



**WORLDS
WITHIN WORLDS**

STELLA BENSON

WORLDS WITHIN WORLDS



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WORLDS WITHIN WORLDS

BY
STELLA BENSON

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S. B.

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PREFACE

WRITTEN IN A BAD TEMPER

WHEN I was young, I travelled by mistake, but now I do it on purpose. I go about the world now with three real brass-studded wardrobe trunks instead of two shabby suitcases, with real letters of introduction and letters of credit instead of precarious samples of my intellectual wares, with a real helpful husband instead of in dangerous loneliness. We grown-up travellers are either tourists or empire-builders; continents are things to observe intelligently or to take root in—never things to stumble over.

I used to think that rootlessness meant lack of prejudices—that being foot-loose meant also being mind-loose—(in the best and most refined sense). But now, as an empire-builder myself, I do not believe that travel broadens the mind after all. It seems to me that the further away from the Strand you go, the more your mind shrinks. Often the Empire-builder Home At Last from Vast Spaces has a mind that has shrunk to a mere button. An excellent working button, of course, but small and bony. This button it is that sticks in the cogs of

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Progress and puts the wheels out of gear. Perhaps Progress is the wrong word; Change would be better. The use of the word *Progress* instead of *Change* crowns novelty with a kind of halo and suggests that there is necessarily virtue in everything new. This is an easy thought, but not always a true one. Actually there must be *some* new ideas that are bound to fail and *some* old ideas that ought to survive. There must be *something* in Diehardism, though it is sad that in the Diehard's view it is always the other fellow who ought to die. "If I had my way, I'd prop 'em all against a wall and shoot 'em. . . ." This, the Diehard's creed, is heard, I maintain, in the far corners of the earth much more often than in the Strand. If you hear it in the Strand, it is usually said by a homecomer, a colonel of the Indian Army, an Australian sheep expert, a Canadian lumberman, a New Zealand hospital-sister, an escaped remittance man from the Argentine, a militant missionary from Africa. *Someone* should die, I admit, and, if necessary, die hard; no doubt an excellent case can be made for propping people up against walls. All I maintain is that this talk of walls comes somehow ill from the lips of persons who live in the Vast Open Spaces. In their minds, at least, there should surely be no walls to prop people up against. If it were true that travel broadens the mind, the mind of the traveller should afford free unhedged pasture for tolerance. But it is not true. For genuine tight-laced insularity, give me the Vast, Unshackled Open Spaces. Freedom, like Charity,

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begins at home—in the Strand. All the tolerant smiles in the Strand, if placed end to end, as the statisticians say, might reach as far as Heaven. But they would not reach as far as Singapore.

When I crossed seas and visited empire-builders and economic pioneers in their own Vast Spaces, it seemed to me that old heads were always fitted on to young shoulders—shoulders that ought to have been too busy squaring up to adventures ever to allow the heads to acquire that elderly habit of wagging. When I say Vast Spaces, of course I mean Bubbling Well Road, Shanghai, or the Peak Club, Hongkong, or the Army and Navy Stores, Calcutta, or Oakland, California. Travel has a way of shrinking the Vast Spaces, too. But even when there is a little space to spare—on the trackless sea, for instance, or among the sands of the Sahara Desert—that space echoes with voices saying, “I simply don’t know what the world’s coming to . . .” or, “Say, listen, who won the Great War, anyway?” or, “Just look at these modern dances—downright immoral . . . they ought to be stopped”.

Outside of the cities of the world there seem to be really no young people. There are persons between eighteen and forty years old who are there either to get rich or else to do their duty or else to marry other young persons. But there are scarcely any young minds. Scarcely any people who could put the world on its feet at once if only the Prime Minister or the President of the United States would come to them for a new idea, scarcely any

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people who would dare to suggest that there might be two points of view about a strike, scarcely any people who write bad poetry or shingle their hair or keep their hats on to France. The fox-trot may or may not be as beautiful and as refined as the minuet, but surely somebody in every drawing-room all the world over ought to be willing to lose his temper in the effort to prove that it is. Temper should surely be lost in the cause of to-morrow—not only in the cause of yesterday. Loss of temper is a small sacrifice to keep the world alive. But pioneers in the Vast Spaces of which I speak, never lose their temper, except at bridge, or when the waiter brings a Gin-and-vermouth instead of a Gin-and-bitters, or when the mail-train is late. Every bar in the uttermost ends of the earth is full of old young men, with or without beards, saying, in unison with Edward Lear's unwilling ornithologist, "It is just as I feared. . . ." The political, moral and social comments on, and solutions of, modern problems that appear in the correspondence columns of the newspapers of Further America, or the outer fringes of English-speaking civilisation, would have seemed stuffy to the late Queen Anne. Rash admirers of Mr. Bertrand Russell dodge about the Limitless Horizons in constant danger from lynching.

I suppose the truth is that pioneers and far-away people live so much on change that they hunger for stability as a man fed on sweets might long for bread. Home, they insist, must remain Home still, and they pray to their gods to keep

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alive, till they reach it, the Home they remember. "New things must always fail, and even if they were to succeed, they would still be new and would make for a cold utopian homecoming for us at last."

Travel then, I suggest, shrinks and fades the mind as an inferior laundry shrinks and fades the silks that are so bright and ample when we wear them first. People who want to keep their minds broad, flexible and bright, should stay at home—should, above all, keep clear of God's Great Open Spaces. I am myself a melancholy illustration of my own contention, since it is a fact that *Life Between the Lone Horizons* has left me stiff with unreasonable prejudices. One of these prejudices is that the hermit who deliberately selects the exclusive society of a million trees, an intermittent grizzly bear, a patch of willow-weed and a pair of chickadees, is simply selecting the society of his intellectual equals. Of course the hermit might retort that he is, on the contrary, selecting the Best Society possible—that, in fact, of the Landlord of the Great Outdoors Himself. In this case I can only bow to the hermit's lofty taste, but I must say I am sceptical about the intimacy he claims. A man should not claim friendship with his Social Superiors unless he is really on what I may call "back porch" terms with them. Now it always seems to me that this is rather the attitude of the chickadee to the hermit than that of the hermit to his Creator. The hermit puts on his spiritual silk hat and patent leather oxfords to go and call on the

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Lord of the Manor, finds Him not at home, and comes back to see a family of field mice making themselves at home on his back porch. Like to like. . . .

This, of course, applies with more particularity to the Great Open Spaces of God's Own Country (including, for the moment, with no political *arrière pensée*, the Dominion of Canada). But I myself speak as one who, though steeped in the works of Mrs. Gene Stratton-Porter, has actually sampled the great open spaces of "the Orient"—(how blasphemous the great open spaces look without their capitals!)—more than those of America. I am perhaps soured by the discovery that the voice of Nature the All-Mother can be more satisfactorily heard in South Kensington than in China. Nature has no more voice in China than has any other female. The harsh hiccoughings of water-buffaloes scratching every inch of her surface with rice-ploughs are practically Mother Nature's only forms of expression in China. Of course she sometimes breaks out into an insubordinate smile of wild azaleas or, like a tomboy, trills out a lark's whistle to the sky, but the Chinese, with hatchets and bird snares, suppress these unwomanly manifestations wherever possible. But even if Nature possessed a voice—even if the Creator had a message for the romantic solitary, it is my belief that such voices are always drowned in every solitude by the clamour of the Only Neighbour. For there always is an Only Neighbour. There is, I am convinced, a damnably neighbourly

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sea-lion even at the North Pole. At any rate, it has been my experience that, however profound the traditional solitude may be, Mother Nature herself is very rarely met in a chatty mood, while there is almost always a thieving wild-cat, a Seventh Day Adventist or a mosquito or something, sitting on one's own back porch, claiming an intimacy one is loth to recognise. Neighbours loom unconscionably large when rare. And looming large is an exercise in which only the superhuman can indulge with dignity.

Is it really a duty to be contented with one's lot—to tolerate intolerable neighbours? Why must we boast of selecting our jejune company, and then make so many kind allowances for it? Why must exiles conspire to whitewash the humiliating fact of their exile? We enforced hermits live among our outrageously haunted solitudes making generous allowances for fellow-creatures who have not earned the right to be so chivalrously excused. Just as your transatlantic solitary, scanning the shades of synthetic expression upon the countenance of his neighbour the grizzly bear, boasts to the more fortunate city-dweller about the things that his hairy substitute for a friend can do—how he seems to come to conclusions that almost make sense—so we, whose back porch is perhaps at the mercy of a Chinese tobacco-salesman educated at an inland mission school, feel a gentle silly pride in his specious friendship, his twice-told home-made philosophies, his political platitudes that would disgrace an orphans' home debating society

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in England, his manifestations of an almost human intelligence. (But why should we make allowances with one hand, so to speak, and write about the Inscrutable Subtlety of the Oriental, or the Ennobling Effect of Solitude, with the other?)

Alas, if circumstances oblige us to live alone among larch trees or Baptist evangelists from Iowa, with the growing of mustard and cress, or the making of easy money for a mental occupation, and pretentious chat or the developing of Nature snapshots for our only recreation—may we not be frank about the thing and admit that we are bored? May we not confess that we never have an opportunity of saying anything we really mean in an understanding ear, or of hearing anything we really want to hear in words that are worthy of our understanding, such as it is. Is it too much to ask, at least, that we analyse our own actual experiences in solitude and semi-solitude, unaided by the conclusions of Mr. Thoreau or Mrs. Gene Stratton-Porter, or contributors to the New York Oriental magazines-de-luxe,—before we write about Fellowship with the Divine in the Great Outdoors, or about the Mystic Withdrawn Orient, Shot with the Glances of Dark Almond Eyes that See Beyond Mere Human Wisdom?

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THE world would come to an end if each one of us suddenly began to see himself as one of a crowd—and that a funny crowd. To be sure, many of us do intend to surprise, and even to amuse, but only within narrow limits, and only as individuals. We all intend to be seen as Ones, not as crowds; all our details of personality are evolved to clothe us as Ones, not as crowds. It is not fair—it is unbearable—that you should sit in a corner and see *me* out of focus—see, in fact, not *Me* but *Us*. Watchful sitters in corners are to be profoundly distrusted; we all aspire to be ourselves the only licensed sitters in corners. Every crowd is a fatally funny crowd, and our precarious dignity depends on the certainty that no crowd includes *us*. The more remote a crowd is from the disagreeable possibility of being found to include *us*, the funnier is that crowd. Hence in every land all foreigners are more or less funny to the natives. Hence to every foreigner all natives are a little funny. *Foreigners* and *natives* are words for crowds that never come too close to *us*; as words, they ring faintly with a cadence that suggests the secret smile of the sitter in a corner.

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A crowd of faces is funny—there is no getting over that. There is a funny indignity in the very variety of faces. One face may seem tragic or beautiful, two may seem romantic, but a hundred faces spell half a hundred smiles to the sitter in a corner. The sitter in a corner sits behind his own face which, he fondly believes, is a dignified, normal and completely unfunny face, and looks at the crowd, and it seems to him that man, collectively speaking, is made in the image of an unkind joke. Every man, shooting barbed discreet smiles from behind the frail defence of his own face, demolishes the dignity of his kind.

Alas for us, we give ourselves away. We keep our skeletons outside our cupboards. Outside ourselves we hang this little creased queer veil, our face, that is so easy to smile at, so easy to criticise, that is such a defenceless target for the sitter in a corner who cannot see our warm sensitive beating hearts, our loves, our terrors, our humilities, our moralities, our honesties and all our justifications. For only our secret shut-away selves can ever achieve a corner to sit in. Our bodies are fatally, incurably gregarious. Our bodies are cursed by a spell which drives them in ridiculous herds before one another's cold eyes.

Sitters in corners are divided into two classes, which I will call kings and pretenders. The king, sitting in his corner, is safe. He is the only really safe creature in the world. To him a crowd can never conceivably include himself; his corner is his rightful heritage, secure from invasion; he can

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never be called upon to abdicate his throne by a treacherous inner voice that questions his divine right to watch without being watched.

The pretender is in far more perilous case. Uneasily he sees ghosts of himself in the cruelly funny procession of mankind; his angle of view gives him glimpses of other watchful eyes, other secretly occupied corners; sometimes he strays from his corner, slips from his tottering throne, and finds himself a mere unit in the comic and democratic caravan of humanity, wending across a desert that has no thrones, pent in by infinite horizons that afford no corners. . . .

For this poor pretender, conscious of an insecure claim, the ideal furniture for a corner is a friend, or, failing a friend, a devotee. The funniness of the crowd, when shared with a friend or devotee, can somehow be subtly transmuted into reviving incense in the nostrils of the tottering sitter in a corner. Certainly the safest throne for a pretender is a throne made for two. The world is fortunately travelled by countless knights errant, visitors in corners not their own, centres who know how to decentralise themselves, altruists with a saving adaptability of vision who, for friendship's sake, will temporarily forego their right to a throne. They visit in our corners, they turn their eyes upon our crowd, they share our smiles and our pruderies. They may harbour what visions they can, they may say what they will—but they must see what we see and, though they may smile at us, they must not smile behind their hands, for that is a

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smile reserved for the undoing of the crowd. They must see our heaven and our hell—not with our eyes but with their own. While they visit us they must enjoy those aspects of the crowd that are peculiar to our corner; their sight, while it may give birth to dreams differing from ours, must not fundamentally give ours the lie. And all our crowd's manifestations, from a broken heart to a row of false teeth, must be within their range of vision.

When the sitter in a corner whispers, "Oh, *my dear*, do look at that Perfect Fright with a Nose like a White Rat, got up complete with guide-book and camera as the Perfect Lady Abroad", she does so because she wants to be assured by her friend's "Oh, *my dear*, isn't she a scream!" that she, the pretender to the corner, is safe in possession of her place apart—that her nose is simply a nose without any rodent associations, and that, though she may be festooned with Baedekers and Kodaks, she looks like the thing she is—a dignified female traveller, travelling. We, sitting in a neighbouring corner, overhear her strictures on the Perfect Lady—(who is, perhaps, our aunt)—and mutter to the sharer of our own throne, "Listen to that Spiteful Cat". But really she is nothing but a mouse, poor thing, looking for a safe hole.

But of course here we touch on the matter of tourists, and tourists, poor things, are hardly fair game, even for the humblest sitter in a corner.

Tourists are not to be counted as human; like mermaids, they have no souls. Man, travelling for

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pleasure between port and port, is hardly to be recognised as man. The tourist in his purest form is never seen on land. There are no corners to sit in at sea, and man, deprived of his corner, becomes a tourist and no man. Man at sea, forced out of his corner like a hermit crab forced out of its shell, has, added to him, some intenser quality, a sort of spiritual armour of grotesquerie ten sizes too large for him, which makes him parody his land personality. He becomes mad in the wilderness, poor little man; finding himself far from his corner, he must detach himself from the crowd in some new way. He must loom large if he cannot sit apart. Blown-up giants, each with a little core of shrinking homesick humanity, we strut about the seven seas. Hence it is that curates on liners are more farcically curatical than any ribald landlubber would dare to represent them, that elderly grass widows keep specially incredible wigs for use at sea, that seagoing Americans out-Babbitt Babbitt, that bridge-players who would only growl at their partners on land, plan murder at sea, that lovers love with such a frantic impermanence. Out of this sea-fever of irresponsibility, such wizards as pursers weave their spells. Pursers are professional sitters in corners; they never come out of their corners, and for this reason they are very sinister beings. They coil themselves forever in their corners, removed from crowds and criticism by a glitter of shiny brass bars and shiny pigeonholes and shiny lights. They are like spiders in the centres of great marine webs, in which all the

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over-blown, top-heavy, bluebottle tourists struggle ridiculously. As sitters in corners, pursers are gods rather than kings; the confused cry of the tourists goes up like incense before the pursers' shining altars. When the clamour of the herd becomes too strident, the purser hangs out a little coloured notice. The enchantments of pursers are expressed in coloured notices on green baize boards, and all tourists, however wild, become meek on reading a purser's notice. When a purser, for instance, wills a concert, he hangs out a terse cobalt-blue notice as an angler hangs out bait. The tourists are easy game. Those who, on land, only sing in small voices in their baths, at sea lean over the purser's counter and say, "I'll sing at your concert—I'll play the xylophone—I'll tell humorous anecdotes in the Irish dialect—I'll impersonate comic females—what does it matter what I do, I shall be *somebody* at last—and, at any rate, it's all for the benefit of Seamen's Orphans. . . ." It is noticeable that pursers themselves never attend ships' concerts. They are, I suppose, always Seamen's Orphans. Yet, with the purser's curse upon them, the tourists cannot refuse to accept the burden either of performance or of audiencehood. They sit powerless, listening to one another's howlings, gazing at one another's antics with a shocked watchfulness that has none of the peaceful shared secrecy of sitting in a corner at home. No one in that rocking glass house dares to cast the first stone. No one has a corner to retreat into. The audience owes nothing but pity

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and tender sympathy to its entertainers. The purser's spell is upon audience and performers alike, the bleak air of the sea has blown reticence and shelter away. One of the purser's notices warns tourists to leave their valuables with him—otherwise, he says a little petulantly, he will not be responsible for loss. But the chief treasure he takes from us as we come aboard is our land dignity, our inviolable corner, our innate land-lubber's modesty, that halo of democracy that keeps us all—on land—pretending to be outwardly decently identical, while inwardly withdrawn, pretending to be the proverbial two peas, instead of the brussels-sprouts, vegetable marrows, carrots and asparagus that we are.

In sight of the safe pinnacles of land, the tourist undergoes a normal and blessed shrinkage. Has no one ever remarked the startling look of unsuspected sanity that comes over fellow-passengers as they emerge, hatted and human, from their cabins at the end of a fantastic voyage? They are healed of their touristhood, released from a spell; their faces are set towards their dear corners again. On the docks stand their friends, the sharers of their forsaken thrones, with hands outstretched to lead each wanderer into his safe place.

How do we reward our friends who tread so patiently the secret path to our citadel, or, when we are far from home, come out to meet us and encourage us with the familiar passwords of our own threshold? We pay them the compliment of detaching them from the queer crowd, of pro-

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moting them to the ranks of the fundamentally unfunny. We go and pay return visits in their corners now and then, and adjust our sight to their secret perspectives as best we may. And so we save one another from loneliness.

The pretender who cannot sufficiently buttress up his secret throne with lovers and friends would do well to keep a diary. A diary—even a cruelly honest diary—is a kind of home-made lover. In the pretender's diary, though he may not be justified, he is always forgiven; though he may not be admirable, he is always visible. His diary cedes to him the right to reign unchallenged in his corner. His corner has a sufficient population—a population of One. That One may be admittedly a poor thing, but at least it is undespised—a real thing, withdrawn from a crowd of ghosts. The ghosts that pass the diarist's corner cannot shake his courage; he looks at them, but they cannot look at him; he is revenged upon smilers behind the hand, upon the cruel queer crowds outside; his accusers are gagged at last.

Diaries are like dreams, an inward consolation to the outwardly humiliated. In dreams, in diaries, we may be wicked, we may be false, we may be utterly cast down. But our wickedness has a wild reasonableness that we may recognise without explaining, our falsity has a secret truth, the hand that casts us down is our own hand. And through all our vicissitudes, in diaries and in dreams, we are at least *interesting*—we are acknowledged individuals—above all, we are *never* unbearably

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funny. Funniness, in the destructive sense, is always confined to crowds. We have all kinds of euphemisms for our own funniness—if we suspect remotely that it exists. According to our varying degrees of vanity, we consider ourselves whimsical, original, irresponsible, eccentric, inarticulate, misunderstood, ineffectual, homely. . . . But the very humblest of our euphemisms only poses us in relation to the contemptible and unperceiving crowd. We admit that the crowd may ignore or overlook us, may hate us, may even smile behind its hand at us. We may even admit that its ignorance, its hatred and its smile may, from its own point of view, be justifiable. But we know—we know—we *know* that ourselves are never funny. The only funny thing that the sitter in a corner never sees is his own soul. His corner commands a view of everything but that. He can only feel his heart, hot with a terrible importance, beating in his breast. He may tear himself to pieces with his sneers, but his soul is safe from him. Self-convicted of funniness of the soul, he would wither like a flower in the flames.

THE FALSE VAGABOND

As I mentioned before, when I go round the world now I do it on purpose, as we Empire-builders always do. But the first time I went round the world I went by mistake. A casual expression, during the war, of a "craving for the sunlight" induced a kind uncle to set in motion machinery for getting me a war-passport to California. The passport, once obtained, was rather peremptory, and, "what with one thing and another", as the saying goes, I found myself in New York one morning in June 1918, after a submarine-haunted voyage, without any reason, as it seemed, for being there.

I went to a modest hotel in Washington Square. A small but sparkling boy carried my suitcases to my room. "Lights turn on right here," he said.

"Thank you."

"Bathroom right there."

"Thank you."

"Want any ice-water?"

"No, thank you."

"Pull yer shades up fer yer?"

THE FALSE VAGABOND

"No, thank you."

"Want an evening paper?"

"No, thank you."

"Well . . .?"

"Well . . .?"

"See here, lady, a'n't yer going to consider the boy?"

"Which boy?"

A glance at his open palm enlightened me.

"In my country," I said coldly, "we consider the boy when we leave, not when we arrive."

"In my country," he replied, "now's the time."

I produced a coin that looked like sixpence, but, cowed by his steely eye, changed it to one that looked like a shilling. "Is this the usual amount?" I asked nervously.

"That'll do fine, for the present," he answered.

So I was left, homesick, in my room, with nothing to do within three thousand miles. The real vagabond, I believe, never confesses to homesickness. But I must be a false vagabond, for I always arrive everywhere wishing I were back in the place I have just left, be it London, Panama, the Sunderbunds, Cambodia or what not. This is not, strictly speaking, homesickness, though it has much the same effect; rather might it be called *yesterday-sickness*. It was particularly acute the first time I looked back across three thousand miles of Atlantic to nice, conservative, meatless, bombful London yesterdays in early 1918. The selfconscious New York public notices about what

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to do in the—(almost impossible)—event of attack from the air drew tears of yesterday-sickness from my eyes.

Suppressing these unvagabondish symptoms, I went out into Washington Square and wondered what I could do for the next year or so. (I had pledged myself on my passport not to recross the Atlantic during the war.) A bus came by, looking depressingly un-English. I got into it. Inside, it was decorated with such optimistic notices as this (I quote from memory):

The Conductor, Terence Quigg, has been chosen for his courtesy, good looks, intelligence, religious tolerance, skill in languages and kindness to animals. He will do his utmost to make your ride in his bus an experience that you will look back on, in after years, with a smile of reminiscent tenderness. Should he fail in this pleasurable duty, you are asked to report to us at 32429 West 482nd Street. Should he, on the other hand, succeed in pleasing you, send us a post card telling us all about it. Write to us anyway. That's what we're here for

I looked up from this notice and found Mr. Quigg pointing a nickel-plated revolver at me. I immediately handed him my purse. Keeping his head in the face of what was evidently a surprise to him, he opened my purse and extracted a ten-cent piece. This coin he fitted into the muzzle of his weapon, which gave a businesslike ping of acknowledgement.

"Now you'll know next time," he said, handing me back my purse.

He leaned in at the bus door, affectionately

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resting his elbow on my shoulder. "Stranger in N'York?" he asked.

"Couldn't be more so," I replied, wondering if I ought to take his hand.

"Well, you listen here," he said, "while I tell you . . ."

A string of facts clicked from him, as from a news tape in a club. "This building is always kinda interesting to strangers. We call it the Flatiron Building."

"I wouldn't call it a bit flat," I said, rubbing the crick out of my neck.

"The height of that building a'n't nothing", he said, "to what you c'n see down town. . . ." He went on pointing out the wonders of his city—the Greatest Department Store in the World, the Mansion of the Richest Man in the World, the Finest Hotel in the World, the Beautifullest Park in the World . . . and all the time his elbow rested negligently on my collar-bone.

I have since found that New York working men are delightful but rather prehensile friends. A New York policeman, for instance, when telling a stranger the way, will often throw a heavy but hearty arm across her nape and call her Sister. But at the time of my experience with Mr. Quigg, this harmless habit made me rather selfconscious, and he and I therefore attracted the attention of a lady sitting on the other side of the bus. While Mr. Quigg was temporarily on the top of the bus brandishing his revolver at other passengers, the lady came over and sat by me.

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"You are a stranger in New York," she said.

"Not quite such a stranger as I was half an hour ago," I replied.

"You are young," she continued—(I was past my quarter-century at the time)—"and I want to tell you that there are dangers for young girls in New York. This is the Wickedest City in the World."

"What about our London?" I cried, stung, but she went on.

"Lonely young girls in New York may easily find themselves in need of a motherly friend. I am going to give you my name, address and telephone number, and I want you to promise to ring me up if you need help."

I was much moved. "Thank you a thousand times," I said, eyeing Mr. Quigg with a look of refined distrust as he thundered down the bus stairs and prepared to prop himself upon me as before. "I shall probably be ringing you up within the hour."

"This place", said Mr. Quigg, "is Harlem, where the coloured folks live. In Harlem is located the Biggest——"

"This is where I get out," I interrupted, pitilessly withdrawing my support from him. During my hasty and chaste withdrawal from the bus I must have dropped the little paper with the helpful lady's name and address on it, for I never was able to find it again. I must add that I never felt the need of it. I remained perfectly safe and retained my virtue without difficulty while making

THE FALSE VAGABOND

many friends. But in the ways of the world I continued to be ignorant. For instance, arriving practically penniless in California and having broken into the house of an absent friend, my only idea of housekeeping was to walk a mile and a half to the town, buy two eggs, return and eat them hastily, being under the impression that eggs were as frail as fish out of water, and wilted away within an hour or two of leaving the hen. The grocer, on the third day, questioned me about this.

“Why don’t you buy a dozen eggs, sister, and save shoe-leather?”

“A dozen eggs!” I exclaimed. “I don’t eat a dozen eggs at a sitting.”

“Nor a hen don’t lay a dozen eggs at a sitting,” he replied. “These eggs you’re buying to-day are the same as you bought last Friday, and they’ll be as tasty next Friday as they are right now. Say, sister, something tells me you wasn’t raised on a ranch.”

Between eggs I sat in my friend’s empty house and played H. S. Oakeley (Te Deum) and Barnby (Nunc Dimittis) on her piano. On the second day, these sweet sounds won their way to the hearing of a next-door neighbour, the excellent wife of a professor of economics. She arrived to inquire into the reason of this burst of sacred song from a supposedly empty house. And—to cut a long story short—lent me twenty-five dollars. I have always found professors of economics and their families generous to the point of sainthood. It must be the result of looking at money in the abstract.

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My fortune was made. El Dorado over again. To rise from the position of lady's-maid-to-an-Italian-opera-singer—(I was fired the same day for not knowing how to sew or to arrange hair)—to that of assistant teacher in the University of California was the work of a moment—or, to put it exactly, thirteen months. And then, full of yesterday-sickness once more, I crossed the Pacific to Japan. But that is another story.

THE THWARTED TRAVELLER

ONE paradise, I suppose, is always a little jealous of another, and this is perhaps why it is so very difficult, if my experience is typical, to get from California, the Land of Olympians and Orange Groves, to Florida, the Land of Sunlight and Supermen. The journey from San Francisco to Miami, in the heat of summer, was one of the most uncomfortable I ever undertook, and I can only ascribe this fact to an unconscious reluctance on the part of California to relinquish the tourist in favour of her sister state. The heat on the train was blistering, the windows, if opened, sucked in such blasts of black desert dust that I arrived in the Jim Crow States indistinguishable from their humblest inhabitants. I had my hatbox—an immense hard cornery thing—as bedfellow because it would not fit under the Pullman seat, there were thunderstorms nearly every hour, too, and on one occasion an insane female passenger, escaping from her attendants, struck me hard, in irrational merriment, on the point of the jaw while I lolled in cramped and exhausted sleep. On the whole, though nothing could be proved, one suspected divine spite on the part of the gods of California.

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As I approached Miami, the crowds in the train became so congested that I could scarcely look out of the windows to admire the glorious mixed views of pineapples and swamps characteristic of this favoured peninsula. "Something must have happened at Miami," I thought. "Or is it only Florida's Pineapple Harvest Festival?"

At Miami Depot I stepped out, astonished, into a howling mob. Now I wanted only two or three simple things of Miami—a tube of toothpaste, a couple of light meals and a bed for the night, and I saw I should have to fight to get them. After battling for some time with the seething mass, I found myself cast up by a human eddy into a little haven occupied by the Y.W.C.A. A flustered Young Christian Woman mistook me for someone else and said that Lot 402 was gone now—I should have come sooner. Undeceived, she was so good as to elicit by telephone on my behalf the information that there was a possibility of a bed at the Hotel So-and-So at nine o'clock to-night. I emerged, more and more astonished, from the depot, and, by standing in a pose of pathos beside my suitcase on a sidewalk, inspired an overfull jitney to draw up and tell me to "catch hold".

"But you're full up," I said, for indeed human limbs were bursting from every aperture.

"Aw, you can catch hold some place, can't you?" said the jitney driver. So my suitcase and I caught hold (of the kind fellow's ear, I think)—and were whisked along the main street. It seemed

THE THWARTED TRAVELLER

to me that we drove like a juggernaut car over massed human bodies.

“Is there a drugstore in this street?” I bellowed in the driver’s ear, as I blew like a banner in the wind beside him.

“Why, listen,” he yelled. “I could fix you up with a dandy little lot to the west of here which’d be just fine for a little drugstore and Soda-fountain business, if you’re thinking of starting in . . . only a hundred and twenty yesterday noon—though I guess mebbe the old man’d want two hundred now. . . .”

I thought I saw a drugstore and stepped lightly off the jitney at a glittering shop door. “I want,” I began, but when the eager young salesman asked what acreage and what locality, I realised that the dangers of Dental Neglect were to be preferred to the risks involved in shopping in Miami.

At the Hotel So-and-So the manager was arguing on the telephone. “That lot—why I wouldn’t give seventy cents for that—let alone seventy bucks. . . . Now if you was to talk to me about a lot down Such-and-Such Street, I might—What’s that, ma-am, a bedroom? Why—if you want to stand outside room 62 till four o’clock, the young woman in it did say she might be going out on the afternoon train, but don’t you take your eye off that door or somebody else mebbe—what was that—a hundred and thirty-five dollars for a corner lot on—aw say—you’ve got another guess coming—all right, ma-am, you go on fight up, but

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say, listen—you're a bit late in Miami aren't you? The swellest bargains have mostly gone by now—I could get you a fifty-foot frontage way back on What-Not Street, but it'd cost you. . . .”

I got my bedroom in the end, without buying the site of the hotel, but I had to forego two meals for it. And when I had finally pinned it down and staggered out to a lunch counter, I very nearly bought by mistake a Wonder Site in a Favoured Residential Locality instead of a fried egg. As for toothpaste—if I ever become one of the Four Out of Every Five, it will be Miami's fault.

EXCELLENT ISLANDS

If I were to make a world, I should speckle it all over with variations on the West Indian theme. Ships in my world could hardly proceed a mile in any direction without coming up against a gaudy, palmy, sizzling, synthetic West Indie. There would therefore be hardly any trade in my world—except in coconuts and coral beads—and Britannia would be hard put to it to rule such frequently interrupted waves. But there would also be no frost or snow in my world—no winds—(except the hurricanes without which no West Indian group is complete)—no trees but feather-duster palms and little soft warm-weather pines—no crops but sugar, bananas, pineapples and Indian corn—there would be no shivering Nordics, but we should all be black and shiny and warm and do no work and fight no wars and sing little tenor songs to guitars all day, or swim in brilliant peacock seas with fire-opal and turquoise fishes tickling our ankles.

—Caribbean waters are never just plain sea-colour—nor are they ever spread with one colour only. The silken sheen of those seas is always a gorgeously *shot* silk—a watered silk—striped and

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ringed and zig-zagged with orange, grass-green, lemon-yellow, plum-purple. The colours of sea and sky do not wait for sunset there, or conform to the probabilities. And these endless, jewelled surfaces are studded with polished platinum islands fringed with jade palms.

I forget how many Bahamas there are—something like seven hundred, I believe. Every Bahama gazes out with delight upon its bright brothers, large and small, crowded exquisitely upon its horizon. It is a sort of Mutual Benefit Society of islands—"I'll decorate your skyline if you'll decorate mine. . . ." Even a little button of an island can take its place in the brilliant scheme, so long as it can lacquer its sands with silver and wave a grove of thin, shock-headed palms.

Every Bahama island is a potential treasure island. The pirates—who must have been men of excellent taste in islands—made the Bahama group their headquarters and are said to have sown a crop of treasure that has not yet all been reaped. I have myself crawled down rough seaweedy steps into several pirates' caves—steps that dip down abruptly between one bright shrub and another into a hole on the edge of the low coral cliffs, and lead into wide caves that look out through natural cliff windows on to the gorgeous sea. Unfortunately, in my case, the pirates' hoards had always been removed from these caves some fifty years or so before my arrival, but every true Bahamian always lives in hopes of finding a cave that no one

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ever found before and mystifying his friends by flinging a six-inch gold ducat or doubloon on the tobacconist's counter in payment for his daily packet of Wild Woodbines. Unfortunately any hopes connected with pirates' treasure have the reputation of being romantically and foolishly speculative—even in lands where pirates are so commonplace that their eighteenth century villas still stand—a little chipped but perfectly solid—in the suburbs of Nassau—a continual reminder of the happy fact that Honesty is Not Always the Best Policy and that *Some* of the Things that Glitter are, in point of fact, Gold. Their fortified guard-houses also peer between the palms out to sea—which surely suggests that they had something to guard. And where is that something now? The Financial Times itself cannot tell me that—we romantics are just as likely to find it as is the Governor of the Bank of England.

Pirates in the West Indies have given place to Americans now. Prohibition in the United States has morally ruined the British West Indies, while providing the islanders with treasure of a more accessible kind than Pieces of Eight. American Prohibition has caused Nassau to come out in a perfect rash of villas and hotels—a symptom of the presence of the thirsty compatriots of the Almighty. In the winter, Nassau is practically a suburb of Palm Beach, and large steamers of the kind known as *D'Lux* squeeze their unwieldy forms round Nassau breakwater to the sound of saxophones, popping corks and other kinds of musick.

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In the summer, however, the Bahamas happily have the reputation of being too hot even for victims of the Volstead law, and the islands are left to the Bahamians—black and white. Jazz gives place to the curious old island songs—(by Piracy out of Negro Spiritualism). In the summer, if I remember rightly, the islands are only reached on two days a week by a little half-sail-half-steam boat called the Mystery J, which meanders from Miami to Nassau in thirty-six hours. The Mystery J holds a place in my memory above all other ships. She had only one cabin, and passengers were meant to fit, like books, in shelves all round it. But I slept—or half slept—on deck—on two chairs, watching the stars rising like smoke out of the flame of moonlit spread sail. And to eat our meals, we all—passengers and crew alike—sat cross-legged on the hatches in the sun. I wish all liners were like the Mystery J.

/ The house where I stayed in the Bahamas trailed its toes in the sea and we could bathe at any hour of the day or night. Or rather, the weather was so exquisitely hot that one felt ready to bathe day and night—but, in Bahamian waters, man proposes, fish disposes. For, once or twice, as we came to the head of the steps, we were checked by the sight of a waiting shadow in the clear, glassy sea—a big sting-ray or a shark or a barracoota waiting on the off-chance of an ankle to play with. And though it is claimed—(by Bahamian real-estate advertisers)—that the fiercer fishes never will approach a bathing beach where two or three



BAHAMIAN PICNIC

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are gathered together, but confine themselves to devouring widows, orphans and misanthropes—yet somehow one is slow to rush light-heartedly—even in large crowds—into a sea stained with such a shadow.

Personally I like my sea clear even of crabs. I think there must have been some kind of Pan-Crustacean Congress afoot when I was in the Bahamas. Crabs were everywhere—except, curiously enough, in the sea. They sat on trees, in drawing-rooms, in beds, in shoes, in grand pianos, on the ruined doorsteps of deceased pirates . . . they moved in masses—all earnestly going the same way—across highroads. During my first few days I sat in the family Ford car with my hands continually pressed over my eyes since, with every turn of the wheel, we crushed at least five hundred crabs. But finally even I—who am opposed to all blood sports—became quite a callous crab-crusher. There were really too many of them, and also it seemed that their show of collective purposefulness was only a pose, since, for no reason, they would suddenly all turn round in their millions and walk equally doggedly the other way. Besides, one of them crawled up my leg once at a picnic, and I could never forgive a thing like that. I was sitting on the floor of a palm-thatched hut during a trip to a minor Bahama, and before I had realised the crab's intention, it had reached a blind alley—(or one-way street)—among my inner clothes. I remember it was a little difficult to explain to the Governor of the Bahamas—(who

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happened to be present)—why I suddenly sprang shrieking from his side, tearing in a maniac way at my person.

That picnic, by the way, was one of the most successful picnics—in spite of the crab incident—that I remember. A thunderstorm came upon us, heralded by a perfect frenzy of colour in sea and sky. We bathed under a fusillade of stinging rain, in a grape-coloured sea, and, since the storm made the palm groves as black as night, sat in the dark in our thatched hut singing to an accompaniment of cracking thunder, crashing coconuts and sausages sizzling on a rain-doused fire.

ANTLIONS

ANTLIONS' snares were all over the little hill between the scarlet tiger-lilies. The hill lifted an old crater above an immense view across which the shadows of clouds moved like dark marching forests. But antlions seemed to us rarer than views. Antlions are little horrors, and nearly everyone really prefers a horror to a splendour.

Antlions may, for all I know, be common-places in the cultured circles in which I have not moved, but to me they seem full of excitement. The antlion is an unpleasant looking beast about a quarter of an inch long; he has an enormous stomach and a very small head. One feels it would be useless to argue with an antlion. He is a complete low-brow, and all the theories of civilisation and other intellectual ingenuities of his victim, the ant, fall to the ground in his presence. His hunger rather than his intelligence prompts him to construct a snare into which the clever ant, hurrying along with his head full of airy ideas about constructive communism, never fails to fall. The snare is a neat, perfectly round dimple in loose sand—a dimple about three inches across and one inch deep. Sand is to the antlion a completely

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manageable element; he sinks into the sand at the bottom of his pit as easily as a cake of soap sinks into a basinful of water. And at the bottom of the pit he waits. He leaves only his arms above the surface of the sand; you can see nothing of him but his thumbs twiddling expectantly.

And inevitably his prey arrives. Ants, like other brilliant radicals, are always in a hurry. An ant never pays any obstacle the compliment of going round it. He is too well accustomed to being the brightest thinker in his world. An ant, arriving at the edge of the antlion's pit, is always sure that he can take it in his stride. No ant has ever come back from the dead to warn the living of the results of such a stride. The stride takes our ant in an avalanche of sand to the bottom of the pit. "Damn," he thinks. "That was a little undignified. But no matter. Nobody saw. Now up the other side." But there is no climbing the soft sliding sand on the slope; the ant scrabbles, slips, keeps his head with an effort, tries again, climbs half-way up with a wily rush. The antlion twiddles his thumbs more purposefully and a splash of sand washes our ant to the bottom again. Fingers close round his desperate body. He calls on his gods in vain.

Nothing but terror, I think, matters to a little quick creature at all. Death is even less important to these hair's-breadth heathens than it ought to be to a Christian. I always imagine that when a small thing, hurrying, trips upon very sudden death, it notices no change. The speed of life in a

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moth burnt in a candle, a fly crushed on a window, a bird shot as it flies, carries it past death. If you never noticed that you were alive, would death make you more aware? I think the little dead beasts go on darting and dancing in the light.

But terror is another matter, and a minute's struggle with a strong, frightful enemy is slower than a million years of death.

Our ant, slowly sinking in sand, terribly anchored by the heavy body of the antlion, knotted himself in terror and effort.

Watching this immoral victory of might over right, we gods were moved to a divine pity. I plunged a stick into the sand and tossed the whole scene of devilry into the air. The antlion popped out of his element like a salmon jumping out of water. He was revealed as no frightful mystery, but as a mean, naked, hungry thing scurrying for shelter. The ant, released in the turmoil, staggered away as though in a trance. Another ant spoke to him, but he made no reply. He had been in hell—he had seen God—his light, sophisticated antennae, usually so nimbly articulate, so ready with explanations of the universe, were numb.

It seemed to me that a religion had been founded at that moment. I feel sure that that ant, given back his life by a rescue so inconceivable, so incredibly removed from the possibility of antish explanation, will become the inspired prophet of a far-reaching spiritual re-birth among ants. The intensity of that ant's experience will infect a few disciples; a handful of faithful apostolic

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ants will weave a spreading net of evangelism all over that hill. A garbled and mystically elaborated dilution of the miraculous intervention will filter through to succeeding generations; a mass of reverent magic will attach itself to my olympic trifling. The divine name of Benson will, of course, never be spoken—or even known—but some occult waggle of the antennae will forever mean *me* upon that hill. I am immortal at last.

As for the uprooted antlion, I think he attached no ethical significance to the incident at all. He only knew that his large stomach remained unexpectedly empty. We put him into another antlion's pit, hoping that his punishment might fit his crime. But no. Tail first, he placidly submerged himself in the bottom of the new pit and sat twiddling his thumbs side by side with the rightful occupant. The next ant that comes that way will be eaten by two antlions instead of one. But of this darker aspect of divine intervention, the elect in the Chosen Anthill will remain happily ignorant.

EMPTY CUPS

THERE is nothing in a puppy. A puppy is a little empty cup into which one may pour a very sufficing spirit, if one will. Indeed one may pour life into it. The spilling of the cup, the death of the puppy, matters, of course, nothing at all to the years, but days can be blotted out by it.

There were D'Arcy, Bingley and Collins, the three sons of a pointer, Josephine. Collins was killed in his kennel at the age of two days by a fierce passing dog, who probably mistook him for a rat. One really had not time to know Collins—in losing him one lost nothing. D'Arcy and Bingley, in a lonely garden, of which the only other charms were dahlias and a row of red South China mountains looking between the plumes of bamboos—became outrageously important. There are hundreds of puppies exactly like D'Arcy and Bingley within the walls of our little templed town. Of course there are hundreds of cups that remain empty.

D'Arcy was always fat, noisy and pleased with himself. He was of impersonal habit and would roll off the human lap like a ball. But Bingley knew the quiet and engaging art of pillowing him-

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self. . . . His fat and ungainly attempts to swarm up ankles on to laps recalled the efforts of a black baby at the foot of a coconut palm.

Bingley's illness runs to a tune in my memory—a flippant tune imported into our lost town by a passing American engineer. . . . *Come every-bah'dy ef you want to hear—A story 'bout a brave engineer—Casey Jones wuz de rounder's name—On a big eight-wheeler he won his fame.* . . . The tune is like a pain in my memory. For three days there were for me only two efforts—the effort to save Bingley and the effort not to forget the words of that tune. Of course neither effort was worth while.

Bingley one night suddenly began to speak. He stood staggering beside my bed uttering syllables in an extraordinary low urgent voice. *Wa-ka-ngur-wa.* . . . The voice was in no way different from a child's. Sudden suffocation was wringing the sounds from his throat. Behind his ribs he was pinched to the thickness of a glove. Well, he could not die, that was certain. A thing as little as Bingley could not thwart a thing as big as I in such a matter. D'Arcy looked at Bingley with his pansy-like head on one side for a few astonished seconds and then robustly knocked him down. "Come back and play again, Bing, here's the other shoe we were looking for. . . ." But Bingley was trying to swarm up a drooping fold of the counterpane—the black baby again, trying to escape from something prowling and unknown.

On the bed with his head on my arm he slept a little, but every few minutes he murmured his

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disturbing unknown words. He had suddenly become enormously important to me, his very unimportance commanded me; he was a waking dream all through a sleepless night; his ghostly hoarse voice in the hot small hours, to the sharp accompaniment of heavy rain outside, seemed to menace me with all I knew of danger for the moment. Behind that threat the silly tune drummed on: *The caller called Casey at haf past faw-urr—Casey kissed his wife at de cab'n daw-urr—He mounted to de cab'n his orders in his hand—Took a farewell trip into de Prummised Land. . . .*

The day quieted voices for a while. In the morning the puppy had no breath to spare for a voice. He would only rest in my arms. Placed on the ground he began a dreadful, unceasing journey in search of breath and ease. All about the garden, pushing between the wet dahlia leaves, tumbling, bumping, reeling, he ran sideways on straddling legs—hunting the ease that I could not find for him. For me his little lurching body cast an enormous shadow that darkened the garden more than ever the mountains did. I could not find any thoughts. Thoughts in this lost garden always come singly . . . a song . . . the breaking of a toy . . . the passing of a cloud . . . can fill the empty valley to the brim.

No occupation dared to intrude into my intense determination to make a fool of death. The puppy was a symbol turned into a reality. What could I think of that would harmonise with the feeling of his difficult breathing against my knee? My eyes

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followed the ponderous and ancient facts of a Chinese history. *P'an K'u is said to have been the first living being on earth, he is represented with a chisel in one hand and a mallet in the other, engaged in splitting and shaping the rocks. He is believed to have worked for eighteen thousand years. . . . Casey Jones widdin tree miles of de place—Number Seven stared him right in de face—He toirned to his fireman and said, Boys let's jump—Cos dey's two locomotives dat's a-gwineter bump. . . .* My nerves were sore with that tune. I would not let the little dog go. If I let him go, he would run chasing death. If I held him, the very determination of my touch could make him eat a little and sleep a little. I felt so sure of life in my hands that I would not send him away to be shot. By day it seemed so easy to hold warm life about his shrunken little body with my hands. But by night I could feel him and hear him fighting for breath in the dark. It was as if he was shrieking silently. He left my hands every minute and lurched round the bed. Then it seemed that a shot—a confession of defeat—would have been best. But always the little dog came back to lie down trembling and twitching against my arm.

Casey Jones said jus' befaw-urr he died—Dere's two maw-urr roads I'd 'a' liked to ride—De fireman said to Casey, Why what can dey be?—He said, de South'n Pacific an' de Santa Fe.

In the dark early morning the little dog suddenly began to breathe calmly and to sleep. I was, for an hour, absolutely happy. I was alight with a victory—that did not matter. I had inter-

EMPTY CUPS

ferred successfully between life and death. A life that was not valuable to anyone but me would go on for ever now—because of me. At the end of the hour the puppy reared himself up choking and bit the ball of my thumb through. . . . The tune began rattling insanely again. *Mrs. Jones sat on her bed a-sighin'—Jus' received de message dat po' Casey wuz dyin'—Toirned to her children an' said, Quit yer cryin'—Cos you've got another Poppa on de Salt Lake Line. . . .*

Jus' received de message dat po' Casey wuz dyin' . . . Jus' received de message dat po' Casey wuz dyin' . . . It scraped on all next day—one scrap of tune—one phrase, like a cheap gramophone with its needle stuck in a crack in the disc. To that tune all day, giddy from lack of sleep, I defied the death that didn't really matter. The puppy was too weak to run away from death or to run after death now. I was his only defence and I never let go. I did not think death could push past me. But in the afternoon the little dog's strange voice came back for a moment—his low humble voice that uttered nothing and was expressive only of his complete unimportance. To the senseless sound of his voice and of the jiggling song in my head—he died. He suddenly stopped muttering. I was astounded. I had remembered death only as a negative thing—as a ceasing of life. But now it was evident that death was an active force, strongly taking possession of something that was mine.

I dare say Bingley's was one of the smallest

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shadows that was ever withdrawn from the sunlight of my garden. He mattered as little as the petal of a flower. He could not have been very valuable to death, but he was valuable to me because I had, for a day, believed myself life. So I was robbed of an illusion.

HOLIDAYS

IN England I love working days rather than holidays, especially when I do not have to work. It seems, perhaps, a little heartless to enjoy the spectacle of my compatriots with their noses to the grindstone, but my point of view is purely that of the sympathetic—and aesthetic—spectator, not that of the slave-driver. English people seem to work so much more cheerfully than they play. You hear, I maintain, many more jokes at the rush hour in St. Paul's Churchyard than ever you hear on Hampstead Heath on a Bank Holiday. On holidays, obviously, family and social cares assert themselves; mothers have young children to snatch from the jaws of lions at the Zoo, young women have aged parents to hoist on to the tops of country-bound buses, young men have their incurably ignorant true-loves to instruct in the subtleties of our national sports, husbands have their wives to restrain them from wagging their false noses at more light-hearted female strangers. Every one has sandwiches or bananas or umbrellas or babies or return tickets or life-size teddy bears or souvenirs or Sunday hats—or even mere dignity—to “mind and be careful” about. On

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working days every one is free of these sobering responsibilities—or so it seems to a spectator. When I think of English busmen, factory girls, capitalists, costers, policemen, pickpockets, old ladies in bath chairs, stockbrokers, princes, babies and nanas round the Round Pound, judges and journalists—all jocosely engaged in their daily round and common task—I am ready to spend my week-ends in Timbuctoo if I may have Monday to Saturday in London.

Not that I can claim to have any considered opinion about Timbuctoo as a holiday resort. I do not know enough about cassowaries to be able to pronounce on their carnival spirits. I should perhaps be more competent to praise California as the country where holiday-making is seen at its best. The Americans have no Bank Holidays, but they have carefully trained their Great Men to be born—or otherwise patriotically active—at convenient and carefully spaced intervals, so that when it isn't George Washington's birthday, it is William Randolph Hearst's, or when one isn't giving thanks for the Pilgrim Fathers' first turkey dinner on American soil, one is commemorating Henry Ford's first sight of the city of Detroit—or something of the kind. I admit I am a little hazy about the various occasions for holidays, but the holidays themselves are fresh in my memory. Holidays in San Francisco, especially, were always rather mad and merry even in the old days, but since Prohibition, they have become mad and merry almost to excess. One was always liable to

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find oneself dancing with complete strangers on ferry boats to the sound of concertinas—but now that mere liberty is replaced by the delicious challenge of the law, few holiday-makers are sober enough to dance on ferries—or anywhere else—by the end of the holiday. The California holidays I most happily remember, however, were much less sophisticated than these post-liberty occasions. In my sentimental memory is a confusion of driving in bathing-dresses through the hot mountain sun, alternately plunging into streams and climbing apricot trees for fruit—(a gloriously easy sport so lightly clad and unshod)—of lying down at night on dry pine-needles, without any tiresome spreading of tents or mosquito nets—of watching selfconscious seals showing off at dawn on lonely beaches—of running down the absurdly steep moonlit streets of San Francisco—of sitting perched on high stools at country lunch-counters ordering “Adam and Eve on a Raft” (poached eggs on toast)—of handing empty jam-jars to over-indulged bears to lick, in the Yosemite Valley. . . .

California holidays are good but tumultuous; the quietest and prettiest holiday-makers I know are the Japanese. The Japanese, when he wants recreation, goes to look at flowers. And when he reaches the flowers, he does not, curiously enough, tear them up by the roots, or sit down on them, or put on his female companion's hat, or turn on a portable gramophone—nor does he even eat bananas or shrimps out of paper bags and throw

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the bags on to the grass. No; he simply goes on looking at the flowers; he and his humble wife and his flowery babies walk—click-clack—click-clack—on their clogs, round and round the flowers, talking in soft light voices about the flowers. By and by they all take out of bright neatly folded handkerchiefs neat straw boxes of *bento*—(rice mixed with a few peppers or fragments of dried fish)—and they neatly make use first of their chopsticks and then of their toothpicks, looking at the flowers all the time. Between one holiday and another, you may hear Japanese talking of a cherry tree in blossom as we Nordics might talk of a baseball favourite or a Derby winner.

Japanese, if one may judge by appearances, care less about food than any other race I have observed; perhaps this is the fault of Japanese food. The average Japanese main meal occupies about eight minutes—not, of course, counting the toothpick session. But in most other lands, holidays are really primarily eating and drinking occasions, more or less, and if the Japanese stand for the *less*, the Russians certainly typify the *more*. When I first saw a table laid for a Russian holiday feast, I was sorry that I had wasted money, energy and space on common English food during the previous week. Strong mahogany tables wilted like mere wicker what-nots beneath the weight of whole hams—ducks—turkeys—geese—chickens—sausages—walnut cakes—cathedrals made of sour cream—tall Kulitch cakes—walnut cakes—curd cakes—*pirojki*—*bortsch*—bottles

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of *kvass* and champagne. . . . Russian Easter orthodoxy provides for this emergency of excess, since no Russian has eaten anything at all since Holy Thursday night or even earlier, but the ordinary English sinner has innocently indulged in his morning scrambled egg and mid-day mutton chop, and the sight of several solid hundredweight of irresistibly delicious food that he must tackle at a sitting is a refined torture worthy of the Slav tradition. Russian Easter meals are spread at sunset, but must not be eaten till midnight. We sit around that meal for five hours, trying to talk on elevating subjects, do crossword puzzles or tell one another the stories of our lives—but everything seems irrelevant; our eyes and our very souls are riveted upon that food. If only Russian meals could be spaced out—a course a day—for three or four weeks—how glorious would those three or four weeks be! Nevertheless, midnight strikes at last, inexorably, and, after a few prayers for spiritual support before the dimly lighted *ikon*, we must eat and eat and eat, far into the dark small hours of Easter morning. The Blond Nordic digestion may die, but it never surrenders; we refuse nothing. At sunrise our Easter greetings have a brave but muffled sound. . . .

China holidays are, of course, the holidays I know best, of recent years, at least. The Chinese are a naturally gay people, but, like the English, they seem to have a propensity to put all their gaiety into their work rather than into their play.

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The Chinese and the English have, I often notice, much in common, and, if it were not for the obstacle of language, a Chinese sugared-apple-vendor and a London bus-driver could always enjoy each other's jokes in perfect soul-communion—as long as they were workaday jokes. But, like the bus-driver, the Chinese coolie on holiday puts on his stiff best clothes and his stiff best manners and parades about with his wife and babies among selfconscious herds of his fellows and their wives and babies. A Chinese holiday parade is almost invariably most pompous and unsuccessful, and a Chinese Boy Scout, incidentally, is the most unimpressive prop of empire that ever banged a cracked drum. Last September in Manchuria, I remember, we celebrated some outstanding day in the short and versatile history of the Chinese Republic. I went as a humble and unmattering female, and was buffeted about among coolies in the outer fringes of the public park, but all the officials—Chinese, Japanese and European—squeezed themselves into long-forgotten forms of frock coats, morning coats, Prince Alberts, top-hats, and other gentlemanly disguises, and stood in one corner of a square formed of gloriously epauletted but perspiring state employés. As the last grandee stepped giggling into his place, a posse of bugles blew a terrific blast into the back of my neck, and all the soldiers saluted and the police—rather unexpectedly—raised their hats. Then a master of the ceremonies—a policeman with specially enormous epaulettes—came for-

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ward and fixed us with a severe eye. Some of the higher grandees were indeed very difficult not to look at—especially one Chinese major, a man with almost as large a wheel-base as a pyramid and rather the same shape. He was obliged by the Democracy he served to appear in sky blue—voluminously skirted and tightly throated—and on the peak of the pyramid quivered a little helmet with a very tall splash of a white plume waving above it. “Three bows to China,” shouted the master of the ceremonies in Chinese. We all began our first bow before he gave the word of command—“First bow”, so that by the time he ordered us to do our third, we were clasping our tummies preparatory to doing our fourth. Meanwhile a flag ran up haltingly to the top of a flag-pole in the middle of our square. On this, the square began to sing, with an effect like Three Blind Mice as rendered by the Deaf and Dumb. First the soldiers groaned a few staves, then the police began to moo, then a squeaking as of slate pencils was heard from the Boy Scouts, and finally a faint breathing sound proved to be the refined melodious contribution of the girl guides. The master of the ceremonies looked cautiously round to see if any more of us were preparing to oblige, and then ordered us to give three cheers for China—(wow)—first cheer—(wow)—second cheer—(wow)—third cheer—(wow)—dash it all, one too many again! Then we groundlings dispersed; all the bands marched away all playing different tunes at the same time on instruments cockaded with

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paper plumes and flowers and flags—and the grandees went off to drink China's health in sweet Japanese champagne.

Perhaps the Chinese record of bannered and silken imperial splendour still affects their newly democratic mind—perhaps the Chinese hopeful tradition-loving eye sees ghostly peacock feathers, faint auras of brocades, shadows of glittering palanquins, thrones, jades and fans, gleaming and fading in the remembering air about their flat, funny, tawdry pom-pom show.

JOURNEY IN YUNNAN

TA-T'OUN has a fierce reputation and fierce traditions; the men of the town were mostly armed quite frankly with heavy obsolete rifles and with daggers, the hilts of which were elaborately chased. Europeans were rarely seen in Ta-t'oun, and we attracted an embarrassing amount of attention. Our escorting soldiers, being hungry, tried to conceal us in a temple while they went off in search of food, but the mob discovered us, surged in through the temple doors with the assurance of invited guests, and formed into a deep, silent ring about us. For a time we sat selfconsciously in this glitter of unwinking eyes and daggers, and then we took refuge in a school which was in session in a side room of the temple. The teacher, a beautiful thin old man in a bright blue robe, sat calmly in the midst of clamour. His pupils, about a dozen little boys, pirouetted, pinched one another, kicked their desks, scrawled on their books, and, all the time, shouted their lessons—each boy a different lesson—at the tops of their voices. Each boy bawled his allotted phrase again and again, and when he had done this a few

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hundred times, he brought his book to his teacher, who, in a faint ghost-like voice, declaimed the next two or three words of the classic under examination. The pupil then skipped irreverently back to his bench and continued to shout this latest addition to his knowledge as before. The throbbing noise of this concerted yet discordant repetition was like the noise one hears when losing consciousness under chloroform.

Our soldiers came back presently. Seated in a tilted heavy sedan-chair, I vicariously set foot on the first red slopes of the pass. Each chair was carried by four men of lawless appearance and incompatible sizes. The shafts of the chair were slung by ropes to short pivoting middle poles, one in front and one behind, and to these middle poles each man set one shoulder. When a change of shoulders was needed, the second front man whined "Pan-kuo" and the leading man passed back to him a staff on which the weight of the chair was momentarily balanced while, with one impulse, the four men ducked their heads and changed shoulders. When the path was very steep a whine in a new tone gave the signal for a very slow deliberate march on flourished feet like a goose-step.

A wedding procession went by, gay, noisy, self-contained in its own raffish compactness—every one there except, it seemed, the bride and groom. Nobody in the procession seemed to feel this lack, however; gaudiness and noise were a sufficient marriage. Flautists, gongsters and



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banner-bearers skipped along, crashing, tootling and dancing, dressed in apple-green with yellow spots and scarlet hats. As an afterthought came two green and yellow coolies carrying—what was it? A coffin? A scarlet coffin, vertical between two poles? No—it was the invisible bride, shut away from her own surrounding glory, crated un-
comfortably in her scarlet crate ready for delivery to her purchaser, a crate riveted with pom-poms, tassels, dangling bits of glass and brass, poor little painted piece of goods, joggling along, alone, in the dark. . . .

The rough cobbled path climbed and climbed. Behind us lay our valley, faint among heat mists and dark lakes of shadow and pale lakes of water. On either side of the pass clouds veiled the tawny faces of the mountains. A little stream rattled down a stony crack in the red earth. Crimson azaleas clung to the dry slopes, and at their feet purple scabious and a kind of refined red clover and miniature shrubs like daphne and clumps of intensely blue flowers—like poor relations of gentians—grew in the yellow grass.

All the time caravans passed us, long trains of mules and ponies running free in a bustle of bells. All the pack animals were decorated with tassels, woollen pom-poms and little pieces of tin and looking-glass. The leading pony of each caravan always wore a high rod springing upright between his panniers; the rod was swathed in scarlet or orange, and, at the tip of it, nodded a great mop of vivid colours which dipped and

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bobbed like a beacon to guide the following ponies and the drivers.

Occasionally less innocent travellers passed us; small groups of men in black tunics buttoned with old silver coins, each man with a gun across his back and a silver-hilted dagger at his belt. These men, who, in daylight, would pass peacefully enough a party under escort, reminded our soldiers that we must get to our destination before sunset or risk attack by brigands. The chant of the chair-coolies had an impassioned tempo now, and there were hot arguments between Number One soldier and his unhurrying subordinates. Reminders of brigands presented themselves. Two rest-houses or provision shops for travellers could be seen in ruins, burnt down by brigands. A few armed guards crouched in a rough turf-thatched hovel, one playing a primitive *p'i-pa* or Chinese guitar, a round-bellied instrument of which only one string seemed to sound the melody, the others being toneless as a child's drum.

At last we could see our destination, set into steep slopes like a quarry, far away at the foot of the mountains. At this hopeful high point in the road a bold peasant had installed a provision booth; blue and white bowls full of sickly looking milky jellies and gravies and curds lured hurrying travellers from the trail. A box of home-made toffee, handed round by me, interested soldiers and chair-bearers as a novelty rather than a pleasure. They all sucked with surprised expressions, and some of them sang a few pensive bars between

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toffee-locked jaws. The sight of a man curled up in a hole in the bank smoking opium, with his great varnished straw hat over the mouth of the hole as a shield or a door against the world, amused all the soldiers riotously. Why this reticence? thought the soldiers; everyone breaks the law in Yunnan. No need to hide behind one's hat. "Do you smoke the Big Smoke (opium)?" the Number One soldier was asked.

"I will smoke a little one now, at any rate," he replied, helping himself to a cigarette from his tactless questioner's case.

Down the slopes to where the town crouched in the late afternoon sunlight, opium fields chequered the earth. White poppies, like great butterflies, floated on squares of grey-green. Poppies by day and brigands by night crept up to the walls of that city and defied them.

The Chinese inn—there are no Europeans in that city—had lately been visited by soldiers or brigands; the words are often synonymous in the interior of China; the place is therefore dismantled and filthy; the owner has gone and only a few hangers-on and a pig or two inhabit the dark rooms round the courtyard. But we stayed there—there was nowhere else to stay—and pitched our camp beds on the first floor in a suite of dark, verminous rooms with windows of fret-sawed wood and painted paper. And, as often happens to me in China, I could imagine myself in the England of five hundred years ago, coming into a cramped crazy cobbled city from robber-

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haunted roads at sunset, entering the inn by a low archway from the narrow street and by an inner archway leading to a courtyard with a little tree and a stone-brimmed well in the middle. There was a weatherbeaten balcony under the eaves on the first storey. We should have blown a bugle mediaevally in the dark archway and sent our esquire, the Number One soldier, to the steps to cry, "Ho, within there!" Then we should have waited to see mine Host, fat and shiny, run out on the balcony, followed by his fluttering fat wife, with promises of venison and pasties and sack for the wanderers.

Alas, our inn was haunted, but not with such jovial ghosts as these. There was no sound in it for all our calling, but the little distant thin sound of errant beggars' music in the street outside, the sound that always spangles the air of a Chinese city at twilight.

JOURNEY TO YUNNAN-FU

WE took our holiday in company with an American visitor of ours and her two children. Such a party as we were does not slip unobtrusively from its moorings—not, at any rate, in Mengtsz. To catch the main-line train which passes at four o'clock in the afternoon, we all had to get up at five in the morning. We breakfasted by candle-light at six to the tune of chanteys sung by coolies as they heaved our luggage away on poles. At half-past six, having managed to catch and shut up five or six dogs, we started in haste for the Chinese railway station. We were accompanied by a crowd consisting of six coolies with luggage, a children's *amah*, the husband of the *amah*, a cook, a travelling boy, three house-coolies, two gardeners, an ex-table boy unwilling to accept dismissal, and a stout, half-life-size teddy bear, for the honour of carrying which our junior American friends constantly manœuvred with high words. Half-way to the station there is a permanent mud-hole, four feet deep, that stretches right across the road. The only way to ford it, I believe, is on the back of a passing buffalo, but most of us prefer to leap,

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frog-like, from dyke to dyke among the roadside paddy-fields.

Our Chinese railway company manages to connect with the afternoon French main-line train by launching a little expedition between seven and nine every morning on the doubtful hour's trip to the edge of the valley. True, there is supposed to be a Chinese train between two and four, but it generally misses the French train. Quite often our unlucky little train falls off the track, and then passengers must get out and push. A buffalo-calf on the rail can disorganise us for days. Half Mengtsh comes down twice a day to see the train off. The engine is exactly like Puffing Billy, the primitive engine displayed as a curiosity at Darlington—it is followed by a row of little springless wooden boxes. In the station it shows off shamelessly,—tooting, shunting, wheezing in all directions in a pillar of smuts. It is Mengtsh's darling pride. It is intoxicated with admiration; it never starts less than an hour late.

But once on the road it has the greatest difficulty in going uphill. Sometimes it only manages to climb the hill to the French line after half-a-dozen attempts. It retires further and further back at each attempt to give itself a longer run. Passengers thus find themselves re-appearing at Mengtsh platform, to the surprise of the friends who came to see them off and have already said every imaginable form of good-bye. Then again, our engine cannot go very well downhill. Its

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trucks run away with it. It has a little brake which cannot curb the impatience of the trucks behind. I suppose in this case the more cautious passengers get out and pull backwards, but most of us, breathing a silent prayer, sit still and are whizzed down into a valley of flooded paddy-fields as though we were in a water-chute. But the water-chutist's and switchbacker's feeling of ultimate safety is absent on our Chinese railway.

Pishihchai, the village where one must wait all day for the French train, makes its living out of pigs and coal. The nose of every passer-by is in constant grave danger both from smuts and smells, and no face on leaving Pishihchai is ever as clean as it was on arrival. Poor Pishihchai, it is a purgatory on the edge of loveliness; all its far horizons—even seen through a haze of coal-dust—are gracious. Brigands are the only travellers who visit Pishihchai with pleasure and profit; they even come down from those same castled mountain horizons for the purpose.

To us the little French train—a toy only a little bigger, only a little less absurd than the Chinese train—came like a delivering angel. It only carried us for two hours, looping round the shoulders of mountains, tunnelling under peaks on which needle-sharp pagodas pricked the clouds, hissing through floods, leaping little garrulous rivers—only two hours and we were thrown out at A-mi-chou for the night. (Every Yunnanese train is Afraid to Go Home in the Dark.) A-mi-chou is a town that knows no change from year to year. If

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you go there next month or next year or—I think—in fifty years, you will see all the stupid little things I saw last night, the noisy river of laden Chinese passengers flowing away from the train up the straight, dimly lighted avenue, the slovenly file of soldiers snaking through the protesting stream of civilians, the little sad trees on either side, each with the fat, smug pony of a Chinese officer tied to it (ponies of the military profession in China are always reincarnations of chargers in old Chinese pictures; their manes are cut in a way that accentuates their thickness of neck, their shortness of head, and their inadequacy of leg).

Always the Greek hotel man stands at his door looking with hatred at his arriving guests; always he affects to make an elaborate choice of keys while knowing very well that he has only about three habitable rooms. (Unfortunately the bugs know this too.) Always the fat French railwaymen are arguing over whist in the *salle-à-manger*, while absinthe drips through sugar into their glasses. Always the servants of the inn wake you up by quarrelling all night and forget to wake you at five when the train begins shrieking for its passengers. Always the whistles themselves bring you to a shocked and sickening awakening from dreams that you have already missed the train.

It is a beautiful journey from A-mi-chou to Yunnan-fu—and so it ought to be. Man has done so much to make the journey unbearable that nature must work hard to reward travellers with her spell woven of crooked gorges and red rivers,

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of waterfalls and streaked precipices, of flowers and young tasselled pine trees.

To me, too, the arrival at Yunnan-fu by first lantern-light is lovely. There is a happy excitement in a chair-ride through the city in the busy evening. The self-important chair-coolies push, curse, roar, sneer, as they hurry at their smooth trot through the impressed crowds, making the noisy dramatic bustle that they imagine is adequate to the passage of "rich foreigners", and swinging their three-cornered, red-lettered paper lanterns.

DOLLS

OUR Mengtsz is a humble town in many ways; we have no fine temples or palaces; our great men are not known outside our own walls; our soldiers go barefoot; our shops contain no jades or porcelains; there are beggars and pigs in the mud of our streets. But one thing we have to be proud of. We have our Hell. (You have no Hell in London.)

Our Hell fits naturally enough into a place of worship. Nobody worships there except one old woman, who sometimes beats a drum, her lips trembling with calculations as tremble the lips of the makers of jumpers, counting stitches. She watches us wandering in Hell, and probably hopes it is doing us good; but she never loses count of her drum-beats, and at the appointed number lays down her stick with a brisk, final manner suggesting "So that's *that*", and totters away on her tiny, distorted feet.

Hell occupies nearly three sides of a paved temple court-yard. There are wooden bars between us and our Hell, so that one cannot actually intrude, like Dante, among the damned. Besides, the damned and the blest, the judges and the judged, are all of a size to force a trespassing

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human Dante to assume also the rôle of Gulliver in Lilliput. Hence, to preserve the dignity of Hell, it is well to let the eye alone enjoy those devious paths.

At the beginning is shown ordinary Chinese life as understood by the Chinese sculptor, who surely ought to know. There is a steep well-crimped blue flood carrying away an astonished householder and all his goods, including his family. There is a fire so fierce that it treats the flood merely as additional fuel. A serpent is enveloping a man who, though his expression is calm, shows by his gestures that the adventure does not appeal to him. There are two tigers, one of which—obviously and ominously sated—sits with his back to everybody. (Do You Get That Feeling of Fullness After Meals?) The other is still pursuing his next victim.

From this busy yet commonplace scene, the eye falls suddenly into real horrors. Three men in blue shorts (the sinners' uniform in our Hell is blue shorts), one with his arms cut off, are being led by a green-striped demon to a door, above which the notice runs, "Prison of Ice". Beyond the door is a thin white toboggan slide, on which sit two sinners, whose self-absorbed and compressed faces dramatically express intense cold. On the bank a yellow demon is just adding to the party a third sinner, whom he holds by the hair and the seat of the trousers.

"No matter how rich you are, you will be afraid of this," announces a placard. We are not

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very rich and not very much afraid. It is nothing worse than a sea of blood, in which are drowning certain persons who evidently cannot swim. One swimmer has even been reprieved, it seems, and sits gingerly on a small lotus flower in the grisly flood, wondering when his turn will come.

Near him, in a blue grotto, sits Beaver, the only sinner in Hell who has been permitted to compete with the hirsute judges and grow a beard. Evidently a favourite with the authorities, one imagines, for he sits happily with a rod under his upraised knees, his arms under the end of the rod, his hands clasped before his ankles, quite unmistakably waiting for an opponent in the historic game of cock-fighting. Possibly some sporting demon—but perhaps this is over-loading the artist's intention.

One must be selective in Hell as elsewhere. Yet I must mention the doorway on the corner, guarded by a big blue demon and an irascible hairy god, who, with a scroll open in his hand, is keeping check on those who enter. In a queue before the doorway are about a dozen saints in floral robes and rather fashionable hats. All look pleased, and several, I am sorry to say, are unmistakably half-witted. The humbler persons at the tail of the queue all carry large animals on their backs—one a horse, one a pig, one a buffalo, one a lizard. . . . It is not probable that they are members of our Dumb Friends' League about to receive their reward, but we can offer no other suggestion. In front of the whole queue—indeed

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actually passing through the door—struts a stray sinner, who has obviously wangled. The blue guardian demon looks ostentatiously the other way, the counting god is busy cursing someone else for getting out of line. In a minute that sinner, blue shorts and all, will be through the door, fishing triumphantly with the two mild fishermen in topers among the blessed ducks and lotus-leaves of the next group.

Really, sometimes it seems hardly worth while to be good. The whole moral of Hell is destroyed.

However, the fishing is only a short interval of peace. The other half of eternity is yet to come, and even Dante must have wavered half-way through Hell. Dante, however, would have paused to converse with the lady who sits at the top of a castellated blue turret yawning (hand politely over mouth) above a notice saying, "The City of the Dead". Sure enough, here is Death in white with a cordial hand outstretched and "You Have Come" written on his tall white hat. His welcoming smile is an inverted one—a downward curve that almost meets beneath his chin; he is obviously not optimistic about the chances of the newcomer at the trial which is taking place on an upper floor. There small angular sinners sprawl at the feet of an angry crimson god, while demons, with obvious enjoyment, read recording scrolls.

At the end of Hell is a gold coiled serpent with a woman's head. This, I think, must be a debased remnant of a legend of Kwan-yin, Goddess of Mercy, the women's goddess. For laid in front of

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the serpent is a row of little coloured shoes, placed there by women who have prayed for baby sons. Once in Penang I went to a Kwan-yin temple in which the priest encouraged hundreds of little live snakes to live in every cranny and niche in the carving of the altar. The connection may have significance.

Prayers for babies enter oddly into Hell. The little shoes turn the demons and the sinners and the saints into dolls again.

And I am reminded of the other dolls I wanted to write about, the little wax dolls on sticks that are made for real babies by travelling peasants on the streets. The figures, when finished, are perfect to the tiniest finger-joint, and to watch their making is like watching a fairy at work. A turn of the thick peasant thumb, a pinch and a flip, and there is the face at the top of the stick—already clearly and inevitably the face of a gay dancing figure. A scrape of a comb on black wax and the elaborate hair is rolled high under a red flower; the draped breast above the flying sash is joined to the head by the tiniest green necktie; a flick of a sharp stick, and the five spidery white fingers wave from the end of the upraised arms. And even when the nimble scarlet trousers of the dancer have sprung into being, and the little shoes with up-turned tips are tittuping down below, there are still the fluffy wax rosettes to fix on the insteps; there are still the buttons and jewellery to apply, and the gold pattern to be printed with a little seal on the elaborate clothes.

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There would always be some new charm to add, one imagines, but the surrounding babies are impatient buyers, and the newborn gay dancer is handed over to be presently pudged into a blob of bright soft wax by fat and dirty hands. What of it? There is another face already—chalky and masked—on the top of a new stick—awaiting the craftsman's hand. A fairy's work is never done.

THE PUPIL

My pupil is grown up, a "Writer" by profession, a Bannerman by birth. He is of that group of Manchu Bannermen whose fathers were sent to garrison the city of Canton at the time of the Manchu control of China.

These Manchu Bannermen, who have not intermarried with the Chinese or diluted their pure Manchu blood, have thus remained for generations aristocratic northern aliens in southern Canton, speaking the pure Mandarin speech and upholding military traditions in the commercial city. After the Chinese revolution of 1911, Manchus counted for nothing, and imperialism and militarism lost the trappings of glory; but still the Bannermen keep a kind of ghost of grandeur; still, it seems, they live with a certain secret swagger, still they feel themselves exiles of empire in the inferior south.

My pupil is evidently conscious of this feeling; whenever he talks of his family and traditions, I somehow see the yellow banners and dragons and knightly silks behind his smooth eyes, and hear the gongs and the clatter of cavalry in his mild voice. And for this reason, I find it surprising

THE PUPIL

that he has salved no personal instinct of romance out of the wreck of his family history, no shred of imagination that he can twist into a rope to throw across to the remoter romances of the West. No stories but his own are stories to him.

He and I are reading an English book together. Fortunately it is largely a book of action, so that his literal exactness is not quite as destructive as it might have been had we found ourselves reading, say, William Blake, Stephen Leacock, or P. B. Shelley. But even from manly and direct accounts of action, his voice, constantly interrupted by a very loud and startling internal snort, can take away all excitement or life.

"Kawk", he snorts, critically examining the phrase under review. "*His weepoⁿ played like lightning round his head and thrice he beat back oncoming waves of the savage enemy, but in the end numbers prevailed and he fell, murmuring, 'Well it is all over now'. His weepoⁿ played'*—kawk—this is a metaphor comparing weepoⁿ firstly to small child at game springing in several directions; secondly to thunderstorm. 'Thrice' is poetic word for three times. The savage or—kawk—uneducated enemy are compared to waves of ocean jumping on beach and jumping off again. . . ."

Disaster, of course, awaits the cultured teacher who here ventures upon a reference to Canute's boast or Hamlet's soliloquy. My pupil is too conscientious to take such digressions casually. A story, whether paste or jewel, must be pulverised by analysis and paraphrase before he can bring

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himself to leave it. "British fable", "Foreign legend", "Noted poem", are his unfailing labels for such diversions, but the labels cannot assuage his craving to turn all fancies into facts.

His sense of humour is also an obstacle. "Then the Canute—he get his legs wet with ocean—hee-hee-hee—his legs become quite wet—hee-hee—that is—kawk—humorous British historical fable. . . ."

He returns to the page, refreshed.

" . . . *Murmuring*, "*Well it is all over now*". 'Well', meaning fortunate, 'it is all over'—'it' refers to what subject—this man's life? If so, surely he makes mistake or perhaps colloquialism. I think he should have said, 'My life shall soon be finished,' or—kawk—'I shall be dead. . . .'"

The examination of a love-scene is even more difficult and perilous.

" 'God bless you—kawk—my beloved,' he said, and his eyes shone like stars. 'The world is ours.' He expresses hope that the God of Christian shall behave kind to this lady. 'My beloved' is affectionate term used between betrothes. His eyes gleam and wink resembling star in sky. 'The world is ours' . . . he informs betrothe that he has inherited large property. . . ."

THE PARTING IN THE MIDDLE

As my husband and I were sauntering on horseback one day along a little grassy path between rice-fields in Yunnan, my husband, who was riding in front, turned round, and, after a second, said to me in a rude, harsh voice, not in the least characteristic of this excellent man, "Come on, now, *quick*—come along at once".

I have not been a suffragette for nothing. "Really, S.," I replied, in the haughty dignified tones of *Woman Affronted*, "have you been married to me all these years without learning that to speak to me in that tone of voice is the very worst way to make me. . . ." Something in his expression, however, suggested that he was not listening to me. He seemed to be looking beyond me, and even made so bold as to repeat, without any apology, his tyrannical command. I turned coldly to follow his eyes, and saw, at a distance of about fifty yards, a monstrous water-buffalo charging violently towards us. Dropping at once my feministic grievance, I turned again and, gathering up the reins, gave my horse a severe blow behind with my whip, at the same time using language of a very stirring kind. My horse

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Molquhoun (please pronounce Moon), who had been eating a wild rose bush, drew himself up, astounded.

“Really, madam,” said Molquhoun, “have you been riding me all these months without learning that violence of word or deed is the very worst way of. . . .” His offended pirouettings at this moment brought him round facing in the direction of the advancing buffalo, now about twenty yards away. Horses, husband and I being instantly all of one mind, we sprang away without further discussion.

Chinese domestic buffaloes are very heavily built, slothful-looking creatures with about five foot of horn to about eight inches of leg. Seen, as they generally are, seated in a water-logged condition in mudholes, gloomily chewing mud, looking like half-depleted Gladstone bags a hundred times magnified, buffaloes give a most deceptive impression of immobility. Many foreigners in China, however, have found to their cost that Chinese buffaloes share the Kuomintang’s dislike of foreign imperialism, and that this patriotic fervour lends them wings. Looking back as we hurried along the narrow path, I saw, to my horrified surprise, that the buffalo was not falling behind at all. On the contrary, it seemed to be gaining a little. “It’s because of its length,” I thought confusedly—for a buffalo has the figure of a Hamburger sausage or stout dachshund—“although its hind part is a long way behind, its front end seems to be close, an optical illusion.”

THE PARTING IN THE MIDDLE

The front end, however, was unfortunately the end that wore the horns. I could see its fierce stupid little eyes, its wide wet grey nose and the little parting which it wore in the tufted fringe which ornamented the space between its horns.

At that moment I remembered that bulls are said to be obliged by nature always to charge in a straight line, and that wise men, therefore, advise those who have been so unlucky as to annoy a bull, to leap nimbly aside and let the animal charge past them. I therefore switched the horse Molquhoun aside into the rice-field. Buffaloes, however, must have more adaptable standards of the chase than bulls—or perhaps our buffalo had not properly committed to memory the rules of the



game he had chosen to play—or again perhaps Molquhoun, who was a gleaming white albino horse, with bright pink eyes, was a mark which even a buffalo could not lose sight of. Be that as it may, the buffalo, in mid-gallop, bent its long bulging figure into the shape of a boomerang and sprang after us into the rice-field.

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A rice- (or paddy-) field, as every one knows, is composed of a foundation of deep treacly mud overlaid with twelve inches or so of water. Every one in China has seen and admired the rice-fields with their jewel-green blades rising out of glittering yellow water, but few have tried with success to cross them on horseback in a hurry. Mud is of course the buffalo's native element, but it was not Molquhoun's. Buffaloes make their living by ploughing rice-fields; one may see them any day cleaving the waters like amphibious Zeppelins, the muddy wavelets lapping their broad bald ballooning ribs. Their huge splay hoofs are well adapted to pressing a foothold in soft mud. But Molquhoun had no such experience. On a ground of bottomless mud under a sheet of thick water, he was wholly at a disadvantage. He showed at once his lack of submarine training. The buffalo gained upon us so fast that had it not been for the fact that its attention was divided between two victims, and also that our four dogs were harassing it by barking insults from all sides, most certainly its great corrugated horns must have come into contact with poor Molquhoun's snow-white tail. As it was, however, after we had all—the buffalo, the two horses, and the four dogs—floundered and dodged about the rice-field in all directions for several minutes, the horses, now thoroughly frightened, managed to reach a dyke, and, hoisting themselves on to firm ground at last, got away at a gallop.

Even so, that buffalo proved to be a far more

THE PARTING IN THE MIDDLE

determined sportsman than we expected. When, after a mile of really hurried going, we pulled up in a valley to let the horses get their breath, we looked back up the path we had come along and saw the buffalo heaving over the crest, still earnestly and nimbly following our trail. We hurried on again, and not till we were inside our own walled compound with the gates shut did we feel comparatively safe. Even then, as we sat down to breakfast, we found ourselves looking nervously at the window, fearing to see that great gloomy grey face, that broad, oily nose, those tear-grooved cheeks, those wide curving black horns and that sinister little parting in the middle, pushing apart our rambler roses in search of us.

I think the little parting in the middle was the thing that gave the experience its touch of horror. There was something so dandyish, so callous, about that neat coiffure, it gave our buffalo something in common with the villains of Mr. William le Queux's stories.

THE ACCIDENT

WHEN I think of travelling in China, I always think of the old stone roads. As a matter of fact, they can hardly be called roads in the crude Western sense—they are really obstacle-race-tracks, only to be trodden on foot, in sedan-chairs, on buffaloes, bullocks or very sure-footed ponies. The roads are made of great squared blocks of stone laid on dykes above the rice-fields; many of the laboriously laid stones have long since disappeared. Once the roads used to cross canals on handsome humpy stone bridges, but now the last straw has broken nearly every bridge's hump, and travellers must roll up their trousers and paddle. But decayed though they be, these stone roads are brave old roads and fear neither mountain range nor swamp. Their pride still shines forth in the shape of upstanding marble or granite tablets at corners, bridges, crossways or entries to towns,—tablets crowned with interknotted dragons and beautifully patterned with the names of the public-spirited men who built the roads. Sometimes an arch—or *p'ai-lou*—commemorating a victory, a hero, or a widow who was so virtuous that she never married again, jumps in a curly

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twist of dragons, elephants or phoenixes across a road. I wish I could remember the days when the old roads were in their glory—when silk-clad mandarins were borne along them in palanquins of the various shades that denoted their various ranks. When two palanquins met, the servants of the mandarins would hold their fans before their masters' faces in order to create a fiction of not having met, since a barefaced meeting would entail an endless polite delay. I have seen British business men in buses taking refuge in the same harmless fiction—only they use the *Daily Mail* instead of painted fans.

Nowadays, on the stone roads *I* know, one meets no one more aristocratic than stout Chinese merchants or clerks tittuping along on tiny pacing ponies, silk petticoats hitched up about high wooden saddles, their escort of soldiers—umbrella in one hand, rifle in the other—trailing along behind them.

It was without military escort, however, that I once rode along a lonely nine-mile stretch of road side by side with fourteen thousand dollars. A French acquaintance of ours—a business man—whose duty it was to bring to town from time to time the moneys in his keeping, being a nervous young man, disliked the idea of taking that lonely ride, burdened with his accumulated thousands. He said that every time he opened his safe, every bad character in the valley pricked up his ears. So a friend of mine—whom I will call Ethelbert—and I, feeling confident that nobody would connect

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us with the opening of the Frenchman's safe, rode across the valley one morning and unobtrusively pocketed the fourteen thousand dollars in question. I say *unobtrusively*, but actually nothing could have been more blatant than the vulgar bulge caused by the unprecedented presence of fourteen thousand dollars in Ethelbert's breast pocket. Trying to look unconscious of our hidden wealth, we cantered back along the sandy track that an irreverent public has made beside the lumpy austerity of the old stone road. All went well till we passed the gate of a walled village about seven miles from home. Here a heedless pedestrian ran like a chicken across the path of Ethelbert's rather impulsive horse. There was a thud, a cry and a cloud of dust—and there on the ground lay the poor coolie as though dead. Of course we threw ourselves to his aid. We splashed muddy water from a paddy-field on to his face and plied him with whisky from a flask—but still he remained apparently dead. We were just trying to drag him into the shade, intending that one of us should ride the seven miles to the French hospital for the doctor and a stretcher, when the villagers discovered the affair. They hastily decided that our intention was to leave the corpse propped up against their wall and ride away to accuse them, tacitly or otherwise, of the murder. They therefore became deliriously obstructive, filled with the adamant righteousness characteristic of the semi-respectable character accused of a crime that (for once) he hasn't committed. They would not let

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us touch the poor sufferer again; they would not let us hire a providentially passing empty buffalo cart to carry him to the hospital; they would not, in fact, let Ethelbert move, but held his sleeve and his pony's bridle, cursing loudly all the time. In vain did we explain our helpful intentions, they would not loose their hold. An all-round tip of a dollar or two would have saved the situation, but alas! we had neither one dollar nor two, but only *fourteen thousand* dollars in big notes gnawing like the Spartan fox at our bosom. Finally, after a long, deafening argument, they led poor Ethelbert away as a hostage. Left thus bereaved, I was allowed to hoist the ill-starred pedestrian upon a buffalo cart and ride gloomily homeward at the cart's tail. It was a nightmare of a ride. The buffalo drivers, being, for lack of funds on my part, unpaid as yet, were deliberately unhelpful. At every little inn—under every shady tree—they sat down to chat, smiling provocatively at me under their big tea-tray hats. They would not direct or rebuke their buffalo—which must have been at best a very ill-disciplined creature—and I, consumed with anxiety and riding a restless horse, had the greatest difficulty in urging it along. I knew no word of the buffalonian language and could not prevent the unwieldy brute from straying aside into the ditches to browse—on which the cart would heel over and the unconscious passenger roll out. I must say, I cannot remember a less enjoyable expedition. But at last, after four hours, we reached the hospital. During

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the last half-hour I had been reduced—for the first and, I hope, the last time in my life—for hitting not only the buffalo but also the drivers as hard as I could with my whip. They all went better after that. Having explained everything to the doctor and found that our victim was not fatally hurt, I rode to the office for which the fourteen thousand dollars had been destined and cried, as I burst into the inner sanctuary, "Ethelbert and fourteen thousand dollars are lost!" I am sorry to have to record that the latter half of my sentence seemed to make the greater impression. The telephone wires began to hum and a little band of Chinese soldiers, despatched by the worried local commandant, was just setting forth when—in rode the missing Ethelbert! There upon his bosom was the familiar crackling bulge of money still! It appeared that he had been led into the presence of the village headman, who was enjoying his siesta in a temple near by. The headman, half asleep, was too apathetic to decide what should be done with stray British homicides. Though unwilling to disturb himself, he at last decided to go and consult a friend, and so they all set forth, Ethelbert's pony—on which he was again mounted—being led by half-a-dozen village volunteers. The day was hot, the pony restless, and finally one of the volunteers whispered, "For a dollar we'll let you go". But Ethelbert, as I mentioned before, had no dollar—only fourteen thousand. So he turned to the sleepy headman and said, "Your men offer to let me go for a dollar, and

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I dare say you'd do the same for five, but I'll give no bribes since you have no right to detain me at all". In the confusion that followed, Ethelbert found himself loosed and he cantered away. It is to be hoped that that village will never hear of the fourteen thousand dollars their lack of observation caused them to miss. It would be enough to make them all take up Pelmanism on the spot.

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IN our town we have a Public Park, a pleasant block of shade in a shadeless land, like a mass of stiff, tufted, green coral, honeycombed with twisty passages through the shade. In cages in our park are a couple of mangey monkeys, a wretched bear tied to a stake, and some long-legged birds wasting their long legs on a few feet of space. Past these the tender-hearted explorer hurries miserably.

But in the middle of the park are the little pavilions, and there we and our Chinese friends occasionally entertain one another.

Dinner, on these occasions, is ordered from the Chinese restaurant in the town. And as the calm, silk-robed guests and hosts bow to each other as they assemble on the steps of the pavilion, they are jostled by yelling, excited coolies from the restaurant, carrying on swinging shoulder-poles barrels of rice, steaming kettles, charcoal stoves, hampers of gaudy tins, and buckets of *samshu* (Chinese wine).

“ We have decided ”, said one of our hosts in carefully prepared English, as we arrived at our last dinner, “ to serve the food in the following

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way: Each guest will have his own plate in front of him, and will help himself with a spoon, rather than with his chopsticks, from the central dish. This idea, we think, will be more sanitary and less disgusting to foreigners than the common Chinese style."

"How nice—I mean, oh, not at all—I mean, never in the least disgusting—but an excellent idea all the same. . . ." (Neither then nor since have I been able to think of a tactful reply.)

We important creatures sat down at a table in the bare backyard of the pavilion to drink flower-tasting tea and to explore with polite nibblings the emptiness of sunflower seeds. The less highly salaried among our hosts roamed about in humble silence behind us. The moon, nesting in a poplar tree when we made our first bow, had time to fly to a willow before dinner was announced.

But at last, after much courteous reluctance at the door, we all filed into the pavilion and wandered, with cries of admiration, round two tables covered with small plates and bowls of *hors d'œuvres*, and fringed with little red slips on which were written our names in beautiful, but to me incomprehensible, characters.

I was too poor a scholar even to find my own name (*An Tai-t'ai*, or Mrs. Peace), among them.

However, help arrived and we were seated at last—chief host opposite chief guest, number two host opposite number two guest, and so on; mists of moral obscurity enveloping persons with less

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than fifty taels a month, though, in actual fact, the most lowly was seated *next to* the chief host.

Among these mere worms hovering on the horizon of the attention of the lofty, one old man especially caught my eye. He had a face like a skull enclosed—without padding of flesh—in taut pale skin; he was like an old Chinese picture of a mandarin, but lacked the long threadlike mustachios which used to—and still occasionally do—bracket, as though in parenthesis, the thin hyphen of a Chinese mouth. His cheek-bones were as prominent as his nose; his eyes were just discreet slashes in smooth pouches.

He was, in spite of his spiritual and intellectual appearance, of such humble estate that he dared not speak one word, or even appear to listen or to smile at the jokes that sprang from lip to lip among the elect.

For Chinese dinners are nearly always very gay—almost as noisily gay as Froth-blowers' reunions sound to us exiles.

The Chinese have more natural light courtesy, I think, than any race. They gild, as it were, their strict social conventions with a sheen of friendly ease. They seem clever in feigning an appreciation they almost certainly cannot feel for all the phenomena connected with foreigners. No guest's remarks are ever unheard, or received superciliously, at a Chinese party; there is no obsequiousness, and yet the laughter is always ready even before the point of a guest's joke has been reached.

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We were helped to eat and applauded in our efforts to eat by dense crowds of servants, small boys, soldiers, dogs, pedlars, and other hangers-on. Servants and their friends are not expected to be unobtrusive in Chinese households. Our conversation was sometimes drowned in the cheers of the audience or the loud suggestions and recriminations passing between the servants.

But after we guests began drinking our pink wine, we made a good deal of noise ourselves. The wine is a raw, strong spirit coloured with syrup, and each glassful is supposed to be swallowed at a gulp down a throat of necessity of brass. On the challenge, "*Kan Pei*"—(dry glass)—both challenger and challenged toss off their wine, and with a florid vaunting gesture, display the emptied glasses to each other. Finger games are played, and the loser of each must "*Kan Pei*". One is the Japanese finger game—like *Morra*—the thrust-out fingers representing scissors, stone and paper. Another—the Chinese equivalent—demands also the thrusting out of fingers and the shouting of a number by each player. The winner is he who shouts the correct total of the fingers on the two out-thrust hands. The loser must *Kan Pei*. It is a noisy game. The air is full of sawing voice-duels: "*I-ko*", "*Pa-ko*", "*San-ko*", "*Wu-ko*", "*Shih-ko*,"—interrupted by yells from the onlookers when the right number is given by a player. Another drinking game centres round an orange with a lighted match stuck in it. This is passed round the table and the guest before

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whom the final spark of the match dies must *Kan Pei*.

After each sip a servant comes and fills the cup to the brim again, so that no one ever knows how much he drinks in a night. After the first few "*Kan Pei*", no one much cares.

Every one knows, however, how much he eats. Twenty-four courses appeared at the last pavilion dinner, and I am proud to say that I only baulked at four of them.

For two hours bowl of wonderful hot food succeeded bowl. Each bowl alighted on the middle of the table amid cries of wonder and applause. It is polite to express a lively interest in Chinese food. We all nibbled, applauded, licked our lips, nibbled again, inquired, gulped and congratulated. It is also polite—as well as unavoidable—to splash gravy all over the table while conveying, between unsteady chopsticks, the chosen piece from the central bowl to one's own,—dipping it into a few bowls of condiments on the way. An amiable host or neighbour will often with his own chopsticks convey a specially recommended morsel to one's bowl. At half-time, every one walked about the garden looking at the gnarled little trees in blue pottery bowls. Then we all returned to start anew.

Chinese sweets are to me things of horror, chiefly because of their livid colours—but everything else would be a happy experience at any table—if only there were not always twenty-three other similar experiences to look back on or look

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forward to on the same occasion. Preserved eggs in jelly, shrimps in batter, baked fish in brown sauce, sharks' fins, chicken in batter, bird's-nest soup, deer's sinews, bears' paws, various fungi, rings of duck and ham strung alternately on a long stick, beans and rice in rice water, syrupy fruits and poison-coloured pastries, back again to duck, to fish, to ham—and at the end of these and many more—rice, the happy promise of surcease.

The never-emptied glass, the increasing inward conviction of over-feeding, somehow immerse the two noisy round tablesfull in a kind of flood of fantasy, as though we were all at the bottom of a lake. The rings of smooth quick Chinese faces, the sing-song language—the simple—yet seldom banal—topics of talk, the sheen of silk brocade, the tree-deflected moonlight outside, induce a kind of intensely clear atmosphere round my senses and all that they perceive—a spiritually-drowned air in which everything is of equal importance.

The talk, it seems, is of mangoes.

“We are too far north to get mangoes. . . . I have never eaten a mango. . . . Can you describe the taste of a mango? . . .”

The time-honoured banality about mangoes having to be eaten in the bath is sternly suppressed by me, but is replaced by an almost equally un-inspired item of misinformation fished up inadvertently out of my dim memories.

“Queen Victoria”, I announced, “had man-

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goes sent to her from India every year as tribute by a certain rajah."

"A tribute of mangoes! Mangoes, to Queen Victoria!" My *bon-mot* is vivaciously translated all round the table. Every one is saying, "Mangoes!" "Queen Victoria!" "Then she liked mangoes, too?"

"No," I persisted, though sorry to disappoint every one. "She didn't have the chance. They were always bad by the time they reached her. All bad."

"Bad! All bad! And yet sent every year as tribute! A tribute of bad mangoes!"

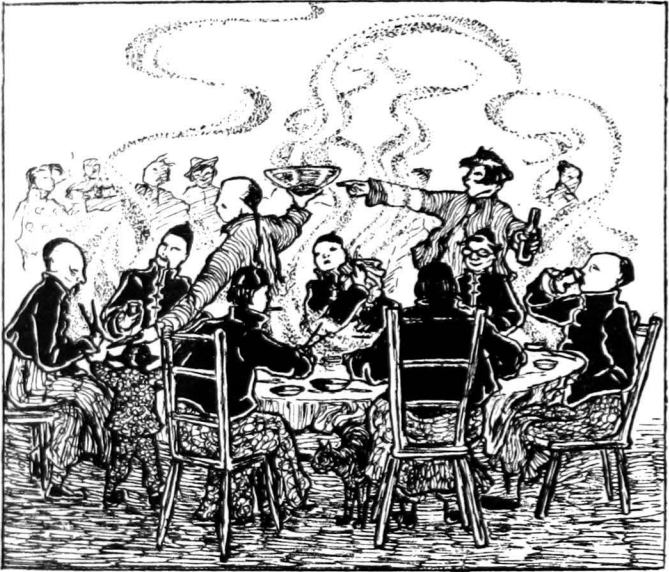
Faces fell all round the table as translation broadcasted the tragedy. "What a waste of money! Then Queen Victoria never tasted a good mango."

Seldom have words of mine scored such a success. *Never* in Chinese company. I could not bear thus to allow Queen Victoria to damp with sorrow my one great social success.

"Just before she died," I added on a rising inflection of hope, "someone discovered that mangoes bottled in honey would keep indefinitely. . . ."

"In honey! Mangoes in honey! So she tasted them in the end. . . ." Faces brightened—suspense was relaxed.

"But *mangoes*—bad or good—as *tribute* . . ." said someone to whom, owing to the exigencies of translation, the story had only percolated rather slowly. "What a tribute—*mangoes*—to Queen Victoria—Ha-ha-ha-ha!"



CHINESE DINNER-PARTY

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We all laughed like anything, mine not to reason why. It was my first and last sally, but its subtlety and wit had redounded to the honour of my lowly sex in Chinese eyes.

So we were all happy, and began gargling into spittoons and wiping our necks with hot soaked towels—the usual preliminary to departure. Eat, drink, gargle and go is the Chinese rule. Conversation should be exchanged only with the mouth full. As the last grain of rice disappears, the occasion dies in its tracks. Good-bye—good-bye. . . . *To hsieh.* . . . *To hsieh.*

Chinese are the only Oriental hosts who really make the unaccustomed guest happy on formal gastronomic occasions. I remember, by way of contrast, an Annamite dinner I once went to in Yunnan.

Annamite men in their floweriest gauzes, their beadiest clogs, and their snakiest turbans stood waiting for us on the verandah of an old deserted house which they had decorated zealously. Strings of paper French flags leashed together little potted shrubs, on whose boughs paper roses were pinned. Similar paper roses were attached to the cigarettes—made, I think, of brimstone and sackcloth, scented with patchouli—plates of which enlivened the table. To smoke one of these cigarettes was a risk in itself, and the risk was doubled by the inflammable nature of the roses, which, if not removed, burst into flames and scorched the smoker's nose.

Four dogs—Josephine, Boniface, Susan and

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Cowslip—though carefully shut up at home, magically materialised at the banquet. Our dogs always do this. Stone walls do not for them a prison make nor iron bars a cage. Cowslip involved himself in Yunnanese politics once, by walking between the legs of a governor-general's brother and tripping him up in the middle of a speech of welcome. And at formal French dinner-parties I often felt that the effect of my best frock and imitation pearls was spoilt by the fact that I was always inadvertently followed into the room by five or six pleased but muddy dogs. . . . However, on the occasion of the Annamite luncheon, the dogs were our saviours. We sat for an hour and a half smiling mirthlessly at our generous hosts over plates loaded with the most disgusting foods it has ever been my misfortune to nibble. Cubes of slightly sweetened chalk, oblongs of yellow gutta-percha, disks of white lead stamped—ironically enough—with the Long Life ideograph, nests of combed gelatine, jellies of congealed whitewash, strips of chewing-gum on a foundation of flannel—all were hospitably heaped on our plates by our untiring hosts. We bowed over each delicacy, and then, diverting our hosts' attention by means of a witticism or a note of admiration that always fell flat, passed on everything to the dogs who stood under the table with their chins on our knees. Boniface, to be sure, spat out some of the courses with loud garglings, which I tried to cover by conversing vivaciously; Cowslip—always the gentle-

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man—refused to take part in anything underhand —(underpaw?)—and ate jellies frankly in a conspicuous place, but happily at that moment one of our hosts was reading in rapid, mumbled French a speech showing cause why champagne had not been provided, so the embarrassing but heroic behaviour of our dogs passed unnoticed.

MANCHURIAN WEEK-END

WE were for a week-end the guests of the gods. It is ill-bred to ask what entertainment our hosts have in store for us. But the gods are lavish hosts. All the four seasons are in their gift—even for the benefit of week-end guests.

On the outward journey, the autumn sun slanted so warmly down the bald red mountain sides that michaelmas daisies had come out in the lower mountain passes, and some of the willows by the river had mistaken the season and donned their red spring haze of flushed twigs—even risking a few silver velvet buds.

Winter crashed down on these comfortable illusions of spring, with the abruptness of an explosion. A furious wind, black with flying sand and spotted with snow, screamed up the unsuspecting valleys and, in the space of one night, killed the flowers and the willow-buds, silvered the peaks and clogged the rivers with tumbling, grinding ice-packs.

Still, we had to get home: A week-end is all very well, but Monday spells Home. To be marooned indefinitely in Keiko, a Japanese village on the edge of northern Korea, looking across a

MANCHURIAN WEEK-END

strip of Manchuria to the rearing white mountains of Siberia, is no prospect for a decent Monday morning. In the passage of our Japanese inn there was a pet cabbage in a pot, green and juicy in a land where no green things are—growing, in a season when nothing should grow but icicles. All Sunday I admired this vegetarian version of the fatted calf and hoped that I might be considered the prodigal daughter of the house, and that that tender corrugated stem might be cut for me. But on Monday, even this wish could not tempt me. I yearned for the tinned husks of home.

We went and looked at the river. On Saturday night we had crossed that river with our coats off, panting peacefully after a warm journey, pointed across by a tranquil young autumn moon. Now it was quivering, bristling and crashing with bowling wheels of ice under a wild wind. The Japanese police told us that it could not be crossed until the ice should either melt away or freeze to a standstill. They thought we should be content to sit round the stove with them in their watch-house, telling them the story of our lives in English, a language of which they knew no word. When we first reached the riverside, only policemen occupied the watch-house. Their officer had a sore eye and a severe and unreticent cold in the nose, but in other respects he was a fairly agreeable companion and drew his subordinates' attention to the beauty of my fur trousers in a very gratifying and polite way. After a while, however, three bearded Koreans, clad in their invariable white quilted

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robes and perched horsehair top-hats, appeared in the watch-house, also hoping to cross the river. Instantly our policemen's manner towards us changed. They became insolent, sullen and obstructive. They obviously felt that, as officials among a subject people, guardians of the fringe of empire, it was their duty to display before the humble Korean "little brothers of Japan" the lofty status of Japanese empire-builders among the other governing races.

Boatmen were finally persuaded to try and row us across the river. The three Koreans accompanied us, and a Chinese innkeeper joined us. The latter carried, throughout the trying events which followed, two empty beer-bottles on which he hoped, if he survived the day's adventures, to get a refund of a few coppers. I dare say he risked his life crossing that river solely on account of those bottles, if the truth were known. I stood on the bank while every one else helped to chop the boat out of the ice. The noise of the ice-blocks, grinding and groaning down the river, was fantastic. The sight of them reminded me a little of traffic in Regent Street at a busy time of day. There went the motor-buses—great clumsy monsters of ice, taking up much more than their fair share of room, coming to a short, top-heavy rest now and then in the shallows. The icy two-seaters and run-abouts skidded in and out of the blocks, bouncing from the mud-guards of their betters. Nimble, thin wedges represented the errand boys on bicycles. And along the bank,

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where the current was slower, crawled the glittering ghosts of coster-barrows, furniture vans and sandwich men.

But alas—where was the controlling policeman?

On the near side of the stream, as we pushed off in our thick ice-glazed boat, the floating ice meandered in a leisurely, twisting current, and such ice-packs as approached us could easily be avoided or prodded away. The shape of the errant berglets was almost invariable. They were like wheels or flat rosettes; their spinning progress had ground them into more or less perfect circles, and frilled them all prettily round with a crackling lace of ice splinters. The rosettes varied only in size; they ranged from a breadth of about nine inches to one of about nine feet—from two inches to three feet in depth. They were like the spawn of great careless departed icebergs, flung in millions upon the threatened river. Or they were like dispersed petals from the huge flowers of the frost.

Towards the middle of the river, the ice, though moving much more swiftly, was packed closely together and could not be avoided. With a cry and a heave, our boatmen thrust the boat's blunt nose into this solid rushing mass. The mass yawned to receive us, packed close again and bore us away. The boatmen's desperate oars scraped uselessly on ice. All our perspectives were instantly reversed. Here we were, it seemed, peacefully rooted upon a still isthmus of ice, while all

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around us the world had gone mad. The line of the mountains whipped up and down the sky; the sandbanks lashed past us like eels; the trees streaked across our sight and piled themselves up behind us. But we seemed quiet and stable, a seed sown in a long uneven white furrow; our shadows were printed firmly upon the unchanging curves that surrounded us. Only the subterranean roarings and gratings, and the contradictory cacklings of the alarmed boatmen and Korean passengers, reminded us of the deceptive incontinence of this continent of ours.

We were quite near the bank. We could have thrown a pebble on to it—but that wouldn't have helped us at all. A friend whizzed past us on a whizzing sand-dune—a Chinese Customs watcher whose watching had never been done to better purpose. Running along the bank, he kept pace with us. We threw a rope, trying to lasso the frantic world. He caught it, but it snapped. We threw another, and it held. Cracking and complaining, the thwarted ice piling up against her bows, our boat swung round out of her white grave towards a world suddenly becalmed and still. We had only to hop, skip and jump from one intervening ice-rose to another, and up an eight-foot mud bank, to be safe.

At the top of the bank we all hissed through our teeth one to another, in the Japanese manner, in token of our satisfaction. The two empty beer-bottles were still safe. The three Korean top-hats were only slightly awry. But our hissings were



ICE ROSES

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premature. We found that we were still divided from Manchuria by narrower, but still formidable, offshoots of our river. All these waters were covered with level, ambiguous grey ice over which grey sand had been blown, so that there was little to show where the solid land ended and the treacherous ice began. Our Chinese rescuer, flying selflessly to our rescue, must have skimmed over these danger-strips like a swallow, but we were now a heavy cautious party of nine, and the ice began to twang like a cracked guitar even under the weight of our nine tentative shadows upon its edge.

Woman's place, I decided, was in the rear of processions such as ours. Cautiously maintaining a distance of about twenty feet between myself and any heavier member of the party, I prepared to profit by the disasters of others. One strip of water was bridged by a line of planks eight inches wide and completely glazed with ice. Another crossing was helped by a round log, also glazed, which had once floated and was now frozen in. Bundles of rushes acted occasionally as snowshoes. The rushes broke like glass. Each stem was enclosed in a pellican of ice. Where the withered reeds and weeds grew thickly in the dells among the dunes, steeples and minarets of ice, each with its core of strangled vegetation, glittered like a fairy Wembley.

The Korean grandfather was too proud to imitate the rest of us and crawl on all fours along an iced log. He strode upright, fell off and fell

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in. He stood up to his buttocks in water looking sharply at us to see if any of us were laughing. His beard was stiff with frost. Round his ears he wore little rabbit-skin rings for warmth. His ears shone pink in their white fur nests, each like a little ham in a frill. But we were not laughing at him, we were simply shuffling away in all directions. Our hearts bled for him, but the brotherhood of man is not seen at its best on breaking ice.

On the mainland at last, we found our cart but not an end to our troubles. An icy wind met us, hazy and stinging with frost particles and sand. Manchurian carts are simply a few planks on wheels. There are no springs and no seats—a sack of horsefeed is the nearest approach to luxury provided. On the outward journey, a couch of horsefeed outspread in a warm sun had been, though rather severe on unpadded English bones, a pleasant and lazy experience enough. But now. . . . Huddled together for protection, we heaved through the whistling sand. The freezing wind flayed our cheeks to the texture and insensibility of buckram; our lips were frozen into something that was at any rate not a smile from the heart; frozen tears, inspired by frost and sand, glazed our eyes.

We came to a Chinese inn and owned ourselves beaten. We were too cold to be brave any more. So all that day we sat in the inn, baking our grateful spines upon the *k'ang*—a platform built over an oven, which is the social centre of a Chinese inn. The inn room was hung with coloured

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prints of the gods, and with quotations from the classics calling the attention of the gods to the innkeeper's deserts. And I hope he will achieve the wealth he prays for, for he gave us two of the best Chinese meals I ever tasted. I hope the smell of crabs and chestnuts went up like incense to the curly noses of the pictured gods and was accepted.

Despair had brought us to a fortunate door, for this was not a typical Chinese inn. The Manchurian inn at which travellers by cart usually stay has mud walls, a leaky grass roof and is only distinguished from other wayside sheds by its inn-sign. This sign is a pole from which a horizontal ring leans out. To the ring is attached a scarlet flounce which flaps in the constant Manchurian wind until it is torn to shreds. Wherever you see this sign, you may press in at the door between the pigs and ponies and squat on your haunches upon the smelly *k'ang*. The hospitable innkeeper will light a fire with faggots in the middle of the floor—(there is no chimney)—and make you unlimited pale leafy tea. And all the villagers will come and watch you drink it, standing like dim and unmoving ghosts in the rolling blue smoke. There are no beds in a Chinese inn—only the *k'ang* is provided. When you have finished eating—your own food if you are wise—you say good-night to the innkeeper and lie down just as you are. After a while, the villagers get tired of the spectacle of foreign devils with their eyes shut, and go away.

But we were fortunate in our extremity. We

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were fed and warmed to perfection, and could wake hopefully to a new difficult day. The day dawned ambiguously; a clear sun looked through windless air between the white shoulders of the medley of Korean, Siberian and Manchurian mountains that intervened between us and home. If you were born, by the way, in this corner of Asia, it would be difficult to be sentimentally patriotic about it. You could never wave your hand to its rivers and mountains and trees and say, with tears in your eyes, "What can I do for thee, Manchuria, my Manchuria?" because half-a-dozen of the mountains would always be in Siberia, another dozen in Korea, and only a few of the balder ones in your Manchuria. A Manchurian wind could blow Korean grit into a Bolshevik eye, and as for the rivers that stitch one empire to another,—I can only say that the confusion of language among the fishes must be absolutely inextricable. Patriotism is the more difficult because every one seems to be living in someone else's native land. The Koreans have been pushed by the Japanese out of Korea into Manchuria, the Manchus, of course, live in China, the Chinese live in Manchuria, the Siberians have gone—it seems—to Shanghai. All we know is that we never know where we are.

However, this morning we set off purposefully along a Korean river in our Manchurian cart, a Chinese driver driving two sturdy, furry Russian horses—called—in error by me—Wok and Yua. The driver's yodelled commands, first to one

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horse and then to the other, made this mistake of mine excusable—but actually, it seems, *Yua* means simply right, and *Wok*, left. Every decently educated Manchurian horse knows its left hoof from its right—though, as events proved, it does not always let its left hoof know what its right hoof doeth. *Wok* was attached to our cart by the conventional pair of shafts, but *Yua* gambolled along the ditch, only loosely hooked on to a side-staple by a rope. This arrangement looked not only unjust but unsafe, but it is rendered necessary by the extreme narrowness and irregularity of Manchurian roads, which would make it almost impossible for two horses, confined in uncompromising shafts, to run abreast. So *Yua* must frisk among the boulders, bean-borders, mill-pools, mud-huts, icicles, chasms and precipices at the side of the track as best he may; his is the brain work, one gathers, and poor *Wok*'s the sheer drudgery.

But clever *Yua* failed us. We were climbing a pass on a very steep narrow trail with a practically sheer drop on the right side of it; we were balancing, as it were, on a knife edge that divides Manchuria from a jutting spur of Siberia. And suddenly *Yua* lost his footing and fell over into the dizzy air of Siberia. His ropes held him up and *Wok* braced himself to tug against his hanging companion. Helped by this, *Yua* managed to squirm round, and, by clawing with his front hoofs, to pull the greater part of himself back over the brink of Manchuria into safety. His wriggling

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upper half, however, was still prostrate on the trail, and his alarmed tail and hams still hanging over space, when Wok took fright, leapt forward, and pulled the heavy cart—containing me—on to the sprawling figure of Yua. Yua's reply to this treachery was simple but decided. With a super-equine effort, he twisted his behind up on to the road and made use of it to kick the cart to pieces.

I was sitting on the cart in a fur sack and I leapt to safety as though taking part in a sack-race. The others were walking, and were far ahead, unaware of the disaster. Six kind Chinese convicts, who were mending the trail some way below, hurried to our help with their guardian soldier and disentangled Wok, Yua, the driver and me from our dilemma. But our cart was in fragments, and there was nothing to do but walk on, cursing the too-inventive gods, until, on the other side of the pass, the driver could find a fresh cart and attach the bruised and chastened Wok and Yua thereto.

And on reaching at last the sheltered, torch-lit, ding-dong streets of the Chinese town where our French host lives, on crossing at last that threshold which promises hot baths, clean clothes, hot whisky-toddies and spring mattresses—what shall we say to the hospitable gods in acknowledgement of such a week-end? Week-end Collinses are notoriously difficult to compose, even to genteel great-aunts in Surrey. What can we say to the gods who, between Friday and

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Monday, have sunned on us, blown on us, snowed on us—all to excess—have tried to freeze us, tried to drown us, tried to smother us in sand, fed us on crabs and chestnuts, fed us on cinders and icicles, tried to drag us to pieces with wild Woks and Yuas. . . ."

Well, well . . . at least they have spared no expense. . . .

I'LL TAK' THE LOW ROAD

THE winter in Northern Korea and Manchuria is a hard master to his little slaves, pioneering men, but he provides for them one free gift every year—the gift of perfect roads, constructed gratuitously without any effort or outlay on man's part at all. They are the only good roads the poor old blundering punctured stuck-in-the-mud Far East has ever known—and they are very good indeed. Not even the expensive speedways of the United States can offer a better surface for traffic than our frozen rivers—our miles of solid ice four or five feet thick, ingeniously overlaid with three inches of snow, renewed from time to time by the Engineer whose name is Somewhere Below Zero, to prevent skidding.

Our rivers are fat flat curving rivers of peaceful temperament; they never indulge in the wild fevers of cascades and rapids, waterfalls and whirlpools. A slightly crimped effect round the sharper bends is all that the winter ice records of mildly troubled summer waters. Sometimes some fundamental flaw in the texture of the ice, or some vagary in the depth of the river, results in a toss-

I'LL TAK' THE LOW ROAD

ing up of great thick sheets of ice on edge, a sort of frozen explosion, an airy blue-green ice-castle cemented with snow. But the river is broad, and the rutted white trail of man, being pleasantly flexible and free from traffic regulations, can wind easily round these obstructions. Carts and sledges can jingle on from town to town without once setting hoof, wheel or runner on sand or soil.

Sledges are always obviously home-made. The Korean peasant always chooses the line of least resistance and he wastes no effort on laborious details of smartness and finish when making a sledge. With string he binds three planks on to a couple of rough bent pine branches and leaves it at that. But his humble sledge, harnessed to horses cheered and amazed by the lightness of the load, spins along the ice at a spanking pace, blessing the river-boulevard with every jingle of the bells.

I dare say the fishes—(by the way, where do they go?)—criticise bitterly this tiresome solidification and invasion of their element. But from nearly every other point of view the scheme is excellent and useful and has only one drawback. This drawback is, of course, the fact that intrusive female novelists and their husbands insist on taking to the ice in wild Ford cars, leaving a trail of minor disasters behind them.

The bucolic horses and mules of Manchuria and Korea have never heard of the mechanical triumphs of Mr. Ford of Detroit. And when forcibly confronted with them, they disapprove of them very strongly. Now it is all very well to be a

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Diehard and put your foot down on these outrageous modern goings on, but if you are a Manchurian horse and put all four feet down at once at a time when you are cantering along slightly sloping ice—you are likely to suffer for your conservatism. Waggon horses in this country run three or four abreast without shafts, and if one horse loses its head and its foothold simultaneously and sprawls on its stomach, the disaster is likely to spread among its fellows. The poor staring fuzzy colts, tittuping along beside their hard-working mothers, see the general downfall of the older generation and spring away towards the horizon with hysterically uplifted tails. A Ford chugging along a river is therefore followed everywhere by the righteous curses of ruffled carters and horses in all known Manchurian, Chinese, Korean, Russian and equine dialects.

Perhaps the recording angel took note of this incense of wrath that rose to heaven. Perhaps this was why we had the misfortune to collide gently with Korea at one point. It had been our intention to avoid setting wheel on the Korean bank of the Tumen river except when actually obliged to do so. The Japanese police who patrol the borders of Korea are so avid for information that the traveller who cannot remember the date of his grandfather's first marriage or whether all his aunts were vaccinated at birth—and cannot easily spare the time to discuss these vital questions in an entirely unknown tongue, strains every nerve to avoid Japanese territory. A skid, however, left us

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with our right front wheel resting upon a few inches of the Japanese Empire, and before we could detach ourselves, we were the prey of three Japanese policemen. What they wrote down in their little notebooks we shall never know, but at any rate it took them half an hour to do it, and even then they watched us go with a baffled starved expression, like three spiders cheated of a fat juicy fly.

After that we hugged the Manchurian bank as closely as the ice allowed. There is no guiding line down the middle of our ice speedway to keep traffic to the left. This is the one point which seems to have been overlooked by the wintry engineer, though one would have thought that a neat line of frozen bulrushes, laid end to end, would have answered the purpose. There is certainly a crying need for police control of the skaters at crowded traffic centres. The resourceful Korean has invented a wooden skate which he binds on to his cloth slipper. The wooden blade is edged with the minimum of steel. Mounted upon these contrivances, Koreans take the part that bicyclists take in land traffic, whizzing rapidly under the noses of horses and the mudguards of Fords wherever the ice is clear, and staggering very erratically across snowy spaces, making an unsteady feather-stitching track. I have not seen one skater wearing the little Korean top-hat. The top-hat is a symbol of dignity, I understand, and a crooked or unseated top-hat is a social humiliation. So when you put on rickety wooden skates at one

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extremity, it is wise to remove the wobbly national emblem from the other.

The advantages of our river highway were brought home to us when we had to leave it and climb over fifteen miles of switchback bullock-track to our home. Our poor Ford tried to behave like a tank, over boulders, snowdrifts, incipient glaciers and landslides, but after a while its faithful heart broke—or perhaps it was the axle; anyway its decision to move no more was obviously irrevocable. The Korean driver was no mechanic; he turned the crank hopelessly with the innocent aggrieved look of a child with a broken clockwork puff-puff. An empty waggon happened to be passing, and as it accepted us as passengers, all the six thin, moth-eaten horses nudged one another. “These foreign devils—trying to be so damn clever, what? But they have to appeal to us in the end.” And they felt avenged for their panic at our triumphant passing half an hour before, when they had all lost their heads and tried to commit suicide in a ravine. We were tossed about the waggon as they cantered maliciously from boulder to boulder. Our bruised bones rose up and cried for mercy within us. We threw homesick glances at the smooth eel-like river wriggling with gliding traffic far below. Certainly one is mistaken in supposing the mere earth to be the native element of humanity on wheels. “You can tak’ the high road and I’ll tak’ the low road. . . .”

RUSSIAN CHRISTMAS

THE White Russian refugees in our North China town escaped from Vladivostok with almost nothing but the clothes they wore. But if they brought nothing in their pockets, they brought a great deal in their hearts—they brought their songs and their hospitality and their unchanging Russian Christmas. Most of them have gone away now. The few that remain support themselves by means of tiny shops in Korean mud-and-matchwood houses, and they live in little cupboard-like rooms behind the sliding back-screens of their shops.

They quarrel a good deal, exchange mistresses from time to time and cheat one another of small sums of money. But at Russian Christmas they all keep open house. Not every one could keep open house in a room eight foot by ten. Especially if one third of the room is filled by a great Russian brick stove, and another third by a Christmas tree. But the abounding spirit of Russian Christmas makes even narrow mud walls expansive and every Russian hut seemed to bulge with singing guests during the second week in January. The

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guests sat in a compressed mass on trestles, on packing cases and on the floor, around a rather taller packing case groaning with the weight of bottles and of dishes of variously treated curds, jams, cabbage and sausages.

It was so cold outside and so hot within. The candles of the Christmas tree, the candles round the *ikon* which enshrined a portrait of the Tsar, seemed to burn our eyes as we came in out of the snow into the brilliant little oven of a room. Our host, wearing a spotless elaborately pleated Russian blouse, apologised for everything—apologised as we bumped our heads in the low doorway, apologised as we draped our coats and fur caps over the tottering goods on the counter, apologised as our dazed eyes fell upon the packing case encrusted with food and on the curls of our hostess. The women amongst the Russian revellers, having no new dresses and no money to buy them with, had concentrated on their curls. Never was hair parted in so many places, brushed in so many directions, stuffed with so many fancy hairpins, built into such haw-haws of elaborate curls.

“Ver’ sorry—ver’ sorry,” said our host. “Ver’ small house.” But obviously he was not at all sorry. Obviously the party had all the glory of those long-ago parties one used to give in the nursery to groups of guests—real or imaginary—squeezed cosily into a house made with three chairs and a table-cloth—parties at which the meal, of glass beads on doll’s-house plates, papier

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mâché hams, real mustard and cress from one's own garden and real tea in a teapot the size of a hen's egg,—was so much more beautifully grown-up than any parties given in later life. I remember the feeling of being warmly safe from the difficulties of the cold outer world, that made those nursery parties under the stuffy table-cloth so radiant—and I felt the same feeling at the Russian party as I balanced myself on a trestle between the Christmas tree and the bed, opposite a cracked saucer full of real sausage.

“Of all things there is not enough,” said the host, looking down with an excited look on the groaning board. There were enough sausages and cakes of curds, enough curls, enough songs, enough bottles of vodka and sweet port wine—but what he meant was that there were not enough eating utensils. The tops of cigarette tins make quite grown-up looking plates, however, and you can pretend they are priceless family plate. Our host ate curds and nuts out of the lid of a saucepan and drank his vodka out of a jampot, but he didn't eat or drink very much because he was singing and playing the guitar at the same time.

“*Spasibo, spasibo—horosho, horosho,*” we murmured—thus rashly squandering half our Russian vocabulary in a breath. With throats burnt with vodka, we tried cautiously to join in the chorus of the current song.

“This song”, said our host, with his mouth full and tears of sensibility in his eyes, “is soldiers' song. It mean, Soldier want to die now, please

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God, if battle lost. Soldier say he want no medal—little wooden cross over grave is best medal for soldier, if battle lost. . . .” Tears rolled down his face. His little mistress tittered all the time, blowing a perfect frenzy of yellow curls upward as she did so. Our host allowed his baritone and alto guests to continue the song bereft of his own tenor voice for a time. “We Russian soldiers all time think and think—more better die than defeat. We wait—we work—we sing—but all time we think—Oi, oi, this waiting is more worse than death. We think, wait a little while and by-m-bye we march to Russiya and make her free.”

“Yes, I can understand your feeling that way, but surely in practice——”

“We soldiers are not practice-men, we are fighting men. We wait only for word of command and when we hear it, perhaps many shall die but surely some shall have victory. The good Angli-CHANIN friends of Russiya shall give much money.”

“Oh, I am afraid nothing is less——”

“The noble America—the France which love freedom shall send armies——”

“I assure you such a thing is scarcely conceiv——”

“All over the world Russian soldier sing sad song and wait—wait—wait for the word of command. . . .”

One could imagine them easily—thousands and thousands of them, exiled all over the world, sitting in exactly this mood over their Christmas



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curds at this moment, talking with their mouths full, singing about death, crying a little into their vodka, waiting for someone else to order them to make a stand against the march of a new day.

The servant of the house—at two dollars a month—a little smiling girl of perhaps ten years old, came in with the family baby on one arm and a pail of pickled cabbage on the other.

“Pickled cabbage,” said our host, examining it eagerly through his tears, while the baby twanged a few discords on the guitar. “This is good. Russians like ver’ much to eat pickled cabbage.”

“*Spasibo, spasibo—horosho, horosho,*” we murmured in suffocated voices, trying to conceal a few superfluous sausages, honey-cakes and pieces of goose in aspic under the shade of the Christmas tree.

A crackling outside in the snow and a sound as of a fresh head being bumped in the shop doorway announced new guests. There was not room for the entertainment of an additional mouse in the bursting little place. Obviously guests must be received in relays. Earlier arrivals, now fed and inspired, must tactfully retire to their homes. The other guests walked a little unsteadily away, huddling their old patched military greatcoats round them because it was so cold.

A Chinese pedlar looked at them scornfully as he cried his wares in a clear drawn-out wail along the starlit snowy street.

Oh—it wasn’t a pretence after all—it was *real*.

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I can hear the song no longer now, and so I am awake and cold. It was no pretence—it was no nursery defence against reality—it was real. Our host was right—it is something worse than death.

THE CIGARETTE

SNOW had interrupted the regular train service, such as it was. Really, of course, it *wasn't*, ever. This particular Manchurian railway is a perfect martyr to chronic irregularity. Snow, let us say, had for over a week given the valetudinarian train an excuse to stay tucked up in its siding like a real bedridden invalid. But snow melts, even in Manchuria, and coolies commanded to clear away drifts over a stretch of fifteen miles are sometimes officious enough to do what they are told. So the train had to make a move. It mustered itself in the station, puffing and whooping to advertise its virtue.

Passengers swarmed to it like bees. The third class was full before the sun came up—so full that the limbs of passengers were sticking out of every door and window. The second class overflowed as the preliminary tootlings of departure began. And a minute before the train started, a surplus thirty or so of unmistakable third-class passengers brimmed over into the first class. The damned had burst the bounds of their outer darkness and trickled into Paradise, timidly at first, but presently bold with sheer necessity. They were all Koreans.

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Koreans are always damned. They may have their despicable reasons for reaching their despicable homes, but they must never be allowed to reach anything except with great difficulty. Everywhere in Korea and north-eastern Manchuria, Koreans may be seen travelling—against the grain. Nothing ever goes right on a Korean journey. Wherever there is water to cross, ferry-boats frothing over with uncomplaining Korean passengers may be seen stuck hopelessly on sand-banks in the middle of the stream, the passengers obediently leaping up and down to try and jerk their craft out of its dilemma. Wherever there is ice to cross, the bullock cart containing a Korean house-moving is always the one to break through. On highroads the Korean family donkey or ox always has to draw aside into a snowdrift to let the Ford car of the Japanese empire-builder go by. On railways nobody ever tells Koreans when the train is going to start and half the family is generally left behind. If they finally manage to reach their destinations, Japanese or Chinese soldiers will most probably lock them in the ticket office for an hour or two while they search them for arms with rude prodding hands. The Korean traveller must, it is clear, be always hours late everywhere. He travels like a beetle in a forest, over and round incredible obstacles. Yet still he travels, unresisting yet un-surrendering, puzzled yet single-hearted, always a little sad, often a little drunk, but always gentle.

This was the first train for a week and probably the last for a week, and passengers, humble though

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they might be, would not be denied. The Koreans filled the train as a herd of kind white cows might have filled it. The barbed snarls and clamourings of the real first-class passengers glanced without effect from their patient immobile determination, from their white padded hide.

The first class had only their honour to defend, so to speak. There was little actual superiority in their Paradise. Their windows were broken, their stove belched smoke without heat, their cushions, though of a luscious blue plush, were full of fleas. Half the passengers, too, were ticketless and travelled first class only by virtue of being relations or friends of the train-men. Still Paradise is Paradise—and the first-class passengers were none of them native to the country they were in—a fact which gives any sinner a free pass into an imperial Paradise. Before the avalanche of native Koreans buried the first-class passengers, they were seen to consist of a large Chinese in blue padded silk with a flapped fur cap like a great four-leaved clover—his shivering wife in unpadded brocade, unhatted except for an artificial daisy in her back hair—a Japanese in skin-tight corduroy, his bloated expression spangled with gold-rimmed glasses and gold teeth, reading aloud to himself in a harsh chanting voice—his wife, with a face like a camellia petal under the great varnished looped globe of her hair, her body folded in a dark steel-blue kimono, humped at the back where her thick silk sash was tied—their child in a magenta kimono splashed violently with mustard-coloured

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and green chrysanthemums, its face extinguished by a dirty pink plush hat, as worn in the Mile End Road, London. . . . There were, too, an Englishman and his wife, the Englishman's Chinese servant, and a Russian in a tattered grey military coat and high fur cap.

Next to the Englishwoman sat a Korean father with his little son strapped on to his lower back. His sitting down was like the collapse of a white elephant. He was padded to about twice his original size with layers of quilted white robes. And he was heightened to half his original height again by his multiplied steeping head-dresses—a fur hood with a little hole in the top through which soared a six-inch high dome. On the summit of the dome wobbled the tiny black top-hat, the senseless and heroic badge of the Korean race. It was tied under his chin with black ribbons. With a sigh he sat back on the blue plush seat, using his baby as a cushion. The compressed baby, which had a white quilted robe and a fur hood of its own, but no top-hat, breathed with difficulty, owing to the weight of its father, but looked about with a subdued sly interest. From time to time it stretched out a little, dirty, chilblained hand to stroke the fur shoulder of the Englishwoman.

The protesting voice of the Englishman's Chinese servant survived all the other first-class protests against the Korean invasion. His proud imperial talk so impressed the conductor that some of the Koreans who had dared to sit near the stove were abruptly removed that the Englishman might

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be offered the seat of cindery honour. But the English passengers refused; they preferred air to honour. They were between the door and a broken window, and they would not relinquish that faint flavour of outer air which reached them in their present position through the stewing smoke and smell. They religiously breathed through cigarettes, turning their noses hopefully towards a crack between the gaping door and its frame. But this crack was a doomed loophole. The eyes of thirty intruding Koreans were upon it. "Since we have, for once, attained the seats of the mighty", they thought, "let us, for once, be comfortable. Let the consoling smell of hot relations and friends be, for once, undiluted by common air." The Korean next to the Englishwoman leaned forward and shut the gaping door. In doing so he passed his much-sleeved arm across the Englishwoman's face and accidentally wiped her cigarette from her lips. His wide innermost cuff devoured the lighted cigarette. The Englishwoman looked at him in alarm, remembering the inflammable nature of cotton wadding.

"Excuse me," she said in English. "My cigarette has gone up your sleeve."

The Korean and his attached baby turned a blank benevolent double gaze upon her.

"My cigarette", persisted the Englishwoman, making a gesture intended to represent an explosion, "has gone up your sleeve. You will burst into flames."

The Korean's thin grey beard, still slightly

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bedewed with hoar-frost, wagged a little as he followed conscientiously the expansive movements of her hands. He looked gently surprised. He was absolutely convinced that he and the Englishwoman could have nothing in common—nothing to say to one another.

A chorus arose from the other passengers—in Japanese, Chinese and Russian. Nobody knew quite what had happened, but every one felt convinced that the Korean had done something wrong. Every one had known all along that the Koreans would do something wrong. The Korean exchanged a sombre glance of intelligence with a Korean friend. "Look what comes of associating with foreigners," the glance said.

Was there a faint smell of burning, or was it only the Englishwoman's heated imagination? She imagined the cigarette, wickedly active in dark involuted ways beyond calculation, gnawing at the vitals of her gentle neighbour. She made a final effort. Seizing the sufferer desperately by his cushioned arm to pin his attention, she made an exaggerated show of shaking her own arm downwards. Such enthusiasm did she show that the whole plush seat quaked and several little Korean top-hats were joggled crooked. All the Koreans watched her for a moment, probably thinking, "She has a flea. What of it?" Then they sighed and began talking in low voices one to another about something else, as well-bred people talk to discourage the offensive advances of a vulgar stranger.



THE LOST CIGARETTE

THE CIGARETTE

At the next station they all got out with the customary Korean manner of hopeful blundering. Perhaps this was their station, perhaps, it wasn't. They would know all in good time.

The Englishwoman watched her Korean as he stood on the snowy platform hitching up his baby by means of a bucking movement of the lower spine. Out of the back of his neck she could distinctly see a thin thread of smoke rising. The baby's nose, immediately above the crater of this unsuspected volcano, was wrinkled in surprise. The Korean himself put his little hat straight on its steeple with a dignified hand and turned away, leaving a thin curling wire of smoke behind him on the cold air.

JOURNEY TO AMERICA

ONE of the home luxuries to which I look back—and look forward—most wistfully is the luxury of arriving undamaged at a destination. Here in Manchuria we never do. Even a simple picnic involves the dovetailing of endless ingenuities and is never achieved according to plan. While as for a real uprooting. . . .

Last October I had to go from Manchuria to the United States. It would have been far easier to plan to go to Heaven. At first, to be sure, the thing looked simple—as we in Manchuria count simplicity. First a tiny train for four hours, then a rather larger train for three hours, then a night in a Japanese inn, then a larger train still—(almost life-size)—for four hours more, then a Japanese coasting steamer for five days, then a trans-pacific liner—then San Francisco. Quite simple if you omit the devilish climate, the ubiquitous Japanese police, and the fact that two Chinese families and an Anglo-Russian family, with their servants, five infants and fifty pieces of luggage between them were amiably determined to accompany me to the sea-coast.

Two days before the journey there was a long

JOURNEY TO AMERICA

strong snow-storm. Our little train started dubiously, to the tune of a threat that if the wind rose and raised drifts, we should never arrive. Behind the train wagged like a tail a special car containing my husband and myself with our fifteen uninvited travelling companions, all shouting in Chinese, English, Russian, Korean and the piercing Esperanto used by babies of all nationalities. Half the population of our town was drawn by our combined charms to see us off. And as we started with a final supreme clamour—the dreaded wind arose. After one hour of groping through minor drifts, we stuck in snow eight feet deep. For six hours we stood there, the wind—laden with snow-dust—whistling through the cracks of our compartment, and all the babies wailing. At the end of that time we were extricated—in the wrong direction—and returned tamely to our starting place.

Our friends viewed our return as an anticlimax and at once began making energetic plans to get rid of us in spite of the elements. Korean carters promised to deliver my husband and me at the Korean border fourteen miles away in time to fulfil our schedule, if we could start at four o'clock in the morning. We agreed, secretly warmed by the thought, "At least now we travel alone". The journey began exquisitely, in spite of the intense cold. The moonlight imperceptibly slipping into dawnlight, the blurred look of the last stars, the pale red rays on long snowy hills from a sun as yet invisible to us, the gay jingling of our progress

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through the just-awakening villages, the drowsy fur-clad villagers fanning embers for a new day—all gave a feeling of ethereal excitement. But very soon the excitement changed in quality. Our road was continually crossed by gullies, and in each gully the snow had drifted. Our horses, jingling unevenly along, would suddenly disappear in eight feet of snow, and the cart would subside more or less gently on one wheel. We and our trunk would then fall out and, after getting the snow out of our mouths, noses and eyes, turn our attention to the apathetic foundered horses. Each accident delayed us for an hour or more. The wind was unbearably cold—that indescribable Manchurian wind!—and I was obliged to exchange my neat travelling hat (which had seemed so suitable for a journey to America) for a fur hood. The hat, thus rendered homeless, became a constant care, finally reaching an undignified sanctuary pinned on the top of our Chinese servant's fur hood. The picture of this Boy, with my jaunty little hat steeping above his sombre countenance, wrestling with torpid snow-bound horses, cracking his whip, cursing the carters, jodelling to the horses, his padded robe bound up under his armpits, will always remain with me.

We had eight upsets in fourteen miles, and took eleven hours to accomplish that distance. So at last, five hours after our train from the border had left, we disentangled ourselves from Manchuria and crossed the river into Korea. The Korean railway promised a night train. "Good,"

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we thought, "at least we have escaped our fifteen polyglots." We sat shivering on bean-sacks in the station shed watching Japanese railwaymen go about their business by the dramatic light of pitch-flares in the snow. Just before the train was due, the dreaded cackle in many tongues burst upon our hearing and there were our fifteen friends again. A goods train, containing this indefatigable party, had struggled through the drifts on the Manchurian side. Enthusiasm—hollow on our side—marked the meeting. Into the eccentric company of their half-hundred packages, my poor one ewe-lamb trunk was immediately absorbed. At twelve o'clock that night, still in excellent voice, our party reached the Korean town at which we had hoped to spend a restful night. But it appeared that the only train which would connect with my boat was a coolie train, leaving at four in the morning. We slept, therefore, fitfully for an hour or two and then cramped ourselves on to wooden slat seats in the fourth-class coolie trucks, unheated except by human overcrowding, and already bursting with little Korean schoolboys without one pocket handkerchief between them. Thus we jolted dismally through another bitter dawn.

At last the sea's blessed line was strung taut between two hills before us, and there was my Japanese coast steamer puffing at bay between the red rocks of the harbour. Full of hope and a sense of manful accomplishment, we began the usual inarticulate dialectics which always mark

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the meeting of travellers and Japanese police when entering or leaving Japanese territory. We struggled to explain the whole story of our lives, as well as our ancestry and our political integrity to a row of severe but bowing officials, with whom we had no word of any language in common. The lighter was already at the dock to bear me and my trunk to the ship. But—where was the trunk? Where was that stalwart, brass-studded friend which had so staunchly shared my tumbles into yesterday's snowdrifts? Alas, it had deserted me; seduced from its duty by the fifty Anglo-Sino-Russian miscellaneous bundles, it had detached itself from our party. Somewhere in Siberia, in Mongolia, in Afghanistan, we imagined our fifty-one faithless packages wandering in a desert of incomprehension. My trunk's defection was to us the last straw. What was America to me without it? After such a storm of effort—all now to no avail—the ultimate peace of despair fell upon us, and with stony eyes we watched the Japanese steamer steam away without me to Japan.

How in the end the trunk was traced and how, by another route, I managed to reach Japan in time to catch the trans-pacific liner—all that is another story. I have written enough, I hope, to make the English season-ticket-holder, grumbling at the delay—(four and a half minutes)—of the express to Surbiton, consider a recount of his blessings one by one.

THE FIRE

WE woke up on Saturday morning to find all our servants and a few perfect strangers perched on the tops of trees in our garden. There was a bright, expectant look on their faces—a look that is common to all human spectators of a public disaster that does not affect themselves. How hard it seems that Lot's wife should have been so severely punished for doing what every one always did—both before her time and since. Leaping, myself, to the upper branches of a young poplar, I could see that fire had been sown in the neat furrows of our town half a mile down the hill. I saw the fire flower suddenly from a strong stalk of smoke, and in the space of a few minutes sow other seeds of fire all round the original growth.

We hurried down the hill to see the thing more closely. As we hurried, we could hear many bells clanging furiously. This was as it should be; fire in its most dramatic form is inseparable from bells. And yet—drama apart—it certainly seemed unnecessary to announce so industriously a fire which no one with an eye or nose within ten miles could possibly overlook. Probably the bell-ringers suf-

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ferred from the universal craving at least to *seem* busy in an emergency.

The flames were springing from roof to roof on either side of the main street of our town, and by the time we reached the corner of Berkeley Street, as it were, a large section of Piccadilly from St. James's Street to Prince's Grill was ablaze, and enterprising flames had jumped across to the Burlington Arcade and were threatening Stewart's at the corner of Bond Street. (I speak in parables which I hope will not offend Mr. Prince, Mr. Stewart, Mr. Burlington or Saint James. It is unlikely that they should ever find out the unworthiness of the little mud-and-paper Korean shops to which I have applied their aristocratic names.)

As we approached the fire, we met desperate-looking Korean shop-keepers, who had lost, for once, their little top-hats, pushing barrows of goods that they had saved—a pitifully poor show of goods, for the fire had come so swiftly. And we overtook groups of leisurely water-carriers, walking with a calm, rolling gait to the sound of a chorus of loud rhythmic creakings—a sound which always heralds Korean water-carriers. The water-carrier carries two buckets strung on a pole which is tightly bound to the small of his back. Although a wicker ring floating in each bucket is supposed to prevent splashing, the carrier cannot hurry without spilling his load. I think he would heave his rolling hips along with the same slow and creaking gait if a tiger were behind him.

THE FIRE

Both the Chinese and Japanese fire brigades had turned out, looking very smart, marching behind leaders with red-and-yellow banners. The Chinese firemen, in black, with chic white rabbit-fur ear-flaps, had a gasoline pump which, though not working, added a pleasing finish to the scene. There were two schools of sartorial thought among the Japanese firemen. Some wore sophisticated khaki greatcoats and others black and coloured stamped tunics, black tights and pretty flapping cotton sun-bonnets, folded square across the brow. They had a hand pump and a tank, into which water was poured, but from which, for a long time, not a drop could be persuaded to issue.

There was a well on the corner of St. James's Street, but the wooden roof over it was wreathed with flames. Excited attempts were being made to knock down this roof with long poles. The Japanese firemen wrangled over the tank. Some wanted to carry it forward to a frontal attack on the fire, and some wanted to take it round to the back, where there was another well. The clamour of conflicting theories rose to a screech, and presently the disputants came to blows.

Meanwhile the flames roared and rolled up great mountains of thick yellow smoke; every now and then another roof fell in and fresh flames sprang to the summit of the smoky peak. Cautious shopkeepers all along the street behind us were loading their goods upon carts and barrows in order to be prepared for the worst.

The only people who seemed to be quite sure

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what to do were the Japanese soldiers, who kept back the crowd by prodding the stomachs of all those within reach with the butts of their rifles. There was also a large heroic Korean dog which, in spite of the shortage of water, had managed to become a walking, dripping, canine sponge; he hurried enthusiastically from group to group, barking in an authoritative voice.

A relieved shout greeted the fall of the blazing roof over the well and the event instantly smoothed away the differences between the contending fire-fighters. Every one converged amicably upon the smoking well, dragging limp thirsty snakes of hose. In a few minutes wild wagging spurts of water were springing to the sky, the dust of the street became a bog, the wet brave dog became wetter and braver, and several busy helpers received the full force of the local water-supply in their chests.

Finally control was established over the raging waters, and all the snakes of hose—now fat and sleek—directed their regard towards the burning houses. The flames gave way to dirty hissing smoke. The proprietors of unburned but endangered shops began breathing again.

A perfect horde of water-carriers, organised by some far-seeing genius, now crawled over the skyline towards an emergency which called for them no more. In all such emergencies there is some far-seeing genius who sees almost too far, and is outstripped by the near-sighted blunderer.

THINGS NOTICED ON AN EASTER HOLIDAY

IN what other land than Korea—fortunately, from the humanitarian point of view—will the road from the inn to the station be lined by caged larks in full song? A most immoral practice—the squeezing of live larks into tiny wicker cages—but if one could forget for a moment to be kind, one could feel that the songs were like spring flowers of hearing. Each lark dwelt on the limit of his neighbours' songs, so to speak; the song of the next lark took up the cue as that of the last one dwindled on the traveller's hearing; the passer-by was passed on from one song to the next, as gentle female pedestrians crossing at night the criminal districts of London are passed on from one policeman to another. The happy free larks above the hills are not so well organised, of course, and have a perverse tendency to sing to no audience but the sun.

Signs of early spring were everywhere—the tense pink and khaki ghost of spring that comes before the green reality. Koreans, very white and blow-away like poppies upon their red land, walked along furrows far and near, pouring seed

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out of big, long-necked wooden bottles that looked, in the distance, like banjos. Rows of willows, wearing pink twigs buttoned with silver velvet, marched with the river banks.

Another sign of spring was the decoration of the mouths and noses of the Japanese army by white influenza masks. The ghastly, grinning de-nosed effect of these ornaments cannot be said to enhance the outward glory of the Mikado's forces. One cannot help feeling that an officer's word of command would be, to a certain extent, disinfected of disciplinary pungency, if breathed through a featureless disc of hygienic gauze. Far off on the plain, a considerable part of the Japanese army was manœuvring, looking as surprisingly purposeful as ants. Little processions of guns wriggled about in the far sunlight; wisps and rings and puffs of cavalry formed and reformed like yellow smoke-wreaths. They were too far off to allow us to see whether all the participants in this activity were ambushed behind influenza masks. I thought I caught a glimpse of precautionary gauze on the horses' noses and the muzzles of the guns, but this may have been fancy.

Our destination was Shuotsu, a group of Japanese inns rising like phoenixes from the steam of a natural hot spring in an abrupt valley near the sea. The valley was charmingly furnished with pine-trees, with brawling streams, with peaked stone lanterns and with little views of the dark blue unshining rim of the sea.

Foreigners being rare birds, our inn—the Inn

AN EASTER HOLIDAY

of the Calm Fairy—made much of us and gave us its most luxurious suite. The suite consisted of a large room bisected with gold spangled screens and furnished simply with two cushions, a brazier and a vase of pussy-willows. But the real luxury of the suite was the glazed verandah round two sides of it—and in the verandah two Real Wicker Chairs and a Real Table. Anyone who has ever wilted in rheumatic despair on the chairless floors of Japanese inns will appreciate the ecstasies expressed in the above capital letters.

The Calm Fairy's chief pride was her bath, generously provided by Nature with a ceaseless stream of almost boiling water. The whole staff of the inn, from the landlord—the calmest fairy of all—very dignified and stout in a becoming grey silk kimono, to the handmaids, young and old, plain and beautiful, with sprays of blossoms and butterflies printed on every inch of them, had no thought but for the bath. A request for hot *saké*, an extra cushion or a Ford car inspired only the same triumphant beckoning gesture in reply. Each time one was deceived afresh; one followed the temptress expecting to be shown some new wonder—only to find oneself arriving once more in the familiar steamy precincts. We had about fourteen baths between us in thirty-six hours.

And it certainly was a good bath; any fairy might be proud of it. But not all fairies could remain calm. For the bath's fault was that Nature had regulated its temperature to suit the apparently asbestos skins of Japanese bathers. The

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more tender occidental, on first springing blithely into the alluring marble tank, was likely to spring out again with a loud oath. After about the fourth martyrdom, however, one acquired something of the horny texture, as well as the colour, of the boiled lobster, and could occupy the bath without more than a few stifled moans of pain.

The detail of the journey home that most clearly stays in my memory is the glimpse of a Korean fellow-traveller with, apparently, *stone-rimmed* spectacles, the bridge over his rather flat nose being decorated with an elaborately carved excrescence like a tiny pagoda (cf. Old London Bridge). I feel strongly that this fashion, if introduced at home, would add much piquancy to the expressions of our English myopics.

NEI-SAN

WE arrived in a dream of weariness and the inn was as light and as curious as a dream; the inn was lifted up on stilts and had roofs like the wings of a moth. The front step shook beneath our stout English shoes and on the front step our English shoes must stay; they would seduce with mud and scratches the virgin purity of a Japanese inn. But still, just as angels no doubt lean out of heaven and secretly admire the swashbuckling sinners of the muddy world, so the little women of the inn, even as they bowed to us, were admiring our gross English shoes which had come so far, muddied so many floors, crushed so many flowers. "English shoes," the women obviously said to each other, and when they had finished welcoming us, they handled our shoes delicately and with awe; "Strong English work—how heavy—how dirty—how excellent. . . ."

The women had small cheerful pale faces under great puffed bubbles of varnished black hair; they wore kimonos across which coloured shadows of leaves and flowers drifted casually aslope. They walked on broad, flat, two-toed feet. The hunched *obi* and the modestly turned-in feet give a woman

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a look of confessed inferiority, as though she lived under a sun to which she could never raise her eyes.

The young woman—Nei-San—who dedicated her services to us was a merry creature. We seemed to her a couple of large jokes and she laughed so much at us that I began to be conscious of the various points of us—seen as jokes; of our stiffness, our piebald pink-and-yellow colouring, our hemp-like hair, our out-jutting noses and in-jutting eyes, our rigid and complicated clothes. . . . “Bif-stakey,” she said. Great red animals such as we were could only be fed on “bif-stakey”. This was lucky, for it was almost the only English word she knew. She knelt on the floor of our room, leaning her elbows on the low table, drumming her fingers as though she hoped to drum unknown Japanese words into our obtuse and beefy understanding, laughing at us kindly. We sat on our two cushions and bowed hopefully. We knew very well we were out of place—we must be content to amuse, content to be clumsy louts in fairyland. The Japanese room seemed to protest against our occupancy; the lovely lines of its emptiness should have led the eye only to bare essentials. We had to admit that we ranked sadly low among essentials. A low table, a lacquered box of cakes on the table, a couple of cushions on the floor, a brazier full of glowing charcoal, a pictured scroll, a bronze pot upholding a little old pine tree with a tree-wasp’s nest prettily clinging to one branch—such stars sufficiently lighted the

NEI-SAN

spaces of the room, and space itself was limited by nothing more gross than sliding screens of black paper powdered with gold. The exquisite walls, the scroll and the little tree were quite as essential to the eye as beef steak was to the stomach. Eyes in Japan should be as hungry as stomachs, should be as carefully considered and as austere-dieted.

But as for us, we were nothing, we were jokes, we were great funny animals to be fed by our attendant with fried fish, hot *saké*, beef steak, rice, hot *saké* again, rice again, tea. . . . She parodied us prophetically while we ate, informing us of what was expected of us. For half an hour she knelt in front of us, acting to us scenes from our immediate future. Directly after dinner, it seemed, our baths would be prepared—she became hot bath-water before our eyes, she almost dissolved dramatically into steam; she became *us*, scrubbing our necks vigorously in her own person, we saw ourselves ducking and douching and finally drying ourselves on visionary towels. There we were returning to our room—and upon that she became herself again, laying our unseen mattresses upon the floor. Pillowing her cheek upon her two hands and shutting her narrow bright eyes, she aptly sketched the passing of our peaceful night. But lo—in ten seconds there we were waking up with a most unlikely briskness; her laugh now expressed to-morrow morning and was in itself a proof of the excellent rest we should by then have enjoyed. “Eggy-eggy,” she exclaimed, tossing

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chunks of empty air hurriedly into her mouth with prophetic chopsticks and pointing feverishly towards the station at which we could almost see our early train panting to be off. And through it all she laughed at us; her bursts of laughter were the stage properties among which our drama was enacted. We were puppets upon her stage, ridiculous puppets compounded of beef steak and thick shoes and uncouth incomprehensible sounds. She must herself put words into our mouths, she must animate our clumsy exotic limbs, she must make straight before us the paths of decorous guest-hood.

The bath began to clank and sizzle in the distance; our puppet-mistress wished to undress her puppets. Only then did she discover the crowning joke of foreigners—their senseless modesty. She wrinkled her forehead, laughed at us and left us. There was a long delay. I looked out and saw her at the other end of the paper passage bowing to a Japanese man. She was changed entirely before him; she touched the mat with her forehead; there was no dominancy left in her and no mockery; she was a slave with a cold obedient face. That little knock-kneed man with his narrow puffed eyes behind thick glasses, his prominent gold-edged teeth, his cropped round head, his slouching shuffle and his olympian manner—he and his like commanded the world she knew and were never funny. As for us, we had no like, we came from a world that didn't exist; our halting tongues knew no commands—and



JAPANESE BATH

NEI-SAN

so we were slaves—we were contemptible and funny.

Seeing me in the distance as she rose from her deep reverence, she began to laugh again. She dragged us both towards the bath. A decent cloud of steam kindly enveloped us as she snatched our kimonos from our modest grasp. Entering blithely with us, she insisted on acting as director of the bathing ceremony. In the steamy air we towered above her like coy Albert Memorials blushing in a sunset. But she would not be overshadowed or silenced or dismissed. She would see the game through. The only concession she would make to our embarrassment was to shoo away inessential coolies who craned in at the door. I crouched in a tall cylinder of exquisitely hot water, encased like a mummy in a sort of immortality of satisfaction.

Our puppet-mistress did not laugh at us any more. She was getting tired of us. Without clothes, much of the exotic absurdity of us was gone. We were not so very different, after all, from real people. Nonchalantly she tried to tidy my hair, as I stuck out from the brim of the bath, with a comb from her own great shiny head-dress. She waved a very small towel at me with a commanding gesture. She wanted to tidy the puppets away now. Hustling us a little petulantly into our kimonos, she herded us away to our room. As she spread the downy mats upon the floor and balanced the hard pillows on edge, her head jerked backwards with a childish weariness; her eyes closed of themselves; she laughed no more.

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Masters were calling her outside. The clapping of distant hands claimed her as a slave. She was relieved of her merry command; she had put her toys away; the joke was over.

GEISHA

THE geisha-house provided a three-hour meal, spread on a low table in a long, delicately bare room. The paper window-screens were pushed back, and we looked out into a jungle of tiny old trees in pots, among which hung bird-cages. A group of lacquer bowls full of different vegetables were crowded on a little tray in front of each guest.

Between us and behind us sat pretty geishas, pouring out *saké* for us or whisking flies away with white horsehair switches—and laughing all the time. Even a fly trying to settle on a foreign guest's nose can amuse a geisha almost to the point of hysterics; perhaps her easy laughter is part of her professional manner, but even so it is pretty and very naturally achieved.

The long, desultory meal was punctuated by dances. Two girls played on *samisens*, two danced—or sometimes one alone—and the rest continued to disturb flies with mirth and horse-tails. The *samisen* is an austere, spidery-looking instrument played with a broad ivory blade. The look of thin Japanese hands wielding this blade with a most fascinating precision of wrist and fingers is to me more charming than the sound of the *samisen*—

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especially as the players always accompany it by singing in unison with the strings in rather harsh, hoarse voices.

The dancing of a geisha has the same Japanese quality of gentle, rippling precision. Not a fingertip, not a wrinkle of the kimono ever gives for a second the slightest impression of fumbling or hurrying or abruptness. The body of the dancer is like nothing more than an exquisite machine. The kimono is seen to be the ideal garment for a dancer; it follows the curving body very accurately without clinging to it, emphasising the whole effect without insisting on muscley irrelevant details.

Surely no bony European hand could ever turn a fan in the geisha way, leaving it floating for a second in the air, only just perceptibly separated from the finger-tips, letting it wheel lightly and quickly of its own light weight, like a falling leaf, to the changed pose of the hand.

Our host heard by chance of the visit of a man dancer who would dance for us if we wished to see him. We did. He came in bowing and smiling a large smile ten teeth wide. He was dressed in a dark green striped skirt and a short kimono, dotted on the upper spine and sleeve-flaps with his white-stamped flowery encircled crest.

He danced first the Dance of Ten Pine Trees. He tied a blue-and-white napkin round his head and stuck into it a green-and-gold open fan. From other wrappings he produced twenty other green-and-gold fans, and while posturing in more and more gnarled attitudes, balanced the fans as quiver-

GEISHA

ing foliage on all the most unlikely parts of himself. He became so much like ten pine trees that if he would have stood in a pine grove any sparrow might have surveyed the crook of his arm for a nest-site. One pine tree followed another, of course—one could hardly expect all ten to hold the stage at the same time—each pine tree twisted its figure into a more incredible tangle than the last, wearing its fanny greenery balanced on its toes, on its nose, on its funny-bone, on its lower spine, on its front teeth—on any place where a fan could not be in the least useful or usual. A pirouette—the fans fell off the tenth pine tree like leaves in a wind. The dance was over.

The dancer began talking to our Japanese host about foreign dancing. We could understand the word "toe-dance", but the rest had to be translated. It seemed that the dancer thought "toe-darnz" a greater miracle than any Japanese stunt. But this was only false modesty, for he began, to the sound of a loud racy recitative, to dance "toe-darnz"—a clever parody which, in a pose sustained entirely upon unsupported toe-tips, was a much more remarkable stunt than the average foreign pirouette in stiffened ballet-shoes. A coy wagging of kimono skirts gave a faint suggestion of Pavlova through Japanese eyes.

After that our dancer suddenly took off an unexpected number of clothes, tied a napkin under his chin, and, apparently dislocating all the joints of his thin bare limbs, shrivelled before our eyes into a whining, mouthing paralytic beggar, stump-

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ing about on horrible mockeries of legs that nobody would have been surprised to see fall in pieces to the ground. Recovering his agile grace and toothy smile at a bound, he began juggling with little lacquer trays, balancing them downwards on sweeping, swirling outspread fingers in a way that could only be reasonably explained by the theory of glue upon his fingers—only there was no glue.

He was never content to dance peacefully and graciously as you or I or Pavlova might dance—he must always be doing something incredible at the same time. It was as if an aeroplane, not content with prosaically proceeding from Croydon to Paris, felt obliged to loop the loop all the way.

The only serious dance he danced was one representing the conventional suicide of an ancient samurai. This was so serious that to our eyes it was a little funny. Suicide outside of Japan can hardly be such a nimble, prancing, voluble, conventional affair.

Our dancer told us that the climax of this dance was often the piercing of a concealed eggshell full of red ink, but that once, when not entirely sober, he had missed the eggshell with his conventionally frenzied dagger, and stabbed himself through. The realism of the dance on this occasion had made a deep impression on the audience, but the dancer had been in hospital for weeks.

There must be limits, one realises, even to miracles.

LANTERNS DOWN THE RIVER

It seems that there is an organisation in our town called something like, "The Society for Committing Paper Lanterns to the River in Memory of Dead Lumbermen". Manchurian lumbermen live lonely lives and frequently die violent deaths, so that, often, nameless solitary men, who have no prayerful descendants to offer roasted chickens to their spirit tablets, are suddenly hurtled into a solitary heaven. All over China festivals are held at this time of year for the purpose of remembering the otherwise unremembered—soldiers, for instance, and criminals and pedlars and beggars and childless travellers and victims of wholesale disasters. . . . There are so many who die and never are missed because they die so far from home, and these, were it not for the festivals dedicated to their memory, would wander as exiles in a heaven unfurnished by the prayers and offerings of the living. The Chinese, however, are a posthumously charitable people, and subscribers would appear to be more easily found to contribute to the comfort of the dead than to the succour of the living.

Yet, in our town it is not to be supposed that

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all—or even any—of the three thousand Chinese who assembled to watch the launching of lighted paper lotuses, were thinking prayerfully of the souls of dead lumbermen. They were there to watch and applaud a very charming sight, and it is doubtful whether even the officials of the Society for Committing Paper Lanterns to the River gave much thought to the origin of their gay frail navy. Even the Taoist priest was doing a mechanical duty when he chanted his prayers over the ashes of the paper effigies—of houses, trousers, shoes and horses—that he was burning for the use of the nameless dead. After all, how many of us think of a scene in Bethlehem as the flaming plum-pudding soaked in brandy is set before us?

As we arrived upon the bridge that crosses the wide yellow river, we could see, over a bristling stockade of shaved or pig-tailed Chinese heads, the headquarters of the Society about a hundred yards upstream. Flags wagged over the gaudy distant group and a big banner bestrode it; already little lanterns were setting forth on trial trips at their feet, although the sun was only now setting. The noise of cymbals, gongs and a drum pulsed harshly above the hushing sound of the river.

A Chinese friend passed us as we stood among the crowds on the bridge. In the usual manner of the Chinese paterfamilias, he was walking about ten paces in front of his wife, who was followed at equal intervals first by a son and then by a daughter. At this curiously long range, the whole family was conversing together amiably but in a

LANTERNS DOWN THE RIVER

shrill scream or bellow as it rapidly strode through the crowd. Seeing us, our friend said decidedly, "This bridge will very shortly fall down. It cannot support such a crowd." With this warning, he marched hastily away, and the loosely strung out individuals of his party whizzed in his wake still exchanging friendly nothings at the top of their voices over their shoulders. We remembered, as he spoke, that the bridge had been built "on the cheap" by a dishonest Russian engineer and had already collapsed more than once. We therefore tiptoed nervously behind the youngest child of our friend, hoping that our tentative occidental tread would not prove to be the straw that might break the back already humped under the weight of over a thousand fellow-men.

It may be said at once that the souls of dead lumbermen kindly saw to it that no such wholesale disaster overtook those multitudes of their countrymen who had assembled to do honour to their memory.

When we reached the further bank, a few pink paper lotuses and fishes, aglow with inner candles, were already floating down the river. They started bravely enough, but they were doomed, for the river, gathering itself together to thread the piers of the bridge, was plaited into miniature rapids which no paper lotus could navigate. Only one stout strawberry-coloured paper fish managed to steer itself through the maelstrom and bobbed under the bridge into safety, amid cheers from

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three thousand throats. Servants of the Society waded out up to their middles in the rapids, trying with poles to guide the heedless bright barques into safe water, but all in vain.

So the Society changed its tactics. It formed itself into a procession and marched down the bank of the river, banners and pennants flying, band crashing and thumping—to launch its fleet from a more favourable shore. In its midst marched three stretchers carrying paper ships. Each ship was plumed with red-and-green plumes, and carried, in the middle of a deck rosetted with lotuses, a curly deckhouse built of green-and-gold spangled paper. The last and largest ship must have measured about seven feet from stem to stern. Other stretchers carried high quivering heaps of paper flowers and fishes. Behind the last stretcher marched the Taoist priest dressed in a long robe and a hat with a hole in the top, through which coiled the looped shiny snake of his hair.

The new launching place was much safer. The souls of the lumbermen must have drawn a long sigh of relief as they realised that no more of their prayer-laden messengers would founder on the way. A group of devotees waded out as deep as they dared into the water and became simply a row of gesticulating half-men cut off at the middle by the dark river. They passed the petalled lanterns from hand to hand and set them afloat as near as possible to midstream. As the full moon came up, an unending procession of floating flowers of light filed out along the river, each coloured spark



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rocking delicately along the winding strands of the current, till, in the gathered perspective of the distant curve of the river, the dancing lights drew together in a crowd, like a far-off fairy village blowing on a cloud.

The two smaller ships were launched to the tune of redoubled crashings on the part of the band; glorious with blowing feathers and flags, they waltzed nobly along, towering above the lesser lights of the procession. Here and there a paper flower caught fire and flared up in a splash of flame before disappearing. All the time the priest on the shore chanted prayers, and sparks flew up from the paper miscellanies he was burning on his little portable altar.

About the launching of the biggest ship there was a difference of opinion in the ranks of the Society's officials. One Vice-President in a long blue robe and white topee was determined that it should not be launched until the last possible moment, when the pyrotechnic appetite of the crowd might be expected to be whetted to the full by suspense. Other officials were anxious that the ship should sail at once, and several times lighted the candles and tried to smuggle the vessel into the hands of the waders. But always they were thwarted by the obstructionist who, with half-a-dozen angry puffs, barbed with curses, would blow the candles out again. Murmurs of reproach from the crowd expressed disappointment each time, and all round us the high logical voices of little Chinese children asked pig-tailed fathers, on

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whose shoulders they sat, Why the Big Ship Did Not Sail.

At last, however, when the paper flowers were almost exhausted, the moment for the great launching was admitted by all to have arrived. The Big Ship, glowing with lights at every pore, was passed, pitching, along the row of wading coolies. The band burst into a rhythmless paroxysm which surpassed its previous thrills. The furthest wader set the ship on the water and the river snatched it away,—the wrong way round, but what did that matter?—the gay lights, like little phoenixes, nesting on its deck, its masts crowned with coloured fire, its scarlet plumes bowing in the moonlit wind. The last galaxy of lotuses and fishes followed it, and with its twinkling satellites it made a knot of dwindling dazzle as it headed for the far curve, and for the heaven of dead lumbermen beyond the furthest curve of all. I hope the souls of the lumbermen played our game as enthusiastically as we did, and received the Big Ship—when fire and water finally etherealised it to ride their spirit elements—as an honourable climax to the evening's ceremonies.

The crowd went home as the Big Ship disappeared. The outward-bound caravans, held up on the bridge by the throng, began again to trail their quiet jingling way through the moonlight towards the hills.

And in the street we passed two members of the Society for Remembering Dead Lumbermen fighting out a grievance in a ring held by admirers

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with linked arms. One of them was the aggressive blower-out of candles. His topee had been knocked off. Someone was showing him what happens to bureaucrats who delay shiploads of blessings in their setting forth to the seas of heaven.

TO THE DIAMOND MOUNTAINS

THE train that takes you to the sea from Kwainei is a real grown-up train. We, fresh from a land of plain wagons, moribund Fords and narrow-gauge Chinese trains that stick on every hill, felt very provincial and deeply impressed. It became dark soon, and the moon slid over semi-transparent patches in the clouds like a skater over thin ice. When we came in sight of the moonlit sea we saw it through an exciting scrawl of sparks from our engine; sparks in great storms enveloped the little acacia trees beside the line.

At the harbour we were set on by Japanese police as meat is set on by flies. Foreigners are irresistible prey to the Japanese police; they—the foreigners—afford so many surprises, so many opportunities for showing perspicacity and scepticism. One perennial surprise is that my husband and I have the same surname.

“The same name!” exclaim the police, smelling a rat at once. “What a strange coincidence . . . suspiciously strange. . . .”

But even without the police—the ultimate proof of arrival in the Japanese Empire,—the

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experienced traveller should soon know that he had left Manchuria.

For instance, there are trees in Korea. The Japanese encourage them; the Chinese treat them, it seems, like pests. In Manchuria, as I have seen it, there is one tree—a sick, fantastic-looking thing, which local sightseers walk miles to see. It is a pine tree, perched upon a crag, and it is the only survivor of hundreds of square miles of forest. Probably it has never spontaneously occurred to a Chinese to plant a tree since the world began. Posterity must look after itself—and if you happen to *be* posterity, you can only grumble helplessly at the price of imported firewood.

The traveller will also notice that in Korea transport facilities actually succeed in transporting him from place to place—a thing that is quite exceptional in Manchuria.

In Korea nimble Ford cars of the newest make spring along reasonably continuous roads. Trains have real doors that open and shut, and baggage racks that hold baggage; and real officials who can generally tell the traveller when the train is likely to start. When bits of the train fall off, attempts are made to stick them on again.

Not so in Manchuria. Our little pet Manchurian train thinks nothing of being five or six hours late at the end of a journey of thirty miles. Often it limply rolls off its embankment and gets nowhere at all till the following week. These adventures leave it battered, of course, but nobody ever mends it. “While it has wheels to run,” say

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the company, "run it shall. When the wheels fall off, passengers will have to walk. But as for attending to such inessentials as mending the windows or putting the funnel straight or inspecting the bridges or paying the minor employés their wages—that is asking too much. . . ."

The first-class carriage in which we travel to the border has six windows out of ten broken. There is a stove in the middle of the carriage, but the woodwork is protected from fire by jagged sections of biscuit tin. The first-class carriage is so full of the conductor's friends that passengers who have paid for first-class tickets can often hardly find a place. The manners of these complimentary passengers usually err on the side of chattiness. They wear dirty quilted coats and tall winged fur hats; they are always suffering from the absence of a pocket-handkerchief. A female foreign devil being a very rare bird, they are always irresistibly impelled to come and sit almost on my knee and ask what I paid for my fur coat—where I bought my rings—whether my watch can really go, being so small—how my camera works—whether they may have a drink of Bovril out of my Thermos. To all these questions I reply coldly, "*Igirisu*", hoping that this conveys that I am a free Englishwoman, and that my wrist-watch, my Bovril and my soul are my own.

A large and handsome part of the Japanese fleet was in Gensan harbour as we came in. It was feeling very selfconscious because one of the Mikado's brothers was to visit it next day; it ex-

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pressed its feelings all the evening in a perfect maze of neat fairy lanterns, which dazzled our eyes as we sat eating *suki-yaki* in our Japanese inn.

The brilliant harbour glowed at us across the inn garden—a sombre, perfect, little rock-and-tree garden, wherein not one twig grew carelessly or meaninglessly. Every tree, well-educated, knew how to twist into a poem.

In the morning as, aboard a new boat, we headed for the mountains, the fleet literally bristled with prim patriotism, for the prince was expected every minute. White rows of men streaked every horizontal surface on every vessel. A hydroplane arrived, alighted on the harbour exactly as a duck alights and, after sitting preening its feathers on the water for a moment, quacked and whirred away to see if the prince was coming.

We had eight days in the Diamond Mountains (Kongo-San), and these are the sights I remember most clearly.

First the Umi-Kongo (Sea-Kongo). It consisted of groups of eccentric domed crags, bowing to one another at odd angles on a very calm, clear sea. Little tufted gnarled pine trees were the hair on the old skulls of the rocks. We rowed in and out of corridors between the queer shapes; the water was as clear as green air, and we could see purple starfish, brilliant anemones and prickly unknowns sunning themselves on vivid submarine alps; fishes moved above them, their shadows following them across remote yellow rocks.

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A round solemn face, like the face of a conscientious bather Bathing For The Good Of His Health, suddenly appeared within ten yards of the boat. It was a seal, and we were one of the very few surprises in its peaceful life. Its moustache bristled with doubt and confusion for a moment as it met our gaze and then, recovering its presence of mind, it submerged without a sound or a bubble. For a minute we could see its fat shocked form under the sea among the rocks, like a dark sea-green sausage among dark seagreen chips—and then it was seen no more.

The inland mountains, next day, were obviously elder brothers—landlubber brothers—of the Sea-Kongo; they were built of the same vast rounded boulders—always oddly slanted, but never sharp; moulded, not chiselled. A dragon crossing the Kongo-San would never scratch himself or risk being impaled; even the high narrow peaks are rounded like finger-tips.

Our next destination was the Nine Dragons Fall, and the difficult trail to it was lighted up and made musical with little waterfalls. They all had pretty names like Flying Phoenix or Stringed Lute; the latter name would have fitted every fall we saw, since they all fell like that, in silver taut strings of water over sharp edges. The Nine Dragons Fall itself fell 300 feet—a long strip of white silken water hung from a cloudy edge to a dark green pool. A huge, graceful Chinese inscription on the face of the cliff beside the fall exhorted us to praise God.

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We crossed one day from the Outer to the Inner Kongo, climbing up the long pass to a high ridge, with a widening prospect of bright sea behind us and a shore fretted with the crags and chasms of Sea-Kongo. In a sort of eyrie between very high, steep crags, to which one climbed by a rocking, chained rough ladder, one could stand and look over an enormous view, across a foreground pricked with sheer needles of stone.

From the cracks of the crags burst a froth of purple daisies, and splashes of brave meagre trees.

Trails in the Inner Kongo start out bravely enough, but always dwindle after the first mile to something that only a frog or a chamois could call a trail at all.

A favourite joke on the part of a Diamond Mountain trail is to lead the traveller suddenly on to a hundred-yard stretch of wet stone sloped at an angle of forty-five degrees to a bottomless green pool. There is neither hand-hold nor foot-niche on such a slope, and only the traveller shod with the local straw sandals can tackle it with any degree of calmness. Trails are also likely to turn into a single notched log leading up a thirty-foot boulder, a rusty chain dangling down a sheer cliff, or a rotten plank, squelching with fungi, leaping shakily over a chasm.

However, every effort, every bruise, every tumble into a pool, every indignity, is worth while, in this country of gorgeous rewards.

One trail may lead to a calm ancient Buddha,

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carved in low relief on a great boulder-face above a pointed lichen-grown stone altar; one trail may stride dizzily to a difficult peak, round which vast bubbles of white mist blow, parting from time to time to unveil the distant jointed silver strip of a waterfall. Another trail may pierce a dark tilted forest in a green and blue twilight, where the little striped chipmunks impudently pelt intruders with acorns. Yet another may show you suddenly, through a loophole between an old cedar and a mossy crag, a distant temple clinging to a sheer cliff-face above a forest of autumn-red, like a winged phoenix rising from the flame.

The Diamond Mountains are haunted by stories. Dragons and gods seem to have been quite common there, and the mountain men gossip about them as you or I might gossip about the people who used to live in the house next door.

We went to the mountains in the company of Ivan, a young Russian-educated Korean, and on the very first day we were obliged to detach him from the idea that any gossip of a mythological or divine kind is not worth listening to or retailing to our Western ears.

“Superstition *nichevo*,” we told him, speaking all at once in all the languages we could lay tongue to, “Koreanski legends *hên hao*. Tell us all you hear.”

Ivan curled a sophisticated lip, but after that he was often to be seen drinking in vivacious information from chairmen, guides or passers-by. He would approach us just as we were poised with one

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foot on an unsteady boulder in mid-waterfall, and the other on a floating log, both arms being twined round the neck of a husband or a "jiggy-man", and tell us dramatically: "Under these waters live three black and yellow dragons," or, "If you look to the North here you can see the rock whereon the Korean god sits to judge the wicked—and there, above these rocks, is the Gate of Korean Hell. . . ."

In the Inner Kongo, I, who am no walker, was obliged to travel largely by carrying-chair over trails which in no other country would be called anything but rabbit runs. Our four chairmen—carrying me—and our two jiggy-men—carrying our luggage—became valued friends. We christened them with the names of movie stars, gave ourselves wholly over to their benevolent but slightly autocratic rule, and learned so many stories from their lips that now my mind only hums confusedly with dragons, stone lions, wandering emperors, revengeful gods and haunted caves at the thought of them.

Douglas Fairbanks was the foreman of the gang; I was under his special charge, and he was full of untiring kindness while insisting on implicit obedience on my part. At one moment he would wave his hand imperiously and I would find myself wafted out of my chair and being dragged and pushed up a cliff by Douglas himself in front and William Farnum behind. At the top, where I paused to look at the view, I would find myself forcibly seated once more in the chair and hurried

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away to some more orthodox view-point. Douglas Fairbanks decided where we should eat, and whether we were thirsty, and what flowers were worthy of our glance, and which red boughs of maple we should pick, and what stories we should hear.

Since parting with Douglas and his five friends, I have felt lost—almost widowed; my capacity for self-determination became almost atrophied during the four days I spent in their masterful but beaming company.

Douglas was very sympathetic about my feeble powers as a pedestrian. He insisted on my scaling all possible or impossible peaks that lay within the scope of our trail, but on hearing the loud, laborious puffings that mark my negotiation of a steep ascent, he insisted on hoisting me in the chair up crags that had never been so approached before. Probably the gods used to arrive on clouds, dragons' backs or the tails of comets, but no lesser visitors had ever reached some of the peaks I achieved by any other agency than their own hands and feet.

The chair-climbing record in the Diamond Mountains is held by Stella Benson on a four-man-power Douglas Fairbanks contrivance.

One of our records is the ascent to the magic well. The way lies partly up a perpendicular dangling chain. The magic well itself gushes forth a rather metallic tasting water, that is guaranteed to cure a thousand ills. Shortness of breath up hills must be the thousand and first.

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A story attached to the magic well deals with a Korean aristocrat who, in the days when Korea owed allegiance to China, went to pay his respects to the Emperor at Peking. The traveller took his servant with him. The Son of Heaven, as master and man entered his presence, rose from his throne and bowed to the *servant*.

“What is this?” asked the haughty and outraged provincial. “Can even the Son of Heaven make a mistake?”

The Emperor replied that he had made no mistake, but that his all-seeing eye had shown him the fact that the servant had drunk of this very magic spring while the master had not, therefore the servant was a wise man and the master a fool.

I must call on King George when I get home and prove the truth of this story.

The big rock that lids the spring was graven all over with the names, in Chinese characters, of visitors qualifying for the respect of emperors, and on the crown of the boulder was piled a castle of loose stones, each stone balanced in its place by a visitor as evidence of his call. These cairns were everywhere in the mountains, their bases moss-grown and stable with age, their superstructures still wobbling from the touch of recent hands.

On every cairn we balanced a stone, but we did not carve our names; compared with the exquisite hieroglyphics of our predecessors, our names would look like sketches of railway trains contrasted with the signatures of fairies.

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We met very few other travellers. The few we met were nearly all peasants collecting acorns. They and the chipmunks disputed possession of the acorns. The chipmunks were dressed in yellow fur, horizontally striped with auburn. The men were dressed in the usual loosely draped Korean white, their hair twisted up in neat chignons on the top of their heads.

One traveller passed us in a steep forest, seeming, to our ignorant eyes, to be a fat, cheerful man of benevolent presence, his round, cropped head held with a rather dashing independence of poise. This traveller greeted us in a harsh, boisterous tenor, and exchanged a few words with Douglas Fairbanks almost with the manner of telling a doubtful but funny story.

"That", said Ivan, "is a nun, making a pilgrimage from her convent over the mountains."

Nuns, he added, answering the astonishment in our faces, are very modest and virtuous women in the Kongo-San.

These mountains bristle with sacredness and with temples and shrines.

On the outer fringe of the Outer Kongo, the temple air is perfumed a little with a sort of tourist sophistication; one feels that the priests are rather janitors in fancy dress than holy men. They know the questions that, in their opinion, every tourist ought to ask; they are ready to tell you that every piece of carved stone is nine hundred years old (900 is a stock date in the Kongo-San; it sounds, I suppose a little more true than

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a thousand), but they are nonplussed if any traveller, knowing something of Buddhist orders, makes tactful inquiries about their own priestly lives and pilgrimages.

In the Inner Kongo, however, the priests are all real priests, busy acquiring merit. One, indeed, with a gentle aggressiveness unusual in a Buddhist, expressed himself firmly on the subject of missionaries. The Buddhist religion, he said, was the most beautiful, ancient, and united of all religions, and it was regrettable that missionaries of alien Western faiths should try to break it up. He wanted to satisfy himself that we were not missionaries before allowing us to watch the service in his temple.

After assuring him that Buddhism had nothing to fear from us, we were invited to cross the starlit temple courtyard at the summons of the sharp acrid note of a gong, and follow the priest into the presence of a dim gold and white Buddha, beaming behind two tall candles and a bowl of lighted joss-sticks. Our friend the priest and his acolyte draped their shoulders in crimson silk and prostrated themselves again and again. The signal for each prostration was given by a sharp-noted wooden clicker in the acolyte's hand. Not a word was spoken or a chant intoned during the ceremony, which lasted perhaps five minutes.

We were to sleep that night in the little guest-rooms of the temple, on the bone-searching surface of a stone floor with polished oil-paper stretched on it so that it looked like shining

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granite—and felt like it. We were fortified for this ordeal by a delicious Korean meal of fried seaweed in batter, fungus variously cooked, fish-soup, rice and bean-sprouts.

The priest, in conversation, told us that there were 12,000 peaks in the Kongo-San, and that on each peak God had printed some sacred sign on the face of nature. In the case of this temple, the sign was the little natural outline of one of Buddha's disciples, roughed in by the hand of fortunate accident on the steep horizon—actually extraordinarily like a crowned, meditating, squatting figure on an altar, with tall pines as candles.

The rather spiteful thought occurred to me that it was characteristic of the difference between the Kongo-San and its secular cousin, the Yosemite of California, that the curiosities of natural mimicry in the Kongo-San should take this sacred form, whereas, in the Yosemite valley, the traveller's attention is anxiously drawn to such phenomena as the figure, sketched by nature on the face of a cliff, of a little fat old woman with her petticoats blowing.

The corners of our eyes were caught one day, as we struggled along a very precarious bouldery trail, by a tiny temple apparently hung from the sky, or pinned lightly to the face of a precipice. It looked like a swallow clinging to the wall of a barn. We followed a crooked climbing path through the woods, and dizzily reached the temple.

The priest who thus wisely stole a march on his confrères by living half-way to heaven, was very

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hospitable and pleasant, made us acorn coffee, and offered us as many roasted acorns as we liked to eat. Acorns seemed to be his only food and drink, and he had no other secular pleasures, it seemed. He warned us not to smoke, as the ground was holy. It was his habit to descend to valley level five times a year, he said, never more. He was very proud of his little temple. The part he lived in was on the brink of the cliff, but the part in which Buddha lived was actually *over* the brink, reached by a trembling climb down a dozen crooked steps unprotected by any rail. A little white-and-gold Buddha presided over a very austere small white-and-gold room, dimly lit by paper windows in carved wooden lattices. The priest opened a hinged shutter in the floor, and, catching our breath, we looked down into empty wind, flowing like clear water over a very distant floor of tossing red maples.

Some of the priests were not so welcoming as was our friend of the acorns.

One temple actually displayed a notice asking visitors not to visit it, rather a damping greeting to one just arriving, bruised and breathless, from an outrageous scramble up a practically trackless cascade. This temple looked especially coldly on women, which seemed unwise in the light of what we were told a few minutes later. A great sacred rock beside the temple was faintly seamed by a long crack. This crack, the priest told us, was the temple's shame, but, according to an ancient prophecy, it would never be healed until three

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saints had been born in the temple. Two saints had already been born—the last one five hundred years ago—and the crack, which had once been a gaping split, was now scarcely perceptible.

I at once asked our Korean companion to point out to the priest that he was acting rashly in thus frowning upon the visits of travellers—especially of female travellers—rather should he advertise the place as a lying-in hospital, in the hope of healing the offending crack.

The valley temples were always more elaborate, larger, and more brilliantly and imaginatively decorated than the temples balanced bravely on mountain ledges.

Korean temple artists seem to me to have been more free from convention than Chinese decorators. One big temple showed a frieze of musicians which had a really Hogarthian raciness. One had a wall covered by a huge and lively painting of two white rabbits (a hundred times larger than life) sitting on their scuts on little chairs on either side of a pestle and mortar. Realistic and ferocious studies of tigers were in many temples, and there was one vigorous sketch of Buddha mounted on a racing elephant, and the inhabitants of Paradise leaning out to see him whizz by.

The big temple of Yutenji has fifty-three little Buddhas entangled in a mass of fancy vegetation. The altar is approached by a very low archway, apparently in order to force worshippers to approach in a suitable attitude of bent reverence.

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But personally I would rather bow before a single Buddha of my own size, or even larger. Fifty-three embryo Buddhas too fatally recall to my irreligious mind Mr. Heinz's fifty-seven varieties.

THE BARBER'S WIFE

THERE has always been a question in my mind as to whether Japanese are human. They may be either changelings or Utopians; at any rate, they are surely too logical to be true. They seem to live behind a veil of terrifying articulateness; there always is a reason, incredibly enough, for everything they do, and there is—to my muddled Anglo-Saxon eye—no fancy or cynicism in them, and no saving silliness.

Our barber's wife was not only Japanese, but a woman, which, it seemed to me, indicated personified consistency carried to a point beyond Western imagination.

Our Japanese barber, while cropping my hair—(no impolite gleam of a sneer betraying the fact that he knew female cropped hair to be contrary to nature)—suggested in the mixture of Chinese and Russian that is our only Manchurian linguistic bridge, that he wanted one of our puppies. "We should like a bitch puppy," he said, "in order, later on, to have puppies of our own to sell."

"How reasonable," I thought dolefully. "Alas! that my spoilt, fantastic, uninhibited puppies

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should be thought of as simple, puppy-producing machines. Yet isn't that what they are?"

The cold breath of collectivism blew in upon my silly fairy world of canine individualism. Living entrenched as I did in a high-walled compound, with only puppies within and only Japanese without, I lived removed from sense. Giant puppies were my whole foreground; almost I thought as a puppy.

"Still, it would be a good home, as Japanese homes go, I suppose, for a weakly puppy. They can't all live and die Nordics. William Dobbin and Becky Sharp are to become American citizens, Jos Sedley is already sold in advance to a sporting man, Rawdon Crawley is promised to the chief of police. Pitt Crawley is booked for Seoul, and George Osborn must go to the owner of his father; but Emmy—little Emmy Osborn—here is her fate. She must be apprenticed to the barber's trade; she must learn to guard a sliding Japanese paper door and to sleep in an old *saké* tub without a cushion. (Query: Is shaving soap poisonous?)"

So the barber's wife came and fetched Emmy away, and the rest of us puppies went on playing tug-o'-war with bits of rope and having boxing matches with the pony's tail and stealing the cook's slippers. I was the only one who missed and remembered Emmy and sent warm thoughts to her in her *saké* tub on cold nights. My hair became as short as a convict's owing to too-constant visits to the barber. Emmy Osborn, with a Japanese-style clipped tail—and a bead of blood

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on the end of it—never failed to welcome me to the barber's chair with shrill whinnings and elastic boundings of recognition. The barber and his wife smiled coldly at Emmy's jokes.

"My visits are her only chance to express herself," I thought sentimentally. "She will never learn to whinny in Japanese." And I thought of Emmy as of a fairy beating itself against a blandly lighted window-pane.

One day the barber's wife came into my garden, preceded by my Korean cook as interpreter. The cook giggled for a minute and then said, "This woman, she say dog have die".

"Emmy dead!" I cried in my silly pidgin Russian, as I turned on the barber's wife. But she was looking past me at Daisy, Emmy's stout golden mother, who was lying asleep in the sun. And suddenly the pale, docile face of the barber's wife was broken up like glass, and tears rushed from her eyes. "Ah—Emmy—Emmy—Emmy—" she screamed, and, throwing herself on her knees, seized the astonished Daisy's paw in both hands. "Ah, Emmy—Emmy is dead." She crouched for a minute, crying in curious loud hooting sobs.

The cook, still laughing, stood over her, as though he were still needed to interpret her meaning. "She like dog," he said, "she all same missy; she no have got baby, so she like dog."

The barber's wife scrambled to her feet, and tried to rearrange her flowery kimono about her feet, now prim in their clogs once more. But,

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seeing my face, she began sobbing again, and stammering in her broken Russian.

"How could a dog like Emmy die—there never was a dog like her. You thought she was a common puppy, but she had wisdom and understanding beyond all dogs—she was like a baby. My husband says so, too—she was like our baby. She always slept on her mat beside our mat. For three days she has been ill, and all that time she has been in my arms—even after she was dead I held her for many hours. How many yen have we spent on the doctor and on medicine! We loved her so much—how can she be dead—she who was never still?" She wandered off into broken stories about Emmy's jocund doings, but interrupted herself once more with her strange, hooting wails.

"Don't . . . don't—there are other dogs than Emmy. She was only a dog. . . . Surely you still have another dog. . . . Your big dog is a fine dog, too. . . ." I spoke in the awkward voice that, in some of us, so often results from the astounding discovery, "Why—but *this is another me!*"

"*That dog!*" she cried, and looked at me as I have so often looked at fools. "*Nu*, that is a good dog enough, but he talks with every one. Emmy", she added in a strangled whisper, "talked only with me."

After a moment she said, "Now we have nothing to do, my husband and I. There is nothing to do. My husband is lying on his mat—

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how can he work? The shop is shut. People must go unshaved."

She stood looking down at the snoring Daisy, while gradually her face set again into its discreet Japanese mould. Then we bowed to each other several times, clasping our hands, and she walked away, clacking her clogs, her toes turned in, as modest Japanese toes should turn. I ran after her with a handful of sweet peas—the only comment I could think of—and she bowed again, and I bowed again. It was as though a ghost of lovely and sorry unreason had shimmered itself into two, and the two halves walked away from each other in the form of an English female novelist and a respectable Japanese tradesman's wife.

ANGELS AND ANCESTORS

FATHERS, mothers and other ancestors are very often the heroes and heroines of Chinese plays. In China the middle-aged never slip out of the centre of the picture; on the contrary, they inherit the earth. In occidental popular art, you practically have to be under five-and-twenty before the lime-light man will waste a beam on you. Though, to be sure, in Hollywood there seems to be a revival of ancestor worship. The movie hero is very often a walking advertisement of the fifth commandment in spite of—or perhaps because of—the fact that his mother is always more senile by forty years than the mother of one on the Threshold of Radiant Manhood has any right to be. (The senior movie generation must have married very late in life.) Among mothers of the junior generation, this position is reversed. When beautiful brides of seventeen get over their hankerings after glittering vice and settle down with the Plain He-Man who Loved them All Along, they always—after a little bashful business with a Tiny Garment—produce outsize babies, aged, apparently, about eighteen months at birth. However, the principle remains the same; movie mothers exist to be succoured by

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strong filial arms, or yanked back from the brink of sin by innocent blue eyes or tendril baby fingers. And this is the chief difference between Chinese and American ancestor-worship. In China no son can win applause by succouring his mother, any more than you or I can achieve heroic status by brushing our teeth twice daily. Such duties are only noticed in the breach. The didactic potency attributed by movie producers to the extremities of infants, too, can find no place in Chinese drama. No Chinese child could, by the appealing glossiness of its pigtail, save its mother from sin; in China, mothers cannot sin; parents *always* know best; no baby, however young, can teach them anything whatever. Sons and daughters rank practically as supers on the Chinese stage.

Chinese heart-strings are a tougher instrument to play upon than American heart-strings, and nothing more tender than a heavy widow, played by a full-sized he-man, can strike a chord of sympathy east of Suez. We had just such a widow at the Chinese theatre last night. She was tall and not too closely shaven and had a very powerful bass voice. Her sleeves were about twice as long as her arms and she used them as a handkerchief. Her white horsehair wig was built into a tall tower. When she needed to relieve her feelings by a poignant female scream of anguish, a little trumpet played by a member of the orchestra, back-stage, had to do it for her. The widow's elder son—black-hearted fellow—had found a good job in a distant place, married, and never written to

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his mother again. She had sent her second son to remind him of his duty. The second son also never came back—indeed how could he?—for his brother and sister-in-law drove a three-inch nail into his head and buried him hastily as soon as he arrived. And now the widow was going herself, plodding ferociously round and round the stage and shouldering her massive umbrella with an expression that boded no good for undutiful sons. The ghost of her second son met her on the road. He wore ordinary coolie clothes with the addition of a long horsetail dangling from his left ear to his knee. His nose was painted white, with a little black spot on the bridge to show where the three-inch nail went in. When his mother saw him—*toot-toot-toot*—the little trumpet expressed her feelings for her, she tossed her umbrella over her shoulder and did a farcical backward somersault. That's the worst of Chinese plays—you never know when you can safely cry. Tragic characters will not keep on being tragic—even a divine personage risks being booted from behind by the funny man. In real life, to be sure, a chief mourner may sit on his hat, or a dethroned emperor go in need of a patch on the seat of his trousers, but on the stage we prosaic Nordics want to know where we are—we like to keep our Henry Irvings and our George Robeys severely apart. If Shakespeare had been Chinese, he would have made little Prince Arthur's mother cry, "Here I and sorrow sit"—and then sit on a pin!

Our Chinese widow lay, trousered legs face-

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tiously in air, vicariously tooting, until the kindly ghost picked up her umbrella for her, hoisted her on to her feet and dusted her down. After accusing his sister-in-law in a really excellent ghost-voice—a veiled dead ventriloquistic voice—he disappeared. The widow with a loud, unladylike ha-ha, shook herself and walked on, uneasily persuading herself that the explanation of the apparition lay in a faulty digestion. And soon she met her elder son in the flesh, dressed up in gaudy mandarin clothes with dragon-fly wings to his hat. He was certainly commendably humble. He offered no excuse for his neglect of his mother, but knelt down with his back to her and allowed himself to be berated for five minutes. Then he told her that her other son was dead—(toot-toot-toot)—and invited her to come and see the grave. His wife offered the old lady refreshments. But the mother's suspicions, aroused by the ghost, became acute at the sight of the pom-pommed head-dress of the murderess. With a subdued toot, the widow threw the contents of the bowl at her hostess' feet—(there were no contents really; the Chinese are a thrifty race). The mother's lament at the grave was really moving, even though it was uttered while she loudly sipped a cup of tea—real tea this time—offered by a sympathetic stage hand. The ghost came back and drew the veil of his dim blurred voice over the volley of toots that brought the tragedy to an end.

We saw several plays that hot night; we sat in that fan-fluttering audience, in the crackle of

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nibbled sunflower seeds and the steam of hot towels thrown from hand to hand, under the hot glare of unshaded lights, for perhaps four hours. But the two plays that stay in my mind most clearly are the tragedy of the widow's son and the comedy of the superman with snakes coming out of his ears. Both these plays illustrated the irreverence with which Chinese can treat the things they revere, both show the indignities of the dignified—the limitations of divinity. The story of the comedy was too intricate for repetition, but I remember a young lady with a head-dress of paper roses and a comic Mongolian soldier leaning over the Great Wall of China and seeing a semi-divine personage in the form of a Chinese general asleep on the other side, with snakes coming out of his ears. To have snakes coming out of one's ears should entitle anyone to respect, and the Mongolian lady and soldier decided at once that the man was a god, or in other words, a potential emperor of China. So they proceeded to make a fool of him—stole his horse and his spear, tickled his nose, tweaked the tail of his coat and carried him home with them—carried the superman home as one might carry a butterfly. In the laboriously facetious dialogue which followed, the funny soldier scored all the successes, the stranger was consistently a butt, in spite of his snakes. Yet nobody disputed his semi-divinity—he would be emperor of China some day and his red brocade and pom-poms radiated a sacred splendour. Clothes are always serious in a Chinese play,

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however fallible and mockable the bodies which they encase may be.

Four very small girls of ages between three and six sat all night on a little bench beside the orchestra, intermittently watching the plays while arranging one another's hair. They were, we were told, learning to be actresses. They never smiled, though gods had their noses pulled and ancestors turned turtle; they showed no awe when the Son of Heaven or the Mandarin's Grandmother cast buffoonery aside and achieved justification in a dazzle of tragedy and tinsel tassels. They were children of the stage, those little girls, and they owed no duty and no reverence to anything or anyone except the property man with his arms full of gorgeous trappings. Gods, devils, grandmothers and knockabout drunks they knew to be only the props that held up the glowing embroideries, tinsels and brocades of their world.

All the evening, my docile China-drugged mind encouraged the performance with automatic near-approval. "Really, that's almost moving—if only the bereaved widow would talk like a bereaved widow instead of sharing a joke with the property man . . . listen—that little flute would be almost charming if the fiddle didn't happen to be playing a different tune at the same time . . . how dramatic that climax might have been if the actor hadn't stopped in the middle to rub his chest down with a wet towel . . . one could almost laugh at that funny man, if the gong didn't

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drown all his remarks . . . what a pity that the arrangement of the lights prevents us in the boxes from seeing more than a fifth of the stage . . . this play, if it had ended two hours and a half ago, when all the principal characters died, would have been almost—— . . .”

And then suddenly my spiritual tongue was loosened. No—*no*—NO—it's not subtle—not even *almost* subtle. . . . Judged by any adult standard in the world, it's absolutely bad—childish—a tenth-rate charade. The plot may be subtle—but it is not coherently set forth. The actors may be elaborately trained—but they are obscured by superfluous supers, dirt and absence of intelligent production. As a piece of acting—as an illusion—as an emotional experience—the show could surely be bettered by Central African Bongo-Bongoes. The only effective things in it are the embroidered clothes, which expressionless “actors” display deliberately, back view, front view, profile view, like mannequins.

It is all part of the odd and prosaic refusal of the Chinese to consider *things* as a part of their setting, and the setting as important to the treasure. The fact that the actors are *there*, busy acting, dressed in the traditional clothes, seems to the Chinese mind enough, in itself, whether they are seen to advantage—or seen at all—or not. In the same way a rich Chinese will invite an honoured guest to come and see his wonderful collection of porcelain, and will take no steps to save him from tripping over the empty bottles,

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old tin cans, dead cats, smells and rag-heaps that welcome the stranger at the front door. The china itself will probably be squeezed in a confused jam on one table in the middle of a bleak room decorated with Chinese cigarette posters. An intelligent and educated Chinese official friend invited us once to come and see his chrysanthemums, in the complex growing of which he had achieved a subtle and almost fanatic success. A Japanese of the same class would have arranged each chrysanthemum plant in a skilful emptiness—a sort of suspense in space that would give value to the surprise of the exotic combed or curly, bristling or drooping, spidery or golliwoggy heads of his treasures. Not so the proud Chinese expert. His exhibits were not exhibited at all—we simply tumbled over a tight, tangled jungle of plants stuck in tins—a mass which resembled nothing more than a coop full of roosting Cochin China hens.

A Chinese mother will invite an expected guest to see her baby son—the ecstatic climax of her career as a woman,—and will lead him into the visitor's presence dressed in a filthy quilted tunic, with his trousers coming down, his hands encrusted with syrup and his nose in urgent need of a handkerchief which is never forthcoming. In the same spirit, Chinese deface or neglect their fine old monuments, rase their forests, and, on reaching a mountain-top at sunset, will always sit down on their haunches with their backs to glory, and discuss dollars and cents.

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A baby is a baby—a view a view—a Ming bowl a Ming bowl—a flower a flower—these, the Chinese know, are *things*—they can be paid for or photographed. The intervening glamour of personality—of interpretation—of, in fact, *art* as we gross material Occidentals conceive of it, is not known to that race which claims to be the world's seers, visionaries and artists.

The fact is, I think, that we look at the Chinese through a veil of senseless traditional reverence—the only artistic illusion the Chinese take any trouble to sustain. Yet why should they, who claim such superiority of taste, be content to be seen with indulgent tolerance by us—to be judged by lower standards than any that obtain in the despised materialists' own hemisphere? Why, for instance, should the Chinese, boasting of the most ancient tradition of pure art and philosophy in the world, evolve the only stage in the civilised world on which actors need not act—a stage which avoids both realism and illusion?

No doubt China, with a population almost beyond calculation, has possessed and even may still possess a handful of first-rate artists, but I suggest that, were it not for the sentimentalists, we should find that the Chinese are not, and have never been, to any extent proportionate to their numbers, creative, and that their record—artistic, spiritual, philosophical, political and moral,—is far surpassed by that of the materialistic Europe which they so complacently despise. Above all, as regards *modern* China, we have been led by most

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American and a few British "cultured" tourists into an *impasse* of silly and unreasoning reverence; I believe that the Chinese are one of the most prosaic and unoriginal peoples in the world to-day, and have the least to teach us.

THE THREE-ARTS SILK SHOP

THE narrow, sunny street of Hunchun was alive with squealing ponies, squealing pigs, squealing cartwheels, squealing babies, but there was a twilit quietness in the shop, in spite of its congested condition. The crowd in the shop did not consist of customers, but included nearly all the thirty employés. On the counter, on the *k'ang*, on straight right-angular chairs against the wall, or on their own haunches, the massed employés sat round the shop, sleeping, singing or arguing in gentle voices. How a shop about twenty feet by twelve in size managed to provide a living for thirty men would be difficult for a foreigner to guess, but the Chinese are above all a practical people, so there must be an unexpected foundation in common sense for the fact that the customer has to insert himself like a tentative wedge into the tightly packed mass of salesmen in the outer shop.

That we, the only foreigners in Hunchun, should come into the shop made a certain stir among the salesmen and several of them stopped singing as we were shown into an inner room. There we were left to ourselves for a few minutes and I had time to become absorbed in a large and exciting picture which dominated the room. It was

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a vivid German Twopence-coloured affair, showing large numbers of Germans leaping into a trench filled with a squirming mixture of Highlanders and Pathans. The Germans, in neat sparkling Sunday uniforms, and with expressions of valiant serenity, were poised in attitudes of heroism, the effect of which was rather spoilt by the humiliating fact that their victory was entirely undisputed. I was ashamed to see that not one of my countrymen was putting up any fight at all, also that their uniforms were in several cases muddy and unbuttoned, their hats lost, their hair sadly disordered. The Pathans were all obsequiously begging for mercy, the Scots were all running away, their kilt-tails flirting briskly over the horizon like rabbits' scuts. Blushing deeply at this scene of dishonour, I looked round at the proprietor of the shop, wondering that he could bother to make himself agreeable to members of such an abject race as he now knew us to be. On second thoughts, however, I allowed myself to hope that since, in common with every one in Hunchun, he was unable to read German, and since he could also have had no opportunity to study the various uniforms so familiar to another hemisphere, he was almost certainly unaware of the discreditable light his picture threw on the valour of China's Allies in the Great War. The thing was to him just a pretty picture of white men fighting, nor did it matter to him from whom flowed the pools of blood which gave animation to the scene.

THE THREE-ARTS SILK SHOP

The walls of the room were lined with bolts of gaudy silk. The bolts were arranged upright like books in shelves. One could almost catalogue them, by analogy with the prosperous suburban library;—those rich and hideous brocades were the Shakespeare, Tennyson and Browning of the collection; the fat rolls of serviceable grey and brown were the Dickens, Scott, Disraeli and Bulwer Lytton sets; the bright, flimsy gauzes were the Ethel M. Dells, Gilbert Frankaus and Elinor Glyns—I could almost pick out a Hutchinson in earnest dove-grey—and the prostrate remnants were the slender Art Editions, birthday books, poems of Adelaide Anne Proctor, shreds of Great Thoughts, Helpful Fragments from Emerson and what not.

But the illusion fell to pieces for our benefit. Shakespeare burst into an explosion of blue rosebuds on a puce ground, Bulwer Lytton unrolled himself into a discreet Chinese gent's suiting. Dishevelled billows and whirlpools of silk occupied every horizontal surface in the room—even our passive knees as we sat in a row on the *k'ang*. We pinched, peered, sniffed and squinted in an effort to seem learned in silken lore. As soon as it became clear that we were not mere philanderers, but intended to buy, the shop showed its appreciation by giving us a cigarette each. Cigarettes on these occasions are not offered in the box, but are urgently thrust into the customer's mouth by the smutty finger and thumb of a little boy—the least considerable of the thirty employés. The shop's

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acknowledgement of our patronage accumulated in a kind of crescendo as our intentions became more and more obviously serious. As our purchases touched the thirty-yen mark, cups of tea appeared in the hands of the smallest salesman but one. At fifty yen the firm's gramophone was brought in. At eighty yen, it drew breath to play a tune, but was checked as we showed a disposition to haggle over the price. Perhaps we were not going to be worth a gramophone record after all.

Meanwhile we could hear the book-keeper singing his sums; he sat leaning forward, with his abacus under one hand and his paint-brush in the other, a long red-and-white strip of bill under his chin, and in a soft-edged flexible voice he *sang* the Chinese equivalent of five-and-a-half-feet-at-eighty-sen-makes-four-yen-forty-put-down-forty-and-carry-four. He would not have been able to calculate, we gathered, except in song. Melody and mathematics are inseparable in Chinese book-keeping; presumably if an accountant's voice was threatened by a cold in the head, the books would have to remain unbalanced. The song was prettily accompanied by the castanet-like effect of abacus beads being clicked along their wires, and at the end of every verse of the song, a few flourishing hieroglyphics were painted in vertical strips down the gay bill.

As we finally agreed on the price, an explosion of more brazen music burst from the throat of the gramophone, and our farewell bows to all the thirty salesmen were performed to the tune

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of a Chinese military bugle melody played with such speed and shrillness that it sounded like the twittering of an insane sparrow a hundred times magnified.

So, loaded with rolls of silk, we went home in an uplifted mood, curiously different, if my memory serves me aright, from the mood of the successful shopper at Barker's, High Street, Kensington.

CIRCUS

A MIGRANT circus came to our town and built itself a nest of striped canvas, matting, flags and masts tied together askew with bits of string. The structure looked like the original paper pattern of St. Paul's Cathedral put together by a village idiot.

The regular ponking of drums continually in our ears made us feel as if we were in Central Africa under the menace of an attack by painted war-hordes. During the performances a large trumpet and a little flute, played on two unrelated keys by untutored Japanese lads, treated our town to renderings of "The British Grenadiers", "A Bicycle Made for Two", and the Japanese National Anthem, in strict and unvarying rotation.

Several hundred Koreans stood outside the circus door all day in the hot sun, in a sort of purgatory from which there was no escape, since none seemed to possess the coppers for entry or the heart for departure. Booths selling melons and Japanese cider sprang up to comfort this enchanted and for ever unsatisfied horde. When we Manchurians eat melons, we eat them very thoroughly. None of your dainty half-canteloupes

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on cracked ice for us; we just bury our teeth in the thick dusty rind, chew for a while with seeds festooned about our lips, and spit freely.

On the platform in front of the huge crazy marquee a clown showed himself from time to time to whet the appetite of the yearning crowd. He was dressed in semi-imitation of an Occidental clown, in red-white-and-blue flounces, and huge red spots, with trousers a great deal too large for him. His nose was floured, but not more so than the noses and other excrescences of every one else connected with the circus—the supers, the grooms, the scavenging coolies—even the manager and cashiers. All were floured gratuitously on the nose, the ear, the eye, the jaw, the seat of the trousers.

The drum was wrought up to a frenzy by the time we arrived, rather late, at the melon-rind-strewed door of the circus. We had to battle with a desperate stream of circus-mad Koreans at the door, but once inside the desired paradise, we, who had squandered fifty *sen*, were led gloriously to the seats of the mighty.

We climbed up an improvised step-ladder to a paradise within a paradise, and there the elect sat on their haunches on a rickety platform, spitting sunflower-seeds—instead of the melon-rind of the common herd. A Japanese lady-assistant rented us three loud tartan cushions as buffers between our bones and the skeleton of the structure itself.

The band, craning in to see the great spectacle

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of foreigners sitting on the grand stand, lost its head and played the "Bicycle Made for Two" and the Japanese National Anthem simultaneously, but nobody noticed—least of all the band itself.

We sat down in the midst of billows of Korean skirts. Korean women never sit *on* their skirts; they treat them as crinolines, and sit down carefully in the middle of balloons of starched linen. Sleeping babies were scattered at our feet. Waking babies stood squabbling in long rows in the direct line of sight of every adult spectator. Each sleeping baby in turn awoke and screamed. The mother, after a long period of hopeless inaction, would offer it nature's supply of comfort, while herself rocking with amusement at the antics of the clown. If this failed to silence the child, the mother would at last rise regretfully to her feet and stand in the attitude of a hair-pin while an obliging neighbour balanced the wriggling baby on her lower spine. A dexterous flip of a dirty blanket and the baby was netted like a fish and, after a few more turns of the blanket, securely bound on to its mother's posterior, with only its voice left free to protest with. The family then, walking on two reluctant feet, left the building.

Below us were the groundlings, sitting on the trampled mud of the arena, their craning figures bulging through the low gaudy rail of the ring. Trick cyclists, equestrian wonders, performing monkeys and contortionists, practically brushed the noses of this section of the audience, and

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the flick of the ring-master's whip must have disarranged many top-hats.

Bells rang, heralding the exciting approach of trick bicyclists, little boys and girls swinging themselves about on trapezes, more cyclists, some tired horses eccentrically ridden by little girls, a white pony jumping through a hoop of fire with a terrified monkey tied to its back, more cyclists wheeling violently round and round the inside of a mammoth waste-paper basket, and finally attaining to the top rim, where they waved the flag of Imperial Japan. . . .

The clown stole every one's applause, as clowns are rather apt to do in all parts of the world. I felt sorry for the children (almost all the performers were little children), because, however clever they were, the clown was always cleverer.

The whole performance was an exact imitation of foreign circuses; the late Mr. Barnum is directly responsible for every miracle we saw. Even the parasols flaunted by the little tight-rope walkers were hideous foreign parasols instead of the pretty Japanese kind. Even the clown's greeting was, I am convinced, a literal translation of the time-honoured, "Here we are again". And his way of replacing his hat, when it fell off, by a well-directed kick with the toe, was surely originally devised by a tame chimpanzee to amuse little Cain and Abel in Eden. It seemed a pity that so much trouble should have been taken, and so much real skill brought into play, over so slavish an imitation of something not native to the

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soil. The Japanese, with their heritage of extraordinary agility, must surely have some native and spontaneous way of displaying it.

However, the audience was delighted, and if, after we left, the clown put a dog through a sausage machine—as no doubt he did—I am sure the conceit seemed to the audience both novel and witty. Perhaps it would do many of our European jokes good to be exported to Japan—and never repatriated.

CHINESE GOSSIP

THE Chinese magistrate in the town of Y—— applied for leave. Though he was fat and middle-aged, it seemed he had a mother to whom he was dutifully devoted. He was obliged to apply for leave, he said, because his mother was ill, and filial duty required that he return to his home at the other end of China (for this was one of those long-range devotions) and care for the old lady, or —if care failed to revive her—help to bury her. So he went home, and the town of Y—— struggled on for a while without a magistrate.

After a while, just as the citizens of Y—— were beginning to scan their bumpy brown horizons for their returning magistrate, they heard that he had over-eaten himself at a feast given to celebrate the death of his mother, and had died of apoplexy, a martyr to filial devotion. He was fat and very fond of the good things of the table, and the story seemed probable and perhaps, to the town of Y——, not particularly heartbreaking. The supply of officials in China by far exceeds the demand. However, the best people of Y—— all, no doubt, said the right thing to the widow, the

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concubine and the orphans of the deceased, and to the new magistrate, and every one else concerned.

They went on saying the right thing politely and dispassionately even after they heard that the story of their magistrate's filial death was, though affecting, untrue in every detail. The unofficial version of the tragedy showed the town of Y—— its late portly magistrate in a quite new and even dashing light.

It appeared that the magistrate had possessed not only a mother but a friend. The mother continued, by the way, and still continues, in perfect health, unaware that her son is officially on record as having died at her funeral. The magistrate's friend was a revolutionary general—or glorified brigand—in a southern province of China. This friend, finding himself prosperous, wrote to Y——'s magistrate offering him a soft job and plenty of perquisites.

The magistrate decided to go and investigate the offer. A Government official's sympathies have to be rather agile in China, where an autocrat may become an outlaw in a night, and a brigand's word may to-morrow be law. The magistrate gave his mother's illness as an excuse and obtained leave.

He intended, if the revolutionary job should prove satisfactory, simply to disappear without explanation and let the poor town of Y—— gradually realise its mysterious bereavement. If the new career should, on the other hand, not satisfy him, he had only to return to Y—— with

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the improvised news of his mother's death or recovery. He was very ready to serve his country in one way or another, wherever the perquisites might be largest.

But his adaptability was his undoing.

Every Chinese official has the right to carry on his journeys a pass which shows his position, and enables him to travel safely and lodge free of expense anywhere in China where his Government happens to be recognised. Our hero, however, being bound for a rather shady destination, was obliged to travel without his magisterial pass, and to pay his way like you or me.

After a few days of successful progress, he was so unlucky as to catch the eye of some of Marshal Wu Pei-fu's soldiers in a train. As one of Chang Tso-lin's magistrates, he should have been perfectly safe in the hands of an allied general's forces, however temporarily allied. So he told the truth—or, at any rate, half the truth—and said he was the magistrate of Y——, going to visit his sick mother. Y—— seemed almost too far off to be true, to the soldiers—(it is so difficult to make the truth convincing in China;)—they were probably new to the work and full of military fervour, so they hauled Y——'s prodigal out of the train at a by-station and took him before an officer.

“Not a very likely story,” sniffed the officer, who was also full of the obstructionism of the military beginner. “Y—— is a very long way off. . . . What are you doing here?”

The poor magistrate again resuscitated his

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dying mother. The mention of a parent is always impressive in China, and the officer softened.

“Then show me your magistrate’s pass, and you can go on by the next train.”

Our poor magistrate could think of no way to explain the absence of his pass. To any Chinese it would be inconceivable that an honest man who had a right to travel free should nevertheless be found travelling at his own expense. One imagines the unfortunate traveller wordless at last, bereaved even of his convenient mother, a helpless orphan indeed.

The officer’s suspicions intensified a thousand-fold. He and his men searched the suspect’s luggage (probably a small bundle wrapped up in a large blue handkerchief). The only paper they found in his bundle was the letter of invitation from the outlaw general.

Nothing more was needed. This was no magistrate but a spy. That letter was as compromising as a bomb would have been. Without waiting for any further justification or authority, they stood the wretched traveller up against a wall and shot him dead.

But at any rate he lives in his fellow-townsmen’s (official) memory as a dutiful son.

THE VISITOR

THE dogs were barking in the distance in the specially insolent voice that dogs reserve for the poor. And Seriozha, the Russian boy-of-all-work, came round to where I was planting out young lettuces, and said, "Ha, ha!" in rather the same kind of voice. At the same time he waved me towards the gate; evidently there was something contemptible and amusing to be seen there.

"What is it?" I asked, following him, and what he answered in Russian I could only translate, laboriously and incredulously, in my own mind as "Half a man".

But that was what it was. At the foot of the tall gate sat half a man, the upper half of a young Korean beggar. Where his legs should have been there was only a board, rolling on four little roller-skate wheels.

He looked up at me with a look that was not a beggar's look; he met my eye in silence and with gentle dignity. He bowed not very humbly; he seemed like a workman come for his wages. He wore a towel as a turban and a clean white Korean tunic—at least, it had obviously been clean until it started up our hill. I thought of the

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state of the track that climbs to our house—mud knee-high, gashed with tilted ruts and rain gullies.

My stock remark—"Seriozha, tell him we do not give to beggars here"—died on my lips as I visualised the obstacles this trustful half-man had surmounted—the mud that must have been to him waist-high, the wet rank grass slapping his face. Certainly he had earned his pay; who should blame him for taking for granted so proudly my realisation of this fact?

"Tell him to wait a minute," I said, and Seriozha, bowing himself facetiously double, shouted a waggish "haw-haw" into the young man's ear. The dogs, amazed and amused to find themselves so fantastically on a level with a vertical adult human face, licked the beggar's ears with condescending tolerance.

I went indoors to find a sum commensurate with his achievement.

It was rather a forlorn hope. As far as I knew, on sober reflection, I had no money in the house. Financial affairs are so simple in my isolated home that actual money is very rarely needed by me. I emptied out my pin-box, my card-case, my vanity bag, my sewing table, my sponge-basket—all the caches where, in times of greater economic activity, money is likely to be found. I even looked—as a last resource—in my purse, and found an American nickel and a French sou—survivors of a less primitive past.

I thought of giving my visitor a cheque, but a terrible vision of the new-made capitalist creaking



THE HALF-MAN

THE VISITOR

into the shiny Japanese bank on his little wheels, and finding himself stranded, past discovery, in the lee of that precipice of bank-counter, made me put away my cheque-book.

From the windows, as I searched the rooms, I could see Seriozha, arms akimbo, sturdy young legs planted wide apart, giggling down into the beggar's calm, sombre face. The visitor seemed to Seriozha a joke personified; the difference of eye-level, and the presence of the little wheels, it seemed, entirely relieved Seriozha of his obligation to recognise human dignity.

Did the visitor's sober, reflective brain, anchored, by a hideous joke, so near the ground, long to be perched—if only for a moment—upon those stilts—those legs, which, it appears, are so mysteriously essential to human dignity, in order that that strong fist might wipe the silly grin from the Russian's face? No, there was no sign of irritation in the half-man's face; in calm silence he watched the other's grimaces. He was resigned to bearing about with him—like the Old Man of the Sea—this heavy burden of buffoonery.

Every time I glanced out of the window, my idea of the day's wages this man had earned mounted higher and higher. But still I could find no money.

Seriozha, appealed to, had no money either—or—wait—he had ten *sen* (about three halfpence) in a forgotten pocket. There was nothing to be done. I gave the beggar Seriozha's ten *sen*.

He took it, looked at it, looked at me with

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an inquiring but not resentful expression, glanced not too pointedly at the house—which must have seemed to him a palace, hesitated a moment, and then bowed gravely to me.

“Seriozha,—tell him I can’t find any more—tell him to come and see me again. . . .”

Seriozha laughed. “He no spik Russian. I no spik Korean.”

The meanness of the gift, coming after twenty minutes of suspense, did not seem to matter at all to Seriozha. This was only a half-man, after all, with less than half a man’s human rights.

Meanwhile the visitor put his hands upon the ground, lifted and pivoted himself to face the gate and trundled away, his wheels squeaking and scraping. Seriozha helped him over the threshold of the gate with a contemptuous kick at the tail of the board. “Ha-ha!” laughed Seriozha after him.

As soon as the family breadwinner came home that night, I possessed myself of money and drove all over the town in search of my visitor, intending to make amends. The high wheels of my pony-trap (do wheels, too, then, need height from the ground, just as human faces do, to save them from being grotesque?) followed all over the town the traces of the little wheels that had carried a disappointed man from my gate.

But though I heard of him on every side—of his sad, boisterous progress through the streets at the head of a rabble of giggling, bawling boys and girls—I never saw him again. The money I owe him still remains in my pocket.

BROKEN HATS

WE have always understood that the Koreans, as a race, were passive to excess.

The ancient purpose of the Korean top-hat—which was originally made of porcelain—was, I am told, to keep the peace. A man could not well engage in riotous conduct with a small porcelain top-hat balanced delicately upon his top-knot. The penalty for a broken hat was often, in the old days, death, and always involved the loss of honour.

The result of this wise scheme has been to induce an almost excessive mildness in the Korean character. And even after porcelain hats gave way to shiny black horsehair imitations, it is not surprising that a race which was bound in honour to keep—at least—its spiritual hat unbroken has been the unresisting prey of its two predatory neighbours—China and Japan.

However, now we see the Korean in a new light.

A young generation has arisen which has never worn the mystic topper. Just as crinolines kept our grandmothers modest, so the national top-hat kept the Koreans slow to anger—and the disappearance of both crinoline and top-hat has

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swung the young generation across to the opposite extreme. Young Koreans, to be sure, billow along in the old voluminous Korean quilted robes—turned black side out in winter and white side out in summer—but they crown this orthodox garb now with Japanese schoolboys' forage caps.

And from under this impudent headpiece, the young Korean lends an ear to the hat-breaking theories now abroad in Bolshevik Siberia and in Young China.

Our town, therefore, has found itself lately afflicted with anti-Christian agitations.

It cannot honestly be said that this feeling has affected me or my family up to the present. For some reason which one would tremble to define, nobody has as yet suspected the inmates of this house of being Christians at all. The worst outrage that has been offered to me as yet was the flinging of a very small stone by a very small Korean boy in a magenta Eton jacket and white quilted plus-fours—and he fell down on his nose with the effort of his defiance.

But the active Christians—the missionaries whose desire it is to convert Koreans, not only by means of direct religious teaching, but also by a good hospital and school—have been much harassed. And far worse was the lot of a Korean evangelist, who came from Seoul to give a series of addresses to the converts and sitters-on-the-fence in our town. The Korean roughs of the town, feeling no doubt that they had made a sufficient study of comparative religions to justify them in



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taking up a strong attitude on the subject, ranged themselves actively against this man.

They opened their defiance by attending a concert over the preparation of which the missionaries and their converts had been labouring for many months.

The result of the labouring, as I understand from the exhausted missionary promoters of the entertainment, could hardly be called a triumph of musical perfection. The Korean singing voice is extremely loud and harsh. Neither the Korean ear nor the Korean temperament has as yet adjusted itself to the letter or the spirit of Western music. Korean optimism is such that Koreans are slow to admit their musical limitations, and the choir-mistress has to use a strong hand to restrain them from attempting—if I understand rightly—the works of Scriabin or the Group Six. But still, the concert, such as it was, was the result of enthusiasm and energy; the performers, at least, were prepared to enjoy it, and even the audience assembled in a hopeful mood.

Only when the concert had begun was it realised that the goats had invaded the sheep-fold, and that the audience included a considerable proportion of persons who were there to criticise the performance on grounds that were—at any rate—not strictly musical. The uproar from this section of the audience was so loud and persistent that not one note of the concert was heard from first to last. The goats most effectively out-bleated the sheep. The missionaries continued their un-

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heard entertainment with one hand, so to speak, while summoning the police with the other. The courageous Korean singers launched their efforts into the uproar, missing no item on the programme, and it is to be hoped that the recording angel listened in carefully, enjoyed the result, and put it down to the credit of the musicians—for nobody else heard one syllable.

The Japanese and Chinese police arrived and arrested the more active disturbers at the end of the concert.

But as each day of the Pan-Christian week succeeded day, it became more and more apparent that arrests made no difference—that enough disturbers always remained to wreck any meeting.

The intrepid Korean preacher was threatened at every turn with death. He walked about in a tight wad of policemen. He was implored to return to Seoul while he might, but retreat, I think, would have involved dishonourable damage to his invisible spiritual top-hat. He preached calmly over a bristling hedge of policemen to a roaring congregation of rioters who wore scarves over their faces to prevent recognition and facilitate escape.

The property of the elect suffered a great deal. Doors, windows, stoves and lamps were smashed. The defence had always to be concentrated on some of the lights, since, if the disturbers had been able to throw the scene into darkness, they could easily have carried out their threats on the evangelist.

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Whatever one may think of the missionary question in China, it is at least evident that these rioters were not acting upon high ethical grounds in agitating against the foreign teaching. The national ideal of the intact hat is surely smirched by these disturbances. Over the head of each rioter hangs, I think, the ghost of a cracked, if not shattered, top-hat—like an aura stained with unworthy sin—and this tell-tale phantom will not fail to catch the eye of the blue-faced devil who guards the gate of the Korean paradise.

THE SUGAR-BOX

LI SING's uncle was outdoor man at the Commissioner's house, and the Commissioner's cowshed was for Li Sing the gateway into an amazing world. On the threshold of the cowshed Li Sing would often stand for hours, watching intensely every movement of the cow's tail, sometimes doing his duty by lifting pails for his lame, lazy uncle, but more often listening to his uncle's talk about the perquisites attached to the service of foreigners. Sometimes the Commissioner's wife would come out of the brick house and talk to Li Sing's uncle in a curious, bursting, foreign voice, using unexpected and sometimes funny Chinese words. This extraordinary woman would sometimes, to Li Sing's surprise, hit him softly on the head with a flat palm and ask him if he wanted to go to England some day. Li Sing never supposed that an answer to these wild words was expected of him. He shrank away from the foreigner's hands, which seemed to him juicy and pink as though stained faintly with blood. The whole effect of foreign women was to Li Sing disgustingly over-sized and highly coloured; their clothes seemed made of a thousand senseless little

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pieces, and their feet and necks were like men's. It never occurred to Li Sing that foreigners were sane. To listen to this woman issuing orders to his dignified, gentle old uncle always threw Li Sing into a sort of trance of strangeness from which he was only roused by hearing his uncle making some mild joke behind the departing back of the foreign woman, referring, for instance, to her extraordinary ignorance of the domestic mechanism of a cow, and her unnatural reluctance to be informed of the details of the cow's various betrothals and confinements. She seemed less wise in these matters than was Li Sing's five-year-old sister, and yet she had at one time or another given birth to a small male foreigner herself. This child ran about the compound amusingly uttering Chinese curses in imitation of the *ma-fu*; it was knitted into a blue woollen covering as tight as its skin. Li Sing had walked round and round this child, and had discerned no opening by which the child could possibly get into its garment, so he supposed that its mother knitted the child into its clothes probably about once a month. How unpractical, how un-Chinese!

"The *T'ai-t'ai* spoke of another child to be born," said Li Sing to his uncle.

"That is her God she speaks of. Very soon it will be the feast-day of the foreign God's birth."

"Where do they keep their God? In the spiked temple in the Mission compound?"

"They have no God that one can see," replied the uncle. "It is just talk. At their last feast-day

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they gave me a picture in a frame of a man with long red hair and a small sheep. It did not look like a god. The frame came in useful for that photograph of myself which *Lo-mu-shih* made."

"Do they always give people pictures on their feast-days?"

"No. Last year they gave the cook's child a box containing lumps of sugar mixed with lemon. The child was sick."

Li Sing sighed. "How could I get such a box as that?"

"You should bow to her when she passes and bring her now and then perhaps a hibiscus flower from the tree that hangs over the Mission compound wall."

Li Sing was an awkward, selfconscious little boy, but, being inordinately fond of sugar, he followed literally his wise uncle's advice. He tied together with a dirty shred of rag two hibiscus flowers and a dandelion, and, snuffling nervously, sought the Commissioner's wife. One never knew what this preposterous woman would do next. Here she was, bent double over the earth, in a thick, shapeless garment caught up here and there by safety-pins, sowing sweet-peas. Li Sing clasped his stomach politely and bowed, but for a time the singular female did not notice him. When she did, she gave a loud, manly laugh. Li Sing recoiled a few steps and threw his bouquet between her enormous muddy boots.

"Look, *hua-chiang*, your little nephew is becoming quite a man of the world," she shouted

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to Li Sing's uncle. The old man smiled sweetly, and, with a murmured oath, commanded Li Sing to bow again. But terror overcame the unfortunate boy, and, uttering a faint, bleating cry, he fled at top speed from the compound, followed by the bellowing laughter of the Commissioner's wife.

However, his bold deed had the desired result. The next time he ventured into the cowshed, his uncle told him that he was invited to see a tree in the Commissioner's house.

"A tree!" echoed Li Sing in a disappointed voice. "I have seen many trees."

"This is a kind of game that the foreigners play," said the uncle. "You will have to wash your neck and remember to wipe your nose all the time."

Li Sing's heart sank, but, buoyed up by the hope of a sugar-box, he held to his determination to see the thing through. The day arrived. Li Sing's mother dressed him in a grey silk robe, and over that he wore a short black silk jacket. His head was shaved except for a little circular patch on the crown. Only once, when his grandfather died, had he been dressed so gloriously. He held his uncle's hand tightly as he approached the Commissioner's house. The hoarse, loud laughter of the Commissioner's wife could be heard from outside the front door, mingled with the wailing of missionary babies.

Li Sing and his uncle both bowed at the door. "Greet the Commissioner, greet the Commissioner's lady," said the uncle, and Li Sing clasped

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his hands before him and bowed, saying, in a voice much squeakier than he intended, "*Shui-wu-ssu . . . T'ai-t'ai. . . .*"

The missionary party was there—the pastor's wife and the three American lady missionaries (whom Li Sing believed to be the pastor's concubines)—but *Lo-mu-shih*, the pastor himself, was not visible. His five little daughters were running about dressed in white muslin with greyish woollen underclothes showing at the neck, wrist and knee. The Commissioner's little boy was for this occasion knitted into a very beautiful fluffy white woollen skin.

Li Sing's uncle did not make Li Sing greet the missionary party, because, in his opinion, missionaries did not know much about polite social usage. So Li Sing now had leisure to look about him. The furniture appeared to him incredibly large, heavy and expensive, but in the matter of arrangement it seemed like a house-moving—all the chairs and tables placed awry, with sagging cushions on the chairs, and straggling branches in large vases on the tables. In his mother's best room the chairs were properly arranged all in a row along the wall, the table was in the middle, and the only ornament was a spittoon.

The Commissioner's wife was behaving in the most violent way, seizing other people's babies by the ribs and throwing them up towards the ceiling with loud cries. Li Sing determined to kick her in the stomach if she should commit this outrage

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on him, but fortunately she seemed to recognise an age-limit. She did not leave him alone, however. She seized him by the hand and said in her ridiculous Chinese, "Here is the little gentleman who brings flowers to ladies. Now, as he is the oldest boy here, he shall pull this with me." She offered him one end of a gaudy crimson paper cylinder, but no sooner had he shyly grasped it than she twitched it violently away from him.

"You should hold the thing more firmly," said Li Sing's uncle. "You are spoiling the lady's amusement by letting go."

So Li Sing grasped the cracker with both hands, and was immediately shocked by a loud report. All the missionary babies began to scream more loudly than ever. The Commissioner, sitting in a large chair, with his hairy hands folded on his stomach, repeatedly called out something that sounded like "bla-fo". His wife, hooting with silly laughter, disengaged from the ruins of her toy a little purple paper roll, and, unrolling it, placed it on Li Sing's head. It was evidently some sort of foreign hat—typically useless, as Li Sing thought, for it would keep out neither rain nor sun.

The reports of crackers now echoed from all sides, and Li Sing became the possessor of a ring with a ruby in it. He was just wondering whether it was real when the Commissioner's child came and with a savage cry took it away from him. His uncle, however, when appealed to, said that the lost gem had undoubtedly been false. When a

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curtain at the far end of the room was drawn back, therefore, to disclose a tree blossoming with diamonds and candles and hung with golden fruit, Li Sing was ready to be sceptical about the genuineness of the marvel. Approaching the tree, he saw at once that the fruit was merely bright yellow glass balls tied to the branches with string. The coloured candles, however, awed him; they must have cost at least twenty cents each, he thought. Beside the tree, to his astonishment, stood a tall figure in a scarlet robe and a scarlet hood; the face was covered with a patently false white wool beard and whiskers. For a moment Li Sing thought it was a big doll, and then he noticed that, as he met the glance of the creature, it strangely closed one eye and opened it again, glaring at him the while.

“Who is this?” asked Li Sing, returning in some embarrassment to his uncle’s side.

“It is supposed to be the foreigners’ God, perhaps,” said the uncle, who was a little surprised himself.

It was obvious at least that the god was a foreign god, since his hands were hairy and pink like all foreigners’ hands. The god now seized some packages from a hiding place behind the tree, and began uttering names in a gruff and rather frightening voice. As each child, urged by its parents or guardians, went forward, it received a package. Each little missionary girl had a square box, doubtless containing lumps of lemon-sugar. Li Sing’s mouth began to water. The Commis-



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sioner's child had a toy train, which it at once broke. The Chinese cook's little girl wept on being given a doll with a black face and woollen hair. The Commissioner's wife received a small leather box containing jade beads (no doubt false like the rest, Li Sing thought), and when she had opened this she gave a loud halloo, approached her husband, put her arms round his neck and her lips to his cheek and made an abrupt sucking sound with her mouth. The Commissioner did not quail. These activities astonished Li Sing so much that when his own name was called he did not at first hear it. His uncle roused him, and he approached the scarlet-clad god. As he did so, the beard of the god fell off, and Li Sing at once recognised the red and perspiring face of *Lomu-shih*, the American pastor. How childish these foreigners were, making such efforts to deceive!

Li Sing received an oblong box wrapped in red paper. Triumph at last! He decided not to give his little sister any sugar, since it had made the cook's child sick. He undid the paper. Here was the box, of shiny wood, and on its lid was a picture of foreigners in red coats riding on horses, galloping after some spotted dogs. The box was empty. Li Sing turned suddenly hot, sick and crimson, as its disastrous emptiness burst upon him.

"It is to keep his pencils in when he goes to school," said the Commissioner's wife, shaking him boisterously by the shoulder.

"Bow to the lady," said Li Sing's uncle; but the boy's blood was up, and he would not

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bow. There was nothing to be gained by bowing now.

"Let us go home," he said in a choking voice.

"You must bow to the Commissioner and bow to the Commissioner's wife first," insisted his shocked uncle. But Li Sing's figure was obstinately rigid; he could only pull desperately at his uncle's sleeve.

"He wants an orange to take away," suggested the Commissioner's wife, and she gave him two oranges. Li Sing and his uncle left the house. In the garden Li Sing, uttering an obscene word, flung the oranges into a flower bed. In a moment, however, remembering that oranges cost three cents apiece in the market, he ran back in search of them and carried them away, pressed against his outraged, thumping heart.

"One should not expect too much of foreigners," said his uncle, spitting tolerantly into the Commissioner's rockery.

A DAY IN SEOUL, KOREA

SEOUL was an excited city; thrills of excitement ran up and down every street. A new shrine had just been built, and Seoul treated it as London treated the first Wembley; it was everybody's destination. An aristocratic Imperial envoy had come all the way from Tokio to open the shrine and to furnish its inner sanctuary with presents from the Japanese Emperor—two sacred mirrors and a sacred sword.

Of course, the joy was all Japanese joy; the shrine was a Japanese shrine, built on the site of an ancient Korean holy place. Koreans walked moodily about their city, Seoul, having their little top-hats knocked awry by Japanese flag-waggings; unseasonable gloom was expressed in the droop of every Korean moustache and in the angle of every Korean button-bowled pipe. But, still, you can't expect everything—and if you are a Korean, it is wiser not to expect anything. The Japanese have "freed Korea gloriously from the Yoke of China", and it is surely ungrateful of Korea to complain that one yoke feels very much like another.

Actually the Japanese are turning old, confused, smelly, beautiful Seoul into an "up-and-coming modern city". Motor roads, new railway

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stations, traffic regulations, Government buildings built in the best wedding-cake style, snappy policemen, bright military demonstrations and Imperial envoys in frock-coats certainly give Seoul a smart, brisk look that it could never before have possessed.

And the new shrine is really effective—probably much more effective than the old Korean sacred place. Up the face of a high sudden hill springs a very tall, simple marble stair. It is bridged at intervals by marble *torii* of the shape common in Japanese pictures—two pillars supporting a plain winged crosspiece. At the top of the long stairway—defended, it seems, from the pressure of the low sky only by a few gnarled cedar-tops—the shrine spreads out broad curving roofs over terraces, like a pale eagle brooding on its high nest.

Japanese processions thronged the streets of Seoul in honour of the opening of the new shrine. Red and white bubble lanterns and banners were threaded like beads along either side of every street, and between these festoons of colour processions came and went. Everywhere shouting coolies dragged or carried enormous platforms on which sat decorated flautists, cymbalists and graven images, fluting, crashing and goggling. The coolies worked much harder on this their holiday than ever they worked on working days; pouring with sweat, bursting with rhythmic, asthmatic cries, harnessed in festoons, they ran before their Juggernauts, encouraged by gaudily dressed leaders, who skipped along backwards in front of them.

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One of the most impressive processions was led by a file of horsemen in the fantastic armour of old Japanese warriors; their heads were helmeted with broad eaves, like pagodas, their faces were frightfully masked, their bodies were fitted together in elaborate dovetailings as though they were marionettes.

But the procession which charmed me most had as its centre a black cow as big as a house, made of canvas stretched on a wooden frame. Its head, curly-horned and scarlet-tongued, wagged facetiously on a pivot, and on its behind some conscientious official had glued a very small municipal licence of some kind, showing that even a twenty-foot cow must submit patiently to police regulations in Korea.

We drifted into a museum full of jade, brass jewelry and wood-carvings. And while we were there, a school-crocodile of little Koreans suddenly writhed in, under the command of a Japanese schoolmaster.

First little boys, two and two, in white Korean clothes topped with the Japanese peaked school cap, like baby bus-conductors—then little girls, two and two, in magenta tunics, white trousers, and apple-green bodices—then papas, two and two, in voluminous white, balancing the usual black top-hats—then mammas, two and two, with thick white kerchiefs jauntily round their heads and white balloon skirts over white padded trousers—then a rabble of grandparents in various shades of billowy white.

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The long whispering procession wriggled hastily round the institution; its Japanese commander never allowed anyone to pause and look at any of the museum's marvels, nor did he utter one word of explanation or exposition. The vision dissolved abruptly at the sunlit front door—the demands of education were satisfied. One can imagine a Japanese educationist citing this practice with a mild complacency. "No, we are not behind the West in modern educational methods. Even the children of conquered Korea need not envy your English city school children their opportunities to expand the mind by educational outings on holidays. . . ."

The real old Seoul was to a certain extent hidden by all these celebrations and rosettes. But the Koreans themselves never change. They have survived so many changes. New methods—new centuries—new patriotism imposed by conquerors—these things take no more root in them than alien trees in desert sand. They have a sombre immortality; the only power they have is the power of resisting change. The new civilisation is but a shadow passing over their sun. No invading banners can cheapen the lifting line of their broad city gates, serene outspreading hills of architecture. No parvenu marble stairways or winged pillars can improve their mountains, bleak brown pyramids, staring one at another across the thick uneven inlay of hive-like thatches that is old Seoul.

YI, THE COOK

YI, the cook, is a Korean, but unfortunately he is too sophisticated to wear the national top-hat and billowing white robes. Instead he wears a shirt with two-inch-wide mauve stripes and a childish sailor hat with a pale blue ribbon round it. He is a wide, though not a profound, linguist, speaking a little pidgin English, pidgin French, pidgin Chinese, Japanese and about six words of Russian. That is to say, he utters words in all these languages indiscriminately, but always fails to speak or understand the language in which his harassed employers are addressing him at the moment. If spoken to in English, he answers some quite imaginary and irrelevant question in French—if I take refuge in my very limited Chinese vocabulary, he will switch to a mild remonstrance in Russian. His Japanese seems fluent, judged by the noise alone, but it is never understood by natives of Japan.

Yi's virtues are those of the dog, and he ranks in our affections directly after our four dogs. He shares with them their capacity for irresponsible and rather ridiculous devotion—he will bring me

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a present of a sheaf of assorted and rather faded flowers in the same spirit as a dog will lay at my feet a little piece of chewed rag,—he shares with the dogs also their naïve light-heartedness and their touching sensitiveness to rebuke. His vices would be of a serious type, if anything connected with him could ever seem serious—he gets outrageously drunk about four times a month, and he is, it seems, a very bad husband. He left his wife in Seoul when he came to us, and has shamelessly neglected her ever since. “I ang-e-ry at my wife,” he tells us, giggling shrilly. “I talkee my wife—now je m’en vais—now I all-same dead. Money no can do, because I all-same dead. Ma femme talkee Consul Amerique—Consul Français—English Church madame—my wife talkee tout-le-monde I bad man. So I have write one-piece letter my wife, I write I am ang-e-ry—I all-same no wife now have got.”

“But, Yi, you have got plenty money now—you ought to send plenty money to your poor wife. You married her, didn’t you? and you must keep her. She can’t live without money.”

“My wife Christian now—English Church madame beaucoup argent—can give my wife beaucoup argent. I ang-e-ry, I all-same no wife have got.”

When Yi comes home drunk, our whole hill trembles. In the distance the sound of Yi coming home is like the sound of approaching bagpipes in the ear of the Sassenach. He reels along Missionary Row screaming pagan blasphemies in

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his own tongue—which is the working tongue of our missionaries,—but at our gate he switches to Chinese, knowing, even in that condition, that Korean flowers of speech would be lost upon us. He never can remember how to open our gate on these occasions, and stands outside howling in ear-splitting Chinese a chant of insults, the refrain of which is something like—“Master no good—master-wife no good—boy no good—coolie no good—*ma-fu* no good . . . Korean better than English—Korean better than Chinese—Korean better than Japanese . . .” etc. etc. The Chinese “boy” and *ma-fu* (groom) go to the gate bleating gentle and reasonable answers to all Yi’s irrational and offensive challenges. Chinese very seldom drink to excess themselves and they have no idea how to treat a drunken man. The three Chinese servants follow the lurching, squalling Yi about the garden, patiently replying to everything he says. The dogs—whose sense of humour is of exactly the kind touched by Yi’s vagaries—spring gaily about him barking wildly and pulling his flapping shirt-tails. Next morning Yi appears with his housekeeping book sticking out of a sling, his nose and one eye a mass of bruises and scratches.

“You were very drunk again last night, Yi.”

“No, madame, I no drink any wine—I only very much ang-e-ry with other man—other man méchant homme—he owe me tirty sen and he talkee By’m-by I pay and I talkee No by’m-by, I wantchee tirty sen toute-suite chop-chop, and he

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run away very much quick and I run after very much quick and he shut door bang and I——”

“No, Yi, that’s all nonsense talk, you were certainly very drunk indeed—everybody heard you. And look at your nose—you must paint it with iodine again. By and by you fall in riverside and be dead if you get drunk like this.”

Yi gives in at once with a disarming, one-eyed smile. “Excusez, madame, excusez, master,” he murmurs, bowing humbly right and left, and then begins reading sadly from his market book. “Turnpits, quinze sen—souplets, tirty sen—horse-inside for dog, cinq sen. . . .”

Yi has imposed his vocabulary to some extent on me; a radish will always be a *turnpit* to me now, and spinach, by some strange alchemy, has become irrevocably, *souplets*.

For a whole day after his ill-judged festivity, Yi is very sad, but next morning the sound of song again begins in the kitchen. It is always the same song, set to the words “Eh—ya—yow—ya”, and it begins in a very small whine but gets louder and louder—louder and—“*Yi, please, song too loud.*”

“Excusez, madame,” and the song sinks to a little wheeze again, “Eh—ya—yow—ya”, louder and louder. . . . He even sings over his newspaper. He is very proud of his newspaper, which a small Korean boy brings him every night. He squats on his haunches on the tennis-court at sunset, reading laboriously, singing gently as he reads. “My niss-paper,” the periodical is called, and he often brings it up in conversation, quoting items

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from it that he thinks will interest me. "English master called Shosh go homeside in big ship last week, my niss-paper talkee."

"Really, Yi, but do I know Mr. Shosh?"

"Master Shosh very much big master, have got very much big house, long time ago his small baby fall out window side, my niss-paper talkee. . . . Have got very much big earth-jump Japan-side, my niss-paper talkee." In order to make this graphic, he shakes the fruit we are bottling violently up and down, spilling half of it. "America-side woman have got small child avec trois jambes, my niss-paper talkee. . . ."

GOOD-BYE, MANCHURIA

COUNTRIES have a wilful way of turning their worst face toward one who arrives and their loveliest to one who says good-bye. Often, during a life of reluctant and various exile, I have found myself alighting with muffled curses at uninviting destinations and—a few months or a few years later—leaving the once-loathed spot to the tune of a sound like cracking heart-strings.

When I arrived in Manchuria two years ago, it was like straying into a nightmare. No train, it seemed to me, had ever inflicted upon its passengers so many frozen draughts, so many unwashed fellow-travellers, such uncomfortable and verminous seats or such a treeless, bladeless, khaki horizon. Iced dust blew in at every broken window, carping Japanese policemen blew in at every door. I remember I had brought with me Yi, the Korean cook, picked almost at random from among the citizens of Seoul—since cooks share with trees, birds, tigers, milch-cows and Bolsheviks the distinction of being absent from the Manchuria-Siberian borders.

“This place bad place,” said Yi, crying gently as he thought of his dear over-crowded Seoul. He

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had mislaid his hat; this was his invariable practice while travelling, as we afterwards found, and the loss had a profound psychological effect on him. I have a theory that the tradition of wearing a porcelain—or in more recent years horsehair—hat five sizes too small, frilly balanced on the skull, somehow inseparably connects the hat with self-respect in the Korean mind, and our cook, though he was a progressive fellow and wore a yellow knitted Balaclava cap in place of the precious topper of his forefathers, was always a worm without his hat. Tears with him, even at his most securely hatted moments, were always near the surface, and de-hatted, he made no effort to restrain them.

“Very much bad place,” he sobbed, on that first arrival, tears coursing down his simple face. “Missy more better go back Seoul.” And I admit that my tears came near to mingling with his.

But two years have passed since then, and Yi now has many merry (if destructive) drunks and romances behind him. And across our khaki Manchuria, flowers have come and gone as sunsets came and went, the rough cheerless trails lead my memory now to charming destinations. Even the train, on the day of our departure, had a noble sophisticated look to me, coming, as I did, from constant painful journeys in springless Manchurian “carriages-and-five” or broken-down *droschkies*. Once more Yi, the cook, was with us—dismissed two days before our departure for dancing in—(hatless, of course)—among our

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guests with the words, "Missy, I am plenty drunk, dinner no can do."

There were no perforated railway carriages or jostling crowds as we left Manchuria. Japanese officials—since we were travelling as officials ourselves—vied with each other in providing us with special compartments, lined with red plush, and in detailing minions to feed us all the way on persimmons, apples, sweet biscuits and tea.

Yi, the cook, and I—at opposite ends of our compartment of state—glued our noses to our privileged windows and wept in chorus. For what a different face Manchuria turned to her departing guests! The khaki grass, swept by an unusually kindly wind, had a polished bloom of silver overlaid upon the gold, as it waved up the slopes. The autumn scrub-oaks wore unnaturally brilliant colours—scarlet, lemon-yellow, plum blue, dark crimson and orange. The peppers, laid out to dry on the village roofs, were sheets of scarlet in the sun and grape-colour where the shadow preserved the hoar-frost on their brightness. The osiers by the river were red with the false spring blush that they always wear just before winter kills all colour. Even the Koreans, surging about the dingy stations, seemed almost splendid to eyes looking their last upon them. The quasi-white robes seemed white as never before, the little blowaway top-hats seemed almost to make sense. There was even dignity in the common sight of a Korean baby taking nature's nourishment under difficulties as its mother caught her train at a cowl-like canter

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—thus killing two birds with one stone. The woman's puny wisp of hair was coiled like a unicorn's horn on her forehead, an older baby than the one at her breast was bound upon her lower spine by a crudely coloured blanket, her grey-white trousers twinkled beneath her voluminous skirts, the knot of her head-napkin had thrown its starchy jauntiness to the wind. -But still Yi and I looked at her with the wet glamorous eyes of farewell, and she is part of Manchuria which has been so much kinder to us both than it promised to be.

“Yi—what have you done with that new fur hat of yours?”

“Oh, missy—hat have lose—work have lose—everything have lose. . . . Oh, missy, I no want-chee go way. . . . Yow—yow—yow——”

Collapsed in the corner of our Exclusive Compartment, the child-like fellow literally yelled with distress.

The mere green trees of Korea veiled from us our austere Manchurian uplands for the last time.
Good-bye, Manchuria.

ON THE WAY HOME

ON a little hill in Fusan stands—or rather soon will stand—a large temple. Fashions in Korean temples seem to change rapidly, and wherever you go in Korea you find the shabby, threadbare temples being given to the poor and new temples being built by those who can afford to enclose their worship in a fashionable new shell every season. The topmost shrine of the Fusan temple looks like a blackboard illustration to a lesson in angles; all its beams are produced like Euclid's straight lines—continued *ad absurdum*—so that the thing looks like a dummy windmill, or a spikey black star on the piney skyline. To this shrine come Fusan's rare strangers—on their way home. Homeward-bound exiles always climb hills—I think in order to try and see over the imprisoning blue horizons, to gauge their distance from dear Piccadilly. Nothing but such a craving could have dragged me up the long steep railless flight of stone steps that leaps, it seems, straight from the shrine's doorstep into the sea. One of wavering balance, like myself, reels puffing up the steps, clutching vaguely at any husband, beggar, abbot

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or worshipper that may come handy. But suddenly one notices the little purple wood-flowers that glaze the steep hill on either side, under the crooked pines, and the kindly even brilliance has a more steadying effect than any handrail.

Everyone in Fusan walks upon that hill, happy to hear the clanging of stone being chipped into temple-shape, happy to see the thickly blue triangles of sea fitted in among the steep green islands of the harbour, happy, above all, to see and to follow such exotic strangers as a couple of homesick Anglo-Saxons. Japanese in George Robey bowlers and Tony Weller greatcoats, Japanese in their natural kimonos, the muscular movement of their little virile figures animating the indolent shape of their garments, Japanese women with outer kimonos hunched into an effect of deformity by the thick *obi* beneath, and their feet, on thick wooden *geta*, turned sharply inward, so that their gait has a sort of weave effect as they ding-dong about the temple ways, Korean men with white-quilted robes and a superfluity of hoods and hats, Korean women wearing a dress that must be peculiar to Fusan—consisting of flowing white head-sheets knotted about the brow by a crown of twisted linen and reaching to the feet, like traditional Bedouins; little beggars wailing underfoot, having followed us rich and rare *igirisu* from the wharf. . . . The beggars of Fusan seem to be all under four years old—much younger than their clothes, obviously. They play gambling games on the wharf with

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loud manly laughter and loud manly oaths. But when a launch full of likely-looking bourgeoisie approaches, the little beggars pull themselves together and detail two of their number to go and cry on the spot at which the launch is likely to land. They cry with a precocious skill and, though I know no Korean, I am sure that their murmured, snivelling tale of orphanhood, starvation, homelessness, disease and lack of education is set forth to the most artful advantage. Their strength, it seems, scarcely suffices to propel their weary feet along among the hampering folds of their too-long jackets, yet they can curvet dismally just six inches ahead of the most determined Anglo-Saxon pedestrian for miles, as faithful to the striding knee of their chosen victim as a moribund fly is to the nose. Their retort to all protests—a snuffle and a sob—is always ready, and the only argument they hear is the potential clink of the copper *sen* in the victim's pocket. And when finally the besieged coins are forced out of their fortress, what a change comes over the tactics of the attackers! Pirouetting with loud shouts of coarse triumph, they run off, dry-eyed, to rejoin their boon companions, trailing tatters blowing in the wind. One does not need a Korean dictionary to translate their cry—"Oh, boy—what d'ye know—I pulled down a dime outa that boob. . . ."

And so we are reminded that we are ghosts, ghosts from another world, walking among the homely shadows of the hill. Everywhere we go

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we spoil something, we change something, we pay our way, as ghosts must, with silver, or in a coinage of shock and surprise and exoticism in a homogeneous world. It is difficult to remember that we have our own place, that somewhere our Kensington Gardens absorb their damp air, where no crowd would collect to see us treading the kindly grass, that somewhere a bus-conductor waits for us who will look only at our pennies because our faces are mercifully no Experience for him.

At a little natural junction of paths in the woods, a Japanese girl sat on a log, crying loudly. Beside her sat a man, trying severely, as men will, to argue her tears away. Filled, as my feminist mind is, with chronic indignation at the too-logical Japanese view of the One Use of Woman, I leaped to the conclusion that the girl had tried to escape from the licensed house to which she had been sold, and that this was her wicked uncle, or the brothel-master, commanding her to return to captivity. So I directed an appalling squint of hatred towards him as I passed, and this, I felt, was perfectly safe, not only because every Japanese man, considered from the feminist point of view, deserves every squint that an itinerant suffragette can inflict upon him, but also because no mere female glare would ever be in the slightest degree noticeable to a male Japanese, any more than would be the mute curse of a tea-kettle. So I had the satisfaction of having said my say, without the usual danger.

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My attention was distracted by a pink-brick mission chapel, heaving into view against an exquisitely restrained background of curved, smoke-coloured Japanese roofs. The steeple of the chapel was like a pink hiccough against the serene monotone of curving eaves. A Japanese artist, seated in front of an elaborate easel, was painting this example of the culture of Watsonville, Wisconsin, or Cardiff, Wales. It probably seemed to him as "picturesque and quaint" as the pagoda at Wembley seemed to us. About him gambolled his disciples—seven or eight little girls in the hot red kilted school dresses that have, by government order, replaced the kimono for little girls of the age that sometimes forgets to trip discreetly. I sat on the bank and asked to look at their drawings. Any one of their productions would have made an excellent present to the retiring pastor from his devoted parishioners; they were really convincing echoes of the pink hiccough and, framed in crimson plush or a border of sea-shells, would have vibrated the heart-strings of anyone who had loved the graceless and wistful architectural exile—as doubtless somebody loved it. This exchange of eastern and western ideals of Culture suggested to me that just as we of the more Cultured British Bourgeoisie are learning to surround ourselves with lacquer biscuit-boxes, fancy goldfish, scroll pictures, braziers, rice-bowls and china pillows, so, perhaps, are the refined Japanese mezzo-brows beginning to live reverently among wool-mats,

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aspidistras, cocktail shakers artistically mounted on gilt brackets, jazz cushions and pigs with plush pincushion saddles. And, in the same way, our cheaper platitudes are becoming their philosophy and their penny oracles are bound in vellum for us.

At any rate, the pink chapel was obviously blushing with pleasure and surprise at finding itself admired by a section of the heathen which it had, one supposes, scarcely, in its wildest dreams, hoped to impress.

My eye, wandering past this centre of artistic energy, fell once more upon the weeping girl, now sitting on a new log close by. She was still crying as loudly as ever, but the man was now sitting beside her beaming lovingly at her disordered face and patting her hand. My rapid imagination instantly changed the plot of the story to one of thwarted true love, or the shared pangs of bereavement, and I threw a sentimental glance of languishing approbation towards the man. I need hardly add that it passed as completely unnoticed as my previous glare of fury. However, one glance, as I hoped, cancelled out the other, and so a moral debt was paid.

But oh, to be in Kensington Gardens again, where men and women are labelled clearly across their homely Nordic faces, and where a shop-assistant discussing the furniture question with his intended bride is unmistakably distinguishable from a white slave trader at his deadly work. Oh, to be part of things again, no more to be mere

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audience. Can't we go back to the launch now, and get quickly on the way home again?

The launch doesn't look as if it were on its way to Piccadilly. It is already stuffed with white-clad Koreans with mild drugged faces. As we sink down on the low wooden bench in the cockpit, a shell of interknitted arms, legs, bundles, umbrellas, crouching torsos and strings of dried fish closes over us as though we had sunk into a well. Is it time for the launch to start? Nobody knows. Nobody else has a watch. Seeing the mechanic's eye straying trustfully to my wrist, I realise the situation at once and nimbly put the hands on half an hour. By fair means or foul, I must get to Piccadilly soon. The rackets engine starts, deceived with touching ease. Somebody's knees are on our shoulders, somebody's horsehair top-hat is pressed against my cheek; deep in our pit of humanity we are no more aware of our course than are trussed fowls. Through the open skylight we can see the stars swirl. The engine breaks down, the stars stand still. Probably some jammed passenger's beard has become entangled in the machinery. We rock upon unseen waters, listening confusedly to the lapping of the swell and to the belching shouts of steamers warning us to get out of the way. Blindfold in our close entangling net of incomprehensible fellow-creatures, the continuity of probable things seems to me to be broken; anything might lie outside this dungeon of dovetailed humanity. Will these wriggling walls dissolve in a moment and leave me

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free, a Cockney among Cockneys, on Tilbury Dock?

No; a Japanese flag and a paper lantern, hung on a spar, swing across the skylight. A Japanese policeman wants to see my passport. We are still too far from home. . . .

BETWEEN KOBE AND SEOUL

WHEN I got up in the morning, the sun was just rising—a round rayless copper sun looking through a fog over the shoulder of a flaunting, square-sailed Japanese fishing-boat. It seems that Japanese painters have painted such scenes so persistently that nature in Japan simply has to rouse herself and show that she can do it too. You never see nature in these impressionistic brushwork moods except in Japan—and in Japan you rarely see anything else. You begin to look for the artist's signature at the upper left-hand corner of every sky. Between Yokohama and Kobe the mountain Fujiyama—a smokey triangle with a tiny white snow-tip—looked so exactly like its pictures that I began to wonder whether perhaps the real mountain had ceased to exist and whether the scene was now nothing more than a gigantic *kakemono* unrolled above Japan for the benefit of tourists.

But one cannot live imprisoned in a picture, and at Kobe I escaped into a railway station as noisy and ugly as the most unsentimental traveller could wish. On the bookstall the only paper written more or less in the English language was an Ameri-

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can movie magazine. All the pretty little Japanese mothers in the waiting-room, humbly wearing their traditional flowery kimonos, white two-toed stockings, high pattens and complicated hair stiffened with varnish and propped with combs—had ambitiously dressed their babies in hideous discordant parodies of English clothes. The climax of the baby was always the hat, generally of an unwholesome pink plush and always much too big for its wearer. The baby peered beneath its hat like a little yellow Tweedledum. As for the men, when they wore foreign clothes, they looked like frogs; when they wore their natural kimonos, they looked like remote dark panthers.

My train, as though the engine were the needle of a huge sewing-machine, ran a seam along the southernmost hem of Japan. We chugged almost all day along the beautiful shore of the Inland Sea. Between rows of gnarled pine trees and the wing-like roofs of temples, I saw the calm sea lifting up distant dark mountains, I saw the fishing-boats, like little sharp white-and-yellow flames, bent all one way by the sunny winds of that sea, and the same wind ravelling threads of smoke from the distant villages.

Japanese officials came and bowed to me. I bowed in reply. They bowed in counter-reply. They brought up and introduced more officials who bowed. We all bowed. My back began to ache, but I supposed that my great fame as a minor writer of High-class Fiction had reached Japan and that these were local dignitaries about

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to present me formally with the Freedom of Shimonoseki. But alas—one of them knew one word of English—a knowledge which he doubled by pronouncing the word as two: “Tick Ket”. I produced my ticket, bowing. We all bowed again. The ticket, waving in the air, became quite limp before it was at last punched in mid-bow. This Japanese bowing habit is exceedingly gratifying to the stranger and I have no fault to find with it except when it accompanies the handing of soup. The bow then becomes not only superfluous but positively dangerous.

Late at night I reached Shimonoseki and hurried on to a tootling ship which, after it had torn the hearts out of feverishly hurrying travellers by its tootles, confessed at last that it had no intention of starting for about an hour and a half. Finding that, though the ship was not nearly full, I had not been given a cabin to myself, I bribed a steward to move me to an empty cabin. Bowing as he accepted the bribe, he introduced me to a bowing official with gold piping and gold buttons. Awed by the buttons, I doubled my bribe and had pressed two *yen* into his hand before I realised that I was addressing the captain of the ship. He accepted the money with perfect politeness and himself chose me a new cabin, even condescending to inspect it first. As he opened the port-hole, he said suddenly, “Frash air—verygood”. But the worst of speaking in a foreign tongue is that you lay yourself open to a reply beyond understanding, and so my kind captain found. He hurried away,

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bowing in confusion before my onslaught of hygienic agreement.

At seven next morning, the peninsula of Korea, looking rather flushed and wild, came alongside. The wharf was lined with the amusing figures of Koreans. All that day I travelled through Korea smiling at the Koreans with a silly touristic smile. The Korean dress is always white and always superficially clean. Koreans do not seem to do any work, for fear of dirtying their white robes or knocking their little top-hats awry. They let their conquerors get hot and rich doing the work of Korea; they leave it to silly giggling tourists to get smutty and crooked-hatted puffing in trains through their lazy red mountains.

CLIMBS AND CHRYSANTHEMUMS

A GRATIFYINGLY optimistic letter of introduction from a Japanese friend presented me as a European Celebrity to the Nippon Yusen Kaisha—one of the biggest Japanese shipping companies. As a result I became the guest of the company in Kobe for a day.

A kind and most efficient Japanese bear-leader was provided to lead me—a rather moth-eaten and anxious bear—about the sights of Kobe.

I had often visited Kobe before without seeing any sights at all. The ordinary traveller arriving in the port of Kobe steps on shore hurriedly with a little prosaic list in his hand—the aftermath of a thwarted shopless twelve days on the Pacific Ocean—(*two yards silk elastic—new toothbrush—repair typewriter—buy little Buddha for Minnie—meet Tommy Oriental Hotel cocktail . . .*). After an hour or two of wrestling with rickisha men and an unfamiliar coinage, the traveller returns on board with a feeling that the spirit of Kobe has been sufficiently absorbed.

But he is quite wrong.

Kobe is not only an Up and Coming Burg, full of typewriters, cocktails and silk elastic. It is

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also a beautiful town, winged with shrines and pierced by sharp cedar-shaded heights from which one sees great spaces of sea and city.

My helpful bear-leader being a Japanese, most of the sights to which he led me were, of course, more or less American sights. Few young modern Japanese enjoy being complimented by tourists on their " Sacred Places Hoar with Age ", their " Oriental Calm " or their " Quaint Old-world Customs ". Temples, gorgeous old silks and crumbling Buddhas are all very well, but it seems that young Japan is prouder of her more prosaic triumphs—her skyscrapers, her department stores, her tramway system and her fire brigades.

I know the great department store of Kobe extremely well now—far better than I know my native Whiteley's.

Panting with asthma and admiration, I followed my kind guide at great speed up seven flights of stairs on foot, and round every department—even that of flannelette underwear. The place looked gloriously like Whiteley's to me—only a little more vivid; the shoppers, in flowery kimonos, were lovelier than Bayswater housewives, and the gaily-dressed children besieging the man who was giving away balloons looked like a bed of poppies waving in the wind.

My cicerone and I paused at the roof garden, only because there was nothing left to climb to except the sky, and I had time to admire the delicious wet white bulbs and fresh dewy trees of

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the gardeners' department, and to gasp, "What a wonderful place—but I have yet to see the elevators, haven't I? . . . I *am* so much interested in elevators. . . ."

Many Kobe sights seem to involve swift and determined scaling of heights, and much as I admire that progressive city, I shall always involuntarily associate it with a sense of incipient heart-failure.

Besides the skyscraper, there was a waterfall, a high-perched reservoir and several unusually steep parks. To the reservoir one climbed up tilted shaded arcades lined with pretty toy-booths; an artificial lake was fed by a fine sonorous cascade, which clove the thickly wooded heights. As to the parks, from each high shadowed terrace one caught a new sight of a mist and sun-haunted Kobe, always seen through a palisade of holiday-making children. Low crooked steps led up and up beneath crooked velvet-green pines to new terraces and new horizons.

When at last we condescended to the level streets, we were met by two specially padded "de luxe" rickishas, which whizzed us along the secret, low-roofed, blind-walled streets of the expensive Japanese Mayfair. We joined more gay crowds of children in a beautiful wide shrine to a long dead warrior—a place fluttering with pigeons and vibrating with the voices of bells and gongs.

We explored the theatre street, and I lagged behind my brisk guide to look at the movie

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posters of straddling top-knotted samurais chopping each other—or themselves—to pieces.

The old classic Japanese dramas are still sufficiently beloved by an older generation to be converted into movies, but the younger generation, my guide said, “sees that American movie is better”. I tried to argue about this, but my guide’s eye was caught by a high tower, unfinished but still climbable.

“You will climb up to top of tower?” he asked anxiously.

It evidently seemed to him that his day’s work was unfinished while one tower remained unclimbed in Kobe. I was grateful but firm at last, as I explained to him that my brain worked much better at a height of five feet three inches from the ground.

A luxurious automobile met us at the foot of the scorned tower, and we drove out to Suma, a beautiful shell-pink ribbon of shore thinly separating old, quiet pine forests from a quiet, sunset sea. The silver fishing-boats could almost come within shade of the trees. Not often does one see an old, consistent forest, like that one, uninterrupted by irrelevant undergrowth; nothing between the strong, red trunks but needle-covered ground and curved shadows. I could send my imagination out on endless romantic journeys across that smooth, striped scene . . . there was “Once Upon a Time” in the air.

The last Kobe wonder that we saw was a chrysanthemum show.

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The chrysanthemums that—tier on tier—lined the corridors along which we wandered were at first just chrysanthemums, growing exquisitely and exotically; but vertically, as nature intended them to grow. As we penetrated further and further into the exhibition, however, the inspirations of chrysanthemum fanciers became more and more delirious—innocent chrysanthemums were twirled and tortured into the shapes of bicycles, of spiders, of explosions, of geometrical problems. And, finally, we came to booths in which were life-sized tableaux built of chrysanthemums.

The same samurais as we had seen in the movie posters—only now expressed in chrysanthemums—were leaping the same swashbuckling leaps, waving two-handed swords in their chrysanthemum grip. Chrysanthemum heroes were committing suicide, municipal disputes of a thousand years ago were depicted at the moment of being solomonically settled by chrysanthemum Shoguns, chrysanthemum princesses were being rescued from chrysanthemum dragons by princes clothed almost entirely in chrysanthemum epaulettes, and the last tableau showed the tortures of hell, and red chrysanthemum demons tearing out with pincers the little pink chrysanthemum tongues of little sinners done in mauve michaelmas daisies.

A chrysanthemum on the river's brim (or anywhere else) will never be just a chrysanthemum to me again.

So I finished my fine day in Kobe with a slightly instructed feeling; out of the mouths of

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chrysanthemums I had learnt disquieting lessons. But I still look back happily to the pine forests of Suma, to the great steep-growing woods that look down on misty Kobe, and to the department stores that so gaily scrape Kobe's skies. And I feel glad that Japan is so wise as to let these greater marvels of nature and of artifice grow as they will, without twisting them, at least, into a moral.

SINECURES IN JAPAN

AT Nara there is a huge Buddha, big enough for the most exacting American tourist. For the benefit of such exacting tourists, kind priests distribute little pamphlets giving the measurements of their Buddha—how many men could sit on the lobe of his ear—how his eyelash compares with the Statue of Liberty's thumb—how many years it took to put on Buddha's acres of gold make-up—and other higher mathematics. But I have no head for figures, and though I seem to remember vaguely that Buddha's nose was exactly twice my own height, that fact does not bring to my mind the real impressiveness of the great calm figure. For the benefit of my own memory, I should best describe the size of Buddha by calling it Albert-Memorial size, more or less, with the spikes shorn off.

In his broad-eaved, dusty, dusky house, the tremendous old dozing god makes a fine show. To maintain his peace, the growling sound of a huge bell—a sound much more solemn than silence—comes intermittently from the bell-pavilion among the trees outside. But Buddha's domination and serene sufficiency are, at Nara,

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illusions. Were he as big as Everest, as gold as sunset, he could not possess the sacred gardens of Nara; and though his bell should ring a sky-full of fantastic sound, it could not rouse the ear with a sound so immediate as that made by the dancing, rushing feet of the sacred deer under the cryptomerias. For Nara is a Shinto place, a great out-of-door temple in honour of life, and Buddha, after all, seems but a visitor there. To Shintoism belong the dark mountainous trees, the grassy slopes crowded with worshippers in fluttering kimonos and with spinning bright oil-paper umbrellas, the jungles of mossy stone lanterns which—like little peaked stone dovecotes—seem to open their countless doors to winged things, birds, blessings or little angels. And to Shintoism belong the deer.

If you stand anywhere in Nara and call *Ko-ko-ko-ko-ko*, about five hundred deer hurry towards you, each supposing that you have addressed it personally. Even in the shopping street they stand or stroll; bicycles cannot startle them, motors have to go round them, rickishas spell tourists to them, and a stout stag may often be seen holding up a giggling rickisha coolie at the point of the antler. For the Shinto deer look upon human beings, and especially tourists, as simple bun-purveyors, and the cry *Ko-ko-ko-ko-ko* is an invitation to the feast. They do not move quickly or even delicately towards their entertainers; indeed, if the truth must be told, every sacred deer in Japan suffers obviously from chronic

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indigestion. It cannot be said to be a victim to what the advertisements rather crudely call "that feeling of fullness after meals", because there is no period in the life of a sacred deer that could be accurately described as "after meals"; no interval separates one meal from another except the few seconds necessarily occupied in staggering from one admirer to another.

Obsessed by the delights of the flesh though the deer may be, their faces still retain that look of innocent spirituality typical of their race. The portly stag, while deftly shouldering away his wife from her share of the food or viciously kicking his child for nozzling at a fallen crumb, still looks at you with that large-eyed, other-worldly gaze which so impressively reminds you of his sacred status; his chiselled pointed face, tipped with a polished nose and delicately nibbling mouth and haloed by the wide ears, always retains an ascetic quality, in spite of everything.

The sacred horse, always standing in a stall at the gate of a Shinto temple, is not obliged, it seems, to consider appearances so much. He never meets your eye with an inspired glow—indeed, he never has time to do so, for he is always conscientiously bent over his manger disposing of sacred beans. An ecstatic sinecure, surely. The guide-book says that a horse dedicated to Shinto gods, whatever colour he may have been born, always rapidly turns white, since the gods prefer their horses so. But I think the hair of any horse that took its duties seriously

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would turn white with the simple effort of keeping pace with such a ceaseless stream of food. Not a bean, of course, must be left uneaten, for fear of offending some anxious devotee, or deflecting some vital impulse of worship. No wonder every sacred horse's bulging flanks are flecked with the silver that speaks of premature responsibility.

I wish that I could get employment as a sacred authoress, in a little stall, perhaps, at the door of St. Paul's Cathedral, with publishers flocking all day to my door pressing royalties upon me without ever demanding any work in return. I can't help feeling sometimes that the Church of England has not made the most of its opportunities.

THE COMPULSORY FEMINISTS

THE two long seats of the tram to Hiroshima were packed, not with human passengers, but with bundles, suitcases, fruit baskets, bales of dry-goods and trussed chickens. The passengers were mostly standing. No Japanese seems to feel injustice in being obliged to strap-hang while a crate of new-laid eggs remains seated—though the eggs have not paid fare. With truly British crudeness, we removed two market baskets and a string of dried fish on to the floor and sat down. The passengers looked surprised and I thought I heard the conductor murmur a few words of apology to the dethroned hardware, but every one was too polite to reproach us. On the contrary, we almost immediately earned praise. An aged couple tottered into the tram. Their withered hands tremulously sought straps to hang to. Not a suitcase offered them its seat; not a bunch of bananas stirred to make room for them. The fine old chivalrous traditions of one born and bred in Number Thirty-One buses from Earl's Court Road to Notting Hill Gate asserted themselves, and S—— rose and pressed the old lady into his seat. All the Japanese seated among their bundles

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gazed proudly at him, as keepers might gaze at a well-trained chimpanzee. The man next to S——'s vacated seat was especially pleased. He wore a very small billycock hat—like George Robey's—and a very large caped ulster, and he bowed invitingly to the old lady as though he had offered her his own seat. The old husband quavered a courtly *Arrigato*, to S——, but our assertive neighbour intercepted the thanks. He bowed on all sides, murmuring something that must have meant, "Not at all—don't mention it—a pleasure, I assure you," as he withdrew one coat-tail from the place sacrificed by S——. We all felt obliged to feel grateful to him; even S——, now squeezed among the strap-hangers, bowed modestly in his direction.

We had been given to understand that Hiroshima was a Beauty Spot, so we were a little shocked to be released from our tram at its terminus in a large, hard, German-looking square, bounded by a railway station on one side and by taxi ranks on three others. The station showed an inviting sign in English—Inquiries—so we hurried to inquire. But Inquiries was the only English word it knew. There were two men labelled Inquiries, and they were both very bright and helpful in intention, but, though full of Inquiries, they unfortunately knew no Answers. S——, on his way home from China, could write Chinese characters. Inquiries could read them. But the meaning of Chinese characters has become worn by use into other forms in the Japanese mind,

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in very much the same way as the American vocabulary has outpaced the English in certain respects. If you handed a London policeman a paper inscribed with the words, "See here, buddie, put me wise to the high-lights of this burg," most of the words would convey something to his mind, but the general meaning might well elude him. This was the effect of the written conversation with Inquiries. However, one of them must have enjoyed a classical education or something, for after about forty minutes of merry hieroglyphic backchat, scribbled on the flyleaf of an old railway schedule, our requirements filtered through, and our informants began suggesting destinations.

"Girls' High School?"

"No."

"City Reservoir?"

"No."

"Electricity Plant?"

"No."

"Zoo?"

"No."

"Biggest Department Store?"

"No."

"Aged temple?"

"Yes, yes, stop a minute, that'll do. . . ."

But they couldn't stop, their minds were too fertile, now that the burgeoning had begun.

"Home for the Blind? Tannery? Barracks?
Very old tree? Girls' High School?"

"No, *no*, no. . . ."

THE COMPULSORY FEMINISTS

Helpful to the point of ecstasy, they hurried with us to a taxi stand and poured instructions into the driver's ear. The driver, after about fifteen more minutes of talk, turned to us and remarked in English, "You wish make visit to Girls' High School?" And so we were driven off protesting.

"Temples — mountains — seashore — maple-trees—ancient castles. . . ."

He nodded with the sunny patience of the obstinate and in a moment drew up at the gate of the Girls' High School. Our British blood was up; we sat firmly in the car. After waiting in vain for our eager departure from his side, the driver turned to us, thoroughly at a loss.

"Girls' High School."

"We do not want it. Please take it away. Mountains — temples — maple trees (etc. etc.). . . ."

He thought for a long time.

"You shall see temple of father's father's father's father of Mr. A——, he build Girls' High School."

The temple, sure enough, stood at the far end of an old avenue of cryptomerias, between old *torii* and stone lanterns. But we had lost interest in the temple from the moment of its connection with the Girls' High School.

"A very notable family, evidently, the A—— family," we said kindly. "Now take us to see maple trees."

"Maple trees?"

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I drew a maple leaf on the back of his licence. At first he thought it was a five-legged ox, and offered to drive us to the slaughter-house, but when he realised that it represented a wonder of nature unadorned, his fountain of ideas was checked. We drove aimlessly about Hiroshima, constantly crossing little tight Japanese rivers on little tight Japanese bridges; the rivers were tucked between the jutting carved grills of little tight Japanese balconies. We drove about the aeroplane field, guiltily hoping that we might not, inadvertently, catch sight of a Japanese military secret and be shot at once. But no, there were only cavalry and artillery recruits riding and driving busily about in figure-eights. Whenever a gun came to rest, a red plush arm-chair was placed behind it, presumably for officers exhausted by the effort of imparting information. (I hope this is not a military secret.)

At the foot of a hill, our driver said, "Ha", and leapt from the taxi, beckoning us to follow. Follow we did, up a steep piney path, fixing our eyes hopefully on temple roofs beetling over the hill crest above us. "Ha", sighed our driver in relief, and we found ourselves fitted on to the tail of a crocodile of Japanese schoolgirls toiling up the hill under the command of a brisk little school-master. "The Girls' High School," whispered our driver reverently.

The poor girls at the end of the queue were gasping and staggering with weariness. "They are all very tired," I said, and the driver, beaming

THE COMPULSORY FEMINISTS

over this proof of our interest in female education, translated my subtle comment to all the girls within earshot. They neighed with amusement.

"Why are they all going up here?" I asked.

"It is goodness," said the driver.

But at the top of the hill the poor girls did not do anything particularly good. They took out little handkerchiefs full of *bento* to eat, and sat and panted with their mouths full. Our driver wanted us to stand and watch them. This was what Hiroshima had to show! But we, with tourist irrelevance, looked at the shrines and the view. The heavy exquisite roofs of the shrines seemed to hang in mid-air, unsupported—there always seems so little wall to so much roof, in a Japanese shrine. Far away across the neat busy city, there was a fairy-like tall pagoda, built of moth's wings and sunlight.

"What is that? Surely not the Girls' High School again?"

"Oh no—that is not new-style like Girls' High School. It is old-style castle. Too old. Not good."

"Take us to it at once."

We stood at last in its shade. It was a fortress, a five-storey pagoda, in sunny white plaster and carved, weather-worn wood. The lowest storey, rooted on a high square rock pediment, was very solid, but the winged topmost tier looked as light as a bird. Its only eyes were arrow loopholes—frail carved wooden grills. About the rocky foot was a moat, flushed with pink lotuses. Beside the

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thick-studded door of the fortress grew a very tall cryptomeria; its crest swayed greenly above the topmost flying eaves. And in the green garden of the fort, very old weather-tortured pines lay twisted, almost prone with age.

“How old is it?”

“Twenty-nine thousand year.”

“Good heavens! Twenty-nine thou——”

“Or twenty-nine hundred, perhaps,” said the driver, looking at us severely. “Never mind. This place no good. Nobody live here. Too old. Girls’ High School is only——”

And he took us away to see some schoolgirls dancing and doing Swedish exercises in a park. There were waterfalls and carefully trained trees. There were deer browsing on lawns and seals diving in lakes. There were maple trees. But the little schoolgirls wore grey crochet tights and screwed pigtails.

Who says the Japanese are anti-feminist?

YOKOHAMA, 1925

YOKOHAMA was spread sadly under a heavy rainy sky; the port seemed to radiate hopelessness over the heavy sea. The breakwater past which we entered the harbour was loaded with junk; it looked like a jointed toy snake; it was built up with old crates, old bales, old tanks, old wheels, old boilers. . . . Everything that had no value seemed to have come to that narrow frail foothold from the dangerous mainland, and to have been forgotten.

Our ship was moored to a wilderness of mud which humped itself between the broken wharf and the water. The concrete of the wharf was in parts broken like a biscuit and in parts crimped like a switchback in even waves. But on the wharf there was a bustle of reconstruction; engines, cranes and pile-drivers were at work under the control of hundreds of coolies in crested tunics and cotton tights. The wharf was almost the only part of Yokohama I saw that seemed to be awakening to the future again.

The rest of the city was a desert. Especially it had the dreadful flatness of a desert. When I saw it last it was a tall city cloven by streets like

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deep narrow canyons. But now it was flat; across it you could see the roots of low hills on one side and the hulks of ships in the harbour on the other. At the end, the Bluff, deserted now, stood split like a great red cheese. The city was shockingly little, seen thus prone; it was nothing but a field full of rubble. Just as to see a man dead brings home the realisation of the insignificance of strong bodies, so this dead town, which I knew as an elaborate gallery of rich streets in which one could lose oneself and find endless surprises—declared itself now as a small thing artificially blown out and now exploded, something that had grown unsteadily from a small root and now was overthrown.

The city had almost no look of rebirth, but at the same time seemed like a parody of a pioneer town. Little dreary wooden shacks were built on the blackened distorted concrete foundations of old buildings. These shacks, a few burnt trees, a great many chimneyed ovens, half-a-dozen big safes and a few twisted rusty relics of motor cars standing on end, these were all that reared themselves upright in the prostrate business part of the town. And two big ragged frames of concrete skyscrapers hung out shreds of western enterprise against the sad sky.

The old Grand Hotel was like a Roman villa. Only its central oven and chimney stood up; the rest lay flat, an intricacy of water-filled stone conduits, cellars and senseless steps. The rubble of the fallen mass of the building had been taken



SONS AND FISHES

YOKOHAMA, 1925

away and the skeleton of the place picked clean. There were the broad front steps that used to lead to cocktails and fox-trots and starlit loggias, now netted with weeds under the rain. Where I used to sit in the evenings behind great plate-glass windows, watching the leaning fishing-boats cross the harbour towards the gay Bund, there were only twisted gashed slabs now, and no Bund—only mud and rubbish and weeds.

Opposite the Grand Hotel an old Japanese man had put up a small low tent like a coffin, in which he sold sweets and little comforts. He lived in a cellar just behind it, entering by a crack into a black hole in a burnt concrete foundation, like a blue ant crawling into its ruined hill.

The Japanese part of the town had much more life in it. Gay booths, banners, painted screens and white-and-red paper lanterns blossomed among the light trodden ashes of the wooden part of the town. Even the cotton fish of rejoicing hung from their mast-heads, wriggling limply in the rain. Each fish indicated a son in the proud house below—something saved from disaster. A big black-and-white fish represented the heir, little red-and-white fishes the lesser sons—probably post-earthquake sons, some of them. Nothing—not even a shrimp—for the daughters. The fish were waking up as the rain stopped and the wind woke. The wind filled the bodies of the fishes, they were fed and nourished by sea wind and they swam complacently exactly as real fish swim in running water—rippling and curving

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their lacy frills. They looked like smug tame things, hooked to their masts above a world of ashes, windbags proclaiming their optimistic domestic symbolism, writing in silly curves upon the wind the empty but effective slogan of consolation that must always tease the grief of devastated worlds. . . . "What of broken hearts, after all, when every day new hearts begin to beat? . . ."

A consolation as silly and as unanswerable as the flowers on Yokohama's ruins. Flowers are so much braver than big business. Half of a little park was gay with roses; stoneworks still clung to a broken rockery in the flat ghost of a courtyard. Several most gracious and absurd little attempts at new gardens were brilliant with azaleas.

“HOTEL OFFICIALS ARE AMAZED . . .”

THE world has turned upside-down and there is, I am told, a rush of unescorted women tourists to England—just as, when you or I stand upside-down, the blood rushes to our heads. Hotel Officials, I read, are amazed at the number of lone women now visiting England or planning to do so. Hotel Officials believe this to be an interesting symptom—but what of, they do not say. I do not find myself able to feel much amazement on the subject; my faculty of amazement in this matter has been dulled by a lifelong impression that there always have been far too many tourists, and that far too many of the tourists have always been women. I do not mind very much, however, whether tourists wear trousers or petticoats or both or neither.

When I speak of tourists, of course, I do not mean travellers. There never can be too many travellers. Travellers, I suggest, are people who want to see far places; tourists want to *say* they have seen far places. Travellers come home and gape dreamily at you when you ask where they have been; tourists bring back souvenirs in order to prove to indifferent friends that they have actu-

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ally trodden on a pyramid hard enough to knock this very chip off, or dried their faces on this very towel in the Wagon-Lits Hotel in Peking, or shaken hands—for a small sum—with this very Red Indian—(autographed picture postcard)—in the Grand Canyon of the Colorado. These tourists may be women or men—the conspicuous thing about them is not their sex, but the immense quantity of junk they carry in their luggage. They are, however, more often women than men because so many women, unfortunately, have more time to waste than men.

Hotel officials must have lived in a chronic condition of amazement ever since the tourists' patron saint, Paul, founded the ancient order of tourists some time just short of the year A.D. 100. Talk of amazement—imagine the outraged surprise of Saint Paul if he could know that despised Woman, like charity, may begin at home but continues in a charabanc, and that the barbarous people who shewed him no little kindness have long since transferred their affability to the mere women who, Baedeker-laden, follow impudently in his footsteps. For the poor world always comes out in a rash of lone female tourists every summer, and, whatever Hotel Officials may say, this eruption is not a symptom of anything except the craving of the uninteresting human being to seem a little more interesting than he or she actually is. It is only more often *she* than *he*, in this case, because women have a stronger craving, induced by their age-long inferiority complex—(an order

“HOTEL OFFICIALS ARE AMAZED . . .”

also partly founded by Saint Paul)—for a halo of assumed synthetic personality. Chips of pyramids, twigs from cedars of Lebanon, cloisonné ash-trays from Canton, anecdotes about what the guide said at Delhi or what the hotel charged at Oberammergau—all these the poor hungry humble tourist collects and attaches to her shell, as the caddisworm collects glass beads, pebbles and floating grasses, and encases herself in a bristle and bustle of imitation importance.

The great advantage of the increase of the craving for *Tourisme*, as the French have christened the science of spiritual souvenir-hunting, is that it holds an ideal of hedonism and grandeur before the eyes of that oppressed class—Mothers of Grown-up Children. Many mothers, before the era of popular female *tourisme*, used to be in the position of discarded necessities, or dethroned angels—(whichever you prefer), when their daughters married or their sons disappeared to the outer fringes of various empires. They lived wistfully on the hope of dandling grandchildren, and, unfortunately, in most cases, the open season for grandchild-dandling is a very short one. In these days no mother need shiver in an empty nest when her fledgelings have flown—the south sings to her, the east calls her, the west claims her—even the North Pole has this year for the first time expressed a wish to be visited by a conducted tour consisting, probably, very largely of ex-mothers. And of course where mothers go, temporarily unrequired aunts need

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not fear to follow. This improvement in the condition of middle-aged women whose advice is no longer needed by their young is, as I say, the one great advantage of *tourisme*.

Of course all this refers chiefly to Americans, since if one meets a phalanx of brisk mothers undulating on camels across the Sahara, or a posse of aunts taking notes in Napoleon's tomb, their nationality may be practically taken for granted to be American. The number of unescorted American female tourists has ceased to amaze even that sensitive plant, the Hotel Official. But now, we are told, he has a new ground for amazement; English shores are being invaded by unprotected females from an unexpected direction—the continent of Europe. I must say I have not noticed this myself; the buses I travel in seem to be always innocent of Swedish aunts, Hungarian mothers, Finnish grandmothers or Czechoslovakian Nanas, though there are often one or two sparkling club-women from Libertyville, Wis., in some corner or other, telling each other that Boadicea is the Pallas Athén or the Albert Memorial the tomb of Sir Christopher Wren. If, however, it is, unknown to me, a fact that Continental women are taking up *tourisme*, I still refuse to be very much amazed; I always knew that American Culture was spreading. I imagine all the Fraus and Frus and Senoras and Signoras and Madames and Prczchns—(I am hoping this last is a Czech word or that if it isn't nobody will know better)—watching the summer stream

“HOTEL OFFICIALS ARE AMAZED . . .”

of club-women swirl between the booths of their market-place, listening to the gay clamour of free transatlantic mothers in their cathedral aisles—I imagine those conservative Continental housewives making a stand at last—downing saucepans and market-baskets with a superb gesture of refined defiance and crying—(in their various languages)—“Dash it all, why should not I also tour? Why should not I, in my turn, amaze hotel officials, why may not I sometimes buy rubbishy souvenirs instead of always selling them. What American women can do, German—(or Swedish or Spanish or French or Finnish or Czecho-Slovakian as the case may be) women can also do. Address me care of Thomas Cook and Son, Ludgate Hill, and d—— the consequences!”

But I must say I do wonder what tourists take home from London as souvenirs. Myself I can't think of anything more typical than a bus ticket, or a chunk of A.B.C. cake, or a test-tube full of London Spring Weather, or a brass livery button that has popped off the swelling bosom of an amazed Hotel Official.

THE END OF THE PARTY

Theresa had been taught by a careful mother to enjoy herself in a ladylike way at all parties—it was rude not to. So, though there had been no young people at this party, and though the conversation had not touched upon dogs, ghosts or the niceness of Theresa herself, but had, on the contrary, dealt exclusively with the doings of unknown residents of Hongkong, Theresa approached her hostess with a feeling of real gratitude and said, “Thank you very much, Mrs. Brierley, I *have* enjoyed myself.” “You must come again, dear,” said Mrs. Brierley with her weak laugh. She was a little startled, because in Hongkong people are not very often grateful for parties. “You must come again, hay—hay—Now mind,—hay,—hay—that’s a promise. It was very unfortunate your dear mother had a cold—hay—hay—but you must tell her how much we loved seeing her dear little daughter. . . .” She threw Theresa’s hand suddenly away and turned to someone else saying, “Margie dear hay—hay—I haven’t had a chance for a word with you for *ages*. . . .”

THE END OF THE PARTY

Theresa allowed time for Captain Trew to get through the door before approaching it herself. Men at doors always embarrassed her because she could not accustom herself to going in front of anyone. Doors had to be always safely corked with the large and gracious retreating form of Mummy before Theresa could approach them with calmness. But to-night Mummy was not here, and here was Theresa exposed to the danger of having a polite man behind her, looking cruelly at the back of her neck. Captain Trew's politeness would have been especially embarrassing, because he was so old—probably more than forty—and walking in front of him would be like walking in front of an uncle. Miss Brierley had not treated him like an uncle at all, but then Miss Brierley was rather old herself. She had been so brave as to say a great many times, "Oh sailor-man, bold bad sailor-man—you sailor-men are all alike." Theresa on the contrary thought that Captain Trew was not at all like other sailors; sailors and uncles are, as a rule, poles apart.

In the hall of the little flat, Miss Brierley threw a strong arm round Theresa's waist. "You fascinating little thing," she cried. "Do tell me—how old are you? I don't believe you're a day older than twelve." "I'm eighteen and a quarter," said Theresa in a voice that tried to be hearty. She did not think her mother would consider Miss Brierley's manner "quite quite". But Theresa at eighteen had been allowed to smoke, to shingle

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her hair and to keep a motor bike in the garage at home in Hampshire. Her mother had said, "Well darling, you're old enough now to judge for yourself . . ." Theresa, therefore, bore the strong arm of Miss Brierley round her waist with a grown-up and modern tolerance. "Not a day more than twelve . . ." repeated Miss Brierley rather absently. Her arm round Theresa's waist tightened suddenly. "Come in here," she whispered and she twitched the surprised Theresa aside into a little room near the door of the flat. There sat Captain Trew looking at Theresa as one fly in a web might look at another. Miss Brierley shut the door. "Abbie's parties", she said, "are as dry as the Sahara. But never mind, dears, trust Sister Winnie to keep something good up her sleeve." Theresa had already noticed that Miss Brierley continually referred to her mother and herself as Abbie and Sister Winnie, so these references did not confuse her. She was, however, surprised to hear that the party had been dry, for she herself had drunk a glass of white wine and half a glass of red wine, not to mention a Creme de Menthe, and she felt quite excited. Miss Brierley and Captain Trew had gone even further than this, as Theresa, worldly creature, had tolerantly noticed.

"Theresa and I are going to drive you home, sailor-man," said Miss Brierley as she poured out three whisky pegs. "I've got Bartholomew in the garage downstairs." There seemed to be a great many names in the gay Miss Brierley's

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family, but Theresa still felt herself in her depth: Bartholomew was evidently a motor car.

"Are you indeed?" said Captain Trew with non-committal boisterousness. He had a neat beard rather the colour of cotton-waste, and his face looked a little blue as well as very red.

"Captain Trew's home is on the bounding main, isn't it?" said Theresa, trying not to be dampingly ladylike. But her companions took no notice of her remark. Miss Brierley laid a dramatic finger on her lip as the voice of Mrs. Brierley was heard in the hall outside. "Margie dear—hay—hay—you *must* come again, some time when Winnie and I are alone—hay—hay—I haven't had a *chance*. . . ." The hall-door snapped behind Margie and Mrs. Brierley was heard to trail away into the distant recesses of the flat. "She's as deaf as a post, is Abbie," said Miss Brierley. "Or can be, when she likes. She knows her place—poor old dear. Now, sailor-man, tell Theresa and me the story of your life. Have you a wife in every port? . . ."

"The story of my life, eh?" said Captain Trew in a way that struck Miss Brierley as very witty.

Theresa left her second whisky and soda untouched, having decided that she disliked the taste of whisky very much, "How *can* you enjoy it?" she said, when Miss Brierley pressed her. "It tastes like medicine to me."

"Medicine it is," said Captain Trew, and Theresa had to laugh with the others, so as not

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to seem to have no sense of humour. She was a little pleased, too, because this was the first time Captain Trew had noticed any remark of hers. She was still more pleased when they rose to go and Captain Trew supported Miss Brierley's entreaties that she should drive to the ship with them "in Bartholomew". "Come along, little girl," said Captain Trew. "Don't be shy. We won't eat you."

They all found themselves in the garage of the apartment house, looking at Bartholomew. Miss Brierley sprang into the driver's seat, stretching long elastic silk legs. She pressed a button—Bartholomew did not respond. "Oh hell," chirped Miss Brierley. "The self-starter's gone phut again." Theresa and Captain Trew, drawn together by a secret hopefulness, walked foolishly round and round Bartholomew. "Hell, hell, hell, hell," squeaked Miss Brierley. "Just when Sister Winnie's set her heart on——"

At that moment the big garage was swept by a beam of light and shaken by a great roar. Another car slid in, with two men in the front seat. "Hell, hell," said Miss Brierley in a loud and hopeful tone. "Isn't it too bad when we'd set our hearts on a moonlight spin to have a Bartholomew that won't go?" There was an immediate response from the other car. "Well Micky, what d'you say to a moonlight spin?" "I don't know who you are," cried Miss Brierley. "But I know where you come from—straight from heaven." "Hoots, mon," said one stranger,

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elaborately jocose. "A'm Mack frae the norrth, and this bossoon here is Micky, wan uv the bhoys, begorrah asthore. . . ."

"What would Mummy say?" thought Theresa as she sat down in the back seat between Micky and Captain Trew. Captain Trew leaned forward to share Miss Brierley with the driver, Mack. "I wish we could drive round the island," said Theresa to Micky. "The moonlight is so lovely." "Moon-loight, bad cess to-ut," said Micky sleepily. "Phwat koind uv a colleen is herself now, begorrah, to——" "I believe you're pretending," said Theresa seriously, pushing his arm away from her waist. "Irish people don't talk like that."

Micky seemed to lose interest in her at once, and she looked down peacefully on Hongkong harbour. The moonlight lay so clear on it that the lights of Victoria seemed irrelevant. Theresa could even see the khaki colour of the P. & O. ship at rest on the glinting water beyond the flocks of launches and sampans. "P. & O.'s are Kipling-colour," thought Theresa, dreamily.

As the car drew up at the gate of the dockyard the sentry saluted Captain Trew. But Captain Trew could not look very dignified because Mack and Micky were yoicks-ing at a Japanese woman who was tripping along past the dock gate with that falling-forward run peculiar to those who wear high *geta*. Captain Trew hesitated at the gate, and Theresa felt sure there was "Well, good-bye", in the expression of his eyes and uncertain bearded

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lips. "Hadn't we better go home?" Theresa asked Miss Brierley in a low voice. "What's the matter with you, silly-billy?" exclaimed Miss Brierley. She took Theresa's arm and Captain Trew's, Mack and Micky hooked themselves on to the line and they walked five abreast along the broad paths of the dockyard, to the tune of Mack and Micky singing "All the world am sad an' dreary, everywhere I roam. . . ."

H.M.S. *Lorelei*, low and silvery, lay against the wharf. A sailor stood at the foot of her gangway and a young officer on her deck. Both looked surprised at the triumphal nature of Captain Trew's return. "Oh aren't all sailor-boys *darlings*?" exclaimed Miss Brierley looking delightedly into the faces of the few sailors in her neighbourhood. The water made a groaning noise against the ship's side as they all crossed the gangway. Miss Brierley ran squeaking along the quiet deck where the moonlight glittered on brass. "Now captain darling, which is your cubby-hole, out of all these funny little doors?"

"Well," said Captain Trew standing in the middle of his cabin with the sweat of an ordeal upon his forehead. "What shall we drink, now we *are* here?" "Hoots mon," said Mack. "Ye're talking sense the noo. Thank God we've got a Navy!"

The cabin would have delighted Theresa had it not been filled with a strange air of discomfort. The soft pink electric light and the silly voices made it seem raddled—and unsuitably grown-

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up, somehow. Seen by daylight, it would have seemed like a drawing-room devised by a domestic child for big dolls—an exciting pretence—an imaginative assemblage of things a little smaller than life. There was a tiny piano, a three-quarter length sofa; there were little yellow net curtains over the little window. “But no bed,” laughed Miss Brierley, pressing through a further door. “Oh, here’s his bed, with a yellow quilt and—oh, *do* come and look, Mack, if you want a good laugh—sailor-men use face-powder. . . .”

Theresa, by the piano, was looking at a model of a death mask on the wall—the face of a young man with an expression of precarious peace after long pain. “Jesus Christ,” she thought, and she looked at it for many minutes.

“Here’s your drink, Missy,” said Captain Trew and she found him looking at her with a look of dislike and confusion. Miss Brierley frolicked beside him. “Oh look, boys, our gallant sailor-man keeps the head of his best girl hanging on his wall. Goodness—what a mug . . . it’d give me the doldrums. Let’s give her a drink. . . .” Whisky spilled down the chin of the mask on to the piano. Micky was playing gently on the muted notes of the little piano, “My lodging is on the cold ground”. For a moment the only sound in the room was a sweet sound, but the feeling of contention and wrongness almost suffocated Theresa.

“Oh,” she said quite clearly. “I *do* want to go home.”

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"Then let's go home," said Micky. He added as an afterthought. "Sure an' we will, mavourneen alannah." Theresa found with a silly astonishment that going home was quite easy. Somehow she had forgotten that such a mysteriously distasteful hour could ever slip away. Yet there she was, walking quietly with Micky across the dockyard. She was glad that she had remembered to say to Captain Trew, "Thank you *so* much—it was *very* kind of you to let me come". She had found it quite unusually difficult to say this in a well-bred way because his beard had been moving from side to side as though he were mouthing curses under it. The moonlit air was cool to breathe. "Oughtn't we to wait for Miss Brierley?" she asked Micky, hoping that they ought not. "She'll come," said Micky.

At the gate of the dockyard Mack unexpectedly joined them,—materialised tranquilly on the driver's seat. "Where do you live, young woman?" he asked. "Hongkong Hotel, please. It *is* so kind of you. . . ."

Micky and Mack, rather curiously, sat in front. Theresa, alone on the bouncing back seat, suddenly burst into smothered tears. "How terrible—how terrible—what a terrible evening. . . ." It seemed to her that never in her eighteen years had she had such a terrible evening. But why? What had happened? Everybody had been very kind. But she thought of the whisky dripping from the chin of the mask, and tears streamed down her cheeks. She bent her head that

THE END OF THE PARTY

her face might be shadowed as the car stopped at the hotel. She stood for a few seconds with her back carefully to the light, long enough to say to Mack, "Thank you—so very much—for the lovely drive . . . I *did* enjoy it. . . ."

UNSATISFACTORY CONVERSATION ON SOFT-BOILED EGGS

IN the year 5000 A.D., two women sat over their wine in the rich dining-room of a house in Tnik, Mongolia's great city, the hub of the universe. The women spoke in that jargon of English which had become the universal language—a sort of shorthand tongue that cannot be reproduced here. Their heads were shaven and they were clad in the loose yet severe dark overalls common to all women of the day. The face of one woman—Remi Sno—was worn, lined, excitable and odd; one would have guessed it to be the face of an artist, and Remi was indeed a musician whose compositions were broadcasted in every hamlet of the globe, and were appreciated even among the ultra-moderns of sophisticated Tibet. Her companion, Belle Eld, was a successful business woman, and shewed it in every line of her cold, complacent and rather fat face.

Conversation flagged, as it often did between these oddly assorted friends, yet, when a knock was heard at the door, both women automatically assumed, the indulgent, slightly irritated expression of busy women interrupted in great affairs.

UNSATISFACTORY CONVERSATION

"What is it, dear?" asked Belle as her husband looked in tentatively.

"I hate disturbing you when you are talking, Belle," said the man a little shyly, not forgetting to smile sweetly in the direction of his wife's guest. "But I was wondering if I might go into your study to finish some work. The children are playing in my sitting-room and it is difficult for me to concentrate. . . ."

"Why Bernard—of course, dearest. How could you think you had to ask? Work there by all means whenever you need a little peace from the young ruffians. Only remember not to disturb my papers, of course, dear, won't you?" And as her husband disappeared, she called after him, "And dearest—I have to fly over to Bombay this afternoon to see a woman on business. Like to pilot me?"

"I'd love to, Belle dear, only . . . it's this work of mine. . . . I did want to finish this article. . . ."

A shade of disappointment crossed Belle's face. "Oh very well, dear . . . of course the work comes first . . . if it's so *very* important as all that. . . ."

And only when she heard her husband's eager—"Why no, darling, of course it doesn't matter. I can finish the article another day. I'd love to come."—did Belle's eyes resume their beam of tenderness. When the door was shut, the business woman said to her friend with a rather cinematic quaver in her rich voice, "Dear Bernard—dear

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little man . . . a wonderful husband, Remi . . . stood by me through thick and thin. . . .”

“A fine nature,” agreed Remi. “And a very gifted one, too. That was a really witty article of his in *Wake Up*, about Men, the Emotional Sex. George and I laughed over it.”

“Gifted, yes,” said Belle. “But—well, it’s funny, isn’t it, Remi, that men never become really first-rate artists. They all remain just gifted—brilliant—promising . . .”

“In the old days,” said Remi, “they are said to have had genius. Look at Mary Mog’s theory that Shakespeare was a man! It’s ingenious . . . it seems to hold water . . . and if she can prove it, it ought to give men a great spur towards real achievement.”

“But what spur do they want?” argued Belle. “Look at their opportunities—their excellent education nowadays—their endless leisure. Husband-beating—physical and spiritual—has absolutely gone out. Mechanical servants were invented for their benefit. They have political representation. Look at Bernard, for instance . . . his mother spared no expense in his upbringing (old Mother Ping was an advanced masculinist)—Bernard was most carefully studied by his mother; when his literary bent declared itself he was sent to James Blunt’s Academy for Poets—(James Blunt was one of Baroness Blunt’s nephews, a very good old family—and quite a good poet himself). Yet Bernard always says now that he looks back on the Academy with horror

UNSATISFACTORY CONVERSATION

. . . perfect refinement and robust athleticism, he says, were the foundation of the education offered—gilded with a superficial appearance of modern freedom. All his mother's efforts on his behalf wasted, you see. Then, since he married me, I've always given him every encouragement to go on with his work. Marriage surely should enlarge a man's horizon and give substance to his inspiration. . . . I bore him children, as you know—and children generally do so much towards awakening male emotion. He doesn't seem to have much natural paternal feeling, curiously enough, but I didn't complain even of that, since for some time he remained so keen on his work. But somehow it never amounted to anything. His keenness was carried to ridiculous lengths once or twice, for instance that time when I was still a junior in the business and was sent to the Antarctic to develop an agency there in a rather lonely out-station. I thought of course that Bernard would be delighted at the change. But no . . . he brooded for a while and then came out with, 'Belle, would you consider turning down the Antarctic idea?' 'What *do* you mean, Bernard?' I asked. 'The firm is sending me there—I have no choice.' 'Yes,' he said. 'But *my* work keeps me *here*. Why does women's work always come first as a matter of course?' 'Why *Bernard*,' I said, 'My work's my future . . . it provides our income. . . .' 'Well', he said, 'couldn't *I* stay behind?' he said. 'My work is here,' he said. 'I write about people and being with people is

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necessary to my writing. . . .’ Stay behind indeed . . . why, what does he think women marry for—to leave their husbands on the other side of the world? You’d have thought a writer at least was footloose—he only needs his pen or his duplicating dictaphone to be able to carry on his craft anywhere. But no,—‘*My work is here* . . .’ says Bernard. Years afterwards, I said to him, laughing, ‘Well Bernard, where should we be now if we’d depended for our income on your career instead of mine, eh? Where would your little Gem Plane fitted with platinum be, I wonder?’ That made him smile.”

“Did you take him to the Antarctic, then?” asked Remi, nodding wisely.

“Well, what do you think? Marriage is marriage isn’t it?—even in these days of male freedom. He could never hope to earn even a thousandth of what I get. Besides—what kind of a woman would people think me if I lived on my husband? Genius or no genius, it’s every woman’s right to have her husband’s companionship at bed and board—and in return it’s every woman’s pleasure and privilege to work for the little man she loves. And it isn’t a question of *genius*. There’s no such thing as a man genius.”

“Perhaps generations of being taken to the Antarctic have left their mark on the sex,” said Remi, nodding still more wisely. “All men artists are misfits, really, you never meet a happy normal one. A man like my dear husband George, though he’s worn himself to the bone in my ser-

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vice, is actually far more potentially happy than your Bernard. Poor dear George, my musical achievement has always been his only aim. Everything in his own life was subordinated to it. You know how I suffer from nervous indigestion—how sleepless I am—how, when I am at work, I cannot bear to be disturbed to eat, yet often wear myself out by fasting. . . . Dear selfless George . . . creeping in at intervals without a sound . . . always sensing the exact second when a soft-boiled egg at my elbow would be welcome . . . never rebuffed by my fiendish temper when I am working at high tension . . . he never allows a servant to do anything for me. Sometimes for whole nights together he never goes to bed, and when my work is done for the time being, he looks as worn out as I do—but *so* happy. Dear, dear little George. I owe everything to him. Nothing is really mine but this queer trick of stringing sounds together. . . .”

“Excellent creature, your George,” said Belle robustly. “That’s men’s real work, of course,—expressing themselves through a stronger nature—has been so since the beginning of time. They can never stand by themselves—it isn’t their nature. It’s logic, of course, the sex that bears the race must dominate the race. Well, I must go and look up my papers before spinning down to Bombay. Make yourself at home, old she, I’ll be back before dinner-time.”

Soon after the heavy tread of the woman of affairs had died away, Bernard, dressed in a well-

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cut fancy leather flying suit, looked in. "Isn't Belle here?" he asked. "Bobbo Bein has just dropped in and I know Belle wouldn't mind him coming too—just for the drive."

"Come in, Bernard and Bobbo," said Remi gently. "Belle's fiddling about with her old papers, she'll shout when she's ready."

Bernard came in, followed by his friend, a gaunt elderly bachelor, with the idealistic tense look of chronic virginity in his eyes. Bobbo threw himself into a chair with an almost womanly freedom of attitude. "I've finished my portrait of father," he said wearily. "And I'm all in. It's no good. All these months it's promised to be something really worth doing—and now it's done—and it's rubbish."

"Now it's funny you should talk like that," said Remi. "Because I've long wanted to get you and Bernard together and ask you something that may seem brutal—something you'll have to forgive, since it comes from an old friend and a great believer in men's aims. What are you doing with your lives? Why are you both playing with this great possession—Art? Since your work is so very good, why isn't it a little better? Those are very perfect instruments—your writing brain, Bernard,—your painting eye and hand, Bobbo—why aren't they doing perfect work? In other words, why do brilliant men like you give us sneering superior women a chance to say, 'Men never can be supreme artists'?"

"You sneering superior women are right," said

UNSATISFACTORY CONVERSATION

Bernard quietly. "Men can't be supreme artists. You have to have a tradition of supremacy to be supreme. *Firstness* can't be spontaneously born in minds trained by indulgent generations to *secondness*. Genius grows out of inherited self-confidence—an inherited certainty that what one has to say is worth saying *because* it is one's own. And the self-confidence has to be *re-inforced* self-confidence—genius begins at home because, to a woman, home means moral re-inforcement. Look at us men's art . . . is its *firstness*—its pre-eminent importance—ever taken for granted even by the most indulgent female relations? Does selfless love on the part of a lover ever foster it—and count itself fortunate to do so—as your George fosters your art, Remi? Look at Bobbo . . . he had to choose between devoting himself to *someone* and devoting himself to *something*—his painting. If he'd been a woman, he wouldn't have been faced by such an alternative—he would simply have been seeking in love a further support for his artistic confidence."

"As it is," said Bobbo. "Because I chose not to put love absolutely first—I can't have love at all. I can't take confidence and encouragement from a lover—because love for a man means *giving*—not taking. I have to do all my own buttressing of my essential self-confidence. And I can't. Nobody can. Not even woman—of the superior sex—could. Genius must inherit from the ages a claim to be fostered and spiritually supported. Without this heritage, genius dies."

WORLDS WITHIN WORLDS

“ Well . . . you men certainly have the essentially male gift of The Gab,” said Remi whimsically. “ What you say is interesting, but what remedy do you propose? You wouldn’t expect women to sit up all night boiling soft-boiled eggs for their artist husbands, would you? ”

They all smiled. The picture seemed so very ridiculous to them.

“ No, of course I shouldn’t,” said Bernard. “ And for that reason I shouldn’t expect supreme genius of a man. Supreme genius grows out of a long tradition of soft-boiled eggs.”

THE END

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