

Starting from Victoria

by

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P R E F A C E.

When a nonentity such as I presumes, at an advanced age, to invade the realm of letters with little if anything in the way of literary ammunition, he should at least be armed with a good excuse. Mine is as follows.

After a long business career full of ups and downs I suffered a severe stroke. This was followed by three months in hospital during which time I fully anticipated returning to my old life. This proved to be a pipe dream and , after some while, I was forced to admit that "I had had my lot" and must retire as gracefully as my restless nature would permit.

Apart from singing , which I had abandoned earlier, my only hobby had been the piano. My right hand and arm had, however, been so affected by the stroke that I could no longer play. What could I do? As an exercise for my hand and arm I began jotting down, slowly and painfully, some events from my early life. My doctor, my wife and some of my friends found the jottings amusing and encouraged me to link them together. The following is the result. If my efforts bring a smile to any lips, or encouragement to anyone afflicted with a disability, then I am well rewarded.

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CHAPTER I.

Birth of a Problem Child.

My earliest recollection of this vale of sorrow, which we call the world was when I was two minutes old on January 31st 1885. The doctor, a lean and hungry looking man and disgustingly nose-y, inverted my miserable carcass and said in a melancholy tone, "It's a little girl". Why he in particular, and doctors in general, emphasise the word "little", I shall never know. Do they expect a baby to be anything from 5 feet upwards? Anyway, an impatient and thirsty looking nurse grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and to my disgust evinced the same filthy curiosity as the doctor. "What did you say it was doctor?" ("it" was presumably me). "A little girl" replied the doctor. "Come and look again" said the nurse, which he did, and I suppose by then my sex had become manifest, because the doctor said, "Well I'm damned!". This was the first bad word I had ever heard and as my friends know, I have never looked back!

I was washed and powdered in due course and the nurse held me up to admire her handiwork and I gather that she had been too busy determining my sex to look at my face, for when she did catch sight of it, she gave a gasp of dismay and threw me on to the bed saying, "If there's a merciful God, he'll take the poor little wretch".

Such, dear friends, was my entry into this world, uneventful to the teeming millions, but to me of paramount importance. I was here for better or worse and I must leave you to decide whether the former or latter.

My early years were spent without undue incident. I can well remember the Jack the Ripper scare in 1888, although at that time I was only about 3½ years of age. I can recall my father warning my mother not to attempt to serve anybody who came into our shop until she was reasonably satisfied that he or she was not the Ripper. We had a peep hole in the living room for that purpose and every customer who entered the shop was scrutinised well and truly.

The rumours spread about were manifold in their diversity. Some were sure "he" was a woman, others that he was a man wearing female clothing, quite a number favoured the suggestion that he was a Whitechapel policeman, but the most favoured idea was that he was an American doctor who had suffered through his association with women of a certain character and was having his revenge on the women whom he thought were loose. Of course I was far too young to understand about the morals of this wicked world, but listened intently to the conversation of my elders and in later years understood more or less their meaning. I wonder how many parents and others discuss delicate matters in front of little children without realising that the majority have keen ears and a good memory.

My prevalent idea was that the Ripper was an evil looking man with a beard who used to eat fire on Margate sands. One afternoon to my surprise and horror he came into our shop and I drove the ladies of the family nearly round the bend by rushing in shrieking in terror, "Jack the Ripper's in the shop". It afterwards transpired that my father was acquainted with the worthy gentleman - I think he had bought him drinks at Margate.

I can recall lying in bed with a dim light on the mantelpiece listening to the hoarse voices of the men selling newspapers and shouting, "Another 'orrible Ripper murder". This was rather terrifying to little nippers like my brother and ~~me~~^{him} at 10 o'clock at night - he was 4½ and I, 3½ years old.

The next incident I can recall was when I was 4 years of age - a year before a sister had arrived and the year prior to my birth, my mother had presented my father with another boy. My mother's mother and sister had come to live with us some 18 months before my fourth birthday and there were now seven of us and never a dull moment, believe me. My grandmother, ably seconded by my aunt, perpetually expressed her dislike of all small boys, me in particular.

About this time, after the worthy lady had told me for the fourth time in about the same number of minutes, that I had gallows written all over my face and prophesied my ending my career at the end of a rope, the end with the noose, in childish indignation, I retorted that so long as she was my victim, I would gladly hang. Of course I did not use these exact words, but this was what I tried to convey and evidently succeeded, because my grandmother slobbered me, followed by a deft left from dear auntie, whilst my poor mother burst into tears. Needless to say I was in dire disgrace and packed off to bed with a parting shot from granny that after my hanging I should spend for ever after in the lake of fire. I took rather a dismal view of this last and very final prospect, but the former had its attraction. You see, I had heard my father say that anyone who was going to be hanged, could choose his breakfast, and as in those days the adults only had a savoury, the children being palmed off with bread and a scrape of butter, the thought of having my choice of breakfast was most fascinating.

As for the lake of fire, I was rather intrigued and wondered whether you had clothes on and how they reacted to the flames; whether you stood still or swam about and if you were allowed to talk; what you had to eat or drink, and finally, if your body was flameproof - that is indestructible or if it got burnt to the bone and the flesh grew again. I rather favoured the latter as I reasoned that one would have a slight let up from pain until one's body grew again. I further reasoned, that the first 1000 years would be the worst, after that period I should have got used to the flames and able to settle down comfortably for ever and ever.

The threat of hell was in those days a very favourite subject with parsons and Sunday school teachers, and as a kid I used to wonder why they put you in the doldrums with their gloomy forebodings and, as a makeweight, made you sing jolly hymns, such as, "Weary of earth and laden with my sin"

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and, "There's a home for little children above the bright blue sky". To me this last hymn was the limit - first telling me I was destined for hell and then making me sing about the home for little children that I should never enjoy. By the way, the clergy for many years have ceased to remind their congregations of the fate that awaits them. Do they interpret the bible differently? or did they tumble to the fact that instead of holding a congregation, they drove people away? I know I never could reconcile hell fire with a loving God, and a 100 years in hell seemed sufficient to me to make a bloke sorry for his sins, but to keep him there for ever and ever seemed a bit steep, ~~to me~~.

I think that by now my parents were convinced that I, and probably my brother, required firmer discipline and we consequently found ourselves one Monday morning being trundled in a pram by auntie to a private school run by a lady. Suffice it to say that she was very kind to all of us and I responded to the treatment far more readily than to the cuffing and nagging tactics of my grandmother and aunt.

I must have been round about the age of 5 when I learnt that an old lady living at the back of us was dying. I was very intrigued with this and spent many hours looking at the house from a back window; I wanted to see the poor old lady ascending into heaven. I did not know if she would be in a perpendicular or horizontal position, what clothes she would be wearing and particularly, whether she would be able to navigate the railway bridge that stood near the house. I imagined her going clean through the arch and any train that might be running at the time, and mused on the shock and thrill it would give the passengers to see a body coming through the floor. I thought that by the time she reached the roof the body would be in another compartment and the passengers therein would experience the thrill of seeing a body appearing through the front of the compartment. However, I never was to know, because she passed away in the middle of the night and left me guessing. No child

can have been more disappointed over missing such an experience.

Humorous Experiences of a Stutterer, Chapter II

We stayed at the school I have previously mentioned, for a few months before going to another private establishment, where a man was in charge and here I got into trouble that was going to affect me right through my life. I was naturally left handed, which in those days was an affliction second only to the plague, or considered so, and my new schoolmaster, on perceiving me writing on a slate with my left hand, nearly jumped out of his pants. He explained at some length the evils of such conduct, how my mind must inevitably become deranged, concluding with the comforting remark that he had already perceived that I was unlike the rest of my school companions and exhorting me never again to attempt to write with my left hand. Needless to say, I used my left hand at every available opportunity. I was "rumbled", however, because my left handed writing was far better than my right. Thereafter, he hovered in my vicinity and struck my knuckles with part of a slate frame if I attempted to use my left hand. Gradually I got accustomed to using my right hand, but at the same time I commenced to stutter and stammer and I have since read or heard on the radio, that a left handed youngster should never be induced to remedy this as it causes paralysis of the muscles of the tongue. It was explained that the left hand side of the brain governs the right side of the body and vice-versa.

Fortunately I was not too self conscious of my impediment and it has given amusement to many, including myself. I was not a very big youngster but very wiry and fancied I could box. At any rate, when I was later on sent to a big school with 350 boys, had I not been able to stick up for myself, my life would have been hell. As it was, when a new boy arrived he was told to mimic me and watch me cry, but generally he cried first, because if I thought he was an easy victim, I slipped into him well and truly. On the other hand,

if he was bigger, I maintained a discreet silence.

Whilst on the subject of my impediment, I may as well mention two or three incidents that amused my distorted sense of humour. One occurred when I was 15 and I went into a barbers for my first shave. The barber speedily removed my "tough" growth and then confidently recommended a shampoo. I explained at some length and with much spitting and spluttering, that I did not desire one, but alas the next minute he said, "Bend forward Sir" and my noddle was in the basin - and I only had 2d on me for the shave!

About the age of 19 I used to go to a tailor, who, with his family, were friends of my parents and consequently my visits were also social and I invariably partook of tea. On my second visit the tailor's wife, immediately I arrived, gave her two youngsters (a boy and a girl) "Comic Cuts" and "Chips" and when they were nearly reduced to hysterics by my painful efforts to talk, she would say, "Show mummy which funny pictures you are laughing at" and they would point to Tired Tim or Weary Willy with renewed mirth. When this occurred for the fifth or sixth time, I told the good lady I appreciated her desire to cause me as little embarrassment as possible, but that she need not worry over handing out the comics, as I quite understood the kids being amused, because I often made myself laugh. I might state here that I have always found it more difficult to talk with children present than with adults.

~~The next~~ ^{Another} incident that amused me was my difficulty in asking for a ticket at Railway booking offices. Three or four times a week I had to go to Clapham in the evening before going home, and for about six years I solemnly presented a piece of paper bearing the words, "Clapham Road Station please" to the booking clerk. He would hand me a ticket with a kindly nod and sympathetic look, but not a single word was, before this incident, ever uttered by either of us. On this particular evening we went through the same dignified procedure as hitherto, with one exception. On receiving the ticket I said in as deep a

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tone as I could manage, "Thanks and a very good evening to you". Believe me, he nearly jumped out of his skin and turned as pale as a muffin. "Was it really you that spoke" he enquired incredulously, and when I replied in the affirmative, said, "Good God, you frightened the blasted life out of me, I always thought you were deaf and dumb".

^{A further}
~~Another~~ incident I will mention was when I was living at Streatham Hill and went to Clapham Junction station for a ticket and as there was no one being attended to at the booking office, I decided to try and ask for it instead of writing the name on a piece of paper. I approached boldly, meaning to do or die, but when I arrived in front of the booking clerk, I could only hiss at him like an intoxicated serpent. He tried to be helpful, bless his heart, and suggested Sydenham, Shoreditch, Stratford, Sidcup, Southampton and we even got as far as South Africa. After each of his suggestions I had shaken my head irritably and at his finally attempting to send me to South Africa, I got windy. "No you b - - y fool", I shouted, "Streatham Hill". By this time there were several persons behind me, but when the coast was clear I returned to the booking clerk with humble apologies for my ungrateful and ungentlemanly behaviour. In mitigation I must explain that it has always been of assistance to me to prefix a sentence with a swear word and I have often found that it was as useful to me as corks in the hands of athletes. It was something to help me over the stiles and hurdles.

One more incident connected with my impediment. My mother suffered with bad ears and was very deaf; and once, when I went househunting with her, we had a whale of a time. We called at many houses that were still occupied, and the lady of the house invariably interviewed us. They gave my mother all particulars, not a word of which she could hear, but looked hopefully at me to shout in her ear what had been said. I could not say a word and after three or four abortive attempts had to desist, but cannot imagine a better

case of the blind leading the blind. I was terribly handicapped because I could not very well swear and I am sure some of the ladies who interviewed us must have thought we had escaped from a home for incurables.

Whilst on the subject of my poor mother's deafness, the following incident will I hope amuse you. In later years she had a tube through which one had to shout, and I mean shout! On this particular visit to her I took two male friends, and what with four sisters and an aunt, we were quite a goodly company. During the evening my mother asked me to sing and after some persuasion I agreed, but the difficulty was to get the tube into a position where it was not bent, so that my "beautiful falsetto" voice could be clearly heard. I eventually had to forego any piano accompaniment - I was the only one present who could play - and kneel on the floor and bellow through the tube, "Sweet Genevieve". I felt an awful fool but stuck to my guns and finished on a plaintive wail, that had on occasions reduced old ladies to tears. I stood up with a satisfied smirk and my dear mother nodded her head approvingly and said "Very nice, very nice indeed, but will you now sing "Sweet Genevieve". Everyone enjoyed the joke, especially my two friends who to this day laugh heartily when reminded of the incident.

Chapter III
The Morrisons

I will now ^{return} ~~retract and go back~~ to my early years. We had a tobacconist shop in Ferndale Road, Brixton, and opposite us lived the Morrisons. There were Lucy, Minnie, Harry, Frank, Edith and last but not least, Bertie - a very quiet and unobtrusive boy, one nobody took much notice of and played with only when there was no-one else. He had a blind eye and looked particularly pathetic with his head slightly tilted. I have frequently heard my mother say she had advised Mrs. Morrison that the nurse she proposed to engage for her confinement was reported to be careless and dirty, but I think Mrs. Morrison had already committed herself too far to retract. Anyway, my

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mother was perfectly convinced that the nurse was responsible for Bertie's blind eye. It was the last three of the Morrisons (Frank, Edie and Bertie) with whom we constantly played and fought. There are two incidents connected with the latter that I well remember. One was when Mrs. Morrison invited my brother and me, with others, to a firework display in their garden. Bertie approached me holding a suspicious looking firework and asked me if I would like to hold it if he set it alight. Of course I was only too pleased, but upon being lighted, I anxiously enquired of Bertie if he was sure it wasn't a "banger". As he solemnly assured me it was a Golden Rain, it went off with a terrific bang - it was a squib, and this was the first time I had seen him really amused. I rather suspect in after life he was imbued with the same devilry when he pulled the wool so successfully over the eyes of his political opponents.

The second incident was when we went there to a party, and during the course of the evening played Hunt the Slipper. Suddenly Bertie exclaimed, "It's under Minnie's bottom" - referring to the shoe. Now in those days to mention the last word in company was an unforgivable sin, equalled only by murder. The unfortunate Bertie was pounced upon by his mother, amid cries of horror from the company, and she proceeded to undress him, for his punishment was to be sent to bed. He cried bitterly, but with tears streaming down his face said stoutly, "Anyway the shoe was under Minnie's bottom". The repetition of this terrible word resulted in Bertie's seat being well spanked and he trundled off to bed. I think these two incidents give some insight into the character of the man who later became the Rt. Hon. Herbert Morrison. It was my mother who told me that the then Minister of Transport was none other than little Bertie. She had a photograph of him in the family album wearing a velvet suit with a lace collar. He must have been four or five years old, and when I went to see him, in

between his ministerial offices, when he was Leader of the L.C.C., I took the photograph with me. I had, of course, written first and made an appointment. He was very interested, but could not recall the many things I could. I had an enlargement of the photograph sent to him and in September 1939, when the "Picture Post" printed pictures of the new Cabinet when they were young, he must have made use of the one I sent him.

Frankie was an imp of mischief. Many times I have seen his father - a policeman - drag him in by the seat of his breeches with a strap in his hand ready for action, and have listened with horror to poor Frankie's howls of pain.

There was a sweet shop in the road in which we lived, kept by an old widow and her son, and one of its attractions was known as the Farthing box. It contained a variety of sweetmeats and the custom was for either mother or son to produce this when asked and hold it up for inspection by the small boys and girls who sometimes took five minutes to decide what to buy with their precious farthing. On the occasion I am about to relate, Frankie and I were standing outside the shop farthing-less and envious, watching the lucky few diving into the box, when Frankie said bitterly that if his father was not a policeman, he would go in and knock the old girl on the head and pinch the box. We had wandered a little way from the shop whilst discussing the likely result of such a terrible deed, when he espied a dead rat in the gutter. His eyes glistened with mischief and he picked it up by the tail and said it was worth more than a farthing and would look lovely in the box. He furthermore suggested that I should pitch it into the box, as it would not be so bad for my father as for his, if I was caught. I needed no second bidding and with rat in hand stood by the door awaiting my opportunity. It soon arrived in the form of a little girl named Lily Smith, who demurely said "Farthing box please". The old lady presented it in the

usual way and I struck. With unerring accuracy, the rat landed right in the box. I was about to make myself very scarce, when I felt a firm hand on my collar and heard an indignant voice saying, "You dirty little black-guard, I'll hand you over to the police". It was the son who had just returned from a visit. Frankie had left the scene of the crime and I had to face up to it alone. The upshot was that the son took me home by the ear, and after relating my misdeeds to my poor mother, I was packed off to bed. A curious way of dealing with recalcitrant infants, but none the less effective. I suppose it was the only way of getting you out of sight and mind temporarily. Auntie duly arrived with my dinner - a slice of bread and dripping - and yards of nagging. I fared the same for tea, minus the nagging. This little affair had its sequel. The young girl who had been in the shop at the time of my misdemeanour, was having a party and Frankie and my brother and I had been invited, with others, but when the truth of the rat affair became public, Frankie was blamed for tempting me, I was blamed for being so easily led and what my poor brother was blamed for I shall never know. At any rate, our invitations were cancelled and we were very disappointed. The afternoon of the party saw three little boys discussing the best way to have their own back. The party was held in the basement of the shop where the Smiths lived and being dark, the tea table was pushed against the window and in the window, a circular hole - about four inches ^{in diameter} down - had been cut for the purpose of ventilation. We three conspirators knelt by the window (after 65 years the incident is still fresh in my memory) looking down at the assembled youngsters making pigs of themselves, as we put it enviously. There was an abundance of good viands on the table and we watched them tortured with pangs of hunger, rapidly disappearing. Frankie was furious and my brother and I sad. Suddenly he left us and shortly afterwards returned with a paper bag full of muck he had got from the road,

which he proceeded to push through the hole in the window. At the crucial moment, Mrs. Smith lifted the teapot lid to refill it and the bag of muck went straight into it. It was very successful, far exceeding our expectations, but we were too frightened to stay and see what subsequently happened but were afterwards given varying accounts by the children who were present. Strange to relate, we were not accused, but no doubt suspected. I seem to be putting the blame on Frankie, but it is unintentional. The truth is that he had more imagination than the rest of us and we were only too willing to help him carry out his suggestions.

The little group of shops I well remember. At the corner was the South London Press, then our shop, followed by a newsagent and stationers, then a restaurant with dead flies by the hundreds at the bottom of the window. Next a hairdresser, the sweet shop of farthing box fame, the Smiths, who kept a secondhand clothes shop and I think the last one was a Boot and Shoe repairer.

Chapter IV *Accidents and Acquaintances*

I was now 10 years of age and there were three more sisters - twins first and then a single. Later on two more sisters arrived and we were eventually a large family.

I had broken an arm whilst having a ride of what we used to call a mail cart. It overturned and I struck my elbow on the curb. My grandmother, accompanied by Minnie Morrison, took me to St. Thomas's Hospital and I can remember that in the room in which we waited was a screen, from behind which came a strange clicking noise. Minnie was very curious and quickly took a chair to the screen with the intention of looking over, when a nurse came in and poor Minnie got it in the neck. My grandmother subsequently discovered that some unfortunate man had swallowed poison and the doctor was using a stomach pump.

A year later I went with the Sunday School to Epsom Downs and there I had an altercation with a swing. The swinger kicked me in the eye and the corner of the swing caught my head near the temple and I fell on my right chin. My chin swelled considerably and hung down an inch or so, or so it seemed to me, and when I was about twelve, hairs commenced to grow there; so much so that my brother would not go out with me until he had trimmed my whiskers with scissors. This explains my having to shave at the tender age of 15, as hitherto related.

To return to the age of 10 from which I have strayed somewhat. About this time my parents gave up the tobacconist shop and we moved into a private house in Stockwell, and shortly afterwards I was allowed to join the church choir at Clapham, where my brother was already installed. I may say here that we both loved it - in fact my brother is still singing in a West End choir and has been there for well over 50 years. I myself retired from choir singing when war broke out in September 1939.

Shortly after moving to Stockwell, we were sent to a big school at Lambeth, which I have mentioned earlier, and here I stayed until I reached the ripe old age of 14. At first I was very unhappy, after so many private schools. The discipline was very severe and there were constant canings going on, not only in the classroom where I was, but in other classrooms which were divided by sliding partitions, which could be pushed back so as to make one big hall. I could write much about the years I spent here, but it would not be of much interest, except to me. The school was in a turning off the Lambeth Road and many Music Hall artists lived there or in the vicinity. Consequently there were quite a few budding comedians and acrobats at the school, for instance George Jackley, who became the well-known pantomime comedian and father of Nat Jackley, and ^{who} was a particular friend of a ^{another school} lad named Aubrey Chaplin. I had heard that Aubrey had a cousin in the Infants

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class and one morning, during playtime, he called to a little fellow standing a short distance away, "Charlie, come here I want to talk to you". The small boy ran over to him with hands in his overcoat pockets holding the coat wide open and with his feet turned outwards. Said Aubrey sternly, "And don't act the damn fool - don't forget I'm your cousin". This little lad was Charlie Chaplin, and when I first saw him on the films in 1915, although his walk looked strangely familiar, I did not connect him with the little lad I had seen at school. I sat next to Aubrey in school for many months and on Mondays took sandwiches for my dinner (lunch was not so fashionable an expression as now). He used to buy these from me, and consume them bending under the desk to avoid detection. He paid me 2d for mutton, 3d for beef, 4d for veal and 5d (what wealth!) for pork. My mother was not able to understand why I suddenly evinced a passion for pork and a hatred, bordering on contempt, for mutton.

Please forgive me if I again go back a few years. My mother was an extremely nervous woman and anxious for the safety of her flock. When I was about 6 years of age, my father suggested one Bank Holiday taking my brother and me to Clapham Common. Much against my mother's wish, she finally agreed ~~however~~, after cautioning my father not to leave go of my hand on any account adding that we all know he will get into mischief if he can. Well, we reached Clapham Common safely, my father faithfully holding my hand very tightly, and wended our way to a pond where juveniles and adults were sailing boats. We stood at the extreme edge, my father admiring the scene, when he withdrew his hand to have a pinch of snuff and I, in jubilation, started to jump for joy and fell headlong into the pond. I was soaked down to my waist and covered with mud, and my poor father was in great distress and kept repeating, "Whatever will your mother say?". At last he told me to run about and get dry; and I did run, right into a man riding a penny-farthing bicycle, which passed over my legs as I lay in the road. I was not hurt,

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but, needless to say, very unpopular with my father, who was unpopular in due time with my mother. I was very unhappy at being the cause of so much friction and contemplated suicide, and hoped that everyone would then be sorry for driving me to such an untimely end. It would also be a terrible disappointment to granny, who wanted to see her prophesy fulfilled. After a lapse of so many years, I cannot see that I was so bad, and if you compare me with present day delinquents, I think I deserve a pair of wings!

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We were on the whole a very happy family - that is after my early childhood days, when my grandmother and aunt had carried on their vendetta; but, I will take this opportunity of placing on record that I was very good friends with them up to the time of their death (my grandmother in 1922 and my aunt many years later). I think before coming to live with us they had a very rough time, which might account for their lack of appreciation of a "sweet" little fellow such as I was.

My mother had a stronger character than my father, who was easy going and very popular. She ruled the roost very ably, not only making the little money which she had at her disposal go farther than most, but doing her utmost to inculcate as much knowledge in her children as possible. There were 11 of us - 4 adults and 7 youngsters (~~one girl arrived after I was married~~) - to feed and clothe and she saw to it that we always took a pride in our appearance. Many a time when I went out to work, she has seized me firmly ~~and~~ kindly, and washed my ears. Dare I confess that even after my marriage she surreptitiously carried a flannel and soap with her and when we were unobserved, she would push them into my ears. Unfortunately my wife spotted her and led off alarmingly, saying, amongst many other things, that she had been, up to that moment, under the impression she had married a man. In conclusion she asked my mother to take me upstairs and give me a bath, addin

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that I seemed a big enough fool to suffer any indignity that she cared to suggest. Forty years later, it was still fresh in my wife's memory. I used to tell her she must have elephant blood in her veins.

*Chapter V
Getting into Cold Water*

When I was about 13 years of age, I became friendly with a boy at school named Graham Baxter - a nice looking, innocent lad and very nervous, or so I imagined. I felt he required protection from the many perils that beset a timid boy at a big school and gave him of my best. One day he observed that his mother had, the previous evening, taken him to a doctor about his nerves (the little blighter knew I thought he suffered in this way) and the doctor had recommended a cold bath each morning throughout the year (the little devil stressed this point) as a complete cure. *I agreed to do likewise and* I entered into this most enthusiastically, the weather being warm, and most mornings when we met we would discuss our personal experiences of the morning's cold tub. Summer passed in due course and when October came the baths began to lose their fascination and I began to look forward with increased apprehension to leaving a warm bed and plunging into a bath of very cold water. Dear Graham fortified and encouraged me and from his remarks he seemed to be immune from the cold and perfectly happy with his morning's dip. I stuck it until early November, and then was dissuaded by my mother from continuing, having come down to breakfast that morning looking more blue and dejected than usual. It was two or three days later before I plucked up sufficient moral courage to confess my cowardice to Graham, and when I did, he was most indignant, saying I was yellow and had deprived him of the moral support he had hitherto enjoyed by trying to have his dip at the same time as me, and thus share my joys and woes. He further said stoutly that nothing would deter him and, until Christmas was nearly upon us, he regaled me in detail with the pleasures of his *icy bath.* ~~morning's dip.~~ Furthermore, he told all our classmates what had happened and was looked upon as a hero, while I was less than the dust.

The Christmas term came to an end in due course and with it the Annual Prizegiving and School Concert, which was attended by most parents. Graham was accompanied by his mother and father (mater and pater we said in those days) and I was ditto. My mother had expressed a desire to meet the plucky little man, as she termed him. I acquainted him of my mother's wish but to my astonishment he put all sorts of obstacles in the way, such as, his mother was very nervous and could not bear being introduced to strangers, and I, "expect my mater and pater will be staying only for the Prizegiving, they don't like being out late". These are only two of the many excuses he invented and I, who had never before questioned his veracity, began to be slightly uneasy, which made me vow that they should meet, if possible. I therefore kept my eyes on Graham and when the proceedings concluded, I soon spotted his parents and quickly shepherded mine in their direction. He on his part had "rumbled" what I was up to and was doing his utmost to get them well out of the way and he succeeded in getting them into the street before me and mine, and some dozen yards ahead. I was on my metal now and determined not to be beaten, I yelled, "Hallo Graham, half a 'mo" and that did it. All three turned round and we were soon busy shaking hands and talking. Even then I noticed dear Graham kept particularly silent and unobtrusive, which I attributed to his shy nature. The day, or rather night, of nemesis had arrived, however, for my mother soon came to the point. "Let me shake the hand of the little hero" said she cheerfully and his mother replied incredulously, "Whatever do you mean?", My mother, equally astonished, said "Why, the cold baths I mean". Further explanations followed, concluding with Graham's mother saying indignantly, "The wicked little liar, he has never had a cold bath in his life; even in the hot weather, if he can he will wash in warm water". Our respective fathers laughed heartily. Our mothers discussed the matter more seriously; as for me, I was too furious

to even stutter. I managed to tell Graham that I would half kill him after the holidays, and I meant to. I brooded over the matter all through the holidays and, on returning to school, lost no time in broadcasting the perfidy of Graham and my intention to let the daylight into his lying carcass. My classmates were, with one accord, on my side and the great fight was to take place during dinner time and one o'clock saw us minus our coats and surrounded by boys. Alas for human nature and its frailties. Graham was a better liar than a fighter, for he funk'd the latter at the eleventh hour and started crying and asked me to forgive him and I, who was a most obstinate pig when opposed, was worse than any girl when anyone expressed contrition.

I got some gratification from realising that Graham must have suffered hell during the few hours that preceded the time appointed for the great fight. He looked absolutely ghastly and I was only too pleased to be friends again. This friendship lasted for the remainder of my school days; since when I have never heard of him. I wonder if he is still alive?

Chapter III Cod Liver Oil

To digress for the umpteenth time, when I was about 8 or 9 there seemed to be a craze for Cod Liver Oil - whether local or universal I cannot say - but anyway it was discussed at home and the conclusion drawn that it was a safeguard against the many ills that beset the flesh. At a later date, adenoids and tonsils were the black sheep and from prince to peasant ^{all} were roped in, often unnecessarily in my humble opinion. That craze died out and the fashion that superseded it, was teeth. Whatever you went to the doctor about, from a headache to a pain in your big toe, he would murmur the all important word, "pyorrhoea", examine your mouth and in ^{nine} ~~seven~~ cases out of ten say you must have all your teeth out. Many a friend with a perfect set of molars have I met a few weeks later looking very miserable and holding handkerchiefs to their mouths. My greeting was usually,

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"Blimey, I didn't think you were such a nut as to fall for it!"

Next came appendicitis. The ordinary man in the street had never heard the word prior to Edward VII being stricken with it, but it was all the rage now and one got quite accustomed to being told that so-and-so was in hospital having his or her appendix removed.

I have mentioned either before, or will later on, that I had all my teeth out, but they were really bad and I suffered agonies before taking this drastic step.

Next came phenobarbitone. Whatever was wrong with you, that was the cure. Do you remember when some were lost almost daily and there was an S.O.S. warning on the wireless? I was continually told by friends that they could oblige me with some if I so desired. They seemed as plentiful as chocolates.

What followed? O yes, penicillin is, I think, the latest, with a psychiatrist or two thrown in, but we don't hear so much about slipped discs now, do we?

I am afraid I have strayed somewhat from the Cod Liver Oil story, to which I will now return, with your permission. A huge bottle was purchased one morning, much to our consternation, and we nippers were lined up for a dose each. There were five of us to suffer, two boys and three girls, and I happened to be the last in the unhappy queue. My mother, first telling us it was tasteless - it said it on the bottle (the biggest lie of the century!) started doling it out, a table or desertspoonful - I forget which - my brother being the first victim. He took a mouthful, then made a bee_line for the sink, uttering pathetic choking noises, and making the remaining four of us windier than ever (as bad as witnessing someone being tortured and it's your turn next!). My poor mother was very distressed by the time it was my turn, having in the meantime dealt with my three small sisters with only limited

success. I had not the heart to make a fuss and so, like the sop and liar I have always been, not only swallowed the filthy concoction but, horror of horrors, said I liked it. The prodigal son's homecoming was tame compared with my popularity that followed. "Lennie likes Cod Liver Oil" was the slogan, and I had to live up to it. When friends and relations visited us, conversation was neatly directed to medicine and coughs and thus by easy stages, to Cod Liver Oil. Even grannie and ^{au}tie often led the way and, as for my sisters, I was quite a hero. The relations and friends usually expressed scepticism and that was what all the family wanted. The triumphant cry went forth, "Lennie's going to have a dose" and all and sundry flocked to the performance, even some of our playmates at times were roped in. Wherever I was, I was dragged in to do my turn and learned early in life that one lie leads to another. How often have I, with a cheerful face and sinking tummy swallowed my dose and completed the ritual by saying firmly, "I like it". How much Cod Liver Oil I swallowed in this way, I shall never know, but I have often thought it might account for its being said by friends and others, "He's too oily you know, a slippery customer".

Chapter VII *Childish Ailments*

I was fortunate with childish ailments. If I was affected, it was only slightly and I well remember when my brother and sisters had whooping cough I did my best to catch it but it was useless. I could not even cough, let alone give vent to a whoop. I was very unpopular in consequence until I resolved to get back into favour, so I chose Saturday teatime for my piece de resistance, when all the family would be present. After an apologetic little cough to focus attention, I let forth a mighty whoop loud enough to waken the dead. After the family had recovered from the shock - it took a full five minutes - I was more popular than I could ever remember and hearty congratulations were showered upon me. This is not as silly as it sounds,

for all the nippers to be affected at the same time. One doctor could attend to three or four in one visit, whereas if each of the children were ill at different times, it meant more visits from the doctor and therefore more fees. Time was saved because it meant mounting the stairs only once to attend to all the invalids instead of separate visits for each individual child, and moreover, it meant disturbing the smooth running of the house only once instead of a number of times.

I worked somewhat on this principle in later years when I had three sons aged 6, 4½ and 3 respectively, who had to have their adenoids and tonsils removed. My wife and I and a lady friend, took all three to Kings College Hospital, where they were operated upon in rotation, carted home and plonked into bed. We had one bad night instead of the three, had they been attended to on three separate occasions.

To this end, when my brother and sister caught measles and I did not, I, for some reason beyond my comprehension, was placed in bed with my sister, instead of my brother. At any rate my sister, although covered in spots, did not appear ill, and I never felt better in my life. Lying in bed was no life for me and after the first day I was most unhappy and on the second day I suggested a pillow fight, to which my sister agreed with some diffidence. It was not a fair scrap and I must have been a cad for I gave her a mighty swipe and she went out of bed and on to the floor as flat as a pancake and of course started howling dismally. I pretended to ignore her cries and stood on my head hoping to amuse her, when in walked my mother with the doctor. My sister was duly comforted and placed back in bed and I had to face the doctor and his righteous indignation. He said that my sister might have caught cold which could prove fatal and that I was a bully and wanted my hide tanned. He never considered that I might have caught cold and being overlooked in this callous way caused me much suffering momentarily. I reasoned that if I cuddled and kissed my sister I could not only kill two birds

with one stone, but could also encompass my own destruction by catching measles. It would also demonstrate my grief over my poor sister's early demise; but my strategy was useless. My sister did not perish, neither did I catch measles.

Chapter VIII
Tribute to a loved Headmaster

I can recall an afternoon at school when I had misbehaved and as part of my punishment, the headmaster directed me to bury a cat, which some mischievous person or persons had tossed into his garden. I was told where to find the spade and soon dug a hole not far from puss~~y~~'s outstretched body. I then very squeamishly advanced towards the "corpse", spade in hand, but immediately ~~it~~ touched the body, it came to life, stood firmly on its four legs, yawned, arched its back, and like any witch^{'s} cat, gave me a spiteful look and dived over the wall. I was shaken and must have turned paler than usual, for on returning to the classroom, the headmaster said "Whatever is the matter? You look as if you had seen a ghost". I stammered out, "Please sir, the dead cat you sent me to bury, could not have been dead, because directly I touched it with the spade, it got up and jumped over the wall". The boys, about 60 of them, thought this a huge joke and laughed uproariously and so did the headmaster.

The headmaster at this school was a very dear man and in spite of the corporal punishment that was served out liberally during school hours, he was loved by most of the boys and very much respected. In cap and gown, and with a long flowing beard, he looked very dignified and to most of us also very formidable. When the 350 boys were assembled in the morning in a big classroom, before 9, there was much laughter and talking going on, as you would expect from such a large number of youngsters, but immediately the headmaster entered, at 9 o'clock promptly, there was a silence one could feel. It was dead, absolute and uncanny. He would walk slowly past the lines of

boys, inspecting hands and boots, and woe betide any boy who did not come up to the standard - he would be sent home and given so many minutes to clean his boots, wash his hands, or both, and when he did return he had to go straight to the headmaster, who administered a hander for the first offence and six of the best on the seat, for subsequent offences. I often wonder what he would have thought of the present day sloppy attitude towards corporal punishment, and of the parents who complain that their dear little angels received a stroke of the cane. The fools, no wonder there is such a spate of juvenile delinquency these days. We were caned for being late, stupidity or inattention, and for the usual misbehaviour that will occur among boys, when they think they won't be spotted.

Not only did the headmaster administer a good thrashing personally, but if it was for a more serious offence than usual, he would write to your father, asking him to give you another.

His only vice - if you can call it that - was taking snuff. He had a large metal snuff box, which rumour said once belonged to Nelson, and he would walk along the desks and hammer in his point of view if he did not approve of a boy's work. The hammering was performed by the metal snuff box on the cranium and if any boy had gone to a phrenologist after one of these bouts, it would have been discovered that he had every vice - and perhaps virtues - known to mankind. After one of his inspections, particles of snuff would fall on the paper you were engaged on, but if you attempted to clean it with rubber, the result was disastrous - it resulted in brown smears all over your paper. Of course, with experience you discovered the best method was to blow the snuff off.

I can remember that when I had been at the school some three months, the headmaster was doing his usual rounds, and to my horror, stopped at the back of me for too long to be up to any good. At last he spoke, "You stupid

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little ass (he pronounced this last word in its broadest sense), 7 added to 5 makes 12, not 11" and he proceeded to thump my pate with his snuff box 11 times to emphasise his point, at the same time showering a quarter of an ounce or so of snuff over my arithmetic paper. This annoyed me far more than the snuff box and, casting discretion to the winds, I said indignantly, "Look what you have done to my arithmetic paper". The other boys were amazed and thought that I should be hauled out to receive six of the best, but the headmaster, after a moment's pause, said quietly, "That was unintentional". Thereafter I was referred to by the other boys as "Johnnie's baby" - "Johnnie" was the headmaster's nickname. It was commonly said that if Johnnie could not cane knowledge into you by way of your bottom, or box it into your head with his snuff box, then you were a hopeless case and fit only for the lunatic asylum (there were no mental institutions in those far off days).

A rather embarrassing incident for me occurred during my sojourn at the school. I had premature knowledge that I should be caned on the morrow because on the day that my offence had been committed, the headmaster was away and I had misbehaved during the scripture lesson given by the rector of the parish - an unforgivable sin. I thought I would be reported to the headmaster, and I was. Now during that week I had been whacked on the Monday and Wednesday and as it was Thursday when I had offended the rector, it was 100 to 1 that I should get it again on the Friday. I had not recovered from the two previous beatings and was like an engine driver - I had a tender behind. As a rule a beating perturbed me very little, I was too used to it, but in the circumstances I hope I may be forgiven for attempting to take precautions. I knew my mother had a liberal supply of cotton wool in her drawer - she used it in making certain garments for my four or five little sisters - I think stays is the word - and accordingly, borrowed, or

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pinched (it's the same thing as a rule), a goodly quantity of this pain reliever, as I thought. On the following morning I liberally lined my knickers with it. I must explain that the headmaster had thighs like the trunk of an oak tree and when he laid you across one of them, resting his foot on a chair, it was most soothing and inclined to make a boy sleepy, but this feeling was very transitory and very soon painfully dispelled. He had a habit of not only making sure that there was nothing between your knickers and flesh, to interfere with the course of justice, but he invariably caught hold of the top of your knickers and pulled them to make sure they were skin tight.

The fateful moment arrived when the clock said 10.5 a.m. and I, with one or two other moral delinquents, were told to come forth and bring our bottoms with us. This piece of facetiousness never failed to amuse the boys. I mean those who were seated comfortably on theirs, and even for the victims it seemed to create a friendly atmosphere, like a punch and judy show at an execution. I was the last to go over the top so to speak, and felt the expert hand of the headmaster hovering over my posterior. "What on earth have we got here?" he demanded, with a fist full of cotton wool, and I had to blushingly confess the truth. Still blushing violently I had to slip down my knickers and remove the offending wool and then, over I went again - three one side, three on the other side - I breathed a sigh of relief and prepared to dismount, but no such luck. A further stinging blow fell on my right and the headmaster said, "that's for cheating" and then the eighth stroke was delivered with the remark, "and that's for thinking I should be too stupid to find out".

Did it end there? No, a thousand times no. There was a long ~~stick~~ ^{penker} in the classroom which was used to emphasize any place on a map or anything particularly important on the black board. The headmaster made me tie the cotton wool on the end of this - I suppose it measured some six or eight

inches down the pole and could not easily be overlooked in the prominent corner where it ~~lived~~^{lodged}. At first I did not tumble to the significance of this move, but it was soon apparent when we had visitors. We had quite a few, former scholars with their families, including girls, and inspectors from the school with whom we were affiliated and friends and acquaintances of the headmaster. At that time I calculated that five out of six visitors - the nosey lot - noticed the pointer and its decoration and asked whatever was that for and this was where I came into the picture. I had to stand on the form and stammer out explanations to the best of my ability, and to the accompaniment of much laughter from the boys and visitors. I was far more embarrassed at that age when ladies were present, especially young ones, but the incident created a diversion in the otherwise grim task of preparing to fit oneself to face the cruel world.

You may think this unnecessarily harsh on the part of the headmaster, but one afternoon he asked me to stay behind and have tea in his house which adjoined the school. He said he was very concerned over my bad impediment and would I ask my mother to take me to a doctor for advice, adding that I might have thought it cruel of him to devise the cotton wool joke, but the motive behind this was the hope that it would partially conquer my sensitiveness. This was on a Thursday and on Friday I told him my mother was taking me to Kings College Hospital on the following Monday. His last words to me when I left on the Friday afternoon were, "When I see you on Tuesday I hope you will have good news". We never met again, however, because he was discovered dead in bed on the Monday morning. This was a terrible shock for most of us, and when he was buried and a service held in Lambeth Parish Church, there was scarcely a boy out of the 350 who could refrain from weeping. The most affected, so it appeared to me at the time being the lads who had been caned the most. There is a plaque to his

memory in the church.

I have earlier expressed my views on the modern attitude to corporal punishment and beg to be allowed to stress the point again. It is mamby pamby and sloppy and the main cause of teddy boys and their ilk.

I have met several of my late classmates in later life, successful men and without exception they have talked about "dear old Johnnie" with something approaching reverence. He was 52 when he died - a mere boy to me now.

Appearance is sometimes deceptive
It was round about this time I went to Shoreham with the choir. The Vicar's brother was headmaster at ^{Lancing} Shoreham College and he - the Vicar - was going to take the boys by rowing boat to see him and the college. Now, as I have said earlier, my mother was extremely nervous and made me promise not to go in the boats for fear of them overturning and so I was left to amuse myself for a couple of hours or so. I found myself near a bridge in due time and set about investigating it. There was not much doing to interest me, so I climbed outside with the intention of crossing to the other side and back in this precarious way. I got half way over and then my hand slipped and I found myself falling, head first, into the sea. I can record that my senses were paralysed and fear left me. As I went down I noticed in an impassive sort of way how the sea had left its green mark on the pillars of the bridge and idly wondered when the tide would be up again and cover over the disfigurement. I could not swim an inch and should have been drowned had I not been for a man in a rowing boat who fished me out after much difficulty and very kindly took me to his home where his wife provided me with tea and dried my clothes and ironed them. I did not say anything about the incident at home for many years and my clothes did not give me away. The point is should have been far safer had I gone to ^{Lancing} Shoreham College with the others.

Thinking about my old schoolmates calls to remembrance that I went to visit one of them some years ago. He was manager of a cinema and we had not met for 36 years. I easily recognised him and he said he remembered me an

we were soon exchanging reminiscences of our school days and anecdotes about our subsequent careers. Suddenly he said, "I wonder what happened to those cocky little snots in sailor suits who Johnnie was so fond of". I was greatly amused and said I knew quite a lot about them as I was one of them and my brother was the other. This caused a momentary embarrassment which was expelled when I laughed heartily and appreciated the joke. He hastened to assure me I had turned out a far better fellow than he would have thought possible and thus the matter was laughed away. Not before, however, I had asked him why he considered us such "cocky little snots," and his answer was revealing. He said it was nothing we said or did that upset the other boys but the way we looked at them that got up their nose. Had they realised what an ordeal it was at first for my brother and ~~me~~^{me}, who had for years been to private schools only, they would have altered their opinion perhaps. I don't suppose we ever felt less cocky than in those days. This particular schoolmate left within six months of our advent, after which period we had become more hardened and I hope we appeared less cocky than hitherto.

Reflecting on what I have just written, I have more than once quite innocently upset people by my appearance and, at the time, I blamed my spats but on the other hand thousands of other people wore them. Let me give you two incidents and you will see what I mean. One night I was walking harmlessly along Edgware Road towards the Marble Arch when I became aware that someone was using bad language. Such expressions as, "b - - y parasite never done a b - - y day's work in your life", "I'd like to stick a knife in your b - - y guts!" etc. floated on to the night air. I had not at first the slightest suspicion these remarks were addressed to me, but as I could still hear the man's curses when I walked faster and no-one was walking past me, when my pace was diminished to a crawl, I had to conclude that I was the innocent victim of some man's spleen. I therefore stopped suddenly and turned round and beheld about eight feet behind me a shabby man who stopped

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immediately I did and prepared to run if I approached him. I was now very annoyed and was determined to "cosh" him if I could get my paws on him. So I entered a tobacconist shop, but no further than the door. My half witted friend came up and prepared to assail me from the door and that is where he went wrong. I seized him by the collar and asked him why the hell he was behaving in such a ridiculous way, but as his answer was "b - - y parasite", I gave him a 4d one on the jaw and meant it. He was a bigger man than I - about 10 years my senior, so I thought one balanced the other. I left him sitting on the pavement with his back resting against the shop, still cursin and made off as quickly as I could. I thought he might have some pals nearby.

Some months later I was walking along the Strand on the left from Charing Cross bound for the Savoy Theatre, and this time I was wearing an opera hat, so it could not be the spats that caused offence, it must have been the hat. But why pick on me? There were scores of other fellows about attired in this way, also on their way to the theatre, but I suppose I looked the soppiest. However that may be, I soon discerned a gruff voice behind me and the usual words, "b - - y parasite", etc. I took no notice and soon arrived opposite the steps leading down to the theatre and crossed over to a refuge in the middle of the road on which a policeman was standing and directing the traffic. I was about to complete the crossing when a particularly loud curse made me look back in anger and there I saw the stupid ass of a man who had been following me. He was the same type of individual I had run across in Edgware Road, about 50 years of age and he was now standing on the kerb in spite of the policeman, gestulating furiously and shouting "as well as a b - - y parasite, you are a white livered cur". This was more than I could stand and so, telling the policeman I was going to slobber him (he said "I did not hear you"), I darted at the man, caught him by the throat

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and hurled him to the ground, at the same time casting doubts as to the legitimacy of his birth. He wasn't hurt but somewhat subdued and I left him sitting on the pavement holding up a restaurant, I think the name was Gows. I returned to the refuge and in a stage whisper told the constable I had settled the bill. He said, "I didn't see anything, Sir". He was a sport.

I have been a blackguard ever since I could stammer out a word, a trifle hasty tempered, very sensitive and too quick to take offence. In short, I have been guilty of all the deadly sins known to mankind except laziness and I never had time to indulge in this pastime until now and I loathe it. Therefore it has often intrigued me to know why I have caused some people to consider me a parasite and a few other complimentary names. I started to go to work when I was 14 and was out of a job for one week only - for which I received a month's pay - until I was nearly 74, when, as related elsewhere, I received a knockout blow by way of a stroke. Otherwise I fully intended to work full time till I was at least 80, ~~and~~ I think I might have eased up a bit then. No, after mature consideration I think my appearance has been against me. In other words, I looked sappy and effeminate, especially in my younger days. I need scarcely say that anyone who made this mistake was quickly undeceived. I haven't looked the least effeminate for the past 30 or 40 years and now I hate to gaze into a mirror as I have lost most of my hair and all my teeth and am nearly blind in one eye. I am certain that any undertaker who caught sight of me would cart me to his workshop and bury me free of charge - out of sheer pity.

Chapter X
My First Job

I now return to the end of my school days, not the happiest in my life by any means. A few weeks prior to my 14th birthday, as I have already informed you, the headmaster had died suddenly and the school was changed altogether, and so at the age of 14 I procured a job in Fleet Street at the

princely salary of 5/- per week. I had to walk part of the way from Brixton and the first morning ^{at the job} a gentleman kept me writing at his dictation, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. There was not a minute's pause and, as a strong August sun had been on my head all the time, I was browned off by then ^{in more ways than one}. My father worked in Fleet Street and I repaired rather sadly to him for comfort. He was a compositor and told me that on his first day as an apprentice, a lad had approached him sniffing at something he was carrying in paper and enquire of him if he thought it was sour. My father obligingly stuck his nose in to find out, and the lad had then stuck the contents over his face. He said he had paste in his hair, eyes, nose and ears and had swallowed enough to make him paste-conscious for the rest of his life. In short, my first morning as a business man was a walk-over in comparison.

In due course 7 o'clock arrived and a young man in a frock coat and top hat told me, "Shut the window, boy". Now, if anything has got my goat since my earliest recollection it has been ~~caused by~~ anyone speaking sharply to me and omitting to say please. I would and will do anything in my power for anyone who asks me nicely, but if they don't, I doubt if a mule could be more cussed. I retorted that, if he said "please", I would gladly shut all the windows in Fleet Street, to which he replied "you saucy little so-and-so, I will wring your b - - neck if you don't do what you are told". He then smacked my face. I knocked his hat off and for the next half-hour we struggled, with intervals for breathing, and during that time I had torn his collar off and he, ~~for~~ his part, had seized hold of my ears and banged my head on the wall. During the intervals for breathing, he had hissed at me, "Now will you do what you are told you little - - ". I could only shake my head in defiance, and eventually we desisted. The point is that I never shut that damned window and the subject was not again referred to, either by my top hatted friend or me.

The boss was an American and a bad one at that. Even I had a roll-topped desk and a Remington typewriter and so did the three or four other clerks in the office; but I afterwards discovered that nothing had been paid for. About a month after my advent, I was given a rise of 1/- a week and to show my appreciation I bought the boss a pen with a view of the Crystal Palace at the top. You looked through a small hole containing a magnifying glass and there the palace was in all its glory. During that day the boss rebuked me, adding that the next time he would kick my gory posterior. These were not the exact words he used but that is what he meant. Said I indignantly, "^{How} dare ^{you} talk to me like that after me buying you that pen". He lent towards his pen tray, found my pen and threw it on the floor, saying: "keep your b - - y pen you damned idiot".

One by one the office staff were dismissed until the only persons remaining indoors were the boss, my friend with the top hat (I later on discovered he was in collusion with the boss) and your humble servant. In addition there were three outside men. One day the boss said to me, "Boy" (I was tired of reminding him that I had a surname and even tried telling him my Christian name, but it was useless, I was always "boy"). "Boy" he said "you take a long dinner hour and when you do come back, if you see two men waiting outside the office, pretend you are working in another firm further up the stairs. When they have gone, if you stand on the W.C. seat every ten minutes and wave a duster out of the window, I will be on the look out."

I carried out his instructions for three days and no secret agent or spy could have felt more of a devil. On the fourth day when I returned, the men were as usual seated on the stairs and one of them said, "Sonny, what firm do you work for?" I ignored him, not having been introduced, and so he followed me. I went to the top floor, and was going into th

lavatory, the only possible means of escape as I thought, when the beastly man caught me by the arm and said, "I thought as much, me and my mate want to talk to you "darnstairs". As I have previously hinted, I have always been a blackguard and on this occasion I said more in less time than I had ever done before or since. I told him his damn paws were filthy, his breath was foul and as for his putrid body, it could not have been washed since his birth. I ended my compliments by attempting to kick him in a particularly tender spot, but he called me a vicious little bastard and dragged me on to the first floor. It took some time because with my free hand I clutched at the bannisters at every available opportunity and it took some moments to disengage my hand. I lost count of how many times he cast aspersions on the legitimacy of my birth. He and his mate went through my pockets whilst I struggled and swore, and procured the office key and thus gained entrance. Never did a traitor who had betrayed the land of his birth feel more guilty or unhappy than I. The men appeared to make an inventory of the furniture, etc. and then departed leaving me the key. I was by now sullen and sulky and refused to bandy words with such low men.

As for the boss, I never saw him again. Whether he got windy because no welcome duster appeared, or whether he crept cautiously upstairs to satisfy himself that all was up, I shall never know. The day this happened was a Friday and on Saturday the three travellers turned up and we all waited for the boss to come with our money. He didn't!

During this week my top hatted friend had been absent, but on the following Monday he turned up and expressed great surprise and concern when I told him what had happened. He assured me and the three travellers, anxiously waiting outside since the crack of dawn, that all would be well by the following Saturday and told me he would ask the boss to give me a 1/- rise for attempting to fight the "bums". The faithful and optimistic few held on for another two weeks, that is to say, three outside men came in on

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Saturday and waited patiently whilst my top hatted friend and I held the fort from 9 till 7, and 2 o'clock on Saturdays. During that period there were mysterious comings and goings of many persons and furious arguments with my top hatted friend, but none of the furniture was removed, which caused me some astonishment, as I understood that when you had the brokers in they took everything except the chairs and beds. Perhaps somebody thought we slept on the desks, which was quite understandable considering there was absolutely nothing to do. Anyway at the end of the two weeks, we, that is the three travellers and your humble servant, decided it was useless to waste any further time and we sadly said goodbye, minus three weeks pay. I never knew what happened to my top hatted friend but his final words were, "If anything turns up, I will let you know". And so I went home, feeling very unhappy and that my business career was finished as far as the city was concerned. However, my father gave me 4d and I bought a mouth organ and for the remainder of the afternoon, drove my family up the wall with my rendering of "Hearts of Oak", "Rule Britannia" and "God Save the Queen".

*Chapter XI
Job the Second*

I soon procured another job, via the Telegraph, in Old Broad Street, and I had by then copied the pranks of other boys, one of which was walking under the tummies of stationary horses. With a palpitating heart I did this half a dozen times or so, but never again after a restless horse had nearly put paid to my already chequered career. Another popular pastime was running when sent on errands to somewhere that entitled you to a bus fare. Many office boys ran to and from their destination and pocketed the fare and it was a familiar sight to see six or so lads in Fleet Street and Ludgate Hill pelting their way along as if the devil was after them - he probably was.

My modus operandi at first was to go through St. Paul's Cathedral - assuming my goal was in that direction - flying up the steps like one possessed, along the left aisle, and out into Cheapside. Often the morning

service would be ^{back to peace} on, when my running would not be so apparent. This route seemed to take me half way up Cheapside before one could say Jack Robinson - but not this one; I should probably have reached Housditch before I spat it out.

I later on thought up what I considered a better way of travelling. I would mount a bus going in the direction I had to go and by the time the conductor had arrived to collect the fare and I had slowly, very slowly, asked him for a place which was in the opposite direction to where I was going, and had been told so by the conductor, I was half way to where I wanted to go, and I, of course, repeated my tactics for the return journey. ~~One day,~~ However, I got on the same bus two mornings running and the conductor recognised me. He, like many nasty men I had met in the past and was destined to meet in the future, did not believe my parents had ever been married, adding that he would put the police on to me. This finished my illicit bus rides and I was forced ~~to~~ ^{or pay the fare -} again resort to Shanks's Pony. I was very fond of St. Paul's and never missed an opportunity of going in there when I brought something cold from home to eat for lunch. I invariably went in and sat at the back and consumed my cold repast in solemn grandeur. I liked the atmosphere of a cathedral, the musty smell, the acoustic properties and general feeling of protection from the outside world. I would have liked to have sung in a cathedral choir, but the stipend offered was too small.

Whilst with this firm the Boer ^{War} was raging and I remember the relief of Ladysmith and Mafeking very well. At the time of Ladysmith, I wended my way to Mansion House where there ~~was~~ ^{was} a solid mass of people, ~~and~~ all men as far as I could see, cheering and waving and I nearly got squashed to death; but it was mild in comparison with Mafeking. Throughout the morning I could hear the crowd cheering in the distance, and so when lunch time arrived I armed myself with a 2d piece of "plain with jam," bought from Pearce and Plenty, and

hastened to the Mansion House where the scene was almost indescribable. There top hats were continually in the air and it struck me at the time that it appeared to be raining toppers, as unreal as the cats and dogs I had heard so much about, but never witnessed. Anyway I plunged into the excited mob and, being there, got well into the middle and was cheering lustily when a hand came from nowhere and I was minus my pudding, and a few minutes later my ~~hat~~ disappeared. I suppose a half hour had flown since I joined the crowd and I thought it was high time I went; but, could I extricate myself? Oh dear no! It was as hopeless as trying to push down the Tower of London. Many had joined the crowd during their luncheon break and the crowd was now solid and compact, some singing, "The Soldiers of the Queen" and others, "The Absent Minded Beggar", and the residue cheering and shouting. I was properly mangled by then and it took me an hour to get free - in fact I thought I never should, but eventually I managed it and emerged into breathing space more dead than alive.

Three months later the staff of a well-known daily newspaper arrived to share our office and all went well for some time until we had a heat wave. Now our office window (we were on the third floor) overlooked a Pickford's Depot and, as the newspaper office boy and myself stood looking out - it was the dinner hour - a van drove in with a huge man at the reins. He was minus his coat and waistcoat and looked frightfully hot, and on dismounting, produced a red handkerchief with which he proceeded to mop his face. The office boy said we could not idly stand by and watch a fellow creature stew in his own juice and that it was our duty to do something about it. His eyes wandered to the office water bottle and the result was that the unfortunate driver received the full contents of the bottle on his head and shirt. We carefully closed the window and congratulated ourselves that he would never know where the water came from as there were a dozen or more windows overlooking the yard. But alas, a few minutes later, heavy footsteps were heard

coming along the corridor and the driver appeared in all his might and righteous indignation. His flow of epithets made even me envious and he finished his tirade by saying that even if he had to - - - well swing for it he would not go until he had broken our - - - necks. He was far too big and ferocious to permit of any arguments, so whilst he chased the other office boy through swing doors leading to and from the other offices, I bolted like greased lightning up the corridor and butted clean into the waistcoat of my boss. His top hat fell over his eyes and he was momentarily winded. When he recovered he enquired sternly what the devil was the matter and took me back to the office where the enemy had just caught up with the other office boy. He had got both my friend's arms behind him and looked as if he was about to bite his nose off. My boss asked him what the hell he thought he was up to, trespassing in private offices, etc., and a descriptive explanation followed, with a very wet shirt as part evidence. We were told to apologise and the governor gave him some money and he departed, muttering something about if he saw us in front of his horse, God help us. Needless to say I was given a week's notice, so was my friend as soon as his boss came back from lunch, and had been told what had happened.

By the time my notice had expired, I had ^{My ~~Chaplain~~ ~~Third~~ ~~Attempt~~} procured another job through the Telegraph, in Billiter Street at a tea merchants. I had told my parents I was going to look for another job and thus evaded telling them I had got the sack again. My father did say, "What about giving a week's notice?" but I parried that by saying I was going to forfeit a week's money. I could afford to do this (so I said) as it was the end of the quarter and I had my choir money. This was the last money, by the way, that I received as a choir boy for shortly afterwards my voice broke.

Whilst at this tea firm I sometimes patronised a coffee shop on the left of Aldgate Pump, going eastwards and on this occasion regaled myself with steak pudding and two vegetables. I had nearly finished my repast

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except for an inviting piece of pudding, but on turning it over I was disgusted to see a huge cockroach lying peacefully on its back. Without more ado I took my plate with its toothsome morsel to the man behind the counter and asked him the price of cockroaches and he retorted, "What's your game you saucy little hellhound?" I pointed to my plate and said, "This will cost you 6d - the price of my pudding". He had the damned impertinence to say I must pay and that these little accidents would occur in the best hotels. I retorted that if he did not stop talking such rot I would stand outside his shop and show the customers my find. He said he would fetch a policeman and he called me a foul name and I went. That corner of Fenchurch Street was henceforth known to me and many of my friends to whom I mentioned the incident as Cockroach Corner.

I stayed with this firm a number of months until one day a packer called me a b - y stuttering monkey. I retaliated by creeping up behind him and placing a chest half filled with tea over his head, and that's how the row started. I was obviously no match for him as he was nearly six feet tall and accustomed to tossing chests of tea about. He twisted my right arm behind me, after a preliminary struggle and put a small bone in my wrist out of joint and it is still out of joint after nearly 60 years. Thus I was again out of a job, the boss saying that one of us would have to go and as the packer was a married man, it must be me.

I was not happy there and it did not break my heart to be turfed out. One thing that upset me was to have to read back a copy of the orders which I entered in a book: the governor having the original copies for checking. He had his own office, needless to say, with sliding panel for use when he wanted to communicate with anyone in the general office. He always hollered through this space when he wanted me to read, "Boy, order book". The clerk would titter and the governor would shout, "I can't hear you - speak up - spit it out for God's sake". Considering there were others who could have

done this simple task in a third of the time, I always considered this unnecessarily refined cruelty. The world might be wicked as a whole now, but in those days individuals, especially a jumped up beggar-on-horseback, could be the very devil.

Another of their funny ways was to take my stool away and compel me to stand so that when the head clerk wanted me he pulled me along by the seat of my trousers, saying, "Wake up Jack Sheppard"; which was my nickname. I was furious and thought dourly of how I could have my own back. A seat full of needles seemed suitable, but on reflection I came to the conclusion that it might prove a double edged sword, so to speak. One of the clerks tried to emulate the head clerk on one occasion, but I retaliated with such a string of obscene language, followed by a punch on his proboscis and breaking his spectacles, as to put a stop to anyone, except the head clerk, ever taking such a liberty again. I had to take it from him or lose my job.

2/c In a lighter vein, ^{there was} ~~was caused~~ ^{by} ~~owing~~ to a grating ^{before a shop} ~~over the~~ window beneath which were our premises and a cellar. If the governor was out and a female happened to stand on ^{the grating} ~~it~~ for the purpose of gazing at the model ships shown in the window by a steamship firm who occupied the ^{general floor -} ~~window and offices~~ there, as soon as she was spotted, the cry of, "over the grating" went forth. Instantly there was a rush to the cellar not only from our premises but also from other offices in the basement. It was all very childish but most of the males, including me, seemed to derive some satisfaction from gazing upwards imagining we could see what was not intended for our eyes. As a matter of fact nothing could be seen except the sole and heel of a shoe and a portion of ankle and stockings. With the long skirts then worn it was not always possible to see as much.

One morning, after the usual cry had been sounded, as I gazed up hopefully, in company with a number of silent males of all ages, a little man who worked at a marine instrument makers handed me a formidable looking pump

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saying, "Give her a cooling, Jack, she looks so hot". I needed no second bidding being as mischievous as most boys of 15 years or so. Just as I pushed the plunger however, she started to walk away and the stream of water missed the target and went up the back of her coat instead. She seemed perfectly unconscious of the calamity that had nearly overtaken her and I have thought with some dread of what the consequences would have been had she not walked away. The fellow who told me to do the squirting had retreated to his workshop before I attempted the disgraceful act and so had the clerks and packers; therefore, I deduced that had I been successful and caught, the others would have denied all knowledge of the incident. I have often wondered how the lady accounted for her coat having a very wet tail.

Chapter XIII
Secure for Seventeen Years

I was by now just turned 16 and soon got another job through the usual channel. You may wonder how I managed to secure jobs so easily when I stammered in the first place and secondly could or did not refer to my previous employers for a reference. I got out of this latter difficulty by asserting that my firm had closed down some months before and that my mother had kept me at home for some months in an endeavour to 'cure my nerves.' As for ^{the drawback of} my stammering, ^{well,} I could write far better than the average boy and thus obtained an interview as a rule and when I did I think, in all due modesty, that my appearance helped me, as I was very particular about clean shirts, collars, hands and face and tidy hair, and a crease in my trousers (I used to put them under the mattress each night). Having secured the interview my next goal was the job and my interviewer on two occasions knocked 2/- off the salary I asked for and on my acceptance seemed pleased to engage me.

Referring to my writing which I regarded as an asset. In those days when jobs were scarce and applicants many and good writing was indispensable in an office, I think it was common practice to open only those letters with good handwriting, consigning the residue to the waste paper basket. I

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myself was frequently given the job of running through 200 letters or so in answer to an advertisement for a junior clerk and selecting the best six or nine to place before the head clerk. How many budding managing directors were overlooked by this casual method of selection, I shall never know, neither will anybody else.

This last situation was in New Bond Street and here I stayed for ~~six~~^{seven} teen years learning a lot that subsequently helped me, and incidentally, where I met the girl, as she was then, who later became my wife. On my first day, however, I excelled myself in stupidity, bad temper and general bad behaviour; and I have often wondered why I was not sacked within a couple of hours after my arrival.

It was in this wise. I was given a seat on a high stool next to a lad about a year my senior, who regarded me quizzically for some minutes and then whispered, "You're a mother's boy". I very haughtily enquired why he had that impression and he replied that I was all collar and cuffs and looked as if my mother had taken me out of cotton wool that very morning. I said indignantly that I would punch him on the nose, when the head clerk told us to stop chattering and get on with our work. This temporarily halted hostilities but not for long. My companion then volunteered the information that he had been a choir boy in the best choir in South London. Now if I was jealous of anything it was the good reputation of the choir I ^{was} had been in, so I hotly retorted that he was a scarlet coloured liar and that my church had the best choir. He laughed derisively and enquired what the hell I knew about singing, adding that he supposed I had tried to sing bass. This was too much for me and with an oath or two, I sent him and his stool to the floor. He was sport enough to tell the head clerk that he had fallen over in reaching for a book, and as he worked with his back to us, he had to accept the explanation pro tem. Dinner time arrived in due course and some of us went from 12 till 1 o'clock and the others from 1 till

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2 o'clock. I was with the latter. Soon after 12, another junior clerk came and sat on my late enemy's stool and produced an alleged diamond ring which he said was worth £250. He said bitterly that in spite of carrying about so much wealth, he had not got enough money for his dinner. I suggested the Pawn shop, but he said he would be asked all sorts of awkward questions as to how he came by it. I naturally asked him how the devil he had come by it, and he said he had found it in a street the previous Friday and was waiting for a reward to be offered - about £50 he estimated. I was not satisfied and wanted to know how he arrived at the figure of £250 and he said he had an acquaintance, a friend of his pater's, who was a prominent figure in Hatton Garden, and he had said that £250 was a low estimate, and that he would keep it dark if he had a reasonable percentage of the swag.

The upshot of all this was the suggestion that I should lend him 4d and wear the ring until the loan was repaid. The amount of 4d was arrived at rapidly. The junior clerk had only 3d on him and in those days a dinner cost 7d - cut off the joint, 4d, two veg., 2d, and plain with jam, 1d.

I wore the ring (all brass and glass) for the rest of the day at the office, which led to some unkind criticism before the day was over. When 4 o'clock arrived I was told that, as I was the last arrival, I would have to make the tea, and here my indignation knew no bounds. I retorted that only office boys did such menial tasks, not junior clerks. The head clerk here intervened and shouted to me to do what I was told; so, with very bad grace, I fetched the milk from a coffee shop next door, first putting on my kid gloves, poured out the first cup but not the second, because I hid in the lavatory. When I returned the head clerk was raving and asked me where the devil I had been, who in God's name did I think I was, etc. As far as he was concerned, I was a cocky little upstart, having spent the few hours I had been there quarrelling and brandishing my 4d ring. I told him that what

I wore was no business of his and he told me to stop squealing like a spoiled girl. All went well until 5.30 when a clerk aged about 25 handed me a formidable bundle of invoices to be addressed and placed in envelopes. This brought the pains on again and I asked him if he thought I was stopping in that damned hole until midnight. I ended by throwing the invoices in the air. At this the head clerk flew at me, so to speak, took me by the scruff of the neck and the seat of my carefully creased trousers and bundled me across Oxford Street, under D.H. Evans' clock, telling me firmly that I must be mad and should be certified, and to stay there for an hour, and when I did return I must apologise to all the clerks, he in particular, for my scandalous conduct; or get out of the firm and stay out.

I ruminated sadly during the ensuing hour, thinking that my city career was blighted and now my first day in the West End would probably be my last. I came to the conclusion that my grandmother was right about my ultimately ending my blighted life on the scaffold. I had ample time for reflection and realised that I was bad tempered, too sensitive, sulky and very rude; and I saw clearly that, unless I remedied these faults, I should never progress. I therefore made up my mind to go back at 6.30 and apologise (the office hours were 9 till 7) and I did in due time. The Head Clerk nearly ruined my recent good resolutions by giving a big grunt, saying that he would give me one more chance for my parents' sake, for whom he felt very sorry, as I must be a constant anxiety and disappointment to them.

Well I tried hard and evidently was partially successful because, as I have said before, I stayed there seventeen years and became cashier. At the end of that period I had a serious row with the Managing Director and had a letter the following morning, Friday, stating that my services were no longer required and enclosing a month's salary. I had meanwhile married the girl I have before mentioned and was now a father of four boys, no mean responsibility, so had to act quickly.

The mention of my sons reminds me that I managed to get the eldest and second one into the ^{choir of the} Chapel Royal, St. James'. There were and still are ten boys only, ^{in the choir} and to have two out of the ten my boys, made me rather proud at the time. They were at the Cenotaph in November 191²⁶8, the first service to be held there and subsequently the procession and the events that preceded it were shown on the Cinemas. When I state that I do not know to this day where the Chapel is, you will hardly believe me, but I don't, although I have been past ~~to~~ St. James' Palace thousands of times and tried to locate it. I was always engaged in church on Sundays, otherwise I should most probably have attended the Sunday services.

*Chapter XIV
Celebrities*

One or two incidents during that long period are perhaps worth mentioning. I used to walk to and from Victoria and New Bond Street, and one evening on my way home I noticed two figures in front of me in top hats and frock coats proceeding towards Victoria, and passers by looking at them with interest. I soon learned from what I could overhear that the two gentlemen were Winston Churchill and Lloyd George, and so I quickened my pace and got a few feet ahead of them so as to listen to their conversation. Very nose-y of me I realise, but I haven't altered much. One scrap of conversation I have never forgotten is Winston Churchill saying irritably to Lloyd George, "Some of those damned fellows have been in the house 20 years and never once have they got on their b - - y hind legs to say a word - they should be kicked out".

Some years past When passing on my way to New Bond Street three mornings out of six I ^{to this} met the future King George V riding horseback along the Mall towards Hyde Park Corner and in response to my, "Good Morning, Sir" ^{he} doffed his hat like the gentleman he was and replied with a smile, "Good Morning my boy". I have gone to work 50% dead, thinking he would miss me if I failed to turn up. What a priceless idiot I was!

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A few minutes walk brought me to St. James's Palace and riding a tricycle in the vicinity was frequently an elderly gentleman with a very long beard, which partially concealed the handlebars. After some weeks I asked the policeman who the gentleman was and he told me it was Lord Salisbury, adding that he supposed I knew the name as I must have voted for him for years (I was 16½). The next time I saw Lord Salisbury I tried my charm on him by going into the road and saying, "Good Morning, my Lord", but he took not the slightest notice of my friendly advances but continued his slow ride with eyes firmly fixed on the road. I never saw him in any other attitude and we never became buddies. The future George V was henceforth my 'pin-up boy.'

Chapter XVI Mishaps and Muddles

Whilst still a young man, I went to visit an aunt of whom I was particularly fond. There were two girls partaking of tea and I was invited to do likewise. During the ensuing conversation the subject of babies turned up and how in later years they showed no resemblance to their first few months. This gave my aunt an opportunity to enlarge on the subject and she did. Said she, "Look what a fine lad - - has grown into. If you had seen him after he was born you would not have thought it possible. Why he was so thin and miserable, his little bottom was no bigger than one of these tea cups." The mention of my posterior in this public way and before two young ladies was too much for me and with burning cheeks I ran out of the house. No ~~kids~~ ^{young boys and girls} have blushed more than I did. I did not see the aunt again for 20 years but she still remembered the incident because she asked me what had upset me; and was very amused when I told her.

Another embarrassing incident occurred when I was still young and went to Ramsgate for a holiday with the choirmaster of the church where I sang, his sister and neice. I was rather "gone on" the latter although she was 15 years my senior, and was out to impress her with my knowledge of life in general and also with my correct behaviour in table manners, etc., the corre

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things to say, and general manly deportment. This was in early Edwardian days when dinner was a solemn ritual and grace was said before and after meals, and there seemed to be less talking than was subsequently indulged in.

I have to stress the foregoing in order that the atmosphere may be appreciated. We partook of duck with the customary accessories, but horror of horrors, my plate was too near the edge of the table and in attempting to cut a toothsome morsel of bird, it overturned and fell into my serviette with its contents. I was stunned - all my hopes of cutting a dash and demonstrating what a devil I was, how hard boiled I was, were shattered in one second. I sat there petrified with embarrassment whilst the warm gravy penetrated to my skin, and watched the other three solemnly working their jaws with fixed determination to swallow as much as possible consistent with the supply and time. If they only knew I pondered unhappily, whatever would they say. Something in the frigid atmosphere must have caused my beloved to look in my direction and enquire if I was enjoying my dinner. The sight of my face and the absence of a plate caused her to say rather sharply, "Why, what's happened, surely you haven't gobbled up all that food all ready? Anyway, what on earth has happened to your plate?" Oh dear! the mortification and humiliation of that moment is still fresh after 60 years. I blushed and stammered out, "It's all gone in my lap". My choirmaster said I was a clumsy idiot, my beloved said that most boys of my age were all arms and legs and the sister (God bless her) said some comforting words and what was left of my dinner was scraped off my serviette and restored to the plate. I had no appetite left and soon retired and changed my uncomfortable clothes. For the remainder of my holiday, however far from the edge of the table I put my plate, one of the trinity would shove it three or four inches further back.

The head clerk of the firm in Bond Street where I was employed for 17 years was a Sunday School teacher and occasionally organised little concerts

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for the entertainment at work-houses, infirmaries, hospitals, etc. and generally roped me in to act as accompanist. One evening the head clerk and I, accompanied by two young ladies and a young man went to a hospital to sing and do a turn or two in each ward - four of them, starting from the top. To my utter dismay, instead of having a piano there was only a small harmonium, the idea being to carry this from ward to ward. I had always entertained a horror of these squeaky little blighters and had never attempted to master one. I at first flatly refused to attempt to touch the thing but when it was pointed out how disappointed the patients would be if there was no concert, I had perforce to say I would do my best. The patients did not have a concert quite as they expected - my turn as a comedian not having been announced. When I sat down to try and play and keep my feet going on the bellows, I was utterly at sea. I seemed to be doubled up with my knees in my eyes and at my first attempt at pumping the infernal thing I pushed it clean off the temporary platform that had been erected. Thereafter it was better than many a pantomime - someone had to stand behind and hold the slippery customer and when I was playing I forgot to pump, and when I pumped I forgot to play, so except for an occasional spasmodic squeak from the wretched creature the prominent features of the entertainment were the valiant attempts of the vocalists to keep going and their indignation with me. Even under these trying circumstances my misguided sense of humour prevailed and it was only by a supreme effort I did not laugh audibly when the young male vocalist started on, "The lost chord". Need I say, he never found it - at least not that evening. The hospital patients deserved their name in more sense than one - they were as silent as the grave for the most part. One laugh on the fourth floor when I shoved the windy blighter off the platform and another chuckle came on the second floor when I audibly told the gentleman who was good enough to hold the infernal machine, that if he was not careful the harmonium would be on the floor. On the whole, a good time

was spent by everybody.

Writing about accompanying at concerts, brings to my mind one or two incidents amusing and otherwise. I was once playing sweet music for a conjuror whose final effort was to produce a Union Jack on a pole from some pocket or other - probably his waistcoat - and to wave it ~~ty~~ and fro while the audience sang, "Hearts of Oak". They were singing lustily, "Hearts of Oak" and I was busily thumping on the piano when the conjuror came too near me in his promiscuous gallaventing about the platform and conked me well and truly on the side of my "bonce". Whether he thought it was made of the same material as the ships I know not, but I do know it knocked me out for the count and I had a lump as big as an ostrich's egg - or that's what it felt like. The song came to an untimely end but after ten minutes I was well enough to ~~re~~sume my place at the piano. Subsequently if I had to play for a conjuror I insisted on having the piano placed facing him - it at least gave me a sporting chance to dodge any of the props he might choose to throw at me. I was very comforted over making this decision when I had to play for a bloke mucking about with pigeons. You know the gadget - they fly round the hall and en route back to the stage, pause for a moment or two on somebody's head in the audience - apparently whispering in their ear.

Only those with some knowledge of music would appreciate the following. I was on one occasion handed a song commencing in E flat, but when I got to the last page I discovered after ^{playing} the first few bars or so ^{of this page that} it was in the key of D. I was not much good at transposing so I played many wrong notes, much to the fellow's annoyance. He evidently had little or no knowledge of music because in spite of my telling him, he could only repeat, "you had the music and if you can't read it, you should not take on the accompanying". This so riled me, ^{that} had not somebody prevented me I would have done my utmost to throttle him. As it was I had to spend my temper on a few choice names. The conclusion of this little incident was a letter of apology I received

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from the budding Caruso a week or so later, explaining that he had borrowed the copies of the song from a friend who, when performing, kept the faulty copy himself and handed the correct one to the pianist. This occurred 50 years ago at a smoking concert and when the artists did not memorise their songs, as they do in these days.

One winter's afternoon, a fellow rang me at the office and asked me if I could act as accompanist at a bowling club concert to be given that evening at the Skinners' Arms, Mitcham Junction. The person they had engaged was indisposed. I willingly answered in the affirmative, always being ready at that time to make an extra bob or two and in due course found myself ^{in the} ~~at~~ Mitcham Junction station. Now, I do not know anything about the place in these days, but you can take it from me that 50 years ago it looked the most God forsaken place you can imagine, especially on this particular evening. It was snowing hard and the exit from the station looked out over a snow covered field with not a human soul in sight, even the ticket collector must have been unconscious or dead or absent, and as for the porter, he was ditto. The point is that I had not the remotest idea where the Skinners' Arms lay and was looking for someone to ask. I stood outside the station as lonely as any shipwrecked mariner when I spotted a figure of a man approaching noiselessly on my left and my heart leapt for joy, ~~but~~ when he arrived at where I stood I perceived that he had two heavy parcels, one in each hand and was ^{covered} ~~covered~~ in snow, and moreover, walking very rapidly. I realised that if I ^{missed} ~~lost~~ this opportunity I was inevitably lost, pro tem. I therefore approached him, trotted noiselessly by his side, and enquired, "Can you direct me to the Sk - -?" Oh, these fateful Ss, how I have cursed them! He shook his head impatiently and quickened his step but I was not so easily disposed of. Again the all important question from me, "Do you know the Sk - - ?" There was silence, and I might have been less than the dog running by his side for all the notice he took of me. I was by now very desperate and in a voice

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fraught with anxiety I spoke, or rather tried to speak and got as far as, "I want the Sk - - ". On this third request he halted and put down his parcels and demanded, "What the b - - y hell do you want? Do you want to turn me into a snowman and play snow balls?" Directly he swore I was save my line of country you might say. I retorted "No" to his enquiry and said "Can you tell me where the - - Skinners Arms are? and he said, "Yes, the third pub. on the right and so-and-so to you". I said "Thanks and so-and-so to you". I was a few minutes late at the Skinners' Arms and when I told the fellow who had engaged me what had happened, he persuaded me to go on the platform and relate my experiences. There were no ladies present and I was able to tell my tale without reserve.

Chapter XVI Choirs and Places where They Sing

Earlier in this narrative, I have hinted of my love of church choirs and this also provided some financial assistance. As an adult in a West End choir I received an annual stipend together with a fee for every extra service. When I got on better this was of no account as I had neither the time nor the necessity to attend these extra services, but continued with the Sunday services and Friday evening rehearsals. When ^{one of} either of my sons required new shoes it was just a question of waiting for some foolish couple to get married or someone to shuffle off this mortal coil.

During my 46 years in the choir, I learned the Psalms by heart and can still remember many of them. As to sermons, I calculate I must have heard 7500 approximately; a few good ones and thousands of indifferent ones. Why the clergy flog Moses in the bullrushes, Daniel in the lion's den, or David slinging a stone in Goliath's dial, beats me and I cannot think that one person in a thousand is interested, considering that every man must have heard the tale; scores of times, either ^{at} day or Sunday ^{service} or both. I do know for certain that any person who can preach well can, as a rule, be sure of a full church. I have always contended that if they applied Christ's teachin

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to modern matters, it would be far more interesting than having a stock sermon for Christmas Day, Palm Sunday, Easter, and Whitsun, and so on. Then there is the parson who tells his congregation what God wants, just as if he was having a familiar chat with him on Saturday evening and God had sent a special message for them only.

Many amusing incidents occurred during these years, far too numerous for me to remember, but a few I do recall might be worth mentioning. I do know that on occasions I have felt really ill with trying not to laugh.

One of my earliest recollections of choirs, was when I joined as a small boy and an older boy pinned my surplice to that of the boy with whom I had to walk ~~into~~ ^{the} stalls. He was bigger than I and when we came to the altar and bowed to the Crucifix before going in separate directions, I felt that something was wrong and was sure of it when he pulled me head over tip. There was great confusion for the minute but as I struggled to my feet, I gasped in my shrill treble, "Why can't you be more careful, you clumsy fool". It is scarcely necessary for me to state that the boy who was responsible for joining the surplices was turfed out and I was reprimanded for my lack of self control.

A short time afterwards we rehearsed an anthem which concluded with three Hallelujahs, each one followed by one bar's tootle on the organ. The boys at rehearsal put words, sotto voce, to these tootles, viz. "Skin a donkey". I was still very young and simply sang from memory and had grown accustomed to the boy's version, so that when the Sunday evening arrived and the anthem was performed, after the first Hallelujah, I, in all innocence I assure you, continued with "Skin a donkey" to the amazement of the congregation and the amusement of the choir, including some of the men. I don't think anyone was capable of singing the remaining few bars. This nearly put paid to my vocal efforts, but after I had been cuffed by some of the choir men, severely reprimanded by the choir master, vicar and church warden, and

suspended for three months, honour was satisfied. At home, the only gratified person was dear granny, who rejoiced exceedingly and said triumphantly, ~~Quite~~ ^{Quite} This was another milestone on my journey to the scaffoldⁿ. My father laughed and my mother ticked him off and dear auntie sniffed and sniffed and said Fred (my father's Christian name) encouraged the saucy little devil.

Boys will be boys and I suppose every nationality ^{are} are the same. Every ^{chair} boy had to be made a "freemason" and this solemn ritual was performed by inverting the victim and placing his head down the lavatory pan and pulling the chain. Most of the boys took their initiation in good part but a few didn't and there were fights and struggles, tears and bad language and in two instances irate mothers wrote to the Vicar.

When my voice broke, I sat with the organist and turned over the pages of music for him. Twice only I caused consternation, once I absent-mindedly during the first lesson, put my elbow on the organ keys and frightened quite a number of people out of their wits - the terrible shriek from the organ must have made them think it was Gabriel's trumpet. A few weeks later, whilst turning over the pages of an anthem in a large volume containing many such, I pulled the darned book off the music stand and it fell on the organist's fingers and keys. The row I had caused the organ to make earlier on was bad enough, but this was worse, so was the confusion. The book, besides pinning the organist's fingers down, was partially resting on the manual above and the noise was like an army of scalded cats. I made several attempts to put the offending book back on the music stand but only made matters worse. The choir had stopped singing with the exception of an elderly bass who we had suspected of being stone deaf and who now confirmed our suspicion. The boys and some of the men had difficulty in restraining their mirth over this deaf "Bull ^{by basses}". The organist did the best thing. He pushed in all the stops and stopped the noise whilst the Vicar announced, "We will now sing the hymn No. - 'Through the night of doubt and sorrow'".

So much for my career as a boy chorister. When I was 18 I developed a falsetto voice, called alto, and in recent years known as counter tenor in some quarters, but I think this is all rot. I contend that unless your speaking voice is similar to your singing voice, then the latter must be falsetto. Be that as it may, I soon procured an appointment in a West end church and here again there were many humourous incidents.

The vicar had an impediment in his speech, different from mine. If he could not say the first syllable of a word, he would hop over it, like leaping over a fence, and concentrate on the remaining syllables. Thus, he would announce a hymn, "Hymn N - - umber T - - who H - - undred and Tw - - enty T - - wo. "Ten Th - - ousand Times Ten Th - - ousand". You must realise I am not treating his impediment as being funny, though I treated mine as humourously as I could, but I have to mention the matter if the following incident is to be appreciated.

At a wedding, the vicar said the first part of the service like this, "D - - early Be - - loved, we are ga - - thered to - - gether etc. etc." and then a visiting clergyman took over. He kept on whistling between words thus, "I require (whistle) and charge you (whistle) both (whistle) as ye will (whistle) answer at the dreadful day (whistle) of judgement (whistle)." You can well imagine that the choir boys and some of the men, including myself, had some difficulty in keeping a straight face and when one of the fellows standing by my side said to me in a stage whisper, "You have got to give the blessing - don't be more than an hour", the lad in front had an uncontrollable fit of laughter and had to leave the choir stalls.

Many years later when I experienced difficulty in having an impression of my gums taken, the dentist told me that a clergyman had made six or seven unsuccessful attempts to have an impression taken. He was sick of it but still very anxious to have new dentures as his present ones caused a whistle. When I asked his name, I was not surprised to learn that it was the same

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unfortunate clergyman I had come across at the wedding. I hope by now they have discovered a ~~less~~ ^{more} sensitive method of taking an impression.

Once during a procession round the church, a choir man kicked the top hat of a gentleman in the congregation many feet along the aisle. It was a good kick, worthy of an F.A. Cup Final. The kicker gallantly picked the hat up and on the return journey restored it to its original resting place, i.e. nearly in the middle of the aisle. Whilst en route there were many suggestions from the choir men as to the best way of carrying the offending hat, the most popular being to, "put it on your bonce".

The method of communicating to each other would have done credit to the prisoners in Dartmoor. It had to be done with a straight face and in an inaudible tone and sometimes nothing would be said and we became expert lip readers.

Now what else comes to my memory? O yes! There was an acolyte in the procession round the church on Palm Sunday who carried a hefty portion of palm, and kept a little piece of it in the ear of the vicar walking in front. The innocent expression of the acolyte and the deft way he guided the 'tickle' back to the vicar's ear after each impatient scratch from the victim, had to be witnessed to be appreciated. The acolyte by the way, developed religious mania a few years later. I wonder if his conscience bothered him.

Then there was the lad who was turned out for misbehaviour before the morning service commenced. It was a brilliantly sunny morning with the sun streaming in through the east window. He went and sat in the first place at the bottom of the church with a mirror and when the vicar started the sermon, the little devil kept directing the reflection of the sun's rays right into his eyes. The poor vicar rubbed and shielded his optics but all to no purpose, he could not get clear of the relentless rays. Eventually the verger spotted the boy and turned him out but even then he

continued the annoyance from the open door until the vicar, who by then had⁵⁸ rumbled "what was happening, called to the verger in a voice choking with rage to, "shut all the doors and see that the wretched boy does not come in". The boy was expelled and his parents written to, but the incident caused some amusement, wrong though it was.

I frequently in my younger days, deputised at other churches for weddings and funerals and here again met with events out of the ordinary. At a fashionable wedding at a well-known London church, the bridegroom and his best man were properly "blotto". Whilst waiting at the chancel rails for the bride, they were convulsed with laughter and when she did appear they were doubled up with merriment. The bridegroom, with hands in his trouser pockets stood with his bride before the officiating clergyman, who softly but sternly told him to "take his hands out of his pockets and remember where he was". This had a temporary sobering effect but when the best man handed him the ring and their eyes met, they were at it again. The minister again admonished him and the service was finished in due course but the responses of the bridegroom were made in a frivolous tone utterly out of keeping with the solemnity of the occasion and surroundings. We subsequently understood that the minister refused to give the usual address and as for the poor bride, we felt terribly sorry for her, although it was difficult not to smile at the bosky pair. She was covered in blushes and with the utmost difficulty restrained her tears. She supported him down the aisle as best she could, but he could not navigate the steps. He fell down all five of them, with an oath audible to all in the church.

I have often wondered what happened at the reception and afterwards. Did she forgive him, or constantly remind him of his fall from grace - and down the church steps, incidentally? I don't suppose I shall ever know, in fact I'm sure I shan't.

At another West End church where I was deputising at a wedding, the

minister who gave the address was very long winded and confidential. No one but the happy couple could hear a word and even they did not seem overjoyed. I must explain that most of the choirmen were in jobs that required consideration. They had to find an excuse for taking an hour and a half or two hours off for lunch. On this occasion, one of the chaps was very ^{fit} fit and eventually decided to go before the service ended, in case he got the sack. Now there were two ways to the vestry, one from which the choir and ~~the~~ ^{the} clergy emerged and left, which meant walking in front of the congregation and the other, a stairway leading to the organ, so our impatient friend obviously chose the less obtrusive way, via the organ. The organist was playing some soft music whilst the minister continued his confidential chat. The choirman slipped over a rail in front of the organ, and the back of his surplice went clean over the organist's head. He could not see a darned thing. The organ gave vent to a wail of anguish like a ^{wounded dog's} ~~scalded-cat~~ and, as for the organist, (he possessed a penetrating voice - of which more anon) he growled like a trapped lion, "What the hell are you doing you clumsy - -".

On another occasion at the same church and with the same organist, the bride was very late and after the first ten minutes, a clear but irritated voice came from the organist, "the bride's late", after another five minutes, "She's damned late", followed in still another five minutes by, "She's bloody late". Fortunately the dear lady arrived soon afterwards, otherwise I tremble to think what might have followed.

To appreciate the delicacy of the situation and others I have endeavoured to describe, you must imagine 8 or 10 men and 20 boys or so trying not to smile - very difficult when it is so ^{infectious} effectual.

The same gentleman had the habit of counting the choir fees during the prayers and dropping half-crowns between the organ pedals. He invariably expressed his annoyance with a resonant, "Damn" and if he pushed down one of the organ pedals whilst retrieving a piece of silver, the organ responded

with a deep blast.

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Just one more incident about this gentleman. The Hallelujah Chorus was being performed and all went well until the final Amen. As most of you know there is a bar of silence preceding this, but on this occasion, on the third beat a bass roared "Ah". Came the organist's voice for all to hear, "You b - - r" and then the final Amen.

What I have related about this particular organist is no exaggeration. He was, when I knew him, getting really deaf and developing cataract^{cy's} and we all know that when we can't hear, we are inclined to talk loudly and moreover to think that if we can't hear, nobody else can. Hence his talking on the organ quite oblivious of the fact that he was perfectly audible. You will naturally enquire why the vicar and churchwarden did not get rid of him, but he had been organist and choirmaster for 50 years when I became acquainted with him. He was a lovable old man and when he was dismissed after 60 years service, most of us who sat in the choir and a large number of the congregation were very sorry and so was he, for after a few months in retirement the poor old chap passed away and those who knew him intimately, said he died from a broken heart.

Before I say goodbye to this, my first West End choir, I must mention that the vicar was a very cheerful man in general and a bachelor, which probably accounted in part for his cheerful outlook on life. But when he preached, he was most gloomy, and I remember him at a wedding addressing the happy couple thus, "You may think that you have every conceivable happiness before you, friends, money, youth and good health, but don't be too sure. Before your car is clear of this road it may be destroyed by another car in a head-on collision and in a few minutes from now your maimed bodies may be lying lifeless in the road".

At this particular wedding, during the signing of the register and the singing of an anthem, a small boy who acted as page and train bearer, darted

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into the chancel with a top hat over his face and performed a clog dance, before he was pounced upon and removed. Even then he was not abashed, for whilst the bride and bridegroom were leaving the church after the ceremony, he had a ride on the bride's train, much to the admiration of two small bridesmaids.

One hot July Sunday evening in church we were very stifled, what with the thick cassocks and bulky surplices and when the sermon commenced I undid my braces in front to get some relief. During the closing hymn I kept my trousers up by pressing myself against the choir stalls and then the blessing came, followed by the exit of the clergy and choir. I had forgotten about the perilous position my breeches were in until it was too late and I had started walking. I only averted disaster by holding my hands firmly across my tummy thus holding up the offending garments. I ~~only~~ just reached the vestry in time as during my journey there my trousers had been slipping gradually. Was my face red, I wonder?

A very humorous man sat next to me in the choir - the same individual who had kicked the top hat down the aisle. Next to him sat a fussy little man who was always telling the boys in front that they were singing flat or too slowly and so on. To remedy the former he constantly had a tuning fork in one hand and in the other a watch to keep track of the latter. He lived some distance out in the suburbs and his train only ran every 30 minutes so you can see why he was so anxious about the matter. One Sunday our fussy little friend was in full swing banging his fork on his knee, saying to the boys, "You're flat" and then, "Hurry up or I shall miss my train", when our humorous friend produced a dangerous looking carving knife from his cassock pocket and handed it to our friend with the fork saying, "You won't be able to get ^{it} the crackling without this". Five minutes later the watch was referred to with an impatient gesture and my humorous friend took a huge watch from his pocket and said, "You are a minute fast old man".

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Of course it seems tame when put into writing but in the solemnity of a Communion Service when you have to keep a straight face, it was very difficult not to laugh. To appreciate the situation one must be there.

Whilst still in a choir and when I was living in Balham, some of my choir friends, including my brother, who was residing nearby, boarded a train at Victoria one Sunday morning. In a corner sat a clergyman whose face seemed familiar, but none of us could recall where we had seen him. We thought he might have preached at the church where we sang regularly, or failing that, have presided at a wedding or funeral there, or alternatively at some other West End church where we had deputised at similar services. We whispered among ourselves but were unable to solve the mystery, so one of our number, with profuse apologies, told him of our perplexity and asked him if he had ever preached or officiated at weddings or funerals at - - - (here we mentioned some well-known West End churches). To all of the questions the clergyman replied with a kindly smile in the negative. By this time we had arrived at Wandsworth Road Station, where the clergyman alighted and, after closing the door, he beamed through the window and said, "It may interest you gentlemen to know that for the past seven years I have been chaplain of Wandsworth Prison". We grinned rather sheepishly and said to each other, "Oh yes you remember we saw him last Christmas when we went to the prison to sing Carols". This was perfectly true, but do you think the other occupants of the carriage would accept it? Oh no, they laughed derisively and loudly, the cads, saying, "You don't expect us to believe that tale, do you? Why you have got guilt written all over your mugs. What were you in for?" and pointing at me one said, "We all know what he was pinched for, he looks the type, Bigamy!". I must explain that these cads were well-known to us and vice versa, and we were really good acquaintances, but they could not resist this fine opportunity for leg pulling. It was a gift from heaven.

I have never been run in but only just missed that experience by a very narrow margin. I must have been about 25, and after visiting one or two other establishments, went into the Coal Hole in the Strand for a doc and doris. There I noticed a man accompanied by a very pretty girl and I suppose my admiration must have been too apparent, because her companion accused me of making eyes at his girl and threatened me with a punch on the jaw. This I indignantly denied, at the same time enquiring who was going to help him carry out his threat, which I knew very well was asking for trouble. More words followed, threats and counter threats, which culminated in the two of us going outside to fight it out. We went down the steps at the side of the "Coal Hole" leading to the Savoy Theatre, and sparred up in truly professional manner, or so I thought, and I was on the point of delivering a knock out blow, again I thought, when I felt a hand on my collar and a knee prodding me painfully in the seat, and the blow intended for my adversary in front, was aimed at my adversary behind. Even before I struck, I realised it was a policeman but it was too late to withdraw and my fist crashed into his helmet, knocking it off, and that was that. He collared me, after saying I was being arrested for assault, and commenced marching me to, I suppose, Vine Street, followed by a few stragglers. I expostulated at some length, pointing out that he had struck the first blow and that I should bring a counter charge against him, adding that I was acquainted with Marshall Hall and would brief him if possible, for my defence. That was a complete lie of course and I don't think the constable believed me for one moment, but it evidently made him consider my point, for after looking round to see how many people were following (there was an old lady of 80 or so and two small boys only) he released me with ill grace, saying he would let me go that time but if it ever happened again, etc. etc. I, still full of wrath, and a half bottle of whisky, returned to look for my adversary, but he had gone.

Chapter XVII Old Clothes

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About the age of 18, I, like many young men of that era, rigged myself out in a frock coat and top hat and a proper B.F. I must have looked. I was very thin with a big head but as long as I walked without wobbling, my hat retained a fairly good posture. But immediately I hurried, it slipped over my ears and rested on my shoulders, or seemed to. I can recall crossing Piccadilly one Sunday evening with my future wife and a jolly old bus driver pulling his horses up on their hind legs and slashing the side of the bus with his whip, saying in his gruff voice, "Don't hurry the Dook, he looks as if he's falling to pieces already". I expect the hat had fallen over the back of my ears and my frock coat was buttoned in the middle, making me appear skinnier than I really was, if that was possible.

I did not intend to write anything about the foregoing but having done so let it remain. What I was going to relate still concerns my top hat and frock coat. One in my station of life had to make this rigout last for years and therefore you must not be surprised when I tell you that not only was I married in them but still possessed them when my eldest boy was 3. I kept the top hat in a special box and on returning home one evening learned from my wife, convulsed with laughter, that the little demon had taken my hat out of its resting place while she was dusting in the bedroom and answered the call of nature in it. So much for that, nothing could be done and that was the finish of my pride and joy of many years. Therefore no hat and the frock coat slept peacefully in the wardrobe for about two years, and at the end of that period I was invited to a wedding where I knew that most of the male guests would wear the recognised form of dress of that age. I therefore bought a new top hat and on the appointed day, arrayed myself in most of my glory - plus my new top hat, but minus my frock coat and this I searched for in vain with a sinking feeling in the neighbourhood of my waist coat. Not being successful, I flew downstairs in a mixture of fear and panic and questioned my wife and she, bless her, had to confess to having

exchanged it for an aspidistra some weeks earlier. She said it had hung about upstairs collecting dust and moreover she thought I was too modern in my tastes to wear such old fashioned clothes. I demanded to know why she had not told me about the coat before I bought a new hat, but as the atmosphere was growing a trifle tense and I was afraid my wife would shed tears, I dried up. Instead of going to the wedding, I took her and the nippers to the cinema. I would like to know why a wife, however wrong she is and her husband right, can nine times out of ten turn the tables and make the old man feel an unutterable cad. 'It's a trick Eve must have practised on Adam in that there garden!

On another occasion I happened to have a special engagement on the morrow, and being November 5th we had burned the guy and let off the fireworks accompanied by the usual merriment that goes with such fun and games. I then hied me to the wardrobe to choose a suitable suit and bethought me of a blue serge one I had bought a few weeks earlier. But it couldn't be found anywhere and so downstairs I rushed and like the gentleman I was and still am, enquired of my wife in a bullying tone, "Where the hell's my blue suit?" She turned a funny colour, the poor little woman, and replied falteringly that it must be where I had put it, so up I went again and searched as diligently as the lady in the New Testament did for a lost tanner. Not that I possessed all that number of suits - I only had four others in various stages of decay, but in my anxiety I even looked in the pockets for my beloved suit. On returning to the living room I found my wife and sons deep in conversation my wife saying she had told the boys it looked like a new suit and they were making futile excuses. The horrible truth dawned on me that my lovely blue serge suit had clad the confounded guy and that with my own hands I had poured paraffin over it and applied a match. I roundly cursed the family for going to my wardrobe and reading the riot act, but that did not recover my suit. Years later we laughed heartily over the matter - years later,

remember.

Chapter XVIII
"Ticker" Trouble.

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When I was about 24 I had a heart affection, and was directed to the heart hospital in Soho Square - there no longer - and went through the usual preliminaries, interviewing the almoner for instance, ^{she} who asked me what was my name, and I told her, and then asked me what my income was. I told her it was no business of hers and I hadn't asked for charity and was willing to pay the maximum fee. She retorted, "You needn't be so rude, I am only trying to help you. The maximum fee is - - , naming a sum far in excess of what I thought it would be, but I paid up and realised I was being penalised for being rude and snooty - it served me right! I then had to wait with dozens of others for nearly an hour before my name was called and when it was I was directed to a doctor surrounded by students. He asked the usual questions such as, "Have you ever had rheumatic fever?" and "Are your parents alive, if not, what was the cause of their death?" and so on. At the conclusion of this cross examination I was told to go behind the screen and undress and this I did, with the exception of a short vest. I sat there shivering for nearly 20 minutes with my temper rising rapidly whilst the doctor jawed to the students. At last I was remembered and requested to lie on a hard couch where, surrounded by students, electric wires were placed about my person and a cardiograph was taken. At short intervals he lectured to the confounded students, presumably on how my ticker was registering and after some 20 minutes I was told I could dress and wait. I could still hear the doctor talking - he reminded me of a broody hen with its chicks - but so far had not bothered to listen, when my attention was attracted by the changed tone of the doctor, "You have the effrontery to tell me Mr. Beazley, after my lucid explanation, that you did not detect so-and-so (using a medical expression I did not comprehend). The answer came, "I'm very sorry sir, but I fear I didn't." "Well" said the doctor "That's soon

rectified", and to me he bawled, "Do you mind undressing again and lying on the couch?" I replied heatedly that I was damned if I would. The students looked uncomfortable but not the doctor, who simply replied that he would talk to me in a few moments. This he did, telling me that it was very dangerous to get so excited and when I - now very subdued - asked him if he had any idea how long I might live, said it might be a week or I could last for years, it depended on my taking matters without undue haste and excitement.

I do not like to think he was vindictive because I refused to undress a second time, but as since then I have been in vile tempers dozens of times and have not fallen down dead, well, it makes one wonder. He himself died some 10 years later from heart disease.

I was now the father of three boys of 4, 2½ and 1 year old, and a private doctor advised me to have a month's holiday at the seaside, adding that if possible I should travel by sea. Accordingly behold us one Sunday morning rising at 5 a.m. and after the usual preliminaries starting forth for London Bridge, carrying our luggage and wheeling between us a pram with two of the nippers in and a pushchair with one. When we reached our destination there were hundreds of people buying their tickets and, on the landing stage, there seemed thousands. My wife had the pram with its occupants and some luggage and I had the pushchair, etc. After standing there in the hot August sun for half an hour the crowd commenced to surge forward as they slowly started to embark. I put the case on my head and tried to balance it with the push cart under one arm and with my free hand holding one of my sons. Suddenly the case on my head began to slip and I released the boy's hand to steady it and he took the opportunity to desert the party. We could not see the little blighter, and with the wife nearly in hysterics were pushed forward and up the gangway. This took longer than you might think, but when we did arrive there on the left of the gangway was my young hopeful sitting on deck eating the meat out of someone's sandwiches which he had lifted from a bag. The owner

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speedily spotted what had happened and had the confounded impertinence to say we should keep our brats in order. We settled down, or so we thought, when the ship's siren gave a penetrating blast. Most of the youngsters near the funnel, including mine, decided to yell their heads off. They had no sooner been quietened down when the ship did it again and parents were at it again. I remember thinking that I was carrying out the doctor's instruction to the letter and how pleased he would be if only he could see me - calm and unperturbed! As a matter of fact I felt like throwing all the kids into the sea - mine included.

Chapter XIX
I am a Postman

I must now digress and go back to August 1914. All the men within the age limit were told they must enlist in the Army, if they wanted a job when the war was finished and if unfit for military service, must become special constables. I was turned down by the Army as I had a weak heart and was useless as a special constable because I stammered in addition. The doctor who examined me on behalf of the police, said jocularly that the person in the dock would serve his sentence before I could spit out the evidence.

These two avenues being closed, some bright spark in the office whose next door neighbour was in the post office, learned that auxiliary postmen were required for early and late deliveries and I was accordingly directed there with another unfit clerk, on the understanding that the money we earned was to be deducted from our salary and sent to the Prince of Wales' fund. For three years I did this job, up soon after 5 o'clock, sorting office at 6 o'clock, delivery finished at 8.15, home for breakfast 8.30 and office at 9 o'clock. ^{Then, of course, there was the evening delivery.} I had a bicycle, otherwise it would have been impossible to get round to schedule. When I first started in September 1914 the last delivery was 10 ~~o'clock~~^{o'clock}, but later on this was done away with and an earlier delivery substituted. Anyway I had a pretty full day taking into consideration that I was in a West End church choir, which included rehearsals, and also in a

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male voice quartet, which did likewise. When I could not perform my duties as a postman, I could as a rule easily get another postman to deputise for me as I paid liberally, but there were exceptions. I have delivered letters more than once in a top hat, but the trouble was to get rid of my empty bag and this was accomplished by slinging it over a garden wall. I have filled in many forms (the postmen called them skins) explaining what happened to my bag and always told the truth, adding that I would pay for it if they wished.

I could write volumes about these years. My very first delivery was at a public house. I was wearing a blue coat ^{and} trousers and a fancy waist-coat, straw hat and spats and a red rose. I must have looked a charlie, because the landlord evinced considerable surprise and said, "Good God, it's Beau Brummel!" I received the compliment with silent dignity and went my way. My postmen friends nicknamed me, "The Duke of Buckingham", afterwards abbreviated to Buckingham and I bore this ^{nickname} ~~nom-de-plume~~ for the whole of my sojourn. Another incident I well remember was when I had a poisoned toe and had to cut a piece out of my shoe to enable me to walk. The lady of a house where I delivered a parcel caught sight of my shoe and exclaimed, "Poor postman, your poor shoe, my husband left off a better pair last week. I'll go and fetch them". Behold me therefore being presented with a pair of old shoes for the first and last time in my life, so far. I thanked the good lady as graciously as I could, and I am afraid the shoes went over a garden wall in an adjacent road, my usual depository for unwanted articles.

A further incident comes to my mind, when a so-called gentleman told me peremptorily to, "shut the gate, you". It was not possible for me to do so, having an armful of parcels in addition to my bag of letters and I told him so in no uncertain terms, adding that before the war I would not have employed such an arrogant man as he to clean my boots. Of course he wrote to the Post Office (they all did) stating that after insulting him, I departed with an effeminate toss of the chin.

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Then there was the woman who asked me if I was doing the work of a man who was fighting for me in France, to which I cheerfully replied in the affirmative, adding that I was also sleeping with his missus in my spare time. Again, there was the lady whom I had known as a girl, who, when the postage for a letter was increased from 1d to 1½d, and from whom I had to collect a few coppers surcharge, called out from her bedroom to her half starved abigail who had opened the door and given my message to her, that there was 6d to pay, ^{she said} "Don't pay the fellow, he is probably dishonest like most of them". I pushed past the abigail and going half way upstairs called the lady by her Christian name, adding, "If I have any more of your insults I'll come up and ~~smack your~~ ^{smack you} bottom". She shrieked to the servant to fetch a policeman and I continued on my way. Next morning I had a further surcharge to collect and the door was opened by madam herself. She was greatly embarrassed to see me but in the end good humour prevailed and we parted good friends.

A few more incidents which I hope will not bore you and I have finished with the Post Office. On a Friday evening, I was sitting by a brother Mason at the Monaco and the following evening, whilst cadging for a Christmas Box (I had ^{to} taken a turn at this) the door of a house was opened by the very brother I had been with the previous evening. He could not comprehend that I was serious but continually said, "What the hell are you playing at, it's not April 1st old man. Anyway, how did you know where I live". It took me some minutes to explain the situation and the incident ended by ^{my} going in and being introduced to the family and consuming nearly a half bottle of Scotch, then 4/- a bottle.

I must now tell of how I delivered a letter before the lady who had placed it in the letter box ten minutes previously, had reached home. She had posted it in the box outside the Sorting Office, which was not emptied until the last minute, that is, just before we were ready to start out. It

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was sorted up to me, placed in my bundle and I was soon on my bicycle proceeding to my ^{work} ~~work~~, about five minutes ride, whilst the lady was walking back, about 15 minutes walk, to her house. I had done part of my delivery, including that particular letter, and on descending the steps met the lady coming through the gate. "Who was the letter for?" she enquired. I replied "Your husband". "Wait a minute" said she, and muttered, "it surely can't be". She opened the door with her key and it surely could be, for there was the letter on the mat. She gasped, "But I've only just posted it, it's a birthday greeting and I didn't want him to get it until the morning. It's unbelievable". I explained how simple it was ~~etc.~~, and she said she would never say another word against the Post Office. I wonder how many times such speedy deliveries have been accomplished.

Once during this period I was proceeding to my work when my bike skidded on the wet road and a passing bus missed my head by inches. I mention this trivial incident because the bus passed over something metallic and the poor driver descended from his cabin as pale as the proverbial muffin - he thought the metallic sound was my cranium. Now if it had sounded like the chopping of wood, I could have understood it!

Still as a postman, I was riding to my ^{work} ~~work~~ one foggy and drizzly night with five parcels and a sack full of letters and my hands were so full that I had to steer the bicycle with only one of the handlebars held between the third and fourth fingers. In addition, I could scarcely see through my spectacles, what with the fog and rain. I wobbled along and was nearing the end of my journey, when an elderly man crossed my path and in trying to avoid him I, and the bike, parcels and letters, fell into the road. I scarcely touched him, but he wanted to know, "Why the hell didn't you look where you were going?" I said nothing, surprisingly, but nearly wept.

Referring again to my days as a postman, reminds me of a certain Christmas Eve when snow lay deep and it was perishing cold. The cold gates and

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knockers did not improve matters and when an imp of a paper boy caught me a heavy smack in the ear with a snowball, I properly lost my temper. I had knocked at a door and was waiting to deliver a Christmas pudding when this happened and, much to the astonishment of the lady of the house who by now had appeared, she witnessed her pudding hurtling through the air to catch the wretched boy in the "bread basket". He was bowled over and lay in the road whimpering and when I went to retrieve the pudding he was most indignant. Said he, "I only threw that snowball at you for fun" and I, still in a temper said, "I did not throw the pudding at you for fun, but meant it as a stern retribution for your audacity". I soon cooled down - if it was possible to get any cooler, and assisted the lad to his feet and gave him a tanner, and from then until I finished with the post office, we were buddies.

What about the lady waiting at the door for her parcel? She said I was a bully to hurt the poor little fellow and what did I mean by chucking her pudding into the road and I retorted that if I had had her in my hands at that moment, I would have thrown her, at which her husband, who had come to the door, said he had been listening to my insulting remarks made to his wife and that he would write to the Postmaster General. Having sized him up in a second, and concluded that if it came to a scrap the chances were 6 to 4 in my favour, I could afford to be saucy. I retorted that I didn't care a damn if he wrote to the Devil, who probably knew him better than the Postmaster General, adding that if he said any more, I would wring his blasted neck. He turned red and then pale, whilst I slung my bag of letters on the doorstep and waited for him. I felt angry and expect I looked it, for after a vain attempt to summon up sufficient courage to take me on, he said, "You black-guard, you will hear more about this" and shut the door. I thought they might offer me a slice of pudding with arsenic when I called there Christmas morning, but there was not a sausage forthcoming and I heard nothing further. In the circumstances I shouldn't have cared a tinker's cuss, in fact I

wanted the sack and deserved it, but men were scarce in those days and they had to make the best of what they had. 70

I can recall an old man who regularly finished his Saturday delivery on Sunday morning. Years later I overheard a fellow in the pub. arguing with a friend, saying that there was a Sunday delivery during the war. An idea struck me and I apologized for joining in and asked the gent if he would tell me where he lived and I was not a bit surprised to discover it was in a road on the old chap's walk.

There was another auxiliary postman, by profession a carpet layer, whose house was in his own walk. If a card or letter addressed to him appeared, he would peruse it and if it was from one of the big stores asking him to lay a carpet that morning, he would simply leave his letters, in some confusion as a rule, and keep the appointment, regardless of his responsibilities as a postman. I am not blaming him, it was his living and he could not keep a wife and family on 25/- a week, which was all he received from the post office. I am simply trying to indicate what a Fred Karno's show the sorting office was and what the poor overseers had to contend with. In fact, shortly after my exodus, one of the two I knew committed suicide. He could not comprehend that we should never return to pre-1914 conditions and still thought that shouting at the men was the only way to keep up his position. I well remember my first morning at the sorting office, when he walked along the line of postmen busily sorting, bellowing, "Silence there". By the time he reached me I was boiling with rage - you would expect it from a cocky upstart like me - and I told him not to yell so, it was such bad taste and totally unnecessary. He at first was dumbfounded and could not say anything and kept opening and shutting his mouth but no sound came forth, until at last he recovered, and again shouting, told me to hold my tongue and get on with my job, adding that I wanted kicking into shape. Until he went away I refused to do a thing, thus we were enemies during the three years I was ther

We had many rows - very many indeed. As the months passed and the established men were called up, women were introduced and he had to adopt a more conciliatory attitude, but I feel sure this undermined his confidence and ultimately caused him to take his life.

The second morning at the Post Office, an established man asked me why the - - hell couldn't I stick to my own job, adding, "How would I like him to do my job". I promptly told him he could not, and asked him to read the newspapers, if he could read, when he would discover that a war had started. It was not a very tactful reply, but I was young and cheeky then, now I am only cheeky. He of course said he did not want any of my - - cheek and would punch me in the jaw when he got me outside, to which my answer was, "Why wait, do it now if you've got the pluck". He was a far bigger man than me and if it came to fisticuffs, one punch from him would have put me out for the count, but he came at me with outstretched arms and I managed to keep hold of both of his hands with each of mine, and forced him to his knees. I could and would in the heat of the moment, have at least sprained his wrists or perhaps broken his arms, but the timely arrival of the overseer made me desist and my enemy, after whispering a few more threats, shut up. He was called up a week later and lost his life soon after being sent to France. I was very sorry and regretted our quarrel, but it was amazing in those very early days of the war to find so many people who thought it would be over in a few months and who resented any threat to their customary daily routine.

I have bragged in the foregoing about my wrists and hands being strong, but they really were. I remember having to go to Hounslow Barracks for a Medical under the Conscription Act, and sitting before two doctors, one of them took one of my skinny hands and said, "I don't suppose you have much strength in your hands" and taking the cue I said pathetically, "No". He said, "Don't tell such confounded lies" and to his fellow doctor, "I've seen

these kinds of hands before, haven't you?" I would not like them round my neck if he meant it!" 72

Chapter XX
Dentistry

A good many years ago I was told that I must have most of my teeth removed and in due course was seated on top of an old horse bus proceeding to Bloomsbury Square, where the dentist was. I had bought the "Evening News" and was reading it on the way, when I caught sight of a small paragraph bearing the caption, "Death in a dentist's chair". This naturally interested me considering the object of my journey and interest developed into consternation when I read that death overtook the unfortunate lady in the very chair I was about to occupy. I at first considered abandoning my visit but my natural cussedness prevailed and 8 o'clock found me in the fatal chair. The dentist was very agitated - naturally - and when I informed him I had a weak heart, said he could not give me gas and when he did, after some argument, it was a mere whiff so that I became conscious whilst he was still ^{manfully} unconcernedly whipping out my molars. I could not move as yet and as for talking; have you ever tried with that darned gag in your mouth?

At a subsequent inquest on the lady it was suggested to the dentist he should have an anesthetist to administer the gas but whether he did this or not I don't know because I never saw him again. I know I thought that it would substantially increase his fee if he did. From what I know, in those days no dentist was forced by law to go to this additional expense, but if he had done it would have been passed on to the patient.

To continue with my tale of woe, the dentist handed me over to an assistant with strict instructions not to give me gas or even a cocaine injection for fear of my heart. He was a very frightened man, but I have since gathered that this last precaution was totally unnecessary.

The assistant consigned to me had been a choir boy in Westminster Abbey and we therefore had a lot in common to discuss, so that my visits were

pleasantly painful, or painfully pleasant - take your choice. Between the intervals of teeth extraction, one of us would ask, "Do you know such and such an anthem?" and the answer being in the affirmative, we would perform it to the best of our ability, whilst he conducted with his forceps. At the conclusion he would ask, "Can you stand another?" and as I usually could we, between us, put paid to a goodly number of bad teeth in a convivial atmosphere. Some anthems were rather appropriate, such as, "O taste and see" and "O come hither and fling wide the gates". I have always thought that the atmosphere and formality of a dentist's, contributes a good deal to the nervousness of a patient and if only they - the extractor and extracted - would get matey, it would be beneficial to both. I remember my wife going to a dentist and starting to yell directly she sat in the fateful chair. The dentist looked amazed and said, "But I haven't touched you madam" and back came the reply, "I know that silly, but you're going to".

Chapter XXI *The Evils of Drink*

I remember when I was about 28 years of age and living at Balham, I had one over the eight on the Thursday preceeding Good Friday. I bought at Victoria, 2/- worth of hot cross buns - a tidy size bag in those days, believe me. I was on the station waiting for the train, when the bottom of the bag split and out fell a couple of buns. I staggered forward to pick them up, when another two fell out and in endeavouring to retrieve them, I trod on the first two, and as fast as I tried to pick up the buns, more fell out and I put my big feet on them. In disgust I threw the rest of them on the platform with an oath and then noticed for the first time that dozens of passengers were gathered near me watching my antics and greatly amused. I told them where to go to in no uncertain terms and then the ticket collector told me I must not leave that mess on the platform, I must clear it up. This I tried to do and fell flat on my knees and could not regain my feet for love or money, when along came a friend of mine, who assisted me to a seat on

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the train and told a couple of lads who were hanging about the platform that they could have the buns if they cared to clean up the mess.

Many years ago on a Christmas Eve, I had lunched with some business friends - very well I might say - followed by a little staff party and a service at Church, ending with a few tonics with the choir "boys." I must have been well oiled, because an elderly damsel, as I subsequently learned, asked me where Sloane Square Station was and I gallantly replied that I was the station and offered my services as a train - so I must have been far gone. Anyway I had a goose slung over my shoulder, a present from the company with whom we did business, a parcel containing presents for the family and friends and of course some money and a watch and chain. I went fast asleep on the station about 8 o'clock and was awakened at 11.30 by the station master. I was minus my goose, presents, money, watch and chain, cuff links - in short everything of any value. I still clutched tightly the piece of string that had held the goose, which had been severed at the neck by my light fingered friend in truly traditional fashion. When I arrived home I was not at all popular, but soon fell asleep again and on Christmas morning arose filled with the spirit of the season and all other seasons. I hid me to church and exercised my vocal chords with a spirited rendering of, "O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion". I write spirited because the choir chaps on the other side complained bitterly about my breath!

*Chapter XXII
Up the Ladder*

I must now return to when I lost my job in 1917. On the Sunday following my dismissal, I wrote twelve letters to post promptly on Monday in reply to any suitable advertisements in the 'Telegraph'. I soon found eleven, one of which might prove fruitful, and this left one letter which had to find a home. The most unlikely of the likeliest was an advertisement reading, "Accountant required immediately - lady might suit". The "lady might suit" had put me off, but nothing ventured nothing gained, I concluded, and so my

twelfth letter went its way. 75

I received four replies during the ensuing week asking me to call, which I did. I could have gone to any one of the four firms, because staff was somewhat of a problem in 1917. Fortunately for me, I chose to go to the firm where my twelfth letter had gone, because it was in the suburbs. I say fortunately for me, and mean it, because it gave me an opportunity to get up the ladder far higher than I had ever entertained in my wildest dreams, and I seized it with both hands, firmly believing that opportunity knocks only once at your door. To be perfectly frank, it was the 1914 war that gave me the opportunity to prove my worth, always bearing in mind that I still had to fight against my impediment.

I was very happy there, everyone being kind and considerate and I felt more important and of more consequence than hitherto. Also they must have appreciated me because my salary was doubled within one year of my joining the firm. I thought I was dug in for good, but in 1920 they went into voluntary liquidation. Another company was formed from the residue under a slightly different title, with offices in the West End, and I was the Secretary. Now, simultaneously with the firm going into liquidation, the Managing Director was approached by the head of a foreign organisation, to be the Managing Director of the British organisation he proposed to open, but he was unable to accept because he had already agreed to be Managing Director of the new concern. And so it was resolved to give this new company the sole agency to sell to the trade only, and this arrangement lasted for a period of a year or so, when, owing to the ^{assessments of} trade being farcical, the foreign company formed a company in England to sell direct to the public, under the title which it bore in other countries. The idea was that the staff and premises of ^{our} my company would be utilised to run the new foreign company for an agreed monthly payment and that the Managing Director should be made the Managing Director of this new company, and your humble servant, Secretary. This

scheme was duly put into operation and proved satisfactory for a time. 76
Then the turnover of the foreign company grew so rapidly as to make it necessary to get premises and staff of their own.

Consequently this was carried out, the Managing Director leaving the first company and being engaged solely by the foreign company, whilst I remained Secretary of both companies, spending the morning with one and the afternoon ^{evening} with the other.

This arrangement was very heavy going for me and I began to feel after six months that I could not keep up the pace much longer, when an incident occurred that remedied matters. The Managing Director who had joined the foreign Company had to be replaced and one was duly appointed by the Chairman of the company. He was a bully and I disliked him heartily from the start and he probably had a similar brotherly affection for me. Be that as it may, he was continually picking holes in me, more indirectly than otherwise, and was very jealous because the Chairman had a good opinion of me. If the Chairman came into my office for any length of time, more than five minutes, he would appear and listen to our conversation. I know he eventually poisoned the Chairman's mind against me and that increased my dislike, if that was possible. The ultimate stage of this vendetta arrived one morning when I went as usual into the directors' office (they had one office between them, but separate desks) for my mail and conflagration. - as a rule the latter was a waste of time. I have long since been convinced that far too much talk is indulged in by the management of most companies. Before now I have been asked for certain information by 9.30 and an hour later asked if I had got the answer, when I had not even left the directors' office. We had been jawing most of the time about absolutely nothing.

To resume, on this particular morning the Managing Director thumped the desk and told me that a certain job must be completed by the following morning - even if your girls work all night (meaning of course, the staff). Now

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anyone who has had the patience to read so far would realise that I was still very sensitive and hated being shouted at and ordered about and I am still the same, and believe that one reacts the same all through life. What annoyed me at the age of four, still does, and what pleased me, ditto. I reacted to the Managing Director as I had done on my first day at work when told to shut the window, viz. I at once became awkward, obstinate and bad tempered. I said nothing, but looked out of the window and whistled, "Tommy make room for your uncle". After an awkward pause, the Chairman said, "Your Managing Director is talking to you" and I replied in a furious temper that "I wasn't deaf. I could b - - y well hear the pigs and they could both go to the devil". I said I would not do a stroke more work for the firm and so on, then went out banging the door after me, in accordance with the worst tradition of childish behaviour.

After an hour or so the Chairman sent for me and after handing me some papers said, "You seem very upset this morning Mr. - - ", I answered in the affirmative, adding that I was finished with the company. He said that I had an agreement which did not expire for another 3½ years, to which I replied that if I was legally compelled to stay that long, I would sit with my feet on the mantelpiece, at the same time pointing out that he had repeatedly ~~reminded~~ ^{sat still} whilst the Managing Director tried to find fault with all I did. The result of this storm in a teacup was that I stayed a further two months to enable the company to get a successor for me and to show him the ropes, after which the foreign company engaged me full time, and none too soon for it was growing rapidly and I soon had my plate full. We had 1 book-keeper and 1 typist one year, and a year later, 9 book-keepers and 6 typists, which gives some indication of the rapid growth of the firm. We soon had to find larger premises, which we eventually did in a well-known West End street, where the company prospered exceedingly. I thought at last I had found a situation where I could be safe for the rest of my working days, but it was

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not to be. In 1924 the foreign organisation appointed a man of their own nationality to be joint Managing Director, followed by three or four other men from the same stable, and there again I had my nose put out of joint - ever the same sensitive nature as of old.

From the outset I was antagonistic to him and resented all he did, and said, for he was a nasty piece of work, sneering and critical and generally beastly. After my exodus the company lost a lot of money and he got the order of the boot. But this is anticipating. He had a kink over statistics and I had to estimate what would be the monthly cash receipts for the following two years based on ^{his} estimated sales, divided into cash transactions hire purchase and trade. It was impossible to forecast this accurately but I did my best and at subsequent board meetings, this nasty little squirt would say in his sneering manner, "I see you estimated the cash we should receive in June would be £10,000, but we received only £9,000. I wonder where you went wrong". It was useless to explain that the estimated turnover had been wrong and the many other factors that had to be taken into consideration, I was wrong and most of the persons sitting round the table were convinced that it was so, with the exception of this man who knew better. He had a cunning way of taking the micky out of me and I never forgave him.

He had another vacuum disturbance - known generally as a brainwave. He asked me to prepare estimated balance sheets for the next 10 years, based on an assumed annual increase in production and sales of so much per cent. As I had a lot of other duties, this was a somewhat formidable task and when completed was not worth the paper it was written on. I ultimately finished after repeated reminders from this man, and at the next board meeting presented them with a flourish, expecting at least a pat on the back, but believe me, the directors gave a casual glance at them and I don't suppose they understood a figure. One of them did say, "How interesting" but in ten minutes they were forgotten and all the hours and thought I had given

the matter was a sheer waste of time. 79

Another of this fellow's playful ways, was to sit up half the night ^{Continued} jawing. I have been going home at 8.30 when one of them has called up, "Is that you Mr. - - . Could you spare a minute?" I have joined them and sat there for an hour until 9.30, and when I left they were still there, still jawing.

You can realise that by this time I was properly browned off, bad tempered, obstinate and sullen, as of yore, but I was getting a good salary and there were my wife and four sons to consider, and jobs in 1926 were none too plentiful. Besides that, there was my unfortunate impediment to contend with, not that it manifested itself in working hours, but would do so if I went for an interview. As a matter of fact some of my clerks who had been with me two or three years were totally unaware of my trouble until the firm gave a dinner and I was called upon to make a speech. As long as I could rap out orders and instructions like a sergeant major, all was well, but, immediately I commenced to talk in a quiet voice, my impediment asserted itself.

My temperament was against me however, and some adverse criticism, justified or otherwise, finished me. I rushed down to the directors' room with my hat and coat on, and really let my hair down. I told the "nasty piece of work" my opinion of all foreigners, he in particular, and announced my intention of walking out of the - - - hole. Very childish of course, but this is a true account of what happened. I stayed with the company a further three ^{months} weeks, i.e. until my service agreement expired, and then exit.

Whilst I was with this company they ^{Chapter XXIII} ~~used to have~~ ^{had many} periodical dinners for the management, that is all the depot managers and the "big wigs" at Head Office plus the company's solicitor, bank manager and auditor - a goodly, representative gathering. Tongues wagged under the influence of the liberal amount of alcohol supplied, and many a depot manager blotted his copy book. At one

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particularly hilarious dinner, two or three of the depot managers reached the one over the eight stage and slid gradually and gracefully under the table and I fear we left them to sleep it off. Three went under in this way and when we went to resurrect them at the close of the proceedings, there were only two. We searched diligently but unsuccessfully for the third - a little Irishman, - last but not least in the lavatories, a most likely place for a drunk, but we could only conclude he had crawled from under the table unobserved and found his way back to his hotel. He had certainly done the former, but not the latter, for, when the train in which the managing director and I were travelling, stopped at Putney Bridge, the guard picked up what looked like a bundle of old clothes and deposited them on the floor of the compartment saying, from what he could understand from the bundle, it wanted the terminus - Wimbledon - and that if ^{the bundle} ~~he~~ was still incapable when he arrived there, he would fetch the police. The train was late and filled with people returning from theatres, etc. and all with one accord sniffed and snorted and tried to look very disgusted and immensely superior - not the least of these being my managing director who was a shocking snob but a very decent fellow, none the less. We were seated some distance from where the bundle lay and could not see clearly without standing up, and in due time reached the next station, East Putney. Then the bundle spoke and said loudly and cheerfully, "Good evening, Mr. - -" (naming the managing director), "and the same to you" (addressing me). Without doubt, you will have already guessed that the bundle was our little Irishman, whom we had lost at the Trocadero. The managing director was choking with rage and at the next station (Southfields) where we lived, left me to deal with the situation, after helping me to get the bundle ashore. As I have just said, he was a very decent fellow but had no time for anyone who got intoxicated, or even drank during the day. Many an applicant after a quite remunerative post has blotted his copy book by breathing stale beer over him.

To resume my tale of woe, I, after some trouble and a considerable amount of bad language, managed to sober him somewhat and discover the name and address of his hotel. It was nowhere near Wimbledon, but in Bloomsbury. I therefore had no alternative but to see him back safely, via Earls Court and so on to Holborn, and a taxi to the hotel. It was too late for me to return home so I procured a room for the night at the hotel, first ringing up my wife to advise her I should not be home. There was no answer however, as she had retired to bed some two hours earlier and was sleeping the sleep of the just, and only realised my absence in the morning when she noticed my bedroom door was open and the bed undisturbed. .

I remember another occasion when a dinner was arranged for the depot managers, following a conference at the Midland Hotel, Manchester. Most of them had to stay there for the night as they had come from various parts of England, and they let themselves go to the fullest extent as they had no anxiety about getting home for the night. There were very few casualties in spite of this, the most prominent being a certain gentleman who had been badly wounded in the 1914 war and had to wear a metal plate in his skull. I undertook to look after him because of his disability, but it was impossible to keep track of all his movements. I realised my impotence when he stood up intending to make a speech, for he turned a funny colour and then tumbled helplessly on the floor. This was greeted by the depot managers with hilarious laughter, but the managing director and I took a more serious view and helped him to his bedroom, undressed him and laid him comfortably to rest, or so we thought. Sometime later the managing director and I went down to the bar for a "binder" and a chat and were amazed to see the fellow who we had recently put to bed hopelessly intoxicated, sitting on a high stool at the counter, fully arrayed in his evening clothes, complete with opera hat perched jauntily at the back of his head, drinking double scotches with amazing rapidity. I almost blush to recall what I said to him and the managing

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director, in more restrained language, was equally ~~was~~ bitter. The object of our indignation laughed and laughed and laughed and there was only one thing to be done. We took him back to his room, removed his hat and coat and slung the rest of him into bed and locked the door and took the key away.

We were astonished to find in the morning that he was remarkably well in the circumstances and that he apparently had not the slightest recollection of his second escapade the evening before. He had slept until the chamber maid came with the tea but was puzzled to find himself with most of his clothes on. He seemed very penitent and apologised profusely and so the incident closed.

At a dinner and dance organised and financed by the staff and not attended by the managerial staff, the managing director's male secretary and ~~the~~ salesman on leaving the function fell in the gutter, hopelessly intoxicated and were arrested. They were placed on bail when sober, and instructed to present themselves at 10 a.m. at Marlborough Street Police Court. It was 5 a.m. when they left there and they had wiled away the intervening hours by having a turkish bath and some breakfast. At a few minutes to nine, I was in my office when in came the two delinquents looking like scared schoolboys and I was soon in possession of the terrible facts. I knew that the managing director would, under no circumstances, forgive the lapse on the part of his secretary and so did my utmost to keep it from him. I took them round to the firm's solicitor, then Mr. Barrington Matthews, and 10 o'clock found the three of us in the waiting room adjacent to the court, whilst our solicitor, of course, waited in the court itself. This seems much ado about nothing I realise, but it was the only way I could stop the unfortunate pair from panic, to feel they were legally defended. Well, it was all very simple, a few words from the constable, a plea of guilty from the dock, a few words from our solicitor and a fine of 10/- each. This was a satisfactory conclusion so far, but unfortunately it did not end there. The managing director

wondered what had happened to his secretary, rang through to me on the office phone for some explanation and was told I had gone out no-one knew where, and when I did see him I was forced to tell him the truth. My idea had been for his secretary to explain his late attendance by pleading he had not been well - perfectly true, he hadn't, but that was ~~an~~ B.G. (now) and the poor secretary was given a month's notice the following week. I was very sorry for him and pleaded with the managing director to overlook the matter, but it was of no avail.

*Chapter XXIV
Rogues and Rascals*

At this company the salesmen were paid commission only and on a sliding scale. There was constant fiddling going on - a real headache for me. Let me try and relate a few ^{incidents} that come to my mind, but I must first of all try to explain the method of payment. If a salesman sold five machines in ~~the~~ a month, he had £2 commission on each; but if he sold six he received 5/- extra retrospectively, that is six additional ^{five shillings,} 5/-, and if he sold eleven, an extra 10/- retrospectively or 15/- in like manner for 16 orders, concluding with an extra £1 per machine for selling over 20. It was a vicious system and a great temptation to many. You can imagine how many men who had sold 20 machines only, realising that if they ^{could sell} ~~could~~ one more an additional 5/- would be paid on 21 machines, plus a commission of £2:15:0, totalling £8. There were also prizes in the form of gold cigarette cases for the top man. What happened is perfectly obvious. In many cases the 21st order was a fake, the order form being completed down to the alleged signature of the customer, either by the salesman in a diguised hand, or a pal. They got over the delivery question by stating that they personally would deliver the machine, or said ~~that~~ a few days later, i.e. the following month, that the order had been cancelled, which did not affect the previous month's record or commission. Others were not so cautious and it was only when payment was applied for that the fraud was discovered and by that time the salesman had probably left. Some were ~~pro~~secuted, but quite a few magistrates took the view that, as the

men were not paid ^{any} ~~in~~ salary, they were agents and could be ^{sued} ~~sued~~ only in a civil court. I will say here that subsequently a salary was paid with lower rates of commission. 84

Well, it grew to such an extent that a letter was composed reading briefly, "We understand that yesterday you were good enough to sign an order for model - , presented to you by our representative Mr. - - . If we do not hear from you within three days we shall assume the order is bona fide and delivery will be made". This did not prevent a man in Glasgow from doing the company for £400 or so, and his method was as follows. He went along a certain road and told the ladies of the houses that he had been promised an order from a lady in an adjacent road when she returned from her holidays, but in the meantime he had no money and could not get any until he sent in some orders. Would the lady mind signing an order, accept delivery of the machine and ignore any letters received from Head Office, and when the lady in the adjacent road came back, he would collect the machine and deliver it to her. It is almost impossible to think people would be so gullible, but they could and were. He repeated his tale with 40 or 50 matrons and when a few weeks had elapsed, removed the machines as promised and either sold them or pawned them for as much as possible. He left the company some four months later, when he knew we should start proceedings for the money and it was only when we started suing them ^{alleged customers} that we learned the truth. A warrant was issued, the man arrested and sentenced to a term of imprisonment. A salesman in Glasgow happened to know his new address - hence our success in finding him. I say success with reservation, because it was really throwing good money after bad, but the company thought a few prosecutions might deter others - I doubt if it did.

Another man in the provinces said that in the course of three days he had collected cash from 4 customers and, as he was afraid of losing it, had placed the money in envelopes ^{and posted it them in an ordinary letter box.} He said he had sent four lots during the time.

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and addressed them to the secretary, name of firm, London, ~~and had posted~~
~~them in an ordinary letter box.~~ He was duly charged and stood for trial
before a jury and a number of magistrates and was, of course, legally repre-
sented and so were we. A number of us from Head Office, in addition to his
depot manager, had to attend as witnesses and I thought we had a concrete
case, but we had overlooked local prejudice. The case went on for nearly
five hours - I will not bore you with details, except for his counsel's
speech in his defence. He said that no doubt his client was a fool, but
being a fool did not make him a criminal and he asked the jury to return a
verdict of not guilty, and this they did, greatly to our chagrin. To ac-
cept such a flimsy excuse from a man who had been educated at a Public
School bearing the name of the town, and was turned 40 years of age, was
monstrous. After the verdict and outside the court, three or four women
kissed him and men shook hands with him. We subsequently learned that he
had discovered the names of some of the jury a week or so before and had
been buying beer for them and cigars.

On four occasions after this he had the damned impertinence to refer
prospective employers to us for a reference, but I had taken the precaution
of having six copies of the local rag containing a full report sent to me
and a copy was sent to each of the four enquirers. I wonder if you'll
think me ^{spiteful.} ~~petty.~~ I don't think I was, if you consider what a liability he
would have been to any employer.

I could relate many other experiences connected with defaulting sales-
men and staff whilst with this firm but will content myself, and I hope any
lady or gentleman who might honour me by reading this drivel, by mentioning
only two more, the first not of much importance but annoying, the second
very tragic.

First there were several petty thefts going on in one of the offices
and I was forced to take action, so a couple of detectives came round from

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Vine Street and after stamping several silver coins with dye and recording the dates, placed them in a drawer from where the other articles and money had been taken. The head clerk of this office was instructed at intervals to refer to the drawer and, should the money be missing, to report it to me, and I in turn would acquaint the detectives. At 1.10 p.m. the clerk came to me all hot and bothered and said that the money had gone since 12.30, the time he had previously checked it. I therefore informed Vine Street and round came the detectives in due time. Those who had gone to lunch at 12 - 1 were asked to turn out their pockets with negative results, and by this time the 1 - 2 staff were back. The first to return was a young man aged 17 who took from his pockets 12/- in loose coin, and it was some of the marked silver, totalling £2, that had been placed in the drawer earlier on. This meant that £1:8:0 was missing and in answer to questioning the lad said he had taken his mother to lunch; and, when one of the detectives in a somewhat jocular way said, "You did yourselves very well, didn't you?" (this was November 1923), ^{he} replied cheerfully in the affirmative, and volunteered the details of how the £1:8:0 had been spent, even to the 2/6d that had gone on a box of chocolates for his mother. As watertight a case for conviction ~~as~~ ever there was, thought I, but here again I was wrong. I did not think a prosecuting counsel was necessary ^{with the evidence} ~~on the facts~~ of the two detectives, the head clerk, and my own, and also thinking the accused would plead guilty.

Full of confidence I proceeded to Marlborough Street Police Court at 10 o'clock the following morning and there I received the first proverbial smack in the proverbial eye. A solicitor in the employ of the firm's solicitors was in the waiting room and greeted me cheerfully with, "Good morning Mr. - , we're against you this morning". I politely asked what the blank-~~ed~~ hell he was talking about and it transpired that the lad's father had approached them to ^{obtain} ~~be~~ counsel for his son's defence and he was now in court. I was dumbfounded, first because we were not represented by counsel and

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secondly because the solicitor who we had so often engaged, was on the other side of the fence. I have since learned that they were perfectly entitled to do this, but I considered this, and still do, very bad form.

The case came up for hearing about 11 o'clock, before Mr. Mead, and we all in turn gave evidence and were cross-examined by the defending counsel, who wiped the floor with us. Would you believe it, the defence was that this 'poor innocent boy', to quote the counsel's words, got into a panic when the marked coins were found on him and still in a panic, invented the story about his mother and their lunch? "The facts are" went on this bullying counsel, "This poor lad had hung his coat in the cloakroom and replaced it with an office coat and some evilly disposed person had gone to the cloakroom and placed 12/- of the coins in his pocket before he left for lunch." "As a matter of fact", said counsel, "his lunch that day consisted of a sandwich and a bar of chocolate and a walk in the park", and of course mother gave evidence and said she had been at home all day. During my cross-examination I grew very angry with the counsel's bullying attitude and in reply to his shouting, shouted back, so much so that Mr. Mead rebuked me for shouting at the counsel and I retorted that counsel had started it, not me, at which Mr. Mead said, "Stand down sir". I had, prior to this, asked counsel how it happened that though he alleged the lad had no knowledge of the money in his coat pocket, he produced it from his trouser pocket at the office. I added, "Somebody's lying and it is not me". It was soon after this that Mr. Mead said curtly, "Case dismissed" and the people at the back of the court cried, "Hear, hear!", at which the usher hollered, "Silence in court" and so I would like to conclude with, "Everybody lived happily ever after" but it would not be true. I for one, chewed over so-called British justice for a long time and to this day wonder why magistrates in those days, anyway, seemed to revel in taking the micky out of the prosecuting witnesses. I have seen many a lady in tears after the magistrate had been critical of the way

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she carried her handbag, "putting temptation in the way of this unfortunate man". Even in those days they were starting the sloppy sympathy for the wrongdoer, now so prevalent. The court case occurred on the Saturday and on the Monday our hero turned up and I gave him a week's salary and a letter stating that, "Owing to reorganisation we were compelled to dispense with his services". . It almost paralyzed my right hand to sign it, but he and his family were a tricky lot and no doubt they had received some advice from counsel.

I will now endeavour to tell you of the tragic event to which I have already referred. I must first of all explain the layout of the Accounts Department. There was a large ~~room~~^{office} in which the majority of the book-keepers were housed ~~and containing~~^{from} a door which led to the Cashier's Office - a lady by the way - and a further door in her office led to the office of the holy of holies, in short mine. It was Friday morning and the cashier was engaged ⁱⁿ putting the salaries and commission ~~in~~ⁱⁿ pay packets, and her desk in consequence was strewn with notes and silver totalling perhaps £400. Suddenly the door of my office opened and she came in very pale and trembling, and I with my customary good breeding said, "What the devil's the matter now?". She told me that she was engrossed with the money when a slight noise made her turn her head and she saw a man standing there with a peculiar expression and, to quote her words, "He looked as if he was going to attack me and I'm sure he would if you had not coughed". I laughed and told her she was imagining things and asked where the intruder had gone and on being informed he had left the office on hearing my 'bark', discovered him still hanging about the outer office. I asked him what the hell he was doing there and he replied that he had no money, so I lent him 10/- and informed him that no commission was paid until 4.30 p.m. and that he should knock on the cashier's door before entering. I thought the incident closed and forgot about the man although I occasionally remembered his eyes, in which the pupils were very small, black surrounded by

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a lot of white, like a snow covered field with a lump of coal in the centre. And so the days passed - of course they did, idiot! - and four months slipped by, when I was reminded of the funny-eyed fellow under review. He had since left ^{the}my company and gone to another dealing in similar products. It was the same familiar story, faked orders, machines pawned and so on, which frauds could only be discovered when we pressed for payment. This case, by the way, occurred prior to the letter of advice being sent, which I have mentioned earlier in this chronicle. When I discovered this man's fraud, I, as usual in such circumstances, referred to the references he had submitted and found they were both from well-known firms and highly satisfactory - in fact so flowery that I had originally written on one, "Who will say the saints are defunct". This should have made me suspicious I now realised, ~~but~~ ^{and} I rang the firms concerned and was not surprised to find they had never heard of my man and had not the foggiest idea how he had obtained possession of their notepaper. After this I would not accept any open references and any ^{prospective} salesman had to qualify for a fidelity bond, ~~and~~ ^{(credit and} I had to engage ^{an} ~~an~~ ^{new} clerk to deal with the extra work these steps entailed.

I rang the firm ^{to which} ~~where~~ he had gone after leaving us and it was no surprise to me to be told that he had stolen money paid to him by customers and that they were seeking legal advice that very afternoon. This was good news to me and I suggested that we should jointly prosecute him and share the costs and that I would see their solicitor with them. This they readily agreed to and after the usual preliminaries the man was charged at North London and sentenced by Mr. Fope, then the presiding magistrate, to six months' imprisonment. I can at this very minute visualise how he looked when ascending the steps leading to the dock. He had his overcoat collar turned up and I was again struck by his peculiar eyes, ~~from~~ ^{from} where I sat in court I could not see any pupils and he presented to me a picture of a blind ghost with white patches for eyes. He pleaded guilty in a low tone when

charged and I could not refrain from feeling a tinge of pity for him, he seemed devoid of all hope.

Be that as it may, he served his sentence and then obtained another job as salesman with another firm selling the same line of goods, and he was forgotten as far as I was concerned, but not for long. It must have been nearly a year since I had last seen him at the police court and I was reading a paper travelling to business when I caught sight of a caption which immediately arrested my attention. It was, "~~Vacuum Cleaner~~ Salesman charged with murder". On reading the article I was amazed and startled to find that it was the same man under discussion, and ^{it} appeared that he had called on an elderly lady living ^{on the East Coast} ~~a little way out of London~~ to collect an instalment due on a hire purchase sale; and when the poor soul produced her purse, ^{he} struck her down and killed her. He was tried at the Old Bailey, found guilty, sentenced to death and ^{hanged} ~~hung~~ in Wandsworth Gaol. His defending counsel pleaded that the sight of money had always unbalanced his mind and he became temporarily insane. "Would a sane man" went on the counsel, "commit a brutal murder for the sake of £3?" which was all the unfortunate lady had in her purse. My thoughts obviously turned to my cashier and I had ~~to~~ ^{now} agree that she had ample grounds for fear and I had to apologise for having discounted her story. This happened 35 years ago but I think in these days he would have been sent to Broadmoor. He certainly was not normal, but very cunning ~~nevertheless~~. *Chapter XXV*

One damned thing after another.
Some months prior to my leaving this company, I was affected with a terrible thirst and drank quarts of water during the day, and ditto of beer at night, and shortly after leaving I was found to be suffering from sugar diabetes. I managed for a while to keep the sugar under control by strict dieting, but in 1930 I sprained my right ankle and ^{as a consequence} had to have insulin. Whether the enforced rest prevented my keeping the sugar down I do not know. The more energy one expends the better ^{one} ~~they~~ control the sugar, but I can

remember many cases where the spraining of an ankle has ^{occasionally} caused diabetes. 91

For 29 years I have had two injections a day, totalling so far over 20,000 and still going - just!

The only occasions the injections are a nuisance are when you have to go out to dinner in the evening and forget to take the insulin, or forget your syringe. I have forgotten the insulin some half dozen times but the most unfortunate experience I have had was, I think, at the Connaught Rooms. I retired to the lavatory with my syringe and insulin and sat on the lavatory seat to adjust my clothes before the injection, placing both these articles also on the seat. When I arose to perform the deed on my leg, the lavatory seat did likewise and my insulin and syringe went down the pan, breaking the former into smithereens. I had to leave and go home where, fortunately, I had spares, but not such an elaborate dinner as I had been forced to relinquish.

*After leaving the foreign company i.e. when my
three months had expired I had to look for other employment*

I had saved a fair amount of money and inserted an advertisement, stating my wish to contact a growing concern who required further capital, in consideration for which I wanted a job. The replies I received were very funny, when applied to me. One was from a milkman whose idea was that I should do a round delivering milk in the morning, help with washing cans and bottles, etc. in the afternoon, and do the accounts as he put it, in the evening. He wanted me to invest £1000 and suggested an annual ^{investment} increment of £156.

Another was from a wholesale greengrocer, who desired me to drive a horse and cart to Covent Garden every morning, getting there at 5.30 a.m., the rest of the day helping with the packing and doing the books. He also wanted £1000, but was more generous with his remuneration; it was £208 per annum.

A third reply was from a lady - a very carefully worded letter - which, after perusing two or three times, convinced me that she wished to run an

establishment where the recognised trade sign is a red lamp. She sought an interview when the matter could be fully discussed without reserve.

You may remember that I have previously commented on my good fortune when I went to the company in the suburbs in 1917, ^{This company under another name} now in the West End, but with some of the old personnel still there, including the chairman. My old enemy there had got into disgrace and been forced to resign. I was fully aware of how I had cursed the firm in general, and the firm's managing director in particular, but I was up against it and must do something about it, even if my pride suffered. I therefore phoned the chairman asking if he would have lunch with me and he replied saying he would be pleased to, and in due course we met at Frascati. No reference was made to the past unpleasantness and I explained the difficulty I was in. He was most gracious and said what I already knew - I was far too sensitive. He proceeded to say that they - his company - had recently put some money in a subsidiary company as part loan, and if I cared to replace the loan and buy some shares, I would be director and secretary. I should be in a position to look after my money and at the same time theirs. I was obviously delighted to return to mother, as it were, and after a few weeks I commenced my new duties. I had to accept a much reduced salary but the work was child's play in comparison with what I had been accustomed to and I was happier than I had been for many months, and this is why I consider 1917 was very lucky for me.

About a year later, my poor wife's health commenced to fail and I was compelled to store the furniture and go into furnished lodgings with my sons, and let the house which I had bought. My wife went to different hotels and lodgings for the ensuing three years and at the end of that period, coinciding with the tenancy of the house expiring, the furniture was taken out of store and she and the boys took possession. I alone remained in digs, as I was suffering badly with neuritis and thought it was better for me to be within easy walking distance of the office. My position with this company was my

last and it continued for over 30 years. During this lengthy period much occurred - it obviously would - my co-director, who took the title of managing director, was a man with technical knowledge, and I, with my humble financial experience, soon had a good business and we did very well. Not that all went well internally, for we were constantly arguing and differed considerably in our outlook, which may have contributed to the success of the firm. If one person says a colour is black and the other says ^{white}blue, after discussion they may find it is really grey, and thereby benefit.

During the 1939 war, the parent company sold their shares and we made good use of the freedom to do as we liked. The first thing, of course, was a substantial increase in our stipend. ~~Chapter XXVI~~ ^{Bombs and Deeds} // In 1941, owing to severe enemy action, I returned to my family, now consisting of my wife and two sons, the other two being married by now, and life went on the same as millions of other Londoners. Bombs to the right of us and bombs to the left of us, in short, bombs all over the ^{neighbourly} place.

One air raid is particularly fresh in my memory. It was about 1 a.m. and several unexploded bombs fell. I did not know this at the time and when the hullabaloo died down, returned to bed. I had not been there more than ten minutes, when a warden rang the bell and said we must evacuate at once. I accordingly arose and very carefully dressed myself, including spats, which at that period of my life I would not have been buried without. Needless to say I also brushed my hair very carefully. I had no sooner descended the stairs ready to depart, when the bell rang again and a warden told us it was a false alarm and we were not being evacuated. So back to bed I went and after about fifteen minutes the bell went again and the same warden appeared and said we must evacuate after all as an unexploded bomb had been discovered nearly opposite the house. And so for the second time I arose and carefully dressed and with my wife was taken, with others, to a hospital some distance away. When we reached there, we were shown to a big

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ward containing a number of men and women and children, none of whom was properly attired. There were men in pyjamas and night shirts and women and children similiarly clothed, and when I walked in with spats and rolled umbrella and kid gloves, the men stood up and said, "Thank God you have arrive - they thought I was the doctor!

I soon disillusioned them, somewhat curtly I fear, and no doctor did arrive by the time my wife and I left in the morning. We spent the following two days at an hotel and then were allowed to return home.

The subject of doctors reminds me that I have frequently been mistaken for one. On one occasion I pushed open the door of a public house and look in and there were half a dozen ladies sitting there. My appearance was greeted by one damsel saying, "Gawd, here's the doctor" and to her friend, "You artful bitch, you never told me you were so far gone".

On another occasion I was in a restaurant and overheard two ladies talking - quite different ^{types} from the ladies above mentioned. One said, "I'm sure its Dr. - - , he brought our little Alice into the world". The other lady demurred and was not sure and so after some minutes of, "I'm sure it is and "I don't think so", the doubting Thomas suggested to her friend that she should ask me. Then followed, "I don't like to" and, "Why not, I'm sure he would not mind." "You do it", "No, you do it" and eventually, "Let's both go" and, so on their way to the desk to pay their bill they pretended to see me for the first time. "Why, what a pleasant surprise " they exclaimed, "It's Dr. - - (mentioning my own doctor). How are you Dr. - - ?". I assured them that I was not a doctor but gallantly said, "I wish I was, as nothing would have given me greater pleasure than to attend to the physical comforts of two such charming ladies." They left me in some confusion and with many apologies.

When I related this incident to my doctor, he did not seem at all pleased and when I saw my reflection in the mirror of the consulting room,

I was not surprised. It must have been a terrible shock!

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Chapter XXVII
The Quartet.

Round about 1919 I formed a male voice quartet and for a few years we did quite well, but as it interfered with my business commitments, I was forced to disband it, much to my regret and that of the other members. Male voice quartets were popular 30 years ago but if you attempted to put one over in these days it would only be an invitation to the 'bird'.

We obtained a few engagements at the seaside to perform on the pier on Sunday afternoons and evenings and we made these trips as pleasant as possible. We hired a car to take us there and back and we have frequently started from London at 7 a.m. and not arrived back until 5 a.m. on the following morning, and then after two hours rest, prepared for another day's work. That was not the happy part I have just referred to. It was ^{going} to and from our destination ^{that} we made merry, especially the latter when we took away several bottles of Guinness and some sandwiches and told jokes and behaved generally like kids. As we emptied the bottles we threw them in the hedges and all went well until on one occasion a distinct human cry was heard. We assumed it was a courting couple, hardly what you would expect to come across ~~at~~ ten miles from anywhere at 2 a.m.

On another occasion we were engaged to sing at the Savoy on New Year's Eve and some bright spark suggested we should pretend to be waiters and suddenly burst into song. We did, and startled the guests out of their wits. Their spoons full of tomato soup in transit to their mouths, when we started to sing, went up and down in nervous jerks and many evening dresses, male and female, were far from spotless. "The Daily Mail" in reporting the New Year's festivities said, "At the Savoy Hotel the waiters sang whilst they performed their duties". The only waiting we did was to assist in distributing the soup!

Then we were engaged by a firm of stockbrokers who, having made a lot of

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money, decided to put up the shutters. They gave all the staff sums of money varying according to their length of service and position. For instance, the lift man was given say, £300 whilst the head clerk got, say, £5000 or so. I am not sure of these figures but they are immaterial to what I am about to relate. The dinner started with the usual nervous solemnity and dignity but as the booze went down the spirits of the company first went up, but only for a time. There was champagne galore knocking about and we watched with amusement what went on. The assembled company got very sentimental and some commenced to weep bitterly, followed by riotous horse play when they started emptying champagne over those who were out for the count. When they had partially recovered they started slinging bottles about and when a few mirrors had been smashed, we decided it was time to show a leg, so how the orgy finished I shall never know. We sang Grace and "When the Evening's Twilight Gathers Round" - the latter very appropriate, and that was all.

A further amusing incident occurred when we were travelling from Cannon Street ~~to~~ and the train was scheduled as not stopping at London Bridge. As soon as the train left Cannon Street, we commenced to change into evening dress and by the time we reached London Bridge the four of us were in various stages of undress - one fast worker had nothing on except a short flannel vest! To our dismay, the train pulled up at London Bridge where there was a large crowd of people - it being the rush hour - waiting to get aboard. We hastily pulled down the near side blinds and fixed a half-penny in the lock to prevent anyone opening the door, but we had overlooked the offside, where there were hundreds of passengers looking in the window and laughing heartily - and you can't wonder at it when you consider what a revealing sight we presented. Of course we frantically pulled down the blinds and then had to attend to the guard of the train who was tapping on the window telling us to open the door. This we had to do and after explana-

tions, the guard let in men only and all was well.

One Saturday, I think the one prior to Easter Monday, we had an engagement a little way down the line from Fenchurch Street, and when we returned about 10 p.m. the station was packed with holiday makers. One of the quartet observed that the crowd looked more like a party of mourners ~~instead of~~ ^{than} holiday makers and suggested we should cheer them up. Why he thought a third rate male voice quartet would make them cheer up beats me - he must have been a conceited optimist. Anyway, we at least woke them up for when we started John Peel - the effect was electric. Everyone within earshot seemed to stop talking and listen and when we had finished our audience called for an encore and they got it in the shape of, "When Evening's Twilight". They listened attentively, even the engines were quiet and at the conclusion clapped to our satisfaction. I had been expecting the arrival of the station master with, "You can't do that there here" but no one came and one of the quartet - the one with the most cheek - went round with his hat, "Please remember the widows and orphans of the Railway Company". In that way we collected over £10 which we presented to the right quarter in due course.

I can remember another occasion when passing Chancery Lane Tube Station. We were on our way to fulfill an engagement and one of the quartet was not quite sure of his note, so we went into the station where the exits to the lifts are, and hummed a few bars so as to make sure. A young policeman on point duty heard us and got very excited, rushing in and ordering us to stop. One of our number indignantly enquired what right had he to interfere with us, stating that we were not begging, not causing an annoyance or creating a disturbance, in short we were not breaking the law in any way. The constable was apparently lost for words and after opening and shutting his mouth helplessly, told us to be careful. This was not entirely the end because we went on to the refuge where he was directing the traffic and sang a verse of "The Long Day Closes". Whether we were within our legal rights I do not

know, but as I have said the constable was very young.

The first time I tasted olives was many years ago and my introduction was a complete failure. I found the one I had in my mouth impossible to swallow and when no-one was looking slipped it into the handkerchief I was wearing in my breast pocket and forgot about it. I must explain that I was there with three other members of our quartet and we had been engaged professionally, and an invitation to dinner thrown in. When the time to perform arrived we all trooped on to the platform and sang a serious quartet, and as an encore chose a humorous one where, at one part, we had to pull a handkerchief smartly from our breast pockets and pretend to weep. You can guess what happened. The olive I had concealed in my handkerchief went sailing across the room and after hitting a lady on the nose, fell into a wine glass. It could not have been done more neatly had I practised it for months. Most of the guests thought it was part of the act and laughed uproariously and we let it go at that. Afterwards I went to the unfortunate lady as soon as I could and after apologies had been accepted and her glass replenished, all was well. I have since consumed hundreds of olives, but have always remembered my initiation.

Chapter XXVIII Adventures while travelling.

During my checkered career, I have left and lost many articles in railway carriages. One week I was sillier than usual and lost a suitcase, tobacco pouch, pipe, gloves and spectacles. The Lost Property office was at Waterloo Station and in due course I called there and enquired after stray pouches and a drawer⁴ was produced containing about 50, but mine was not there and I said so. I then asked about stray pipes and another drawer was produced containing about 100 of the smelly things but still the result was negative, and so was my search for my spectacles and gloves. By this time the railway clerk thought I was being funny but I assured him I was not. After all, if I had been on the fiddle, I could have claimed some of the articles - I do not know

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what would have prevented me. Anyway I had left asking for the most important article - my suitcase - until last and the railway clerk's suspicions returned fourfold when I claimed one as mine. He wanted to know what it contained and when I told him the colour and pattern ^{of the suit} and ~~make~~ ^{the} and ~~name~~ ^{the} of a tailor his questions being answered satisfactorily, he had no option but to hand over my case, which he did very reluctantly.

When preoccupied I have on occasions been very absent minded and made ticket collectors think I was a case for the loony bin. Instead of producing for inspection my season ticket, I have warmly shaken hands with him, given him my key, or pipe, or tobacco pouch, or gloves and last ^{but} ~~by~~ not least, when I was very busy at the office and took sandwiches for lunch to save time I parted with these, to the amazement of the ticket collector. Although I referred ~~ed~~ to the latter in the singular ~~tense~~, there was more than one ticket collector whom I embarrassed with my stupidity.

One or two incidents during my stay in Vauxhall Bridge Road come to my mind, apart from the usual office routine. One of the travellers offered to teach me to drive a car and I gladly accepted the offer. He possessed a car and so lessons duly started - on Putney Heath. After an hour or so I could manage a straight road at about 40 miles per hour, but when it came to stopping the car I was hopeless. My final attempt was when I got my foot on the accelerator and I could not lift it off in spite of repeated efforts. The car kept half stopping and then leaping forward spasmodically in response to my stuttering feet. A young man was seated on ^{the shaft of} a Wall's Ice Cream barrow, apparently making up his accounts, ~~and~~ I made straight for him and he fled across the heath with me chasing him like a kangaroo. My instructor's head was bobbing backwards and forwards in accordance with the jerkings of the car and he was gasping, "Be careful". His warning was timely because the young man fell over and had not my friend seized the ~~start~~ ^{steering} wheel, the car

would have gone over him. I never attempted to drive again as I suffered with cramp and my doctor thought it might account for my stupidity.

Then there was the time I was accompanying another traveller to call upon some of his customers. We were going through a provincial town - I forget which one - and I was having forty winks in the car when suddenly he said, "Good God, there's a mad horse". I opened my eyes and saw him disappearing out of the car door and at the same time there was a horse attached to a van dashing straight at the car. I sat there petrified and it was as well I did for the horse went right into the bonnet with his forelegs over the bumpers and struck the front lamp with such force as to send it hurtling a dozen yards or so. Had I been in the act of getting out the lamp would have hit me in the tummy and probably killed me. I must explain that we were ascending a somewhat steep hill when the crash came and as I got out the car was slowly going backwards dragging the horse and van with it. A man and a policeman were doing their utmost to halt it and shouted to me to stop the car, which of course I could not do and said so. They said, "Why the hell can't you, you are the driver". I was indignantly repudiating this when my traveller appeared from nowhere, or so it seemed, with the key and turned the engine off and applied the brakes. He lost his head completely and I my life, nearly. When he panicked he simply removed the key and that was all - he didn't even turn it and he subsequently told me that he had run down the hill and was afraid to return, fearful of what he might find.

*Chapter XXIX
Children, Gypsies and Spats*

As I have already stated
My office for many years was in Vauxhall Bridge Road. I walked down from Victoria, as regularly and punctually as clockwork. One morning I noticed a little girl trying to cross the road - there were trams in those days, which did not simplify matters - so I took her by the hand and helped her to the other side, at the same time giving her a penny. This was on a Friday, and on the Monday there was my little girl and two others, waiting

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expectantly for me at the same spot. I surrendered to this form of black-mail by seeing them across the road and parting with 3d, and the number of youngsters grew daily, so much so that after a week I walked another way and dodged them. At the end of the week I thought it would be perfectly safe to resume my old route, but I had not taken into account the buoyancy of youth. Believe me or believe me not, in the distance before my very eyes (with apologies to Arthur Askey) there were at least a dozen youngsters of both sexes gazing hopefully in my direction and holding hands so as to form a long line of kiddies along the kerb. Simultaneously with my approach from Victoria a young policeman approached from the other direction and when I arrived was endeavouring to convey them across the road and could not understand their antagonism. I soon explained the situation and ended by throwing all the coppers I had on the pavement for them to scramble for, at the same time adding that I could not continue giving them money, and the policeman told them they would get into trouble for causing an obstruction. Even after that I noticed one or two children waiting hopefully at Tom Tiddlers Ground, but I passed them with as much dignity as I could command.

Years later the little girl who had been responsible for the above by telling her pals, used to pass me regularly each morning. She had now grown into a good looking girl of 16 or 17, but she only looked at me once and then I gave her a broad wink. Thereafter she walked on the other side of the road, clearly indicating that she did not like me.

One Saturday morning many years ago when the date happened to be November 5th, during my stroll to the office along Vauxhall Bridge Road, I was assailed on all sides by guys in person, guys in little carts, some alive and some dummies, in short guys of every sort and size. They seemed to all make a bee-line for me, one reason being that there were not many people about and another reason was, I suspect, that I looked soft and sappy. I emptied my pockets of small change and by the time I reached the office hoped

I'd be dead before the next anniversary. Just as I opened the door I spotted a lad about 9 years of age rushing across the road towards me pulling a sugar box on wheels containing a rather timid 'guy' with black streaks down his cheeks and a bright red nose. "Remember the guy, Sir" shouted the young hopeful of 9 and I, with empty pockets and rising blood pressure, said heatedly, "Jam and butter your blasted guy - chuck him in the river - so long as you take him out of my sight". The little guy had looked very hopefully at me at first but, hearing my tirade, was now gazing forlornly and fixedly at my spats and when I had finished, he said in a very disappointed tone, "Oh dear, and him in spats!". Talk about out of the mouths of babes and sucklings!

Writing about spats recalls when we went to Falmouth for a holiday in 1938. I was wearing white spats (I wonder I didn't go to bed in the darned things in those days) and before dinner went for a stroll in the town which, by the way, is miles from the sea front I think. Apparently the Cornish people were not very familiar with my foot gear, because my passing through the town caused quite a sensation. It was early on a Saturday evening and the streets were crowded with shoppers, etc. I noticed several adults gave my feet a curious glance, one lady remarking to her boy friend that she thought I must be a ~~Scot~~^S soldier in private clothes and had forgotten to change my boots, adding, "He doesn't know what a mut he looks". To hide my blushes and restore my dignity, I stood for some moments gazing into a tobacconist's window and when I turned to resume my stroll, I saw with amazement that I was surrounded with prams and pushchairs containing dear little children who had adopted all sorts of postures to get a better view of my spats. One little darling had lent over the pram so far as to overbalance and but for the strap that held her would have fallen on her dear little head, and at that moment I should have rejoiced exceedingly. "What has the man got on his feet?", "I can't see", "Is he a foreigner?", "Perha

he's a harmless lunatic". These and other observations assailed my sensitive ears and, losing my temper, I turned on them and cursed them roundly. At that they retreated, no doubt concluding I was a lunatic but not entirely harmless.

*Chapter XXIX
Pitfalls of the Cinema*

I expect most of us have experienced that feeling of helplessness when first entering the auditorium of a cinema. The sudden transition from daylight into inky darkness. I have always been particularly stupid this way and the following anecdotes will indicate what I mean. One afternoon some years ago I went with my wife to the cinema - the Metropole at Victoria - and ^{we} were shown by the usherette into a row in which there were some vacant seats, and there left. My wife toddled past the people, who had to stand to allow us to pass, and I blindly attempted to follow her but lost track of her altogether. In desperation I sat on a vacant seat and ran my hand over the occupant of the next seat saying, "Is that you darling?" The reply was shattering, "No you clumsy fool" said a shrill female voice, "I am not your darling and take your filthy hands off my nose".

In similar circumstances I sat on a man's knee, but he was a sport and a humorist and said, "That's lovely dear, and if I could see through you, you could stay". We both enjoyed the joke.

Still in the balcony at the Metropole, I was slowly mounting the stairs towards the exit when I lost my balance and to save myself from falling, clutched desperately at what I thought was a white post, but it was an elderly man's bald pate. He was not a sport nor a humorist, "Can't you be more careful you clumsy so-and-so" bellowed he, "Not content with nearly breaking my so-and-so neck you must go and knock my glasses off". With the aid of my lighter these were found, at the same time I caught a glimpse of his face. His eyes were nearly out of their sockets, his face was red and mouth wide open and he suggested a half strangled cod to me, except that I don't imagine

the latter would have had a red face.

The only other incident worth mentioning, was nothing to do with darkness. A young girl seated in front of me had long curls. I absolutely itched to pull her hair and during an organ interlude, to the amusement of my companion, I pretended to pull it. I write "pretend" with extreme reservation for at the crucial moment she bent back her head and I found a curl in my hand, too late to prevent me giving it a hearty tug. My companion was very amused and so was I inwardly, but I had to look confused and apologise profusely, which I did, saying I was tempted by her beautiful hair. She was with her mother and they both seemed mollified by my admiration of her thatch - had she been with her boy friend I should no doubt have received a punch on my proboscis.

One more anecdote connected with the cinema and then we leave it for good. I was seated there one evening with my wife on my right hand and the film was a Laurel and Hardy one. Some amusing incident caused me to laugh uproariously and catching hold of my wife's knee, or so I thought, said, "That's jolly funny, isn't it dear?" O calamity, calamity (with apologies to Robertson Hare), in my mirth I had clutched hold of the female leg on my left. A loud voice said, "It's not funny you filthy beast, I'll call the attendant and give you in charge". I did my utmost to pacify her but all the old geyser would say was, "You wait till the lights go up, you filthy beast". In due course the film finished and the lights went up and so did my "sweetheart", and returned with the manager. The dear lady was about 65, with a long crooked nose and a flourishing moustache, not that she could help any of these drawbacks and I could not very well defend myself by pointing out that she was no oil painting and that she was the last person on earth I would choose for any intimacy, because her reply would have been obvious - when you committed the assault you could not see my face. By this time people in front were gazing up and people behind were gazing down and

some had left their seats to join the merry party. The manager, whom I knew very well, asked us to go to his office and after some time satisfied the old girl that a genuine mistake had been made by me. My wife was furious and nearly had me pinched by asking the old geysier, "What man would want to touch you, you old fool", forgetting as I have already said, that it was dark and I could not tell whether she was 18 or 80, even from her legs. The manager's final point was convincing. He told the ^{good lady} ~~old geysier~~ that most metropolitan magistrates were wise men and would not find it too easy to believe that the average man would on any occasion assault a female on his left when his better half was seated on his right.

Chapter XXXI
Cycling

At one time of my life I rode a bicycle anywhere and everywhere and when I ultimately gave it up, I was nervous when crossing a road. When on my bicycle I was going with the traffic and perfectly happy, when crossing a road I seemed to be going against it. However that may be, I had several accidents ^{on my bicycle} and I hope you will have sufficient patience to read about one or two or more, if not skip it.

Now for it. Once I was descending a steep hill and the brakes refused to act. When about two-thirds down I must have been travelling very rapidly when a confounded cat ran across my path and I went head on into it. By now, assuming you have read as far, a lump will be forming in your throat in sympathy with poor pussy. You can keep a little for me, gentle reader, because when my front wheel contacted pussy, it was like riding against the rock of Gibraltar. The cat had crouched down at my approach and received the onslaught with firmness and apparent stoicism. As for me, the sudden stoppage threw me over the handlebars and I fell heavily on my knees and hands, bruising and grazing these parts considerably. As for the infernal cat, my last vision of it was on a wall looking at me with dignified contempt. I had apparently not scratched the surface of the first of the

blighter's nine lives.

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I was the proud possessor of a brand new bicycle in the autumn of 1914 and riding to the office in the morning espied a girl riding in the opposite direction on what appeared to be, like mine, a brand new machine. The road was deserted except for we two and nobody could have felt safer than I did at that moment, but fate can be very unkind. The damsel was almost past me when, without the slightest warning, she rode straight at me and abandoning her handlebars threw her arms round my neck. You can imagine what happened; we and our bicycles went down with a crash. The girl had a nasty cut on her forehead and I sprained my wrist. As for our respective machines, they looked like so much old iron, the wheels being bent, the mudguards wrenched off and the pedals were all askew, besides other minor multiple injuries. The distressed girl was full of apologies and explained it was her maiden ride on her new bicycle, and that when she saw me some unseen power made her make a bee^line for yours truly. Fortunately I knew of a shop not too far away where we could get the necessary repairs done and she had to carry her bicycle as best she could manage with one hand holding a handkerchief to her bleeding head and I was no better, as my wrist was too painful to use and was swelling rapidly. On disposing ^{of} what was left of our brand new bicycles, she proceeded to a doctor, whilst I went to the office on foot. I never learnt the girl's name, neither did I see her again.

A few years prior to this, about 1908, it was someone's birthday at the office, I forget whose but it does not matter, and it was customary on such occasions for a few of us to repair to Finch⁷es in Oxford Street and have what we termed a "bob's booze up". I am not attempting to defend such outrageous conduct, but you must remember that we were all fairly young and irresponsible and, as the office hours were 9.30 to 7 o/c and 3 o/c on Saturdays, if we had not occasionally let ourselves go, life would have been very drab. I can

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hear somebody saying, "What about the teetotallers?" to which I can only
reply that they were stronger minded than I. Anyone who might honour me
reading this will have realised I have often yielded to temptation since I
enjoyed it. Anybody who could stand more than a shilling's worth wisely
spent in those days, was a super man or woman. Let me try and remember.
We usually started with a dock glass of fruity port for 3½d, followed by
half pint of bitter 1½d, half quarter of whisky 3½d, and one for the road
another port, 3½d. If my arithmetic is right, this should add up to 1/-
I probably exceeded my bob's worth, for when I tried to stand on my feet,
was helpless. Nevertheless I insisted on riding my bicycle home to Ball
and was almost carried out and placed on the saddle and launched: I dare
my friends thought into eternity. I was as right as a trivet on my fa-
ful steed, passed Oxford Circus, Regent Street, etc., in fact until Balham
Station was nearly reached, all was well, and then I think I must have gone
to sleep, because I did not notice that the road was being repaired and
straight into a pole that had been erected and a number of red lamps, that
were scattered about, finishing my triumphant ride head first in a pile
mortar. It was very soft and soothing and I felt certain I should have
to sleep had it not been for a very stupid watchman who made sleep impos-
sible by demanding in a belligerent tone, "What about my red lamps?". He did
say "red" but it was what he must have meant. It appeared that two of
had been broken and a halfcrown exchanged hands as soon as I could extri-
cated myself from the mortar and lamps, and stand on my feet, and then we were
How I carried my wounded steed the rest of the way home I shall never know
the eighth wonder of the world I think!

Chapter XXXII
Mostly about Tommy Handley

In the summer of 1947, my wife and I went to stay at the Queen's
Brighton, and found our table in the dining room just next to that of
Mrs. Tommy Handley. Their table was in a corner by the window overlo-

the sea and ours was not far away, obviously. On the second morning of our stay, every time I looked up I noticed several ladies glancing in our direction and assumed they were looking at Mr. Handley. The receptionist and the manager had told us on the day of our arrival that they were staying there and no doubt all the other guests had also been told, and I imagine their respective waiters had pointed out where they sat, hence their glances in our direction. That evening my wife remarked to me that she was surprised to find she was so popular with the ladies (she wasn't as a rule) and was at a loss to understand why, when she told them we had four sons, they expressed surprise and said they had always understood we had no family. This increased her surprise, for why should they have understood anything whatsoever about her when they had only been talking to her for five minutes, and they had not even asked her name. Well, it certainly was a poser, but I soon forgot the incident except for wondering why so many ladies crowded into the lift when we were there and attempted to engage me in conversation. I on my part said as little as possible because of my impediment and was none too cordial, wishing I could be left alone. Matters continued in this way for nearly three weeks when it was broadcast that the Handleys were leaving on the Thursday morning. I happened to be sitting just outside the hotel waiting for my wife and when she at last arrived, the mystery was explained. It appeared three ladies had approached her in the foyer saying that they were sorry she was leaving that morning, and wishing her and her husband a safe journey. When she told them we were not leaving for over a week, they said, "Our waiter clearly said you were going this morning, Mrs. Handley". It was another surprise for my wife and she gasped out somewhat rudely, "I am not Mrs. Handley you silly fatheads". They in their turn were surprised and incredulously pointed to where I was sitting and said, "That's Tommy Handley and we thought you were his wife". Explanations followed, my wife saying she wouldn't have known Tommy Handley from Adam - that was true. The only

notice she had taken was when Mrs. Handley, who came down to breakfast first, closed the window and my wife promptly opened it. All very embarrassing to me, but I got used to it. What had caused the confusion was when the waiter ~~OK~~ the ladies' table pointed out where Tommy Handley was sitting, they imagine he was pointing to me. How Mr. Handley would have reacted to an ugly looking devil like me being mistaken for him, I shall never know. When they were leaving I shook hands with both, apologising for my limited conversation, at the same time observing to Mr. Handley that I only knew one individual who stuttered better than I did. He said, "Who is that?" and I said, "You", at which he ^{I must explain that I had seen him only once or twice} ~~stuttered in one of his turns~~ laughed and said, "That's a good gag". Mrs. Handley said she hoped we would meet in town, but we never did. As you all know, he died at the end of the year and Mrs. Handley has recently passed away. While stopping at the Queen's, I lost a very dear friend, then Tommy Handley died, and a few years later my wife died. I have never been to Brighton since and do not intend to. It recalls too many sad memories.

I was in Westminster Hospital when Tommy Handley died and my nurse, an Australian, and another nurse I did not know were given tickets by the matron for the Memorial Service at St. Paul's Cathedral. Thinking of Westminster Hospital reminds me that I had a very happy time during the two months I was there, in spite of an operation on my knee. I was doing some Christmas shopping in December and was going into the Express Dairy Company for coffee when I slipped and did something to my knee, I forget the medical term, and was taken to hospital by ambulance. I was there ^{during} ~~for~~ Christmas and ^{on} Christmas morning invited four nurses into my room to have a gin and orange. They were partaking of this soothing drink and wishing me the compliments of the season when in walked Matron, to do likewise. Whether she noticed what was, on I cannot say, but the nurses suddenly became very industrious, dusting the furniture, putting the bed straight and rearranging the flowers, all with one hand, with one exception, as they had to hold their drinks behind them. The

exception was one nurse who I noticed was using both hands and when matron had departed, I learned that this particular nurse had slipped the glass and its contents into her pocket.

Chapter XXXIII
Some amusing memories

A few years ago, during the tennis fortnight at Wimbledon, I was one morning in the staff room of the station not many miles away, and on the platform were loud speakers, which the railway authorities used for directing the crowds which alighted there in the morning and departed in the evening. I was very friendly with the staff and on this particular morning the room had one occupant to whom I said, "What's the matter with you, you miserable looking - - ". He replied that he had the - hump, so I proceeded to relate two or three spicy stories in order to cheer him up. I was halfway through the third yarn, when the foreman rushed in and turned off the loud-speaker, which someone had omitted to do the previous evening. For the first and last time I had been on the air. It appeared that someone had told the foreman that a number of people, on alighting from the train, had heard one gentleman call the other, "A miserable looking so-and-so" and the gentleman had replied that "he had the - - hump". This, he continued, was followed by the first gentleman (that was me) telling an amusing story, at which many on the platform, including some ladies, laughed. There followed a second story a bit nearer the bone, and now a third was being told that threatened to be worse than the second. He thought he had better draw the foreman's attention to these mysterious voices before the fourth story was related.

My fame as a broadcaster reached as far as Victoria, where my leg was pulled a good deal and caused much laughter.

I have had some amusing experiences travelling on trams and buses. One evening I boarded a tram at Streatham bound for Victoria and the conductor heralded his advent to collect the fares, by saying in a loud voice, "Have your money ready please and make up your minds where you want to go". I was

in no mood to appreciate his humour, and when he reached me I yelled "Victoria" at the top of my voice. He made a pretence of cleaning his ears to hear better, but said nothing. The following morning I boarded a tram at Victoria and heard a cheerful voice saying, "Have your money ready, etc.". I was on the point of telling him my destination, when he caught sight of my face and remembered the previous evening. "I wasn't talking to you governor" he said, adding, "I'll give you full marks for knowing where you want to go and saying so. I've been deaf in one ear since last evening".

I was sitting on the top of a bus in front of two women and overheard one of them say, "You know that poor old George was killed last week" and the other replied, "Yes, I did hear something about it. What killed him?". "Oh" said the other, "His old woman fell on him, but then she was over 20 stone" and back came the reply, "Gawd, no wonder he died".

Which reminds me of an epitaph I read many years ago when on holiday. The headstone showed a lady's name - Mary Ann, and her weight, 20 stone, and the following, which read:-

"Here lies the body of Mary Ann
With her head on the bosom of Abraham
Very nice for Mary Ann
But rather rough for Abraham."

There was another tombstone indicating a gentleman who had departed this life owing to his horse having bitten him, and the epitaph read:-

"Horse bit master
How it came to pass
~~Was~~ horse heard parson say
All flesh is grass."

For 20 years before I was knocked out for the count, I was in the habit of having a sleep every afternoon, recommended by the doctor after my lung trouble. I had a camp bed on the top floor where I worked, in a dark and dingy room looking like a thieves' kitchen, and I covered myself with an old blanket. One gloomy winter's afternoon the door opened suddenly and a man

appeared, startling me considerably. I petulantly asked him what the hell he wanted, ~~but~~ he made no reply to my polite enquiry but contented himself with glancing about and making one or two notes. I subsequently learned that he was from the War Damage Commission. Anyway, he went down to the general office and said, "I'm afraid I disturbed the old night watchman". One of my sons who worked with me replied, "The old nightwatchman happens to be the boss and incidentally my father".

On another occasion whilst my "bedroom" was under repair I used to rest in my office armchair on the first floor, and one afternoon was brought to earth by the window being flung up and a fireman appeared ⁱⁿ in full fire-fighting rigout. To my usual polite enquiry he informed me that the showroom was on fire and I, half asleep, retorted that I didn't care if the whole of London was on fire as long as I was not disturbed. He said, "You're a cool cuss I must say, I hope you can keep that way". I am not relating this little incident in an attempt to brag about my pluck, the fact was I was too silly to realise the danger I might be in and so I went to sleep again, undisturbed by the noise of the fire engines and the murmur of the crowd.

As soon as I finished my rest I discovered that a fire had been lit in an old grate under the showroom where the chimney had been bricked up, and the flames had shot up setting on fire the ceiling of the room, which was of course, the floor of the showroom. A panicky typist had telephoned for the fire brigade and when I asked why I wasn't told, they said they decided not to until the fire spread, my son adding that even if he had told me the place was on fire, I should probably have told him to put the damn fire out and not to bother me. I wonder. I never did discover why the blooming fireman did not enter by way of the shop door, instead of using a ladder to my window

At the factory where I went in 1917, the accounts department was one end of the building where I ~~resided~~ ^{resided}, and the Sales Department was the other end, where the managing director had his office, and when he wished to see me

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he would contact me on the phone. One morning he intimated in the usual way that he wished to see me and I, before starting to walk through the factory, lit a cigarette at the electric fire from a piece of blotting paper, which I deposited in the wicker waste paper basket. Half way there I suddenly remembered a document that I intended to show the managing director, and retracted my steps back to my office. It was as well I did for the smouldering blotting paper had set alight the contents of the waste paper basket, which in turn had set fire to the waste paper basket itself and the flames were licking the side of my desk, which, but for my fortunate return, would soon have been well alight. I had six girls in the outside office and did not wish to alarm them, and furthermore, they had frequently told me how dangerous it was to use blotting paper for lighting my cigarette and that I would not be satisfied until I had set the place on fire. I therefore had two very good reasons for attempting to conceal the result of my carelessness. These thoughts flashed through my mind in a split second, whilst I was trying to noiselessly extinguish the flames, which I accomplished by throwing the office carpet over the flaming basket and stamping on it. At first this was not very successful, the flames shooting out from under the carpet with a swoosh, every time I stamped, but at last it died out and I was left with a mass of burnt paper, a bottomless waste paper basket and an office filled with smoke. Any minute one or more of the girls might come in for one reason or another, and so I had to act promptly. I rang for the office lad, who on entering was about to make some alarming exclamation, but I pressed my hand over his mouth and practically dragged him through the door by his head. I murmured horrible threats in his ear as to the fate that would overtake him if he should blab, and between us and a broom, which he stealthily procured, cleaned up the place tolerably well, and of course we opened all the windows. So far so good, but I still had the remains of the late waste paper basket to contend with. The bottom had perished in

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the fire and all that remained was the upright part which measured a yard or so in length, and this I concealed beneath the mat under my desk. Several times during the day one or another of the girls wondered where a curious noise came from, and it was of course caused by my feet on the wicker, but I remained silent and as static as possible, locking the door of my office when I had to leave it. The girls murmured amongst themselves wondering why I was so cautious, concluding that I didn't trust any of them and in consequence the atmosphere could be cut with a knife.

It was on a Friday when all this happened, when I left early to attend choir practice. Before I put on my overcoat, I wrapped the remains of the waste paper basket round my waist, intending to throw it into the gutter when I was a safe distance away. Loftily saying, "Goodnight" to the girls, I prepared to make my exit like a dignified duke. I had just turned the handle of the door when there was a shriek of laughter from the ladies. I turned round and enquired what the devil was so funny and they asked me what I had underneath my overcoat. I then discovered that two of the wicker spokes had penetrated my thin spring overcoat and were protruding out at the back about six inches each. No wonder the ladies were amused. I had to explain the whole chapter of accidents and many things that had puzzled them during the day were now cleared up, amidst renewed laughter. I could not or would not go to the choir rehearsal with two holes in my overcoat, which was ruined, so did some more office work with a very chastened spirit.

Chapter XXXIV
Finale.

About 1950 my poor wife was stricken with Parkinsons disease and for three years we had a very unhappy time. She gradually became weaker with all the attendant miseries of the disease and on February 22nd 1953 she passed away. During her illness my youngest son with his wife and two sons came to live with us, the idea being that my daughter-in-law would look after my wife. This she did until my wife became absolutely helpless and

then I had to engage a nurse.

Some few months before her death, my son bought another house. He had ~~had to~~ ^{sold} his first house in order to come to my aid, and so I secured the services of an excellent housekeeper, who is still with us. I say us because later on I again married, a lady some 20 years my junior, who I had known for some years, and also her family. Let me say at once that this marriage has proved very successful, although I can never forget my first wife, whom we discuss without reserve.

Whilst she was still ill, a black cat that she was very fond of, disappeared, and after a week had passed without pussy turning up, I offered a reward of one guinea - a silly thing to do. Thereafter, we suffered ~~of~~ constant bell ringing and knocking at the door and kids of all sizes with cats of all sizes appeared. In three cases they were soon followed by irate neighbours who had seen the child creep into their front garden and stealthily purloin their pussy from the very doorstep. Then there were men who called with cats in sacks, baskets and crates. At one time we had four men and four cats in the living room, each claiming the guinea. Each one had to be taken up to my wife for inspection, and at long last she was satisfied that one was hers, and so I paid the reward and she nursed the cat for some hours, that is, until a very angry lady called and said she had been told that a man had been seen to put her cat in a sack and bring it to our house. To prove her point she said its name was Nigger, and if he heard her call, he would come at once. Sure enough, the wife's bedroom door was open and the lady called Nigger, and he leapt off my wife's lap with a ~~new~~ ^{mischief} of delight and bounded into the arms of his mistress. What about our cat? Six weeks later the housekeeper found him one morning in his usual place - on the window sill, fat and well nourished. Where the little blighter had been we never knew.

Subsequent to my second marriage, all went smoothly and without undr

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incident until November 23rd 1957 when I suffered a stroke which has put paid to my business career. This occurred on a Saturday evening totally unexpectedly. After lunch I had enjoyed my customary snooze, my wife calling me at 5 o'clock. I washed, brushed what hair I had, put on my jacket and proceeded to pick up my ring with my right hand. To my surprise and consternation I could not even place my hand or fingers on the ring; I was some six inches off the mark. I managed to struggle to my bed, on which I attempted to sit but I fell sideways on my right side. I called to my wife and told her what had happened and she said she must telephone the doctor, but I persuaded her not to for the time being, instead to try to help me downstairs. This she did, but we got no further than the landing when down I went again; so back we went to the bedroom where I tried to lie on the bed but slipped and lay helpless on the floor at the foot of the bed. My wife by now was thoroughly alarmed but kept her head and phoned the doctor who arrived in a few minutes. After he had lifted me back to bed he gave me an injection, phoned for an ambulance and to Westminster Hospital, advising them of my advent.

I did not lose consciousness for one moment and can recall distinctly everything that happened down to the smallest detail. For instance, going over Lambeth Bridge in the ambulance, I realised that something serious had happened to me and startled my poor wife by uttering an oath in a loud voice. I did not then know that I had suffered a stroke, but subsequently I was told, with the comforting news that I should be up and about in a month - all moonshine, of course.

I have since learned that a stroke frequently deprives one of speech, but not so in my case. In fact, my impediment has become less noticeable - the only advantage I gained. The disadvantages are many. I can no longer carry on my business activities, cannot play the piano which was my chief hobby and from which I had hitherto derived much pleasure, can only walk with a limp and assistance, cannot do much with my right hand or arm, cannot read as my eyes are affected and so ad infinitum. My greatest problem is how to pass the time now that I have finished the foregoing.

I was in Westminster Hospital for nearly three months and, as I was compelled, owing to a physical weakness, to have a private room at over £30 per week, it was an expensive luxury. The only privilege one enjoys in a private room is to be alone, except for frequent visits from nurses; but otherwise one fares no better nor worse than the patient who pays nothing. The physiotherapy department was in the basement where, as far as I could detect, there was no heating whatsoever. The modus operandi was for a nurse to take the patient from his warm bed, place him in a chair, after tucking a blanket round him, wheel him to a lift and thus to the freezing department; there he was left until one of the physiotherapists could attend to him. When she did she would divest the victim of most of his clothing and direct him to a couch on which he lay and did sundry exercises. She had other patients to attend to and would sometimes forget one. This would have been bearable in a warm atmosphere, but in the cold winter months was almost unbearable. Women and men were there and; taking everything into consideration, I dreaded those unhappy times. I did not expect preferential treatment because I paid £30 a week - heating should have been provided for everyone. Soon after returning home I had a bad attack of bronchitis which I attributed to the hospital's physiotherapy department.

I engaged a private physiotherapist for a year and made some progress, but not sufficient to enable me to walk alone out of doors. I cannot hope for any improvement at my age, although I continue exercises twice a day, so as not to grow more helpless than is inevitable. I have never ceased to marvel how, without the slightest warning, a person can in a second be reduced to impotence, and in a number of cases never recover. Accidents are of course a different matter. If a steam-roller goes over your head you expect to feel a trifle under the weather!

Whilst in hospital I lost my appetite and sense of taste, but was compelled to eat because I was given insulin to combat the diabetes. One can never rest for long during the day; early morning tea, a wash, a maid to dust and sweep, insulin injection, breakfast, a raid from nurses to

make the bed, a visit from a junior doctor, then the sister, a nurse with a pill, another with a concoction in a glass, a visit to the physiotherapy department, lunch, another wash, visitors, tea, a visit from the doctor-in-chief, nurses lugging you out of bed to tidy it up, insulin again, dinner, and so on. You try to sleep to prepare yourself for the next day's skirmishes.

I am not for one minute criticizing the staff, who were most kind and helpful; but just attempting to dispel the prevalent idea that staying in a hospital is 'all beer and skittles.' One or two things at Westminster did, however, annoy me. For instance, a nurse has, on one or two occasions, arrived with my dinner before I had had an insulin injection, whilst it was more usual than unusual for the meal to arrive 15 minutes after the injection instead of the 30 minutes laid down. This appears to show an utter lack of co-ordination between the kitchen staff and the nurses.

Another complaint was that the doctors or nurses or both failed to keep me sugar free; although I had been able to do so for 30 years, with a few exceptions, when left to my own devices. The house doctor would inform me two or three times a week that sugar had been found and that everything possible was being done to reduce it. To that end I suppose I was given strawberry jam which I assumed was for diabetics and sugar free, until I was otherwise informed; and, on Christmas Day, a nurse served a mincepie with my tea! I anxiously enquired if she was sure it was meant for me and, her reply being in the affirmative, I greatly enjoyed it and was swallowing the last crumb when she rushed back saying that she had given me the pie in error.

Three years later and I have only partially recovered and am rusticating at home - with the accent on 'rust'.

I had always hoped I would die at the office but that ambition has now not the faintest hope of realisation. At one time I thought it a foregone conclusion that I would die on the gallows, but the passing of the Homicide Act has made this virtually impossible! In any case I cannot go out and look for a victim - he or she must come to me!