. Inflamed by one table, Lawrence railed against all the "furniture of life" with which, he insisted, humanity was over-occupied—caring far too much for material objects, far too little for the essence of human relationships. "Come away!" he shrilled out, looking at me as though I stood in immediate deadly peril. "Come away. Free yourself at once, or before

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you know where you are, your furniture will be on top instead of under you." This admonition gave me a nightmare in which I was trampled to death by the legs of my own tables and chairs.

I often wonder how different my idea of Lawrence would be had I had no first-hand impressions; never met, but only read him. Perhaps what would most surprise those who know him only through his books is that Lawrence the talker never seemed, like Lawrence the writer, obsessed or even preoccupied with sex—a word he detested—"mean, belittling, sor-did-ifying word" he called it. In fact, though I heard him talk with so many different people, I can't remember ever hearing him discuss sex, to which in a letter in answer to one from me, asking him to contribute to a book intended for the young, he alluded as "the bee in my bonnet which I assure you buzzes not over-loud". But I do vividly remember the abhorrence—he had a curiously prim, prudish side—with which he spoke of Casanova and certain other authors. No Puritan could have protested more violently against writing that deliberately set out to entertain readers with intended indecency. A mystical materialist, he wanted to make sex valid, devout—beautiful instead of ashamed. With this aim he even tried—hopeless task—to rehabilitate irretrievably degraded words; to lift them out of the gutter in which they had lain for centuries. His method may often have been mistaken, but his intention—to release humanity from that degradation of sex which gives so many a fear of it—was always burningly idealistic.

Not only was his sense of humour insufficiently robust to stand any jokes about sex, he was also profoundly shocked by promiscuity. This being so, probably the most hurting irony of all his life was that, misinterpreted, his doctrines were constantly invoked in defence of behaviour which he himself thought utterly reprehensible.

What else about the man as I remember him would most surprise those who know only the writer? But for the one big gap in it, his sense of humour? Yes, but probably still more

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his high spirits, gaiety—or rather joyousness. Few readers of Lawrence would suspect how much sheer fun one enjoyed in his company, and how often the laughter was without any bitterness, wholly delighted and delighting. For despite his faculty—a faculty which makes for unhappiness—for distinguishing between his own feelings and merely accepted ones, inherited or imbibed in childhood; and despite the almost terrifying honesty that this faculty gave him, Lawrence had such intense enjoyment in the mere fact of being alive, and when he was happy, his happiness was wonderfully contagious.

For one thing he had that thrice blessed gift of utter absorption in the task of the moment, were it cooking the omelette that was the best I ever tasted, laying a fire, making a hat or milking a cow. I don't believe there was any manual work in which he would not have taken delight and found poetry. In a letter to me describing how he had scrubbed the filthy floor of a cottage he had taken in Italy, he wrote: "To see the dark floor flushing crimson, the dawn of deep red bricks rise from the night of filth, was enough to make one burst forth in paeans and hymns." In writing of the boy Lawrence, E. T. (the Miriam of *Sons and Lovers*) declares, "no task seemed dull or monotonous to him; he brought such vitality to the doing that he transformed it into something creative." In the same lovely book she writes, "there was a quality of lightness about him, something that seemed to shine from within . . . he was like the naked flame of life."

Did I, myself, see that side of Lawrence called his "dark self", the side which Richard Aldington says was "the inevitable counterpart to his vivid light self"? I'm sorry if this makes dull reading, but I can't honestly say that I ever did. Desperately unhappy I saw him—tormented at times—but I never had so much as a glimpse of that almost maniacally violent, perverted Lawrence of whom some of his "friends" have had so much to say and to write. His very misery nearly always seemed shot through with poetry and something akin to ecstasy. Even though his eyes might be dark with despair,

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I never saw them five consecutive minutes without a twinkle. Nor did I ever meet him in one of his reported moods of longing for oblivion—for “heavy sealing darkness, silence, all immovable”.

In my experience of him he was very much more of a Jeremiah in his letters than in his talk, which I never remember as being long without laughter. Did he not himself write, “One sheds one’s sicknesses in books—repeats and presents again one’s emotions to become ‘master of them’”?

I wish I had been older, or rather, less absurdly young for my age, when I met him. I would have questioned him much more deeply. Yet I must have argued with him more than I can remember. In answer to what protest of mine, I wonder, did he write, “I don’t know that I am any the better for your rebuke.” He never gave me any conceivable cause for a quarrel, though from time to time he girded at me for being a “woman with weapons she would never use” (what these weapons going to rust were he never told me). Sometimes he accused me of “subscribing to the war” and inveighed against what he called my miserable mesmerised acquiescence in it. A “verbal drubbing” he called one of these written attacks, and said he hoped I should find no “little adder of offence therein”.

At one time, too, he upbraided me for the amount I “went out”. Comparing such gregariousness to indiscriminate charity, and maintaining such a life to be no “real existence at all”, he urged an immediate retreat to the country and that I should do my own housework. When, shortly after this, I told him that I had become secretary to J. M. Barrie, he laughed and said “I wondered what sort of a rococo job you had found!” but if this was a sneer, it was against the employee not the employer, for odd though it may seem to you, these two men, so dissimilar both in their writings and in themselves, had a mutual admiration. Barrie was so much struck by *Sons and Lovers* that he wrote to Lawrence about it. When Lawrence, who had long greatly liked the book *Margaret Ogilvie*, received this “Fan” letter, he went, accompanied by Frieda, to see Barrie. An interesting friendship might have ensued, but unfortunately the uninhibited Frieda went too straight to one

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particular point. She never could understand any embarrassment about money or see any reason why it should not be transferred from a well-filled to an empty pocket—had the full purse been her own, her views would have been the same. “How do you do, Sir Barrie,” she said. “I hear you make an income of fifty thousand a year” (interesting news for Barrie!). “Why shouldn’t you give Lorenzo enough money to pay for our passage to Australia?” at which her host, who like most people preferred to give unasked, shrunk back into his shell.

The discovery that Lawrence and Frieda were in close touch with Barrie’s sometime wife, then Mrs. Gilbert Cannan, raised yet another barrier of embarrassment; a great pity, for Lawrence would have been an exciting ingredient in that gallimaufry of guests whom, as I shall tell you in my next and last volume, Barrie later on entertained at Stanway.

So much has been written about Lawrence’s “foundered” relationships. Probably, like most exceptional men—poets in particular—who tend to attribute to others their own perceptions, he was often angry with people because they could not understand what they were congenitally incapable of understanding. To one of Lawrence’s hypersensitivity, to be thwarted in the search for understanding and sympathy was to suffer bitter disillusion—almost a sense of betrayal—

“With a gentleness came I
With my heart in my hands like a bowl;
 but they spilt it triumphantly
And tried to break the vessel and
 violate my soul.”

But if some of Lawrence’s relationships did founder, the most important one never did. Whatever quarrels he and Frieda may have had—I never saw one, but heaven knows enough has been written of them—their relationship remained the essential thing in his life. It may or may not be true that Lawrence, as we have so often been told, from time to time hurled a plate at his wife’s head. What of it? Is it so very important? Less memorable men have done as much and more in this line without becoming world-famed for it. What

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is unquestionably true is that he never ceased to depend on her, and loved her until the end. "Whatever happened on the surface of everyday life, there blossomed the certainty of the unalterable bond between us."

How many conflicting things have been said of this strange being whom Aldous Huxley calls "a man superior in kind, not degree, to all his contemporaries". While one writer accuses him of "savagery", another pronounces him "the gentlest, kindest person in all human relations that anyone could be on this earth". One complains of his irrationality and "violence"; another writes "he is so reasonable and so overwhelmingly good that there is no end to it". What, indeed, has not been said of him whom Middleton Murry acclaimed as "the starry genius of our time" . . .? Almost everything, except that he was *not* a genius.

For those bewildered by apparent inconsistencies I recommend a thorough reading of his poems. In them, I think, rather than in aberrations of behaviour, is to be found the essential Lawrence.

To come back to my own memories of him. Now that he has been dead for twenty years, what are the impressions that still persist? First, that radiant quality of lightness which struck everyone. Secondly his intuition, which was like a sixth sense. Thirdly—surprising perhaps to you who have read so much of his violence—a singular *gentleness*. Yes, despite all the anguish, fever and fret. This is not to deny that he could often be bitter and searingly derisive—largely, I think, because, as Vernon Lee said, "he saw more than human beings are meant to see, and that was why he hated them so much". It was also why he loved them so much.

Does unhappiness predominate in my memories of D. H. Lawrence . . .? No, it does not, for, anguished though he might be by all "the flounder and stupidity on top", he was always *cosmically* conscious—always raptly, quiveringly aware of the mystery of the world; and to him that mystery was always, in his sense of the word divine, a *divine* mystery.

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So many people here and in America have said "You *must* write about Eliza". Miss Eliza Wedgwood was in every sense of the word our nearest neighbour, and very much a part of that Stanway of which H. G. Wells wrote. She continually came over to us, and all our visitors were taken to see her in that orchard-set, grey-gabled cottage which became so dear to numbers of people, both for its own Cotswold charm and as the very personal setting of a much-loved friend.

To this little home, perched high above the lovely village of Stanton, Eliza delighted to welcome with a hospitality which had a unique quality, not only friends, but countless friends of friends. Tea in "The Cottage", preferably on a Sunday, when, her one maid being out, Eliza could, as she preferred, entertain us in the kitchen instead of in the parlour, became a regular institution. As I write, I see the familiar scene—the raftered ceiling with its oak-beams, painted, like all the doors of the cottage, Mediterranean blue by her great friend John Sargent, the gleaming coppers, the latticed windows, the huge table homerically spread—bannock cake and rose-leaf jam were two of the *spécialités de la maison*—either for hordes of children silently munching before they darted out to hunt for Easter eggs hidden all about the garden, or for a company of grown-up people assembled to talk rather than to eat. And *how* they talked—deafeningly sometimes under that low ceiling. Were I a Conversation Piece painter, one of my favourite subjects would be that picturesque kitchen and some of its gatherings. Among the guests I see most vividly are Mary Anderson, Arthur Balfour, Ruth Draper, George Wyndham, H. G. Wells, Walter Raleigh, and J. M. Barrie. Usually they are just talking—talking with immense zest, now one at a time, now

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all at once, but in some pre-First World War pictures they are listening to the golden-haired Percy Grainger singing one of the rediscovered folk-songs for which he had combed the Cotswolds—even its workhouses—to collect.

Eliza Wedgwood was a great-great-granddaughter of the famous potter. The cottage did not become her home until she was well over forty. Until then she lived with her extremely handsome and domineering mother in the “mansion” of the village, a lovely Tudor house called Stanton Court. Mrs. Wedgwood always treated her youngest daughter as though she were still a child, though an exceptionally useful and industrious child; so much so that, so long as her mother lived, Eliza, still primarily, indeed almost professionally, a daughter, can scarcely be said to have been allowed to become a person in her own right.

She did, however, always find time to devote much of her immense energy to the welfare of the village of Stanton, to which when her mother died in 1908 she returned after a brief interval of absence to take up her abode in The Cottage for the rest of her days.

Thus practically the whole of her long, and intensely active life was passed in the same highly-favoured little village, which was truly said to be her “family”, so intimate a personal concern did she make the welfare of its every son and daughter.

Not that her energies were ever narrowly localised. From the first inauguration of the District Nursing Association she made and continued to hold herself responsible for its local furtherance; and it was the same with I don't know how many other county organisations, of all of which she was the extremely lively heart and soul.

Even in this era of rapid change, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire have not forgotten how great a pioneer Eliza was; how many obligations now officially shouldered by the Government she undertook entirely on her own initiative. To give one example of the versatility of her private enterprise: many years before the nation conceived any sense of responsibility for the mouths of its school children, Eliza, entirely on her own idea and at her own expense, engaged a dentist to

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come at regular intervals to examine and treat the teeth of all the sons and daughters of Stanton. The dentist's dread activities were carried on in her own sitting-room, but even such a torture-chamber association—this was long before the days of even nominally "Painless Dentistry"—failed to lessen "Miss E-loi-zar's" popularity with the children who suffered and benefited from her scheme.

Perhaps the most difficult of all Eliza's self-imposed tasks was to persuade the fathers of clever schoolboys to allow their sons to take up the scholarships they had won; for once a boy became old enough to bring home a weekly wage, few agricultural labourers could see the sense of wasting any more time on "book-larning". To win her way in this matter, Eliza often needed to draw heavily not only on her unlimited supply of moral courage but on her limited purse as well.

Generosity was, indeed, the mainspring of Eliza's character—unstinted generosity with time, trouble and, when necessary, money. I doubt whether in all the annals of practical Christianity anyone has ever shared so modest an income with so many others—more literally made a very little money go a very long way. (Five pounds was the sum set aside yearly to spend on her clothes.)

But if she was the most altruistic woman I have known, she was one of the least self-righteous. I don't think she was even particularly ethical. Compassion, not conscience, actuated her. She gave, not because she thought she ought to give, but just because a spring of love gushed from her heart.

I suppose that was why her unselfishness, extreme enough to be called selflessness, never gave any uncomfortable sense of sacrifice. Nor did it make her less of a personality. On the contrary, she was what with smiling affection is called A Great Character.

If she was incapable of a harsh act, Eliza could be bracingly caustic in speech, candour indeed was one of her traits, for, widely accepted as a Character, she was fully licensed to be trenchantly outspoken. Humbug, indolence, indifference—any form of shirking, she could not, to use her own expression "away with!"

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Talking of people whom she did not like, and they were not few, Eliza was brimful of entertainingly-expressed prejudices. She herself would have been the first to admit that she was as violently biased against some people as she was biased in favour of others.

Even those she loved with a love scarcely this side of idolatry, though they would have been hard put to it to think of any sin by which to forfeit her love, could nevertheless rely on her as implicitly for criticism as for sympathy.

Socially, Eliza was by no means, at first sight, everyone's "Cup of Tea". Except for her very fine, expressive eyes, she was, I suppose, until towards the end of her life, plain. (In any case I'm sure her mother had told her so, and she had accepted the verdict.)

Many people thought she talked, not only too much, but too loud. It must be admitted that when she became over-excited—and company sometimes went to her head like wine—her voice did vie with the peacock's.

At times, under the influence of a kind of social intoxication she became so exuberant that she almost screamed instead of spoke her words. But if some strangers were put off by those bursts of ebullience which made her travesty her true self, I remember no one who on closer acquaintance did not come to like both herself and her company. As for her many devoted friends, they were utterly dependent on her.

Eliza's occasional overwhelming vehemence may well have been partly due to her long subordination to her mother. Perhaps after being pent-up for so many years, an unavowed sense of release never quite lost its exhilarating effect. Living alone may also have contributed. I notice solitude usually results in one of two extremes. Some become taciturn, others garrulous.

Though one or other of Eliza's self-appointed duties kept her at Stanton nearly every day in the year, she occasionally paid a brief visit to London, where she delighted in meeting new people. For this she had wonderful facilities, being fortunate

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in having for her niece that remarkable hostess Sibyl Colefax, of whom more hereafter.

Besides excursions to London, Eliza enjoyed some rapturous holidays in Italy with John Sargent and his sister Emily; but, tethered as she was to Stanton by a thousand ties of duty as well as affection, no one ever belonged to one place more than she did.

I often stayed in The Cottage for weeks at a time, and I can't remember a single hour in which a knock on that blue front door, always propped open however cold the weather, did not announce that some villager had come to seek Eliza's help. Anything might be wanted—a bottle of medicine, a letter to a hospital, a lift along the road, the use of the village hall, or a so-called "loan" of money. Often the appeal would be merely for advice or for sympathy. Someone had had a quarrel or bad news; or was suffering from tooth- or heart-ache, or from a leaking roof. No one knocked at that blue door in vain.

Though Stanton did appreciate Eliza's services to the full, it gave quaint expression to its gratitude. When at her mother's death it was supposed that "Miss E-loi-sar" was leaving the village, a subscription was raised for a silver cup to be given to the benefactress; the inscription engraved on this cup was "Presented to Miss Eliza Wedgwood in token of gratitude on her leaving the village of Stanton".

This was not the only time Stanton showed a happy way of putting things. I remember a meeting held in honour of its admirable landlord upon whom a knighthood had just been conferred, at which the spokesman ended his tribute: "And we would also like heartily to congratulate our landlord's wife on so recently becoming a lady"!

The great devotion of Eliza's life was to my mother; and to a share of this devotion all my mother's children—and their children too—succeeded by mere hereditary right. I can remember no phase of family life—certainly no crisis of any kind—in which she did not take intimate part. From infancy

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onwards we could all rely on her for understanding, sympathy, encouragement, advice and fun.

Her friendship to my mother's family was no sinecure, for fond as we children were of her, we had ways of showing our affection which, though complimentary, since they proved our complete trust in her capacity to take things in the right spirit, cannot have been wholly pleasurable. When my mother was obliged to go away from home, Eliza would be invited to come to stay at Stanway to "keep an eye" on its children, and have a change. She had a change all right.

Perhaps the vehemence of her manner was provocative. Or was it her unresentfulness that made her such a victim of practical jokes? Whatever the reason, she spent many hours locked up in her bedroom and was, I'm afraid, given some very peculiar things to eat. We also thought it everlastingly funny to unpin her false hair and wind it round the handle of the front door. Another favourite sport was in defiance of the coachman's shaken fist to put ourselves in between the shafts of the brougham and take Eliza for an extremely bumpy ride. Bowling along the hard high-road in a child-drawn vehicle must have been an alarming experience, but Eliza's screams, however gratifyingly loud to her tormentors, never held any reproach. She used, however, to say that after her fortnight's "change" at Stanway, she returned to Stanton three-quarters of a stone lighter in weight.

The last twenty or so years of Eliza's life were cruelly hampered by the painful arthritis which crippled her. No longer to be able to walk over the hills she loved or, in her own words, to "step over" the mile and a half that separated her from my mother, was a deprivation hard to bear, but she never allowed lameness to diminish her altruistic activities; nor could it ever teach her even the rudiments of self-consideration.

The knell of September 1939 found Eliza not only crippled, but desolate from the recent death of my mother. Before long, wartime restrictions cut her off from nearly all those she still cared to see, while in The Cottage, as everywhere else for the ageing and infirm, housekeeping became dauntingly difficult.

Very weary, very lonely, very sad; just as someone utterly

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tired-out longs to go to bed; so, I think, Eliza longed to die, and surely few had better earned the right to sing *Nunc Dimittis*; yet even at well over eighty years of age, she still could not consider herself, but had to exhaust her ebbing strength in unremitting care of the yet older sister who shared her home. Once this last sad duty was faithfully discharged, she herself sank into illness from which there could be no real recovery; nor could those who loved her wish the mere epilogue to such a life prolonged.

Their thoughts, released from the present, gladly fly back to the past, with its never-fading memories of "Eliza Cottage", as a little boy—confusing two delights—used to call her. Crutch in hand, black lace over her head, they picture her, as they had so often seen her awaiting those she loved—for ever on the look-out for their arrival. In their vision of her she sits at the always open window—how often one longed to shut it, but the birds of the air who shared that renowned hospitality must at all hours be fed—and as her friends draw near the blue door, the noble eloquent countenance on which—for her spirit has long since come through her face—the years have wrought, instead of as on others destroyed, beauty, lights up in radiant heart-warming welcome.

No other greeting can even remind me of hers.

* * *

"Please put me beside The Priest", guests would plead if they knew I was going to arrange the places at the Stanway dinner-table. The Priest was the nickname by which, because he looked so unlike anyone else in holy orders, the Reverend H. B. Allen was universally known. For many years The Priest had been the headmaster of the well-known private school at Temple Grove (the original residence of the Sir William Temple to whom Swift was secretary); but being an ardent lover of the Cotswolds he used to spend his holidays at Coscombe, a house only about a mile from Stanway, which he rented from my father.

After selling his school very badly—for in all business matters

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he infallibly did the wrong thing—The Priest fell into financial difficulties from which his nature made it impossible for him to extricate himself. For a while he took in pupils at Coscombe—six at a time; but the expense of its upkeep to his great grief obliged him to leave it in 1904 and take up his abode in a small house in Didbrook, where for many years he acted as curate. When in 1940 he was appointed to the living of Stanway and Didbrook, he did not move into the large vicarage but stayed on in the little house and continued to take in pupils.

Meanwhile he had become a famous coach whom many members of two generations remember with grateful affection. A wonderfully inspiring teacher, he was much given to praise, often as unexpected as it was stimulating, the effect of which was to make his pupils feel, sometimes against their better judgment, that their ignorance was not so much their own fault as that of bad teaching in the past. I remember what an intoxicating incentive I myself found his extravagant praise during the far too short time in which I had the fun of working with him.

His methods were unorthodox; the room in which he taught was a scene of admirable disorder, the hours very erratic; study being always liable to give place to any rival occupation which at the moment might appear more attractive to either master or pupil. Plenty of "Priest-ragging" seemed a recognised part of the curriculum—complimentary to the teacher as evidence of his pupils' affection, but not always a comfortable experience.

Despite the apparent lack of discipline at Didbrook, results were excellent. No coach was ever more successful in contriving to get into Oxford or Cambridge boys who without his help could never have passed their examinations; while all but the veriest clods were infused with something of his own devout love for the classics.

Few of the Didbrook pupils were natural scholars; had they been that, they would have needed no extra tuition to matriculate. But so grateful was The Priest for any spark of intelligence that he tended to exaggerate the abilities of some of his

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boys and so was often chaffed for making swans out of geese. There were, however, some blessed exceptions to the general run of dunces, particularly among boys whom delicacy of health had kept away from school. The Priest's touching delight, indeed jubilation, whenever any really gifted youth fell to his lot, was always lyrically expressed. I have never forgotten his rhapsodies over A. E. Napier, whom he proclaimed to be the most brilliant undergraduate he had ever had the bliss to coach, just as he extolled Ronald Storrs as the most brilliant boy who had ever been at his preparatory school.

It was while my brother Guy—an inspired exponent of "Priest-ragging"—was a resident pupil at Didbrook because illness had obliged him to leave Eton, that we came to know The Priest so well; and from that time until his death early in 1950, he remained a close friend and boon companion of all my family.

In politics The Priest was anything but progressive: his appreciation of the natural good sense and mother-wit of the untutored sons of the soil made him resent even Education Acts.

For the last thirty or so years of his life, The Priest was devotedly and most divertingly looked after by his manservant, Edwards, always called "Bert", who in his own line became quite as famous a local figure as his master. Originally a stableman, the remarkably versatile Bert turned as occasion required into chauffeur, butler and hospital nurse, as well as guide, philosopher and friend to his master, and in addition did every kind of odd job in the district, from hair-cutting to air-raid wardenship.

The Priest's unlikeness to a clergyman began with his appearance, which was startlingly unclerical. Except when actually functioning in cassock and surplice, his attire usually suggested some very close association with the stables rather than with the Church. Very small and puny-looking, with sudden hurried movements, all his vitality, intelligence and personality centred in his large grey eyes.

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I have never known anyone so intoxicatingly responsive to any attempt to amuse him. He was subject to absolute paroxysms of laughter. The first symptom of a paroxysm was that one tufty eyebrow would shoot high above the other; then as his hand flew to his mouth to hold back the false teeth which otherwise were apt to get laughed out of it, a sort of drowning look came into his eyes, and the whole of his tiny frame crumpled up in convulsions of mirth. These fits of laughter were often quite alarming, for, like so many people who live to a great age and seem to enjoy perpetual youth, The Priest had an officially weak heart. They left him gasping and blue in the face, and sometimes he would have to lie down for several minutes to regain his breath. Indeed, I often thought he might be the first man literally to die—and how could man die better?—of laughter.

One of The Priest's comic mannerisms was a trick of breathlessly gasping out: "Oh, thank you so much ER, ER, ER. Thank you so much!" whenever anybody said anything which pleased or amused him. Such a habit did this become that to my great delight my first stammering through the Greek alphabet was accorded a veritable volley of "Thank-you-so-muches".

Once he had sold his school The Priest was troubled by want of money for the rest of his days. Like Falstaff, and other lovable characters, he could find "no remedy against this consumption of the purse". Borrowing might linger and linger it out, but the disease was incurable. There was never very much income on which to overdraw, but however much there had been it could never have sufficed because—a characteristic always recognised and taken advantage of—he was constitutionally incapable of saying no to anyone who asked him for money. Another heavy drain on his resources was his love for animals, which compelled him to buy and give free board and lodging to any horse, whatever its age, who struck him as looking overworked, tired, depressed, or just insufficiently loved. His stables and fields were full of these pensioner horses.

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He loved riding, and deeply pitied anyone who did not; but he detested hunting. In my own long-ago hunting days, he used often to ride to the meet with me; but at sight of the hounds he invariably turned tail and scuttled home.

If The Priest was sorry for those who did not appreciate horses, he was yet more sorry for anyone so benighted as not to like Greek. After he became a parish clergyman, he would sometimes forget he was no longer preaching to schoolboys, and quote Latin and Greek to the puzzled ploughmen. He is even alleged to have declared in one sermon that he could not conceive of any Heaven which did *not* include a thorough knowledge of Greek!

Whenever I visited him latterly I would find him, though almost totally blind, poring over an Aeschylus. He told me that the Greek letters were clearer than the English; but I suspect the real reason for his choice of that particular book was that he knew it by heart.

Because of The Priest's unclerical appearance; his unholy glee in gossip; his habit of gabbling through the service; his chronic impecuniosity; there were some who considered him unfitted to be a Vicar. He may not have been a very earnest theologian. Of one who at that time had been a clergyman for some sixty years, the following anecdote would seem to indicate that he was not. One day I asked him if he liked So and So. "Yes," he answered. "He is very nice. The only trouble is that he *will* talk to me about Theology—a subject to which I have never given very much attention."

He was certainly far more concerned with the ethics than with the dogmas of Christianity, yet some of the most moving sermons I have heard came from his lips; and if to be wholly independent of material things—even of the most rudimentary comfort—denotes spirituality, as surely it must? then I have known no more spiritual man.

Like Horatio, needing no revenue save his good spirits, he could, often did, subsist most merrily on bread and marmalade. His sense of humour was invincible, enabling him to laugh at life's bad jokes as well as at his friends' good ones. Few people can see the funny side of their own physical infirmities. I have

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never known anyone else in the least amused by being blind, but I assure you that the predicaments in which cataract placed The Priest seemed to strike him as irresistibly comic.

The last time I saw him, only a week or two before he died at the age of ninety-three, he might have been playing at *Blind Man's Buff* for fun. "I can't SEE you, Cynthia," he declared, hooting with laughter, adding—for to the last he was an optimist—"but I'm sure you are looking very nice."

His cook came into the room, and once again he was overcome by the ludicrousness of old age. "I can't remember your name," he said blithely, "but I know you are very kind."

Unbelievably frail he looked—frail as a cobweb, but except for his blindness and occasional forgetfulness of names, he showed no signs of his great age. His mind was as nimble, his zest as keen, his sympathy and interest as alert as ever. Reminding me of various old friends, he clamoured for the latest news of them.

Eileen Bigland came with me on that last visit. She, who had never seen him before, said, "I have never seen extreme age worn as a disguise before. He is one of the youngest, most alive beings I have ever met. Shut your eyes—and in the cadences of the voice, the occasional inconsequentiality of his speech, you have eternal youth. But the strange thing is that if you keep your eyes wide open you *still* have that feeling of speaking to somebody essentially young. You know that the little shrouded form in the woolly dressing-gown, with the filmy eyes, the froggy touch of a hand already lifeless, has less than nothing to do with the man who cocks his head bird-wise to one side and chuckles: 'I forgot something just for a moment—now it's come back. Such fun, such fun!'"

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WHERE, you ask, did I spend most of the year after I came out? Stanway was still both the background and the foreground of my life, for I never went to London except for the season. I did, however, very often go to stay in other people's country homes, either at set house-parties or just to join in the ordinary home life of some girl friend. Needless to say, in those far-off days I arrived on a visit quite untroubled by any fear that my presence would mean either more work or less food for my hostess, nor did I feel any obligation to take my turn at dirtying the sink or at mislaying the table.

Innumerable houses—large, medium-sized and small—were smilingly, smoothly run by an ample staff seemingly delighted to welcome visitors. It is difficult even to remember, still more to convey, that cheerful, willing atmosphere in which nothing seemed too much trouble and housemaids were so friendly and so kind.

Though I was sometimes a little intimidated by the men who had risen to the very top of the domestic-service tree, I can't say that I often encountered in real life that figure so common in fiction and on the stage, the puma-footed manservant of impalpable presence and quite uncatchable eye. Even butlers, however august and however imposing their mien and demeanour, were seldom above being visibly, sometimes audibly amused. The young wag whose sally made one of those well-buckramed countenances crease into a smile felt he had scored a bull's-eye.

Comfortable as was the "atmosphere" of country houses, their actual temperature would seem extremely Spartan to those who now complain whenever a "shedding of the load" deprives them of the electric fire in their bedroom. When I

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was young, one endured—taking it for granted wherever one stayed—far greater cold than our present unending state of emergency has yet inflicted upon us. Electric fires were undreamed of; and since in the most lavish households coal fires were seldom lit upstairs before evening, on winter mornings one's bedroom, often huge and many-windowed, could be as cold as a church on a weekday.

I remember just a few glorious exceptions where—luxury of luxuries—awakening to the delightful sounds of the crackle of paper and the snapping of newly-kindled wood, I opened my eyes on the pleasing sight of a smiling becaped housemaid on her knees at the hearth, in a print frock so stiff with starch that it crackled as loudly as the fire which—bless her—she had lit without consulting me. (What was the good of being asked if I would “like a fire”? Of course I had to say, “Oh, *no!*”)

Nor was there yet any thought of running water being laid on to the bedrooms. Morning and evening a brown-lidded can was carried into your room and placed in its turban of towel in the basin on the washing-stand.

You perambulated, often for vast distances, the passages in search of the nearest bathroom, as likely as not to find it locked, or, worse, not locked but occupied by some careless wallower who, having forgotten to turn the key, yelled as you opened the door. Sometimes an unscrupulous possessor of a valet would send his “gentleman's gentleman” on in advance, armed with a sponge, to take unlawful possession of the bathroom and keep others out until he was ready to occupy it himself. This was rightly considered very sharp practice.

Arriving to stay at a country house party could be most alarming. On my way there I used to assume every particularly unprepossessing-looking fellow traveller to be bound for the same place as myself. The drive from the station to the house jammed up against total strangers, in a crowded car, was an awful ordeal to anyone young and shy, yet one longed for it never to end because of the dread of arrival.

Some houses diffused an atmosphere in whose glow you at once felt yourself thaw and expand; in others the ice on the social surface took some time to break; in some—not many—

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it never really broke, and from arrival to departure something ponderous in the air made it seem difficult to breathe.

How dauntingly distant on Friday evening Monday morning could seem! But usually by Saturday, and nearly always by Sunday, I found myself, often to my own surprise, wishing I were at the beginning instead of nearing the end of my visit.

When I look back on the self-consciousness of youth, no symptom of it strikes me as more absurd than the extent to which we fussed about the writing of our "Collins". (I see that word, once used by a few, is now in the dictionary.) You wouldn't believe how heavily we took this letter of thanks. The prospect of having to write it darkened our whole visit. Painfully laboured rough copies left behind by mistake were sometimes found in blotting-books, and it must be admitted that certain hostesses did have the reprehensible habit of entertaining the guests of one party by reading aloud unintentionally funny Collinses written by their previous guests.

A large fraction of our time was spent in changing our clothes, particularly in the winter, when you came down to breakfast ready for church in your "best dress", made probably of velvet if you could afford it, of velveteen if you couldn't. After church you went into tweeds. You always changed again before tea, into a "tea-gown" if you possessed that special creation; the less affluent wore a summer day-frock. However small your dress allowance, a different dinner dress for each night was considered necessary.

Thus a Friday-to-Monday party meant taking your "Sunday Best", two tweed coats and skirts with appropriate shirts, three evening frocks, three garments suitable for tea, your "best hat"—probably a vast affair loaded with feathers, flowers, fruit or corn—a variety of country hats and caps, as likely as not a riding-habit and billycock hat, rows of indoor and outdoor shoes, boots and gaiters, numberless accessories in the way of petticoats, shawls, scarves, ornamental combs and wreaths, and a large bag in which to carry your embroidery about the house.

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All this necessitated at least one huge domed trunk, called a "Noah's Ark", an immense hat-box and a heavy dressing-case. No one could grudge the perspiring porters the sixpences they seemed to think adequate reward for their Herculean labour. How we should have shuddered with horror, laughed with incredulity at the idea of *women* porters!

No maidservant could possibly carry a "Noah's Ark" up or down stairs, so, if there was no man in the house, one had to be "got in". Street-runners used to pursue the heavily-laden four-wheelers bringing homecomers from the station, secure the job of unloading the mountain of luggage, and stagger upstairs with it on their backs.

During my first few country house visits my besetting fear was that I should be late for dinner, a somewhat sacramental affair, half an hour before which the boom of the dressing-gong threw me into a fluster, for evening frocks were not then easily slipped into, nor hair quickly dressed, and guests were expected to assemble in the drawing-room some minutes *before* the second gong went.

It was dreadful to be the impatiently-waited-for last comer at whose entry everyone sprang to their feet. Then each man gave his arm to a woman and the animals went in two by two.

Dinner was followed by a segregation of the sexes. This interval often lasted a considerable time, for most hosts liked to sit long over their wine and cigars. Excessive indulgence of this inclination sometimes caused life-long warfare between usually well-accorded couples, for even in that era of often thoughtless employers, the mistress of the house worried if her staff was kept up too late. In this war battles might be lost and won, but no victory was final.

Otherwise well-broken-in husbands were remarkably insubordinate in this matter. More than once I have seen an exasperated wife driven to indite her husband a note—from her expression she might have been signing a warrant for his arrest—demanding him forthwith to "join the ladies". Then with the air of one who quells a mutiny she rang for the butler and made the unhappy man carry her missive into the dining-room. But this extreme measure was seldom taken. To compel

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a self-respecting butler thus to violate the sacred ritual of the dining-room was too cruel, nor was it pleasant for the guests to be joined by a flushed, obviously resentful, if somewhat sheepish-looking host.

We stayed downstairs conversing or playing games until half-past eleven or twelve, and then, after we were supposed to have gone to bed, usually sat up talking to one or several girl friends. A "haircombing" was our curiously unattractive name for this late night session to which we were so much addicted. Why was it always so much easier to talk after, than before, bedtime? My "haircombing" sometimes went on into the small hours of the morning; my companion often being my future sister-in-law Violet Asquith, whom—remarkable fact—I found as good a listener as talker. Still disinclined for sleep at four in the morning she and I would sometimes steal, swaddled in eiderdowns, out of the house into the dew-drenched garden. No wonder the young occasionally found the table "cleared" before they slunk into the dining-room. But most households were goodhumouredly resigned to breakfast going on until half-past ten. And what a meal it was with its array of lidded silver dishes whereunder little blue flames kept piping hot curly rashers of bacon; eggs—poached, fried and scrambled—mounds of moist kedgerie, haddocks afloat in melted butter, sizzling, bursting sausages, ruddily-exuding kidneys. And with what homeric appetites young men—old men too—fell on the meal with which they broke their night-long fast.

The finest trenchermen first lined themselves with porridge immersed in thick yellow cream and then piled on to their plate something out of practically every dish. After this they rammed down scones buttered two inches thick, and lavishly topped with marmalade, honey or home-made jam. This third course was followed by fruit. Nor in those days did the women of the party sustain themselves for the wear and tear of a whole morning's idleness on only a glass of orange-juice and a triangle of toast. Far from it. I remember no talk of banting in the era of which I write; yet practically every girl's waist measured less than twenty inches.

After some few visits I became less obsessed by fear of being

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late for dinner, of running short of conversation, or of serving double faults at tennis, and—great relief—my “Collins” ceased to seem a matter of much importance.

I also discovered that I was much freer to do as I liked than I had at first supposed. Naturally every guest was expected to pull her weight in the boat, as the metaphor went, and add what she could to the common stock of enjoyment, but this left plenty of time for which you could make your own plans—perhaps go for a long walk with whomsoever you chose. (I am writing of ordinary parties. My letter to Beb described my sufferings at shooting-parties.) If you wished, you could even spend a considerable time in your bedroom, where you usually found plenty of books you wanted to read.

Looking back on these early visits has revived so many dormant memories that if you really want to know what it felt like to me to be an Edwardian girl, I'll give you a succession of flashbacks of my eighteen-years-young self at country house parties. The various moments of memory which they record were not really all experienced on any one occasion or in any one given place, but in my mind they have fused into the sequence of the forty or so consecutive hours of one typical Saturday-to-Monday.

This is what comes back to me:

(Arrival.) I see myself being convoyed by a butler across a wide expanse of well-kept lawn to where beneath the great flat branches of a magnificent cedar my hostess dispenses tea. Through the mists of my shyness I see the pleasing sight of honey-in-the-comb, blackberry jelly and Devonshire cream. Peaches too and stork-shaped scissors beside bunches of white grapes.

I peer into the silver kettle at my distorted reflection to see if my nose is shiny. It is. . . . I look about me. Guests who have finished tea are strolling on the lawn in pairs or in groups. Sheathed in high-waisted muslin frocks, I see beauties in bud, beauties in bloom, their faces shaded by cartwheel Leghorn hats laden with flowers. With them are young men

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in white flannels and straw "boaters", and two or three important-looking old men in striped trousers and grey top hats. They all seem to know each other intimately, but I have never seen a single one of them before. . . . At last I catch sight of the only person on whose presence I rely—(had I not known he was to be here, nothing would have induced me to come)—but, alas, lawn-tennis racket in hand, he is disappearing with three others into the distance! It is like seeing the life-boat rowing away from, instead of towards me. I begin to sink. . . .

My hostess drags a young man away from the laughing group with which he is obviously enjoying himself, and introduces him to me. He feels obliged to ask if I would "care for a turn". He takes me all round the famous gardens. It is a perfect evening; the air is fragrant with sweet geranium; rose-petals fall. It might be lovely—damn lawn-tennis!—but my bored companion only asks me questions, questions to which he can't possibly want to know the answer. . . . Had I been to Ascot? . . . Would I be going to Henley? . . . To Goodwood? To Cowes? Did I know the Somebody Somethings and the Someone Elses? I get so tired of hearing my voice say "N'no," "No," "N'no."

At length we drift into the delicious coolness of indoors. Jugs of iced lemonade, great bowls of crimson roses into which—for something to do—I plunge my flushed face and draw in deep draughts of fragrance. Then I pat and stroke two nice responsive dogs, golden Labradors. . . .

What can I do next? . . .

At last I am taken upstairs, and shown my large, light, lavender-scented bedroom. Crackly glazed chintzes, a dressing-table decked in flowered white muslin and blue ribbons; wide, wide open windows through which the scent of roses and jasmine pours into the room, and earwigs too.

At sight of my own clothes laid out, my own hand-mirror on the dressing-table, my own Oxford Book of Verse at the bedside, my suspended sense of identity begins to return. Having helped myself lavishly, unscrupulously, to bath salts, a luxury unknown in my own home, I lie in wreaths of steaming

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fragrance. I come down for dinner confidently expecting to sit beside the tennis-player. Instead, I find myself between two strangers who make the worst of me. . . .

We follow my hostess into the drawing-room. The ice has not yet broken. . . . I wish I hadn't come. I'm frightened of all the other girls here. They are so old. An alarmingly smart-looking woman in a diamond dog-collar stares at me through her lorgnette with cold prognosticating eyes.

"Not at all like her mother," she pronounces.

I hate her. I decide to emigrate—to go to some place where I shan't for ever be compared with someone else. . . .

The men saunter in to join the ladies. . . .

A woman sings; for the age of accomplishments, though fast dying, has not quite passed. In a deep booming contralto she sings, "Two Eyes of Grey that Used to be so Bright", "Pale Hands I Loved Beside the Shalimar. . . . Where Are You Now? Where Are You Now?" Her voice wobbles far too much, nevertheless tears come into my eyes.

Most of the young people are rounded-up to play Demon Pounce, but the tennis-player is made to play Bridge which he hates. I hate Demon Pounce. What an evening! . . .

Sunday Morning. I come down dressed ready to go to church. I am very late, and yet much too early, for—horrors—there is only one other person at breakfast—the Ambassador! Must I call him Your Excellency? Shall I ever be able to get the words out? Rustily, I attempt some French. Oh, why did my governess always address me as "Tu" instead of as "Vous"? Naturally I can never help doing the same. The Ambassador is appreciably startled by this familiarity on my part which he has done nothing whatever to encourage. . . .

(Afternoon) . . . A long crescendo of delight begins.

I have changed into a linen frock and a sunbonnet. There is a dancing haze of heat. The click of croquet, the thud of tennis-balls is almost continuous. But I neither play nor watch any game. I am taken on the river. Trailing my fingers through cool, clucking water, I lie for hours in a punt. . . .

By Sunday evening I like nearly everyone in the house. I

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have lost that dreadful "on approval" feeling and am quite at my ease with the other girls. They no longer seem old.

After dinner the really-old play Bridge, but we go out into the garden. On such a night as this no one in their senses could stay indoors—one of those marvellous nights of high summer, when the air is still heavy with the scent of flowers, and everything is steeped in quicksilver, tingling with magic. . . . Some indescribable enchantment seems to be abroad. . . . Suddenly a strange kind of awe seizes me. I shiver and fall silent. The feeling seems to be shared, but the next moment the spell is shattered by peals of laughter from a nearby group. Someone suggests dancing. To our own singing we dance for half an hour by the light of the moon on the close-cropped lawn. . . . Then some of us go for an unauthorised bicycle-ride, spinning along dusty white roads, between high hedges. . . .

Monday Morning. Time to go. Everyone is so friendly and pleasant now. Even my host, of whom I still stand in great awe, says as he shakes my hand on the doorstep, "I hope you will come and see us again. I think Brandy and Sherry (my first friends, the golden Labradors) both approve of you." These are the first words he has addressed to me, but knowing what his dogs are to him, I feel as though I had been given my colours.

Great as were summer delights, it was delightful to return late in the year to some such house where you had enjoyed yourself in July and to find its dogs remembered you and that you felt quite at home. This time I wear tweeds instead of muslin. Instead of lying in a canoe I hasten through the garden sniffing the keen air pungent with bonfire smoke and the acrid scent of chrysanthemums, to go with quickened winter steps for a long walk in the woods. Golden leaves fall through pale sunshine. Blue vapours have started to rise before we get back to the house, not yet curtained, but beginning to twinkle with lights. I change for an immense tea,

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and probably play "gibbets" with the companion of my walk. After dinner, perhaps charades are acted; uproariously funny charades, so the performers think, and quite often the audience is amused as well.

No doubt the cold in my bedroom gives me gooseflesh, but this only enhances the joy of the glorious blaze downstairs, where huge logs are flung on to the great mound of ashes which is allowed to pile up day by day.

What else do I remember of country houses in general? Nearly all of them had one common denominator—a welter of dogs. In some families they were well disciplined, staying in their appointed places—possibly even in special baskets—and never ensconcing themselves in chairs or begging at meals. In fact they were rather cowed. But in most houses—certainly in those where I felt most at home myself—the dogs were all over the place and quite as uninhibited as any modern parents could wish their children to be. They climbed up you with muddy paws; thrust wet blackberry noses into your hand, whined, slobbered; belaboured you with their tails; tripped you up; overturned tables, lamps and tottering babies. Whatever the weather, they insisted—barking until they got their way—on being taken out. They brought hideous trophies of the chase into the house—still warm tatters of newly-killed rabbits—and smugly deposited them at your feet, or if they really loved you, right into your lap. Flumping themselves on to whichever they thought the most comfortable chair, they curled up in voluptuous sleep, but never for long at a time. Disturbed by a sudden thought that some other chair might be even more comfortable, they soon resettled themselves, so that by the end of the day there was no single chair you could sit on without getting covered with hairs.

Perhaps they were worst of all in the dining-room, where, blackmailing you with that intolerably soulful, if maudlin, look that only canine greed inspires, their eyes followed every morsel of food on its way from your plate to your mouth. How we pandered to these household gods, but that was easy enough,

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for the charm on which they so monstrously presumed was indeed great.

An important ritual in most country houses was the after-tea "Children's Hour" (*hour?* what reading for mothers of today!) in which you took active part. The children might be the younger sons and daughters or cousins of the house; they might be the grandchildren of your host and hostess. They might not be relations at all, but just temporarily parked there by friends. Whoever they were, down they stumped in their sashes and necklaces of amber or coral beads to be entertained with Peep-Bo, Ring-a-ring-a-roses, Here we go round the Mulberry Bush, Hunt the Thimble and so forth.

After the babies had reascended to the nursery, there often followed a schoolroom contingent with whom we perhaps played Hide and Seek all over the house. Or if there were enough of us Musical Chairs, in which event I invariably disgraced myself, for at that most thrilling game I had not lost—nor have I yet—any of my will to win. So far from helping a child to victory, I behave like the most shameless Gulliver, hurtling out of my way whatever luckless Lilliputians may totter between me and the only vacant chair.

In many houses one found, an admirable ingredient, someone neither like oneself a fleeting guest nor a member of the family, yet a permanent inmate. Usually this resident was engaged on some creative work. He might be a writer who, perhaps once invited to avail himself of the library, had somehow stayed on ever since. Or he might be a musician, a kind of family minstrel. Sometimes this permanent guest was given a nominal job. One might be called the librarian; another The Controller—whatever that may mean; others did a little amateur tutoring in the holidays. Usually they were excellent company, unobtrusively cultivated, very good at taking you "round the pictures", tactful; and sympathetically if smilingly

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well versed in all the politics, jokes, idiosyncrasies and tensions of the family whom their presence so well leavened.

If your host and hostess were old, often there lived in state upstairs a great personage like some redoubtable Queen Mother. As a privilege you were taken to visit Nannie.

She still spoke of her sometime nurslings, perhaps now themselves grandparents, as "Master This", "Miss That" and "little Miss So and So", and if you found favour she showed you their photographs, their locks of hair—even their first teeth. She told you which particular foods none of them had been able to "keep down", which fruits had "fetched them out in spots", what trouble she had had over this one's teething, and that one's chest.

You heard, too, "what a One For Reading" Master This had been; also of his habit of biting his nails, and of his sister's fear of the dark. With great pride she declared they had all been "regular little Turks", but only because they were so full of life, not (darkly) like some suet dumplings she could name, for really they had always been ever such lambs with hearts of gold. Whenever they came home they would run upstairs first thing to see her, and they hadn't forgotten her birthday not once, and she only wished their own children took after them more but then nurses weren't what they were and even mothers had taken queer notions into their heads. Yes, things were sadly changed and she often wondered what we were coming to, still in spite of the rheumatics which prevented her getting about she had a great deal to be thankful for and she would be the last to deny it.

With any luck one also made friends with the gardener, often a great character. I'm not thinking of the bowler-hatted up-to-date Horticultural-College-trained experts who presided over very large and grand gardens. I mean the real traditional countryman who, never having left his native village, had "worked man and boy" in the same garden. As I remember

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him he wears an apron of sacking, and bast is plentifully twisted round the legs of his trousers. He has a habit of spitting vigorously into the earth-caked palm of his hand before, grasping his spade, he drives it with a contented grunt deep into the soil. When I steal his grapes he shakes a horny fist at me; but somehow the gesture is in inverted commas.

He is famed for his "green fingers", his foreknowledge of the weather, his gnarled obstinacy which is like the roots of an oak. He invariably uses the possessive pronoun—"My border; My roses; My asparagus" as well he may, for indeed all these things *are* his. No one would dream of giving him an order, and to any proposal, advice or entreaty, he is as impervious as to the weather. Without necessarily being actually hard of hearing, he has that great gift of being able, without offence, to become convincingly deaf.

His attitude to the mistress of the house is expressed by an indulgent shrug. By all means let her dead-head his roses. No harm in that. She is very welcome to present him with the first prize at the Flower Show. He will even allow her to offer up at the Harvest Thanksgiving Service some of his finest blooms, and one of his largest pumpkins, but should she take into her pretty head any new-fangled nonsense about pouring chemical on to "my beautiful compost heap", or dare to express any opinion as to whether "my peas" or "my beans" be ready for the table—that is a very different matter. As to her wish that there should be no yellow in the herbaceous border next summer, for all the difference this makes, she might just as well tell him she would prefer the East Wind not to blow.

But if this loyal cussed lovable autocrat keeps his employers firmly in their place, it is done with rugged courtesy. Few would detect that tiny flicker of the eyelid—you couldn't call it a wink—which heralds the onset of an attack of total deafness.

"Boys be'ant what they were," he complains, scowling at the latest recruit to his tiny land army. He growls at whichever government is in power—declares he is sure he doesn't know what the country is coming to. And how right he was, for much as he distrusted progress, I doubt that he really

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believed his garden had much to fear but winter and rough weather. Not even in his worst humour did he foresee what the future would bring to his life's work.

Thank heaven, he cannot see "my lawns", "my borders", as they are today.

I hope no ghosts of gardeners walk. . . .

I remember how sometimes when I was staying in one of those homes which gave us so strong a sense of stability and permanence, one girl would idly say to another, "Suppose you were told that if you looked into that glass you would see yourself exactly as you will be forty years hence, would you have the courage to look?"

It occurs to me now that, had we in fact been cursed with the power to see into the future, appalled though we should have been to see what the years were to do to our faces, we should have been even more astonished to see what they would do to our houses. Scarcely one of these places—where once upon a time "we were young, we were merry, we were very, very wise"—is today a home. From nearly all of them the turn of the wheel has evicted the family to whom each belonged—or seemed then to belong.

In a few exceptions the owner still lives on, occupying two or three rooms. Some, architectural monuments of a now almost vanished way of life, stand empty—decaying. Others are roofless. Many have been converted into museums, schools or hotels. One is a branch of the Borstal Institute. Another is a nursing home. Hardly one still serves the purpose for which it was built. As private homes, by their sheer size, they are as irretrievably relegated to the past as galleons, mail coaches and sedan chairs.

* * *

Now that I have told you something of country houses in general, I'll give you some memories of particular visits. Much in the same random way as I picked my team of Lovelies, I'll choose very much the same number of houses, as different one from another as possible. Don't be afraid of being

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Baedekered. I won't describe the actual buildings, but merely try to give you glimpses of their inmates and their way of life as seen through my young eyes.

I promised to tell you something of Arthur Balfour in his East Lothian home, Whittinghame. As a child I often went there by train from Gosford to join the dancing-class held for the horde of nephews and nieces who spent six months of each year under that most hospitable avuncular roof. With his fiddle tucked under his chin, our little dancing-master threaded his way amongst us, bleating with distress as we floundered through his beloved Eightsome reel, and at some time or other during the lesson Arthur Balfour always came in to look on. For ten minutes or so he would stand watching our efforts with a benevolent, if slightly pitying, smile; then, with an indulgent shrug of his shoulders and a kindly word or two to each performer, walk with elastic tread from the room.

Sometimes I went to Whittinghame just for the day; sometimes I stayed for a few days, to be the only child among the dozen or so there who was not a member of the clan.

Baffy Balfour, the eldest of Arthur Balfour's nieces, then a newly-grown-up girl, was, I'm sure, already busily taking notes for the biography she was one day to write of her uncle, around whom the whole household revolved like the solar system round the sun, worshipping him with an unveiled idolatry of which he seemed to be sublimely unconscious.

After I came out, I went to stay at Whittinghame again. Some of the tribe of nephews and nieces were now grown up, some still in the schoolroom. A stream of visitors flowed through the house, to all of whom as they basked in his ambience the host seemed to lend the same rapt and kindling attention. Meals at Whittinghame were at times atmospheric. If Miss Alice Balfour and her brilliant, not seldom fiery sister-in-law, Lady Frances Balfour, agreed in nothing else, they were at one in their opinion that no one else should ever speak with any object other than to lead up to "Arthur", and at times their technique as two self-appointed Speakers was a little disconcerting to the shyer guests.

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Many interesting people came to Whittinghame, but though my highly-favoured young ears heard much good talk there, I never thought Arthur Balfour shone quite so brightly in his own home as elsewhere.

Alice Balfour, of whom I was very fond—she was so kind to me when I was a child—devotedly kept house for her brother. She took her Martha-duties most seriously. Whenever I arrived she was always just about to count, or had just counted, all the spoons and forks. I remember how gallantly her brother struggled to look suitably distressed when, newly ascended from the pantry, she one day interrupted him in the middle of a fascinating discussion on Quaternions to tell him one of his salt spoons was missing from the silver chest.

Thanks, no doubt, to Alice Balfour's influence, Whittinghame was in some ways a decidedly old-fashioned establishment. Smoking was allowed nowhere except in the one rather grimly functional room set apart for the purpose, and to the general confusion, the clocks were kept an hour in advance of Greenwich time, a measure taken, I imagine, to lessen the risk of departing guests missing trains. A certain ritual was followed, notably the institution of the communal Sunday walk, which always included a visit to the stables. Golf was, of course, impossible on the "Lord's Day".

My impression was that in some ways Arthur Balfour lived like a guest in his own house. The servants were all obviously devoted to him, but I suspect that he had little if anything to do with their engagement and direction. He also appeared blandly unconscious of the friction and jealousies almost inevitable wherever in-laws conglomerate.

If Alice Balfour was the domestic Atlas of his home and Lady Frances its firebrand, Gerald Balfour's wife, Lady Betty, a blessing to everyone, was its Good Angel—tactfully, tirelessly, self-effacingly devoting herself to the difficult task of always keeping at least the semblance of peace.

One of the first parties I ever went to was at Hewell Grange, which I was some day to know so well as the home of my

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youngest sister. This very large house, built for its owner, Lord Windsor,¹ had been finished in 1890. I was impressed by the vast galleried hall, and enchanted by the glorious nursery passage, long and wide enough for us to play football in. The food at Hewell was startlingly delicious. Perhaps the fabulous teas appealed most to my own unsophisticated palate, but every meal was equally good; our host, who knew as much about food as about art, having the excellent habit of jotting down a comment on each course.

My most vivid memory of that first visit to Hewell is of the impression made on me by the beauty of my hostess. In this I showed no callow taste, for with her grace, her exquisite head with its aureole of red-gold hair, her lovely Luini eyelids and enigmatic lurking smile, Gay Windsor² was indeed a living poem. Slender, ethereal, delicately aloof, she struck me as a, perhaps, not quite three-dimensional being. I remember thinking that she looked almost as though, wrought of silken thread instead of flesh and blood, she had just strayed out of some romantic piece of tapestry. She certainly did not seem to belong to the modern world, but was exactly as I pictured those ladies whom troubadours celebrated in song, and in whose honour knights tilted at the ring.

But in some ways the almost Lady of Shalott impression her appearance gave was misleading. For despite that withdrawn, still look of hers; so far from being a languid onlooker she was in reality one of the most industrious and executive of women. Nearly every hour of her life was put to the fullest possible use. Not only were her own hands ceaselessly busied in fashioning something, but she inspired others to work; instituting a kind of local Guild where to designs she gave them the estate carpenters made furniture which she painted herself. She also started a weaving industry at which, again to her own designs, tapestries were woven.

Her husband, who launched so many musicians on their careers, was equally industrious, and in the same unobtrusive way. He did an immense amount of public work, was the

¹ Afterwards Earl of Plymouth.

² Afterwards Countess of Plymouth.

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most assiduous and conscientious of landlords, and like his wife was always busily engaged in creative work in his home, to which he added several stained-glass windows of his own design and execution.

Thus there was a curious contradiction in the atmosphere of Hewell, for while something about Gay's personality and presence instilled around her a tranquillity in which her guests could enjoy the indolence of lotus-eaters, her house was in point of fact a humming hive of industry.

It was at Hewell, as I told you, that I first collided—literally collided—with Charles Whibley. It was easy to see why he was so clearly welcome a visitor there, for socially Gay *was* passive. Delighting in other people's vitality, enjoying their flights of fancy and nonsense, she liked to be entertained in almost as uninvolved a way as a theatre audience. If one imagined her in those centuries to which her beauty seemed to belong, it was easy to picture her graciously amused by the Court Jester. Herself a legato, uncompetitive talker, Gay took little part in general conversation, but her sudden humour with its delicious ripple of irony, the illuminating certainty of her taste and values and the delicate flavour of her mind, made talking to her alone a rare delight.

Her movements matched her slow, gentle utterance. She looked as incapable of hurry as of chatter. Sometimes I tried to picture her forced to hurry; but I never could. No, not even at a railway station, not even were the house on fire, could I imagine her moving otherwise than with that habitual slow drifting grace which made her entry into a room seem scarcely an act of volition, and reminded me of a red-gold autumn leaf wafted by a gentle breeze. Yet, as I have said, for all her lovely loitering gait, she accomplished more in one hour than do many bustling women in a week.

Fashioned though Gay was to inspire poets and painters, fitted to play the part of an Egeria, and able without conscious exercise of charm—you never saw the net flung—to cast a binding spell, it is nevertheless as a mother that I most vividly remember her. I see her, as I saw her in the hall that first visit, with her devoted sons, all three of whom she was fated

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to outlive, standing round her like pillars, and the one adored, adoring daughter with her gentle goodness—sheer goodness—already shining out of her starry eyes. (I heard it said of Phyllis¹ that hers were the only eyes you could without hyperbole call “starry”). Mother and grown-up daughter is a proverbially difficult relationship. Whenever this fact was deplored Gay and Phyllis were cited as the most triumphant exception to the rule.

Certain houses, in which much entertaining was done, almost gave me the impression that when the guests left on Monday morning the building, too, might vanish, like Klingsor's Palace. They seemed merely places of entertainment, not homes. It was difficult to imagine even what the host and hostess looked like when they were not being galvanised into life by their guests. Perhaps they too vanished when left to themselves?

Nowhere more than at Hewell did one have directly the opposite impression. Welcome though guests were made to feel there, royally as they were entertained, they never seemed more than incidental—extraneous to the real life of the place, which one knew to be no more affected by our comings and goings than is the continuous flow of a strong river by the little boats that pass over its surface, or a deeply-rooted tree by the birds that perch in its boughs. That, I suppose, was why as a girl I seemed to draw some sustenance from its atmosphere, and never left it without a vague hankering after an existence more ordered and purposeful than my own.

One particular Whitsuntide is indelibly imprinted on my memory, because I happened to be the only girl of a large party of Lord Curzon's guests at Hackwood, a fact of which I was made unnecessarily and acutely self-conscious by its being so repeatedly remarked upon. “I say, Cynthia,” was continually said in a tone suitable for addressing a timid and

¹ Lady Phyllis Windsor-Clive, now Lady Phyllis Benton.

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backward child, "do you realise you are the only girl here?" I had no idea how to answer this rhetorical question. . . . Ought I to express myself honoured, or apologise and offer to leave?

When I discovered the first evening that as everyone else was to play Bridge after dinner my host and I were to be left alone to entertain one another, panic seized me. However, this intimidating ordeal proved a pleasant experience. No one could have been more—for once I think "affable" is the right word—than my host. First, he played with childish enjoyment on his new toy, a huge bellowing pianola organ, then he talked—no, "conversed"—most entertainingly.

Margot Asquith in her description of George Curzon in her autobiography writes: "He has an expression of enamelled assurance", a vivid phrase, but I think an over-simplification. I see what she meant. The enamel was there all right, but it was not without cracks in its surface.

Lord Curzon was said to have an oriental love of ceremony and splendour. In fact I had heard so much about this ex-Viceroy's taste for pride, pomp and circumstance that I had arrived half hoping to see my host enter the drawing-room on a richly-caparisoned processional elephant heralded by a roll of drums. It certainly needed no trained psychologist's eye to diagnose him at a glance as a man who would prefer to be mounted on an elephant rather than on a donkey, to reside in a Palladian mansion rather than in a bungalow, to employ men-servants rather than parlourmaids; but every man to his taste, and I saw nothing unusually imposing or oppressive in the style kept up at Hackwood.

He seemed an admirable host, especially at the dinner-table, where he was successfully anxious that others should shine as brightly as he. On this occasion he was proudly producing—not that any impresario was needed—Sir Walter Raleigh to some friends who had not yet met "The Professor".

By Sunday afternoon The Professor, who had held the table at every meal, was sated with brilliance. To my delight he told me that he couldn't possibly stand any more Good Talk. Without delay (he declared) he must take refuge from this

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everlasting scintillation in the company of someone with whom he could be silent; so please would I come for a walk with him at once? If this was rather like Alfred Tennyson's outburst at the London party given in his honour, "I've had a glut of men! I'm going to Cheltenham", I was only too glad to be The Professor's "Cheltenham", and we had a lovely walk, from which to the general discontent, for he was the star turn of the party—and several sirens had planned to take him for an anything but silent walk—we returned very late for tea.

For all his surfeit of talk The Professor did not during our walk have many flashes of silence. He was as full of wit and rollick as ever—though, as always, however antic his disposition, with sudden delightful plunges into solemnity.

Lord Curzon's chronic industry and his passion for administration—both of which, I think, came largely from the need to take his mind off the bodily pain which, poor man, he was never without—manifested themselves in attention to even the smallest details of housekeeping. I remember my amazement when, happening to arrive earlier than I was expected, I found him engaged in putting out the soap and towels in my room! Later he took me on a personally-conducted tour of the downstairs regions, and showed me, written out in his own hand, the menu for every meal to be served both in the Room and in the Servants' Hall for the next fortnight!

I learnt more of his devotion to detail and his ceaseless superintendence from my former governess, who went to teach his daughters. Before engaging her, he rang me up and made the most searching enquiries. "Can you," he asked in characteristically mock-pompous phraseology, "Can you thoroughly recommend this daughter of Austria, your sometime preceptress, as a suitable person to be entrusted with the upbringing of three high-minded orphans?"

My governess must have found Lord Curzon quite a change after my father. She used to tell me, half in admiration, half in dismay, how in a procession of one, her new employer would enter the schoolroom at the beginning of the term, arrange all the books and pictures, and draw up the time-table of lessons. To the detriment of her digestion he also made a

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habit of examining her pupils on their studies throughout luncheon.

Another large house-party where to my initial dismay I was again the only girl, was at Eaton Hall. I found myself at breakfast the first morning alone with four red-faced fox-hunters, all reading newspapers and consuming mutton chops. To my inexperienced eyes these four sportsmen looked so highly specialised—so blatantly “horsey”, that I at once labelled them incapable of any interest unconnected with the stables. In fact, I felt I had intruded on a party of centaurs. But for a muttered, unconvincing “Good mornin’” the centaurs did not speak. Neither did they neigh. They merely ate aloud. *Why*, I lamented, had I not like all the other Shes of the party, breakfasted upstairs? But before I had finished my porridge Uncle George,¹ resplendent in his pink coat, positively pranced into the room, so happy at the prospect of a snatched day’s hunting that he sang *Tirra Lirra La* as he helped himself to buttered eggs. Before long we were joined by his stepson, Bend’or,² to whom he was devoted. Those two were on the happiest possible terms, and the talk became as lively as at any meal at Clouds. The centaurs ceased from chumping, no longer squinted at the newspapers reluctantly laid down at my entry, and joined in the conversation, shaming me soon for having so hastily mislabelled them, for besides knowing, as might have been expected, Surtees by heart, they also showed themselves well up in both Chaucer and Ronsard. Talk flowed until it was time for me to go to the stable to be introduced to my mount, a gleaming chestnut mare by whose dazzling unlikeness to my dear friends the “Bargains” in the Stanway stables I was at first intimidated. But she was as well-mannered as she was well-bred, and at once took complete and expert charge of her respectful rider.

* * *

One of the places where I most loved staying was at Avon

¹ George Wyndham.

² The Duke of Westminster.

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Tyrrell, the house built by Lutyens for Lord and Lady Manners in a lovely part of the New Forest near Christchurch. Before my first visit I had been told that my host had once won the Grand National on his own horse, information which made me gaze at him with respectful awe. Surely, I thought, he must live in a perpetual state of conscious self-satisfaction, but he seemed, as indeed he was, the most modest of men. His two sons, John and Francis, and the "Twins", his Amazonian daughters, Betty and Angie, had all inherited his love of horses, and their guests joined in glorious reckless rides, hunting and rounding-up the wild Forest ponies. For further exercise, violent hockey was played immediately after luncheon.

The different generations were always blended at Avon; nor was there any preferential treatment; the elderly and eminent being expected to take part in the post-prandial hockey, in which shins were chipped, eyes blackened. I can't tell you with what zeal, ageing hard-worked unpaid servants of the State flung themselves into this dreadful game while "resting" in the country.

Lady Manners used to say that but for her, "Hoppy", as her husband was always called, would never have asked a single guest inside the house. If this were true, he was very good at simulating pleasure in welcoming guests.

Unselfish yet full of personality, our hostess, widely loved as "Con", had no pretensions to beauty, but great charm both of expression and manner. Though she had devoted friends of every age, I think Con must have had a special gift for the young. She was so delightfully stimulating to us, making us feel by her lively interest, that everything to do with us—our opinions, our happiness, our development, our future—*mattered* so much. I, for one, remember how, so to speak, dramatising me to myself, she made me feel my life was some exciting serial story of which she could hardly wait for the next instalment.

Perhaps it was in tribute to this eager interest of hers, that it was on a visit to Avon Tyrrell that my husband and I became engaged; not that we told her, or anyone else, our news.

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Though Con was so appreciative and understanding, the value of her affection was never lessened by the fear that it might partly be owed to want of discrimination on her part; for even to those she loved best she could be bracingly astringent, at times caustic. Whenever she thought a home truth needed, she did not hesitate to tell it, but skilled in silver-coating the pill, she never in the least reminded me of that bugbear described by Canning,

“Give me the avowed erect and manly foe,
Firm I can meet, perhaps return the blow;
But of all plagues, good Heaven, thy wrath can send,
Save me, oh save me from the candid friend.”

If she had a fault in my eyes, it was that she was a little too intolerant of any failure to enjoy social life as much as she enjoyed it herself.

Margot Asquith in her autobiography described Con as “brittle”, by which I suppose she meant that she could be hurt by her friends, as who that really cares for them can not? But what Margot meant by a “becalmed exterior” I can’t imagine, for Con’s manner was so vivacious that it bordered on the agitated. Her love of being amused, her twinkling delight in the wit and idiosyncrasies of others made it a pleasure to watch her face when she was with people whose talk she enjoyed. It was like a child’s at a circus. So much so, that though she had ample resources to make her excellent company to herself, I could never imagine her alone. So strongly did I associate her with lively talk that I could no more think of her without an interlocutor than I could think of Jessop without his bat. What a happiness-dispenser she was! After all these years the mere thought of Avon Tyrrell rekindles the memory of what it was like to feel consciously, exultantly young.

* * *

Summer seaside delights always remind me of Penrhos, the house in Wales where I used to stay with Lord and Lady Stanley of Alderley. Thanks to their youngest daughter,

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Venetia,¹ a great friend of my girlhood, Penrhos was a favourite meeting-place for Violet Asquith, her brothers, myself, and those who with us were accused of forming a "Set". Though none of us would ever admit to being in the least deliberately cliquey, we did feel a little self-conscious at Penrhos, for there we couldn't fail to realise that some of the family rather resented the new friends Venetia, their youngest member, had introduced into their home.

One Penrhos party was much enlivened by an entire stranger—the question whether or not he had joined the "Set" became the stock joke of the house-party (nearly every house-party had one stock joke)—a baby bear Venetia had bought at Jamrach's as a present for herself. At his then tender age, "Lancelot" was a most beguiling pet, affectionate, guzzlingly greedy, and in appearance sheer "Teddy Bear" come alive. One evening whilst exploring the house he wambled into the bathroom in front of me. As I lay pleasantly relaxed in clouds of steam, I heard the scuttering of claws, stertorous breathing. Looking up I saw Lancelot had clambered up on to the chair which held my towel, on which he now sat in a furry hump, blinking at me out of his sly little slits of eyes. . . . Suddenly, flop, flump, splash! There he was, floundering in the bath beside me, and his frenzied struggles to get himself out of hot water left me well claw-marked.

Before long, poor Lancelot, increasing in bulk, slobber and infragrance, and declining in charm, but still affectionate—too demonstratively so—took it into his head to hug a visitor, whereupon public opinion compelled Venetia to present him to the Zoo, where we used to go and pelt him with buns, wondering, but unable to decide, whether he was content behind bars or was pining for the amenities of a house and the companionship of Man.

My next Penrhos party included a guest very much more memorable than Lancelot—none other than Winston Churchill. Besides intoxicating us with his talk, he made his presence felt

¹ Afterwards Hon. Mrs. Edwin Montagu

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and remembered by giving a most impressive display of that very quality of leadership which was destined to make him the saviour of his country. He had not yet discovered that he was a painter, and so still needed others to help him to give his energy and creative instinct full scope.

One flaming day in June he decided, or rather decreed, that under his direction we must all, not fight, but dig on the beaches. Symbolically enough, we were to construct immense fortifications.

We began our labours in the height of the afternoon. The sun beat pitilessly down on our breaking backs. The sand burned our bare feet. We dug till we panted, gasped, ached in every muscle.

What a remarkable testimony to that compelling personality that it never occurred to one of us that our toil, our sufferings, were not inevitable! Not one of us thought of downing tools. No whisper of mutiny arose. Staunchly, if a little sullenly, we chanted with dry throats:

*“Ours not to reason why,
Ours but to dig and die”.*

Nor did our dominator show the slightest symptom of waning energy, incipient fatigue, or budding compassion. In fact, a Grave Situation was rapidly developing on that beach, when—only just in time to save one of the older members of his slave gang from succumbing to heart failure—Winston providentially injured himself. The shoulder which had been dislocated in the South African War “went out” again.

Probably Winston in the course of what nobody can deny has been a full life, has forgotten this trivial, long-ago incident, but how often did it return to my mind in those years when everything seemed to depend on that very power of his to infuse others with some spark of his own spirit!

I see him now as he looked that day, more than forty years ago. How different from the elder statesman all the world now knows. Yet how like! Then—the hair was still red, the brow less massive, the countenance pug, rather than bull-dog. He looked older then; as if the weight of the world and of

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his own destiny were on his already bowed shoulders. Yet the boyish look he was never to lose was there. . . .

Now he brooded; silent, glowering—almost glum. Now his talk surged in magnificent periods, the flow of his speech occasionally checked as by a pebble in its stream. Then as now, there was the dynamic quality; the tenacity; the defiance, the “Ha Ha” to the trumpets, the rich, at times sardonic, humour, the framing of unforgettable phrases. . . .

Always there was that almost frightening intensity—incandescent, white, but suddenly, as a stream in silver spate is gilded by the sun, turning to gold, as his brilliant wit flashed or his imagination glowed. . . . Now and again his imagination burst into blaze. He held you with his glittering eye.

* * *

I wonder if you fell a victim to that epidemic of pageants which swept the country in the first quarter of this century. Were you ever coerced into making a fool of yourself as a Druid, an Ancient Roman, or a Regency beau? I demeaned myself by accepting every kind of part, from Titania and the Spirit of the Cotswolds down to just one of a crowd of lepers. My physical sufferings in the cause were great. I spent an entire day of torrential rain in a chiffon dress, over which I could wear nothing else, while every now and again the hoofs of galloping horses splattered clods of sodden earth into my face.

I also suffered (and enjoyed) moments of acute social embarrassment, as for example when a redoubtable Pageant Mistress bawled through her megaphone, “For my Fifth Episode, I require a dozen very fat, rather flabby-looking men and a dozen quite plain women. For Episode Six, a number of thoroughly weedy men. Volunteers kindly step forward.” She pointed here and there, “I see several who will do admirably,” she graciously declared, with the air of one who congratulates the winners of a Beauty competition.

One of my most vivid memories of making a Roman holiday was taking part in the York pageant, mounted on a very restive horse, and trying to conceal from the audience the fact

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that the safety-pin which alone kept my improvised costume together had come undone and was causing me acute pain and worse anxiety.

For this ordeal I stayed with Lord and Lady Wenlock at Escrick, their home near York.

But I have many other happier memories of visits to the Wenlocks—particularly of the immensely enjoyable balls followed by huge bedroom breakfast-parties, animatedly presided over by the daughter of the house, Irene Lawley, who, pretty as a Dresden shepherdess, appeared to trip through life as blithely as though it were an unending cotillon and she its leader, but was in reality, then as now, remarkably capable, exceptionally useful, and a born home-maker.

At one of those very gay Escrick balls, to my own, but not the butler's amusement, I had myself announced as fifteen different notorieties in succession. This butler, though grieved and embarrassed, did not snub this simple form of humour, unlike that "colleague" of his who, asked to collaborate in a similar jest, firmly torpedoed it. "If you please, my Lady," he declaimed from the door, "Miss Ponsonby is downstairs, but she wishes to be announced as the Archbishop of Canterbury."

I remember many pleasant Saturday-to-Mondays spent with the Jekyll family in their Surrey home, Munstead. Lady Jekyll, who wrote an admirable cookery-book, so entertaining that it is well worth reading, though few of the ingredients in her recipes are now allowed us, was a past mistress in every branch of the art of housewifery. Her inspired food was as alluring to the eye—everything was *en surprise*—as it was ambrosial to the taste. Some of the dishes she created, her *spécialités de la maison*, could surely, so her guests declared, only have come to her in a dream.

Munstead was famous for its garden, and everything in the house combined comfort, character and beauty. The beds were supreme, the bath salts more varied than anywhere else. The very fire which burned more brightly than others was stirred by no ordinary poker, but one made to Lady Jekyll's order out of some special wood which when used gave out a delicious fragrance.

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Munstead was an abode of the Arts as well as of creature comforts. Music, talk, reading aloud, all flourished there, and Lady Jekyll's two talented daughters, Barbara¹ and Pamela,² conspired with their mother to keep their guests as happy and amused as they were comfortable.

* * *

In my youth one of my greatest delights was to sleep out of doors. To have no ceiling but the sky, and to be woken by birdsong at dawn instead of by the housemaid's knock at eight, filled me with bliss. But few grown-up people sympathised with this taste. "Why," they asked with crass rationality, "Why leave a perfectly comfortable bedroom for certain discomfort, damp, insect-bites and probable rain?" My father indeed thought the practice sufficiently what he called "potty", to demand that cold-water treatment which used to be given in lunatic asylums. Jug in hand, he would stand at his bedroom window on the look-out for my return; and as I tried to sneak into the house unseen—why is sleeping out so disfiguring?—I would hear a jubilant Ha, Ha, Ha!, and down on my tousled head came a well-aimed cascade of water.

I gave my Aunt Pamela³ top marks for one characteristic trait—her complete understanding of this so-called folly, and it was under her connivance that I enjoyed far the best staged sleeping-out-of-doors of my life. One marvellous night in June, when a party of young people were staying with her at Wilsford, she lent us her caravan to transport our bedding, and waved us off on our four-mile walk to Stonehenge, where we made our beds immediately outside the circle of great stones. As far as sleep went it was a chequered night. At two we were woken by the screams of one of our party, a girl who in her nightmare was being sacrificed by Druids. An hour later, the horse, inexpertly hobbled by ourselves, broke loose, and stampeding for his stables, narrowly missed my face with his hoofs. At

¹ Now Lady Freyberg.

² Afterwards Mrs. Reginald McKenna.

³ Lady Glenconner, afterwards Viscountess Grey.

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dawn we awoke for good, drenched in dew, the song of the skylarks ringing in our ears—"Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive!"

Wilsford, with its chalk streams, enchanted water-meadows bordered by the Avon, and the downs rising behind it in a natural amphitheatre, is one of the loveliest places I know.

Aunt Pamela, as you know, was beautiful and gifted, but I mustn't give you an overdose of my own family, so I won't attempt to describe her. Nor to my regret did I ever see so much of her as of my other uncles and aunts.

Family love was almost a religion with the Wyndhams. Few men can have been fonder of one another than George and his soldier brother Guy.¹ My mother was devoted to both her brothers and, as well she might be, to her sister Madeline Adeane. She loved and admired Pamela too, but these two—the eldest and the youngest of the family—did not in later life see very much of one another, not because, widely unlike though they were, they did not enjoy one another's company, but because their very different ways of life made meetings difficult to arrange.

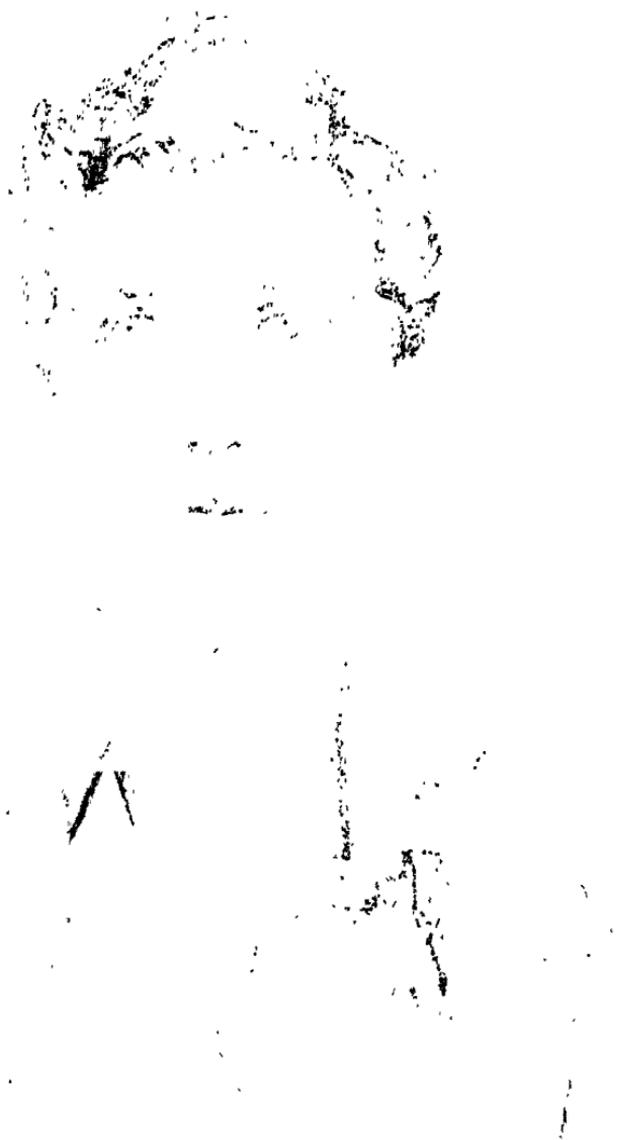
Unlike my spontaneous, unmethodical mother, who, as I have told you, was at everyone's beck and call, Pamela had a very definite sense of values, and sufficient firmness—rigidity some called it—to defend these values by keeping to certain self-imposed rules. Had she not done so, sought after as she was, her life would have become too cluttered-up by acquaintances and engagements to leave her enough time to devote to those things she thought most worth while—her children, her village friends, poetry, the cultivation of her own considerable literary gift, and that life-long enthralling interest so happily shared with her second husband, Edward Grey²—her love for, and study of, wild birds. All these and other absorptions made her reluctant to leave her own home more often than was necessary. That was why she seldom came to Stanway. Neither could my mother, tethered, as she nearly always was, to Stanway by visitors invited, if not by her, by themselves, often go to Wilsford.

¹ Colonel Guy Wyndham.

² Edward, Viscount Grey of Fallodon.



Mr. and Mrs. Winston Churchill shortly after their Marriage



R

Edward Horner

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From time to time Mamma would become a little distressed by the fact that two sisters should see so little of one another. She once wrote a letter to this effect, to which Pamela's reply contained, so we thought, a wonderfully typical phrase, "It is quite all right about you and me", she wrote, "I find I am able to love *operatively* (the italics are mine) from a distance."

How much life would be simplified if more people made this convenient discovery!

Adopting Aunt Pamela's phrase, we constantly urged our mother to "love operatively from a distance" whichever friends of hers we did not want at Stanway.

Have you ever noticed how intolerant some people are of bird-lovers? This hobby, unshared, seems to irritate far more than others. "Bird-bores", amateur ornithologists are often called.

I remember someone saying rather acidly, "How much I should like to know your beautiful and clever Aunt Pamela, what a pity I'm not a pipit or a reed-warbler."

This was quite unfair. For all her love of birds Pamela did make time for plenty of human beings, and had many devoted friends who found in her companionship a restfulness it could not have given had she not exercised a certain thrift in the spending of her time. I don't believe she ever wasted a single hour of her own, or of anyone else's life.

I think Pamela remained all her life in unusually close touch with the young. Sir Osbert Sitwell, a great friend of her eldest son Bimbo, who was killed in the 1914-18 War, has told us how delightfully welcome she made the friends of her children feel at that time, and the contemporaries of her gifted youngest son, Stephen, owed her the same gratitude. In *Noble Essences*, Sir Osbert Sitwell writes: "Her house became for Rex Whistler what it had been for me, a second home, and the particular and kindly atmosphere he found there stimulated him and accustomed him to seeing many kinds of people."

* * *

In girlhood, as in later life, I often stayed with Lord and

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Lady Desborough, then Mr. and Mrs. W. Grenfell, at Taplow, their house perched on a hill high above the Thames over whose waters Lord Desborough seemed to rule like Neptune over the sea. Taplow was full of every imaginable kind of trophy won by its owner, who, perhaps the greatest living all-round athlete, had sensationally distinguished himself on land, sea and river. His earlier feats—athletic wild oats they might almost be called—included swimming the Niagara Rapids, and rowing across the Channel in a small open boat. He was also one of his country's hardest voluntary workers.

At Taplow, guests were keyed-up to concert pitch by the unique social gifts of their hostess. Breakfasts there were more lively than champagne dinners elsewhere. Whatever you might be engaged upon you felt as though something important were at stake. Everything took on a greater intensity, and enjoyment seemed the law of life—enjoyment and enthralled interest in your fellow-creatures. I would sooner have died than confess to feeling tired, or ready to tolerate the idea of bedtime, and so unflagging was the hostess herself that after presiding over a tournament of talk at each meal, holding a succession of "dentists" (a "dentist" was our word for a pre-arranged tête-à-tête) and playing games until after midnight, she would often sit up talking to the girls of the party until far into the small hours.

Taplow was a remarkable meeting-place, for while Lady Desborough's social dexterity seemed able with equal ease to tune in to statesmen, diplomats, soldiers and poets, her early-laurelled sons, Julian and Billy, both gladiators of physical strength and prowess, both bearing academic honours thick upon them, made their parents' home an arena in which all the spirited youth—intellectual and athletic—of Oxford and Cambridge met in friendly contest.

* * *

When, as sometimes happens, the long ago returns, one of the loveliest settings where the past re-enacts itself in the theatre of my memory is Mells, for some four hundred years the

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Somersetshire home of the Horner family. The very name "Mells" seems to breathe a mellowed serenity. A small grey-gabled Manor House, it stands in its gentle abiding beauty but a stone's throw from the church with its famous tower, to my mind the finest in England.

Though Mells was so essentially the scene of family life, it was very dear to many guests, to some of whom, indeed, it seemed the nearest approach to a home of their own, so generously did its mistress give them the freedom of her own abundantly rich and varied life.

Frances Horner's appearance was immediately impressive. She had remarkably beautiful, very wide apart, somehow strange eyes—"ghost eyes", a little boy called them. The expression behind her eyes and the lines—shaped like swallow's wings in flight—so deeply delved into her brow, made her face seem that of one whose experience of life has been unusually wide and deep. Possessed of a forceful character, a vigorous mind, and salt-like sense, she was a woman of great influence, and an inspiring, steadfast friend. Highly executive, she was skilled in everything to do with the ordering and beautification of a house, and the welfare of a village. Seemingly prodigiously strong, she was as untiring socially as she was in work, and enjoyed a robust unfastidious love of life and of human beings.

Sir John Horner, a tall bearded figure out of a Paul Veronese picture, was a fine presence often by his own choice in the background: but though aloof ready to unbend and, when unbent, charming and humorous. He loved the company of scholars, particularly of historians. Unfortunately he was deaf, though I rather suspected not nearly so deaf as he sometimes found it convenient to appear.

Their four children, two daughters and two sons, were all endowed with considerably more than their fair share of beauty. My two great friends in the family were Katharine, the second daughter, and Edward, the eldest son.

Katharine's beauty I have already tried to make you see, but beauty was not the only glamour she exercised over my young self. Did she not know Greek? Was she not reputed, though

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she would never let me see it, to write poetry? Above all, was she not romantically engaged to Raymond Asquith?

Edward, who, to the bitter loss of his friends, was killed in the First World War, had singular radiance of youth and almost Greek good looks. His gaiety, bright intelligence, pliable mind, quick comprehension made his company as great a luxury as one could possibly enjoy and miss for the rest of one's days. I loved, too, his characteristic and contagious conviction that life should be lived, not only lavishly, but resplendently.

As I write, the years fall away, and I am back at Mells in a room full of books and of reminders of the Pre-Raphaelites, by whom Frances Horner had been so greatly admired.

Let me give you a picture of the family. Frances, perhaps the most accomplished needlewoman of her day, sits stitching vigorously at a large embroidery-frame. From time to time she lays down her needle to study a catalogue of bulbs. She is also listening, and intermittently talking to Lord Haldane, a constant guest, who puffing at a large cigar, speaks of the Infinite, or quotes in his queer guttural whisper, "No coward soul is mine, No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere", which he tells me is the finest poem ever written. Cecely, the eldest of the family, with looks straight out of a fairy tale, is painting a water-colour of the view of the garden through the window. Mark, the youngest of the family, an extremely handsome boy of twelve or so, is poring over the Army and Navy Stores List which for him, no one quite knows why, holds all the romance of the Arabian Nights. A large dog lies at his feet.

Katharine drifts into the room, wearing a pale blue sun-bonnet. In her hand is a volume of Yeats' early poems, and she herself looks not unlike one of his fated heroines—Deirdre, perhaps. Perched grimacing on her shoulder, sits Fluto, a little monkey that Raymond Asquith has given her. This creature is very dear to her, but not to all visitors, some of whom he is not too particular to bite. Edward comes in superbly dressed all in white for riding. . . .

The three Miss Horners, who live in the village, suddenly appear to remind their sister-in-law—quite unnecessarily, for

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he never forgets an engagement—of some parish function at which she is expected. They are visibly horrified to see that their niece Katharine is smoking a cigarette. . . . They depart.

I am asked to read aloud from William Morris' *The Earthly Paradise*. As so often happens, this has an immediately pentecostal effect. Everyone bursts into conversation. Some argument springs up. It may be about Yeats. It may be as to whether or not the monkey is to come to luncheon. It may be—very likely is—about why on earth the So and So's have been asked to stay, for Frances' children do not by any means share her gregarious taste in human beings. Excited by the raised voices, the monkey starts to gibber and chatter. This sets the big dog off barking. Sir John comes in, and asks a little plaintively if there need be quite so much noise, and why not go into luncheon which has been ready for ages?

We enjoy an unforgettably good meal, for our hostess has made her home as famous for food—both its appearance and its taste—as for stimulating talk. In the afternoon we ride or bathe.

After tea we sit in the lovely walled-garden and talk. I love to make a third with Edward and Katharine. Edward, receptive, responsive, is always a fluent eager talker. Katharine can be silent, seemingly far away, rapt in her own thoughts. She never speaks just for the sake of saying something. She has no small talk, but at any moment may kindle—and then how one listens!—into lively speech; even flare into brief flame. And whatever her mood one always wants so much to know her point of view, and enjoys the climate of her mind.

To remember Mells is to be reminded of so much—the discovery of Yeats—budding friendships, quickening interests; in fact of a lovely sense of widening dawn.

Almost alone of all the houses where I used to stay as a girl, Mells is still the home of one to whom in childhood it was home. To the happiness of many who find it a haven, Katharine still lives there. There has been no break with the past, which seems still to permeate the atmosphere and gently mingle with the present.

THE "NEW ELIZABETHANS"

SEVERAL of the friends of my youth who were killed in the First World War belonged to that group which afterwards came to be called the "New Elizabethans". You have asked me what the "New Elizabethans" were like? To describe them would be as difficult as to convey the atmosphere before the 1914 War, when the young lived so carelessly, and yet so strenuously.

What common denominator was there between beings so widely dissimilar one from another?

Lloyd Osborne in his book *The New Elizabethans* wrote of these young soldiers that "They were bound together by friendship and a large-horizoned philosophy of living which scorned many social conventions and many schools of thought."

What else did they share?

Nearly all of them were brilliant scholars who refused to allow study to cut them off from life. Many of them were redoubtable athletes. Most of them were poets; all of them were adventurous in the art of life. They were exuberant, and at times, as youth should be, riotous. The dazzle of their wit and fancy often concealed their underlying earnestness, and a trick they had of speaking in inverted commas was mistaken by the undiscerning for a symptom of "cynicism". Because of this trick, combined with their inveterate habit of weighing all things for themselves, of pulling up by the roots for examination every moral code and social convention, and their horror of "cant", certain members of the older generation with stodgier, less penetrating minds than their own frowned upon them. These elders, shaking humourless heads, spoke of levity and lack of principle; they condemned these young men as hedonists, and questioned their patriotism. To their own con-

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temporaries their bright flippancy was never more than a quite transparent veil.

In her autobiography Margot Asquith writes, "Brilliance of a certain kind may bring people together for amusement, but it will not keep them together for long; and the young, hard, pre-war group that I am thinking of was short-lived." When she wrote this, had Margot already forgotten that it was difficult for any group, brilliant or otherwise, whose young men became subalterns in 1914, to "keep together for long"? It was not their friendships which were short-lived; it was they themselves.

To say, as D. H. Lawrence said, that these young soldiers were "in love with death"—because, challenged to match themselves with the hour, they fought with as much zest as they had played; and, faced with its loss, perhaps found new intensity in life—to say this is, of course, arrant nonsense. Their death was, in the fullest sense, sacrifice. Heaven knows, they had enough to lose! If some of them did feel, as I trust they did, that mystical joy in fighting immortally expressed in Julian Grenfell's poem *Into Battle*, they were equally alive to all the other aspects of war. But since the doom that had come upon the world could not be shunned, and they were poets, most of them preferred to dwell upon whatsoever mitigated the horror of war—its lurid splendour, and the human qualities it revealed—the fellowship, the heroism, the humour. To glorify the qualities that partially redeem war is not to vindicate war.

Nor did they—as some now seem to suppose—enjoy a fool's paradise. Though, I think, many of them were upheld by a sense of crusade, and though, thank Heaven, they could not foresee that future which is now our present, yet most of them were far too intelligent to believe in the slogan of "war to end war".

You ask why were they called "New Elizabethans"? Because, I suppose, of their exuberance, their love of life in all its variousness, the impulse they shared to express themselves in verse. I think, too, because the name implies their great, even if unconscious, indebtedness to the past and to tradition.

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The name was probably conferred on them after Rennell Rodd wrote, in his tribute to one of the most outstanding and lovable of them all, Charles Lister :

“He was of the type which would have found its right environment in the large horizons of Elizabethan days, and he would have been of the company of Sidney and Raleigh and the Gilberts, and boisterously welcomed at the Mermaid’s Club.”

Whatever I may write here of those I happened to know is, of course, applicable equally to thousands of others of their generation. Dr. Johnson said of Pembroke College that it was a “nest of singing birds”. Gilbert Chesterton writing of the war of 1914-1918 said, “one does not know if it is fighters singing, or singers fighting”.

Miraculous and wonderful, indeed, how a whole generation was filled with the gift, as well as the desire, to express itself in poetry. A Pentecost of pain . . .? Merciful, mysterious compensation . . .?

All I know, looking back, is that “suddenly everyone burst out singing”. The “war poets”, as they were rather crudely called, were recruited from all ages and all ranks of the fighting army. Some few of that great company I was privileged to know.

When we spoke the other day of the “New Elizabethans”, you asked me to tell you of four in particular of those whom I knew personally—Charles Lister, Patrick Shaw-Stewart, and Julian and Billy Grenfell; a good choice, for, though so representative of the group, these four great friends were yet widely dissimilar one from another.

Charles Lister¹ had a personality which, from earliest infancy until his death at twenty-seven, attracted and held the love of the most diverse people. His distress at human suffering and his craving to help to bring about a social Utopia made him an extremely active Socialist both at Eton and Oxford, a remarkably persuasive one too, able, if only temporarily, to

¹ Son of Lord Ribblesdale.

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effect the most improbable conversions. Monsignor Knox wrote, "The only explanation of his suddenly converting to the tenets of Socialism men of the most alien turn of mind was that no one was capable of resisting Charles when buttonholed by him for more than two minutes."

Not content with the study of sociological treatises and statistics, Charles went to live for some time in the East End to learn about poverty at first hand.

His multifarious Socialist activities were at their height during his Oxford years throughout which, closely "affiliated"—as the jargon runs—to the Independent Labour Party, he continually organised clubs and committees, and spoke at the many very lively public meetings instigated by himself. Despite all these preoccupations and distractions he took a First in Greats—under the circumstances a remarkable feat.

Charles' Socialism sprang from the generous enthusiasm which made him wish to dedicate his life to some cause, and an eager love of humanity, combined with a youthful faith in its perfectibility. When deeper knowledge of both character and conditions brought him reluctantly to the conclusion that human beings were not governed by logic, nor millenniums likely to be ushered in by Acts of Parliament, he regretfully changed his politics. Thus, to those who disbelieved in violent changes and breaking away from the past, this brilliant and large-hearted young man became the constantly-cited example of what they believed to be the truth of that dictum—a dictum so irritating to those of opposite opinions—"A young man who has not been a Socialist before he is twenty-five shows he has no heart; a young man who remains one after he is twenty-five shows he has no head." But though Charles changed his political opinions, he never lost his burning desire to better the lot of his fellow-creatures. The thought of the Industrial System which, so it seemed to him, had turned millions of them into mere cogs and wheels in a vast inhuman mechanism, continued to torment him.

For all his preoccupation with Causes, and his dedicated spirit, no one had a more contagious gaiety than Charles. His

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presence enlivened every gathering, and, though greatly attached to his personal friends, he seemed equally at home in any kind of company. To quote Monsignor Knox again, "Political Oxford, Sporting Oxford, Revolutionary Oxford, all knew him as a familiar."

And what a beloved, top-heavy familiar, with his large head, ungainly movements, eccentric manner, melting smile, and irresistible funniness, both intentional and unintentional! Though Charles could always lead the laugh at himself in retrospect, he was too much interested in his subject to be hampered by any sense of the ridiculous while orating, or ever to care in the least what sort of a figure he might be cutting in public. As with all the most lovable people, one laughed at, as well as with, him.

Besides his serene disdain of danger, and that love of his fellow-creatures which, perhaps for the first time, found full scope in the fellowship of war, his rollicking sense of fun stood him in good stead throughout the horrors of Gallipoli, where he was a master of merriment, assuring and almost convincing his comrades in the Hood Battalion that they were having the "time of their lives". "Charles's incomparable personality enlivens the whole Battalion", wrote Patrick Shaw-Stewart.

Like many of the greatest enjoyers of life, Charles seemed to set little store on its continuance. In one of his last letters from the Front, written before he was wounded for the third and last time, he wrote, "I know now that I shall live. I do not mean that I may not be killed."

* * *

Patrick Shaw-Stewart survived Gallipoli to fight and die in France, but he, too, had been one of the many memorable figures of the famous Hood Battalion in which Rupert Brooke was a subaltern. Charles and Patrick were devoted friends who delighted in one another's company, but in most ways they were remarkably unlike one another. Patrick, an extreme Conservative, an unabashed hedonist, was evidently much

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more concerned with individuals than with Causes. He seemed to look on life as both a race which he intended to win, and a banquet which he intended to enjoy.

An easy winner of "The Newcastle" and "The Ireland", and a Fellow of All Souls, this brilliant being was able, without any apparent change of gear, to switch from scholarship to finance, to become at the age of twenty-four a managing director of Baring Brothers. But this post was not intended by him to be more than provisional. He was still considering how best to open his oyster, the world, when—as he said—the date of his birthday indicated that he must go into the Army, whereupon he at once became a keen, gallant and extremely efficient soldier.

Patrick's mind was so astonishingly quick that whatever you said to him was answered almost before it was spoken. Every ball was half-volleyed. Conscious, I think, of lacking the letter of introduction of good looks, he took infinite trouble to make people like him. What else do I remember? His amazing verbal memory, infallible sense of humour, penetrating insight, extreme candour, and his hatred of what he thought false enthusiasms and of convictions rooted in obtuseness; also his disarmingly frank and successful social ambition, amusingly combined with an engaging trick of always trying to make one think the worst of him. Above all I remember what I liked most in him—his intense appreciation and affection for his friends.

I don't believe the worldly hopes men set their hearts upon would ever have turned to ashes for Patrick. Therefore from one so eager for this world's delights and prizes, from one who, as he so often declared, had no hope of personal immortality, the following poem, striking as it does, a slightly unexpected note, comes, I think, with special poignancy. It was found written on a blank page of his copy of *The Shropshire Lad*, for which he had a passionate admiration.

*"I saw a man this morning
Who did not wish to die;
I ask, and cannot answer,
If otherwise wish I.*

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*Achilles came to Troyland
And I to Chersonese;
He turned from wrath to battle,
And I from three days' peace.*

*Was it so hard, Achilles,
So very hard to die?
Thou knowest and I know not—
So much the happier I.*

*I will go back this morning
From Imbros over the sea;
Stand in the trench, Achilles,
Flame-capped, and shout for me."*

* * *

Of the many remarkable pairs of brothers whose deaths in the war left their country, as well as their friends, so immeasurably the poorer, none can have been more variously impressive than Julian and Billy Grenfell, those magnificent specimens of youthful strength whom Maurice Baring called Castor and Pollux. Both were remarkable scholars, brilliant athletes, natural leaders of men.

Much as these devoted brothers had in common, their friends found them delightfully unlike. Julian, who looked every inch the born fighter, mighty hunter that he was, had an almost stern expression. Even in repose he suggested sheathed strength, suspended speed; while Billy, a cherubic-looking giant, moved with a slow drowsy grace that masked his immense strength. The sweetness of his smile and manner to those he was fond of was wonderfully different from anything shown to mere acquaintances or to unkindred spirits; for neither brother had yet had time to outgrow the rather uncompromising intolerance to which youth is prone. Nor did they see the slightest need to conceal it.

Julian's poem *Into Battle* has become so famous that many think of him as a single-poem genius. You and I know that

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he wrote other beautiful poems, but you may never have seen these simple verses his brother wrote when John Manners, one of the most attractive of the group of friends, was killed at Mons. I like these verses for their very unpretentiousness, and because, though so evocative of the boy to whom they were written, they would have been equally appropriate to how many others of his generation.

“O heart-and-soul and careless played
Our little band of brothers,
And never recked the time would come
To change our games for others.

It's joy for those who played with you
To picture now what grace
Was in your mind and single heart
And in your radiant face.

Your light-foot strength by flood and field
For England keener glowed;
To whatsoever things are fair
We know through you the road;

Nor is our grief the less thereby;
O swift and strong and dear, Goodbye.”

Sometimes, only very rarely, I try to picture what these early friends, who did not grow old as we who lived grew old, would look like today had they lived. . . . I never can do it. I still see them too vividly as I remember them. Eternally young, their bright images guard the memory of the youth and hope which once we shared.

POSTSCRIPT

Now that I've come to the end of my second volume, you say I must begin the next at once.

I know that Anthony Trollope, suppose he finished one book in the four hours daily set apart for writing, did straight-way start on another the same morning. But I am not Anthony Trollope. No, I consider myself entitled to a long spell of idleness—I shall feel such a Croesus of leisure. You can't think how pleasant it will be to read instead of to write! But when I've enjoyed a holiday—then, I promise you, I will take the pen between my teeth again and do my best to obey more of your commands and describe to you, as they appeared to me, some of the people whom you have asked me about—my father-in-law H. H. Asquith, J. M. Barrie, Thomas Hardy and various others.

CLAVERTON LODGE, BATH, 1950
15 QUEEN'S GATE GARDENS, S.W. 7, 1951.

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