INTIMATE THINGS

Other Books by Karel Čapek

METEOR

HORDUBAL

PRESIDENT MASARYK TELLS HIS STORY
(Recounted by Karel Čapek)

THE GARDENER'S YEAR
(*Eighth Impression*)

FAIRY TALES
(*Second Impression*)

DASHENKA
(*Second Impression*)

With Josef Čapek

ADAM THE CREATOR
A Comedy in Six Scenes

INTIMATE THINGS

by

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INTIMATE THINGS

ON LITERATURE

FORGIVE me if I start off with something quite other than literature, something from the days when I was a small boy. Your city boy is a kind of super-boy, a born sceptic, lord of the streets; and it is quite natural that he should have a huge contempt for hobble-de-hoys, nincompoops, bumpkins, and clod-hoppers, as he nicknames country boys. Your country boy looks down immeasurably and with justice on the city boys; for he is lord of the fields and forests; he knows all about horses, and is on friendly terms with the beasts of the field; he can crack a whip and has under his dominion all the treasures of the earth, from willow-switches to ripe poppy-heads. And even your boy from a small country town is by no means the least among worldly princes; for he includes in his circle more than any other mortal creature: he can watch all human activities at close quarters.

When I was a boy in a little country town I saw at home how a doctor's business is run, and at my grandfather's I could inspect the business of a miller and baker, which is ever so jolly and fine. And at my uncle's I saw what a farmer has to do; but if I once started on that I should never stop telling you all I learnt there, and all the things I got to know. Our nearest neighbour was the painter who stencilled the

walls,[1] and that is a tremendously interesting job. Sometimes he used to let me mix him the colours in their little pots; and once, almost bursting with pride, I was allowed to smear one stencil pattern with the brush; it came out crooked, but otherwise most successfully. I shall never forget how that painter used to stride up and down the planks whistling, gloriously splashed with all the colours of the rainbow; and he stencilled in such miraculously straight lines, sometimes even painting in something freehand—it might be an amazingly well-nourished rose the colour of stale liver, on the ceiling. It was my first revelation of the painter's art, and I lost my heart to it then, and have been in love with it ever since. And then I used to go every day and have a look at how the innkeeper runs his job, and see how they roll the casks down into the cellar and how they draw the beer and blow off the froth, and hear the wise tales the old gossips tell as they wipe the froth from their whiskers with the backs of their hands. Every day I used to look in on neighbour cobbler and watch in silence how he cut the leather and hammered it on his last and then put on the heel, and all manner of other things; for shoemaking is an intricate and delicate work, and if you have not seen leather in the cobbler's hands you know nothing about it at all, though you may wear shoes of Cordovan or even of celestial leather. Then there was neighbour hurdy-gurdy man, and I went to see him too, when he was at home, and was so surprised that he did not

[1] Most Czechoslovak houses have their rooms stencilled in colour-wash instead of being papered.—TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

play his hurdy-gurdy at home, but sat and stared at one corner of the room till I felt quite uncomfortable. There was the mournful stone-mason who carved crosses and queer, short, dumpy angels on the grave-stones; he would tap away all day and never say a single word, and I stood watching for perhaps an hour while he chipped away at the unseeing eye of a weeping angel. And then, ha ha! yes! there was the wheelwright with his beautiful wood throwing off sparks and his yard full of hastening wheels, as Homer says; and a wheel, you know, is a wonder in itself. Then there was the smith in his black smithy: I burst with pride when I was sometimes allowed to work the bellows for him while he heated the iron bar red-hot and hammered it, looking like a black Cyclops, till it sent out a shower of sparks; and when he put the shoe on the horse it smelt of burnt horn, and the horse would turn his wise eyes on the smith as much as to say, "All right, go on, I shan't make a fuss."

A little farther on lived Tonča, the prostitute; I did not understand her business very well, and I used to pass her little house with a queer, dry feeling in my throat. Once I looked in through the window, but it was all empty—just striped feather beds, and some consecrated willow catkins above the bed. I had a look at the mill owners' businesses, and watched them hurrying through their counting-houses, and collected foreign stamps out of their waste-paper baskets; and I watched the mill hands at the vats full of tow, and the weavers at the mysterious mechanical looms: I went into the red-hot hell of the jute-drying

kilns and scorched myself beside the stokers at the boilers, wondering at their long shovels, which I could hardly lift. I would visit the butcher, eyeing him with interest to see if he would cut off a finger. I would have a look in at the shopkeeper as he weighed and measured; stop at the tinsmith's, and go into the carpenter's yard where everything was a-whirr and a-clatter. I went to the poor-house to see what the poor do with themselves, and went with them to their fair in the city on a Friday to learn how the business of begging was carried on.

Now I have got a profession of my own, and I work at it the livelong day. But even if I were to sit in the porch with my work I don't think a single boy would come and watch my fingers—standing on one bare foot and rubbing his calf with the other—to see how a writer's business is done. I don't say that it is a bad or useless profession: but it is not one of the superlatively fine and striking ones, and the material used is of a strange sort—you don't even see it. But I should like all the things that I used to see to be in it: the ringing hammer-strokes of the smith and the colours of the whistling house painter, the patience of the tailor, and the careful chipping of the stone-mason, the bustling of the baker, the humility of the poor, and all the lusty strength and skill which men of towering stature put into their work before the astonished and fascinated eyes of a child.

FROST FLOWERS

THEY are called "Flowers," and in old-fashioned descriptions of nature we used to be told that "the artist Frost conjures up luxuriant and enchanted blossoms." Well, I have had a careful look at them, and I have found that the inventive faculty of the artist Frost is really along the lines of a tinsmith; what he has a special preference for conjuring up on our windows is rather like a barbed wire fence. As far as the vegetable kingdom is concerned, he restricts himself to forms akin to thistles, holly, thorn bushes, and prickly twigs. Or else you find a kind of pointed fern, prickly leaves, serrated foliage with dreadfully sharp thorns, spiky moss, slender pine needles, stinging nettles, in fact anything very sharp, thorny, and far removed from flowers. A window grown over with frost flowers is not in the least like a blossom-covered arbour; it is more like a cutting through a wood: a dreadful web of thorns with which we are surrounded as in a besieged fortress. A window is a hole in the wall; when the first frost comes this hole is blocked up with a fantastic barricade of ice lances, daggers, and needles. It is not a blossoming and luxuriant pleasure garden, but a blossoming and luxuriant blockade of terrible sparkling swords and bayonets.

* * *

When fresh snow falls something miraculous happens: the streets suddenly look broader than they

were before, and the houses are farther from each other than at other times, and the things in the world which seemed constricted and narrow find elbow room through this white overgrowth. All expanses are much broader; the world has suddenly a higher calibre, just as we speak of the calibre of a gun barrel. If I wanted to describe it properly I should have to write with the lines set farther apart from each other, leaving the nice white paper between them; and you who read this would have to pick your way with your eyes along the little streets which I have left you between the lines, just as when you trot delightedly through freshly fallen snow:

* * *

It is not mere chance that on our thermometers we always use both systems, Fahrenheit and Centigrade. If I want to protest that my room is badly heated and that it is frightfully cold, I declare (using Centigrade) that it is "only fifteen degrees"; if I said (using Fahrenheit) that it was fifty-nine degrees, I should weaken the force of my protest. But if I want to make out that the room is dreadfully overheated, of course I say that it is sixty-eight degrees (Fahrenheit) and not twenty degrees (Centigrade). If I want to point out that there

is a terrible frost I measure it in Centigrade; but if I want to prove that it has got milder, I give the temperature in Fahrenheit. That is why it is quite right that (with humane consideration for our mortal need to exaggerate a little always) they manufacture thermometers with two different systems of measurement.

* * *

However, when there is snow on the ground the degree of frost might be measured still another way—acoustically. If the temperature is only a little below zero the snow crunches underfoot with a nice deep sound; if it is five degrees below zero the snow begins to creak in a rather high voice; at ten degrees it squeaks and rings in a high, clear tone; but at fifteen degrees below zero (Centigrade, of course) it pipes and whines with a sound as terribly high as harmonics played on a violin. One might say, "To-day there are 'the second C above the stave' degrees of frost." Very severe frost is quite a shrill whistle like a knife scraped over a plate.

The prettiest thing about the snow is that it gives the human earth back its virginity. In times of snow the most trodden of roads has moments when no foot has yet touched it, and when the first walker sets foot on it a little hesitatingly and reverently, like a mariner on a new and virgin continent.

It is possible that the snow is white from some physical or chemical causes; but I would rather believe that it is white so that our northern nights should not be so terribly dark. Perhaps it is white simply because it is the frozen light of the longest nights.

FOR BOOKWORMS

ONE of the stock questions with which we sometimes plague our fellow-creatures is: What is your favourite book? Like most trite questions it is most unprecise. More correctly it should run: Which is your favourite book for such and such an occasion? Certainly people will have one favourite book during the fortunate and epic state of being a boy just hesitating whether to make himself a sling or to read Oliver Curwood; another when suffering from the confusion of puberty; another when head over ears in love; and still another for the greater and more serious part of life spent in hunting through the tresses with a comb for the first grey hair and its successors. That, of course, is an old story; it is only surprising that while books are published "for children" or "for adolescents," they are not also published with the express designation that they are for young donkeys or old greybeards, divorced husbands or lonely misanthropists. Even disregarding these differences of age, it is not every book, however good in itself, which suits every situation. For instance, the Bible is not particularly suitable as reading matter for a train journey. Poems are not usually put in dentists' waiting-rooms for patients to while away the time of waiting. A man does not envelop himself in Hugo's *Les Misérables* with his morning coffee, but rather in the newspaper.

I would go so far as to say that the morning is not the time for reading books; one feels that one is wasting

time. It is only as the day progresses that the ability and need to read books slowly grows, culminating usually at night; on the whole your bookworm belongs among the creatures of the night; for that reason his crest is an owl and not a chicken or a duck, which would otherwise be an excellent emblem for the gluttony of book-lovers. Only the newspaper is made for the morning reader with his mouth full of roll or hanging to a strap in the tram. Newspapers are the sails under which we sail into the full day. Magazines on the other hand are best read after the midday meal, while books, like love or orgies, are mainly a nocturnal occupation.

The matter becomes far more complicated as soon as we examine the various circumstances of life. If you are run down you choose reading matter which is like a good slice of meat; you do not want to nibble at something dainty but to hack valiantly like a wood-cutter at work; and you choose a fat novel with a good plot; if possible a thriller, but if not a thriller, then an adventure story, preferably seafaring. At a time of mild indisposition and when a prey to worry or overwork, your preference is for exotic, historic, or Utopian novels, mainly because these distant climes and ages do not really concern you. In the case of sudden illness you long for some extremely exciting and absorbing reading which must not be sentimental and must end happily—in other words, a detective story. If the illness be chronic you put aside detective novels and seek out something genial and hearty: probably it will be Dickens. A careful reader will note that Dickens

and Gogol are authors who arouse a taste for food. To what book one gives preference in the hour of death I have not yet investigated, but I am assured by a high authority on the subject that in gaol and when life is in danger Dostojevsky is not the author most easily digested; *in carcere et catenis* the most comforting books are said to be *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *The Three Musketeers*, or Stendhal's *Rouge et Noir*.

On Sunday people like to read essays because in this way they can be mildly bored in an odour of sanctity; or classical works, to read which is considered "the duty of every educated man"; Sunday reading, on the whole, is rather like the performance of some honourable deed while everyday reading resembles a profligate orgy. On summer holidays the best things to read are the old almanacks and annuals as far as they are to be found at one's country lodgings; when there are none one takes the local paper. In the autumn the best person to read is Anatole France, because of his peculiar mellowness; in winter readers will consume all possible sorts of fodder, and even put up with the bulky psychological novels which they markedly avoided in the summer. Very fat novels are for bad weather and snow-storms; the worse the weather, the fatter the novel. In bed one does not read poetry, but prose; poems one reads perching lightly somewhere like a bird on a twig. On a journey a man will read Baedeker, the newspaper, the current chapter of a serial story, and topical pamphlets. When he has toothache he likes romantic literature which he would scorn when he has a cold. When waiting for anything, let us say a letter

or a visit, he prefers short stories, for instance Chekhov.

Besides these there are a great multitude of books which I am at a loss to classify, nor can I say in what exceptional circumstances they are read; I have not been able to get to the bottom of the subject.

SNOW

EVERYONE says that we used to have more snow than we do now. Where the snow has gone I don't know, and the meteorologists have not so far been able to shed any light on the subject. But the fact remains that in past times snow used to be more plentiful. In Šimon's etchings Prague is seen quite snowed under; in the old lithographs you see sledges driving through the streets of Prague; as boys we used to have snow-balling every year, and long slides down the streets, and tobogganing, and we used to write our names and draw patterns in the snow, and build far more snow men than the present generation of boys. This fact is as indisputable as the decrease in floods, fires, and other natural phenomena which enlivened our childhood. What is the cause of it I do not know, but the long and the short of it is that times are not what they used to be. Not by any means.

The other day I saw a snow man—as a matter of fact I think it was at Brno—and I stared at him in amazement, for the scales had fallen from my eyes. There was I, a couple of steps from the tram lines, suddenly face to face with a pagan idol, blood brother of some authentic stone monster of prehistoric times. Lusty, enormous, monumental, terrible, and dignified—simply an idol, a snow god. The boys had forgotten the proper ceremonies: they did not bow down before the god, nor bring him human sacrifices; yet they had

at least, from the depths of some unconscious atavism, set up an idol—huge, godlike.

A bit farther on there was an attempt at a slide—it was about as long as three thumb-lengths and sprinkled with sand besides. Yet every urchin running along that way was trying (in vain) to have upon it the celestial delight of sliding. And a little farther still the street turned itself into something like a gentle slope; immediately there were a fleet of toboggans, each with a boy on it lying on his tummy, struggling to get along at least a couple of inches. They really couldn't manage it; there was too little snow; it hardly covered the layer of frozen mud. But they dug into the ground, pushed themselves off, prised themselves forward a hand's breadth at a time in the eternal hope that their toboggans would suddenly move forward and glide—glide! Ah! isn't that the eternal dream of some means whereby man flies? Of something which alone, without effort, by sheer magic power, will carry him from place to place? Is it not in its essence the age-old legend of the magic carpet, the seven league boots, or the winged horses, the prehistoric myth of glorious and enchanted flight? To be carried away—if not across seven mountains and seven seas, at least over half a yard of street! Instead of commonplace, prosaic walking, to be borne in some enchanted vehicle which glides along of itself, even if you do have to help it a bit laboriously! Boys have a hidden feeling for these things. To drag your cart or sled up the hill and then let it coast down is not so much an outcome of the modern craze for speed as the primitive delight in miracles, the atavistic dream

of magical motion. Boys are mythology come alive; children are the pagan prehistory of mankind. The oldest tradition in the world is to be a real boy.

Look! As soon as I began to attempt this deification of the snow the gods at once showed their approval; for flake by flake, while I have been writing, they have sent down the snow to cover the city. Real snow—even if for the moment it is only a light, cold sprinkling. But the first sparrow on the opposite roof is hopping along on a snowy carpet right up the tiles. It would be hard, it is true, to make a proper snow man out of what has fallen, and still harder to glide in an enchanted chariot over the rough slope of the cobbled street. But at least this thin white blanket means that even in these poor, degenerate, and really gloomy times there is still a little room for the pagan forces of life, for the heathen elements, telluric traditions, enchantments, and wonders; that there still remains—— But no, nothing! I cannot finish what I was going to write; the snow has stopped, and it is all black and wet once more wherever you look.

So there can be no doubt about it: we used to have more snow, and the snow we had was better, drier, with more body to it; not the slushy kind of stuff we get now. It is so true: *Où sont les neiges d'antan?*

MAPS

THERE are some people who collect postage stamps, and others who store up all the picture postcards that they have ever been sent; and sometimes they rummage through them and say: "Let's see, that is the Boulevard de la Poissonnière, and here is Trajan's Column; and how did this card from Vaclavice get here? Here is Tarascon; in this one that little man always stands in front of the castle and stares at the camera; whom will that be? I should like to be there; I'd see if he's standing there still. Brno, Nürberg, Tábor, and here's even a view of Alexandria."

And there are people who keep old railway time-tables; and if they happen to be sad and don't know what to be at, they look up the connection for Oslo or Lisbon. For at Oslo or Lisbon in some strange way they find relief, because there is or was a connection there, and it is or was possible to leave everything behind them and go journeying on and on, farther and farther, to Oslo or to Lisbon.

But best of all, better than picture postcards or railway time-tables, are maps. Of course I don't mean those brightly coloured ones where there are merely red, yellow, and green States and black railway lines. But the maps where the lowlands are painted green like the loveliest meadow, in which a man can wade up to his eyes, and the hills are shown in a pale tawny colour like the young rye, making you think of sun-baked loam and the white gleam of ripening crops; and the

higher mountains are brown, brown like rocks, russet like moss, and the still higher mountains are frowningly dark, the colour of bare stone, and right at the top are white points and expanses—the eternal snows. And then there are little blue veins, which are rivers, and they wind about so that one must follow them; and azure lakes the colour of the sky, little mirrors in which not even one tiny cloudlet is reflected; and marshes sprinkled with blue commas; and eternally blue seas; and finally deserts all dotted over like the sand we used to play in when we were little.

And you let your eyes wander about the map as though you were going on foot over the whole surface of the earth. Here a little green tongue of plain is digging its way into the purple-brown mountains. What a lovely walk through green meadows between high rocks! Foxgloves grow there, and verbena, and Our Lady's Tears,[1] and wild thyme; and farther down the meadow are forget-me-nots and alders, and little fawns stand trembling there, fascinated by the wolf. But come here to these golden, swelling hillocks which cross the green plains looking like ears of corn; here you wander along tawny paths, the sun burns the back of your neck, and a yellow brimstone butterfly flutters in sail-like flight over the shining ripples of corn. You see, too, the red walls of villages, for the towns have gone right down into the valleys and are stuck like bulging eyes on to the blue veins of the rivers. You wander from town to town; you find little out-of-the-

[1] A small, bright cerise-coloured single wild pink.—TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

way towns, hidden away like keepsakes at the back of a drawer; you read names that are never in the newspapers, for in them folk live a quiet and uneventful life; you find names that lure you on as if something beautiful and strange were waiting for you there. You pause below the wonderful ramparts of the mountains; you go along the bottom of the valleys and look up to where they are climbing the summits like wild goats; you discover valleys full of solitude, where there is not even a path but along which you long to thread your way, for who knows if you would not find there the loveliest place in the world? You are seeking for *your* path through mountains and men; you are seeking for a solitude, abandoned not by God but by men; or else for some distant express train which, with a roar in all the languages of earth, would have carried you off to some other life. Ah, to be able to start anew!

As I say, maps of the world are beautiful things, and full of secret signs. You would like to be everywhere; you would like to live all the lives there are in the world; you would like to know everything and stop at each place, satiated with effort and learning. But you do not manage even to go all over the map of the world and read all the names on it. Only sometimes you conquer a silent path across it with your eyes; and you see a multitude of things, like a pilgrim who has no goal but who does not journey in vain.

FIRES

A FEW night ago, a fire broke out just opposite our office in Prague. A red glow flooded the sky above the roofs; servant girls who had gone to fetch the beer stood staring with mugs in their hands. In a minute or two the fire engine was there and a crowd of people, and then it was all over. But that moment was enough for a man to feel stirring at the bottom of his heart the old and ardent instinct of fire-worship.

We each carry in us, willy nilly, the primordial pagan, the primitive cave-man; we are fascinated by fire. The man who has never stared into the glowing stove on a winter evening, who has never burned old papers squatting before the stove in the reverent attitude of a savage, who has never in his life made a bonfire in the fields and danced round it, is perhaps not descended from old Adam but from someone else; perhaps his ancestors were hatched from frog-spawn or fell down with the rain, like the ancestors of vegetarians, total abstainers, and other superhuman beings. And the man who has never made the mystical, fiery sign of eight with a burning match, has never felt an awful and felonious ecstasy when man's petty fire breaks its chain and flies up in a mighty blaze.

It is part of us. A great fire wakes horror and wonder in us, a strange jollity, a wild passion for the flames. We forget all about night and sleep; we feel we want to camp about the fire and chat in an unexpected outburst of primitive comradeship; and when the

firemen put it out we disperse unwillingly and with a certain disappointment that it is all over now and that it was not a bigger affair. We remember the fires which we have seen and experienced at one time or another as great and glorious events in our lives. We envy the firemen and policemen and the superintendent of the Fire Brigade who can smile at the fire from so near, like priests before the altar, while we are crushed together behind the cordon like the faithful at the chancel rail. Ah, if they would at least let us hold the hose so that we might have some share in the Brotherhood of Fire! As a boy I had a great, heroic ideal: I wanted to be a fireman, to stand on a ladder and play the water on to the lashing flames. The roof would fall in, a column of fire would shoot up into the night sky, but I would stand in the rain of sparks and not go one rung lower.

We are Fire-worshippers in the dark depths of our nature; you can even see it in our metaphors. We speak of the "flame of passion" when we want to give a poetic name to a fatal infatuation for a woman; if we were to speak of a deluge of passion or an elementary catastrophe of passion, it would not sound so irresistible. With the same partiality we speak of the "blaze of revolution"; if we announced a "flood of revolution" I don't think we should win many zealous followers. In the same way a man "flares up in righteous anger," although what righteous anger does as a rule is to cause an awful lot of talk. As you see, the cult of fire is deeply rooted in our imaginations.

"In fifteen minutes the fire was got under control

by the local Fire Brigade." That is all you read in the paper. The newspaper-man's hand would nearly have fallen off if he had written that "from among the leaping flames came the despairing cries of women and children"; that "the unhappy victims could be seen rushing to and fro wringing their hands"; then "Chief Fireman Rudolf Holub, swiftly making up his mind, flung himself into the flames and at the risk of his life carried out two children, after which he fell to the ground unconscious." Of course it is not true, but why should the papers only tell lies about politics? If they can invent something bad about the opposing party, why can't they invent something fine about Chief Fireman Rudolf Holub? Why can't they invent Rudolf Holub altogether, swiftly rescuing children by the dozen? If I were a real journalist (for unfortunately I did not become a fireman), I would not let even a small fire out of my hands until I had wrung out of it great leaping flames, despairing cries for help, and heroic risking of lives; for all that belongs to the sacred cult of the fire. We have not learned to make a fiery festival out of the burning of a shed; and yet is that not a much more fantastic occurrence than the resignation of a Cabinet Minister? It is, after all, far more elemental than debates in Parliament. If the end of the world came the papers would publish a police report on it with the note that "the damage is to a large extent covered by insurance"; but here, again, there would be nothing about leaping flames or despairing cries.

MELANCHOLY

A MOMENT ago you were chatting and joking, interested and amused by all sorts of things. Now you are staring at the ground; you wish you could pray, but you do not know for what or to whom. Dispirited, tired, and indifferent, you find it strange that you could have been amused at anything a few minutes back, and still stranger that you will have to get up to-morrow and go about your business. And worst of all your throat feels constricted and you seem to have a load on your back and your eyes are like lead, so that you can hardly raise them from the ground.

What has happened to you? Nothing, nothing really. Just one or two trifling mishaps. Something hindered me on the way, but it's hardly worth mentioning, something I wasn't expecting; something hurt me a little, I can't get it out of my mind; it's nothing, really, when you take it all together; if I were to add it all up it would not amount to even one decent reason for grief. It's nothing; but it's too much altogether, altogether—it's not worth mentioning, really; but, you know, life is a terrible business.

I am pretty sure that on the day when King Solomon wrote the creed of all the pessimists—when he wrote, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity"—that on that day nothing special had happened to him; his kingdom was not tottering, his favourite wife had not died, he had not felt the touch of death in his ailing body. It was nothing—nothing serious. In truth, nothing had

happened to King Solomon that day: only, perhaps, he had read folly and guile in the eyes of his favourite wife, indifference in his friend, baseness in his body servant; something had slipped out of his hands, perhaps something unimportant; some enterprise of his failed, something had disappointed him; he saw things in just a slightly uglier light than usual, folk just a trifle more tiresome, life a little more difficult. Nothing, if you take it all together. But King Solomon on that day broke down under the weight of that nothing and shuddered; weary unto death, he set down in his book the vanity of things.

For, look you, it is possible to be a hero in the face of the great blows of fate. Death, ruin, shipwreck, can be borne with a head unbowed, as they say; in the last resort one can struggle and perish. But it is not possible to be a hero in the face of pin-pricks. You can really overlook the pricking a couple of times; and then you can pretend a few times more that you did not notice it; but when it comes to the tenth or fifteenth prick, all your heroism leaves you. Man is powerless against small pains. He can feel a kind of pride in having broken his leg, but he can feel none in breaking a finger nail. He can bear the death of his wife with fortitude, but he cannot bear it heroically when she is stupidly mean to him. He has a certain catastrophic consolation if his house falls down, but he has no consolation if his house is hopelessly ugly.

Melancholy, the severest grief of life, is a suffering from small causes. It is the severest because it does not give way before heroism; there are no heroic victims

of melancholy. It is in any case a weakness, or rather a defencelessness in the face of petty ills.

* * *

I might almost say that there is no modern tragedy. Take Ibsen: his modern tragedies (even including *Ghosts*) are really melancholy comedies; the tragedy of their heroes lies in the fact that they are pathetic creatures who inevitably put themselves in the wrong, and so are essentially ridiculous. Your classical hero broke himself against the divine order of things, which is tragic; your modern hero breaks himself against the human order of things, which is slightly comic, but mainly sad. Shakespeare's heroes always die; that saves them from unwilling absurdity. Modern heroes usually live on, which is both laughable and pathetic. If Othello had not stabbed himself, but had been found guilty of manslaughter with extenuating circumstances and spent his old age as a retired general on half-pay, he would have been a modern hero; that is to say, a melancholy semi-hero. That is why anyone who wants to write a real tragedy must end his play with a wholesale massacre. It is not that death is in itself tragic and sublime, but that after that your hero can do nothing to disfigure his heroism.

To survive suffering is a melancholy thing. And if there is such a thing as modern heroism, then it must be not heroic death but heroic optimism. But modern drama has not yet got so far.

A PLAN FRUSTRATED

EVERY winter at about the beginning of February, when the days are beginning to lengthen, I make up my mind and swear by all that is holy: No, this year I really will not forget to look out for it, and when it comes I will keep watch on it closely and carefully, like a detective. I will choose out one particular twig or shoot, I'll measure out a square yard of garden for myself, and I'll see how the spring comes. I will carefully study the first sticky, brittle sheath from which the bud is beginning to burst; I'll pore over the bud and find out about its tiny growth, its furry or sticky surface, its gradual swelling. I must be there when at last (with a gentle sigh) it opens, when the pale edge of the first little leaf pushes out, when it spreads out its little leaves, still folded up as if new born, when these little closed fans of leaves begin to unfold and expand, to turn into real leaves. Suddenly, instead of bare twigs there will be a green bush and I shall know all the details of how it happened. Yes, that's what I'll do. And besides keeping watch on the twig I'll look at my square yard of garden; suddenly before my eyes a tiny chimney will come pushing through, a thin finger will poke up, and I shall see how the first grass is putting its cool little tongue out of the earth, a short, merry little finger which shoots upwards and begins to spread out. I shall wait impatiently for its little brothers; I shall count them, and there shall not be one at whose exciting birth I have not been

in attendance. Why, perhaps at last my square of ground will throw up a strange shoot; it will come out under my eyes and reveal a lovely bud; perhaps it will be a crocus, a burdock, or some flower which has never been before, which I shall discover and call by my own name. Perhaps a pair of birds will nest on my twig and show me how eggs are made. Yes, this year I am really not going to let it just happen; I shall catch the spring *in flagranti*; I shall look at his hands, right at his fingers, to see how he does it, and whether there is not some swindle, trick, or doubtful dealing. I will stop it, control it, observe it, examine it, investigate it, spy on it; nothing shall escape me this year.

Yes, with this firm and incorruptible resolve I go through each winter. Then come the days when the sun shines so; the ice melts and the seagulls come flying back, and then I decide that to-morrow or the day after I will begin to carry out my plan. And listen, people, it is so lovely when the sky turns blue and all that. Old women in the street are selling violets and cowslips; one has a sudden longing to seize a switch and lash at sundry females.[1] Yes, now I'll just polish off this little job of work and that article, and a visit, two small errands and that letter, and then I shall be alone with the spring, and I will go and see how it is really done. And do you know what? I won't do any of those tasks and duties to-day at all; they can all go

[1] In the villages there used to be a spring festival at which the girls ran down the village street and the boys lashed at them with switches, while the next day the boys were lashed by the girls.—TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

hang; for to-day I must go and look if spring is beginning yet.

And why, bless me! it's happened already! The bushes are green and there in the young grass the flowers are out. By and by we can sit down in the shade, wipe the sweat from our foreheads, and buy a bag of early cherries. What, cherries over now? Then give me some autumn damsons. After all, it is beautiful in autumn, and one can still enjoy oneself. . . . Good gracious, my friend, have you been asleep? It's November, the fire is lit in your room, and you seem to be another year older. You must leave it till next year, and when the beginning of February comes round make up your mind firmly that this time nothing shall escape you. But take care that the spring does not circumvent you by some trick, that he does not cheat you and steal a march on you. Take care, take great, great care next time!

CATS IN SPRING

IT is all over now, while we, numb and coughing mortals, are still waiting for our spring, the spring of pensioners and lovers and poets. But our cats have already been out on their great springtime adventure, and coming home again after their two or three weeks of love escapades, lean as straws, dirty as rags on the rubbish heap, they run first to their saucers and then straight into the arms of their masters; for with man they are as happy and safe as we Christians in the arms of God. After which they blink their golden eyes and purr softly: "I'll never do it again, Big Man. If you only knew what I've been through! I don't even want to think of that striped ne'er-do-well, that brute with a bitten-off tail, that faithless creature, that wild beast. . . . Ah! it's so lovely to be home again!"

In this recent cat's springtime thousands of your pussies have had their kittens made for them, and now will prowl furtively through your rooms with swelling bodies, lackadaisically arching their backs. Only take care that when their time comes they do not creep into your bed! And when they bring into the world two or three blind, squeaking kittens with little quivering tails, there begins the eternal spectacle of maternal love. Your cat overflowing with gentleness and dignity, lying on her side, curled round so that her whole body and all four paws are protecting her shivering offspring, and making herself their cave,

home, and furry bed; and she will croon softly in answer to each of their squeaks in a voice which she only uses at these times, and she will give them her teats so wisely and devotedly that one marvels silently at the reason and inventive routine of feline motherhood.

And now I come to look at my little cat who has taken the very first opportunity to discard her youthful ignorance—for it was her first adventure and her first experience of motherhood—and has rather hurried into her first cat's spring. She has brought three squeaking waggletails into the world, and before she has recovered from the surprise the kittens are gone; her master has had them done away with. Well, now I ought to be able to describe the restlessness and grief of the mother cat, and to proceed from that to reflections on the mystery of maternal love; but the mystery which I observe is somewhat different. The cat is certainly restless, but I couldn't say that I notice any grief; instead of that she puts on a voice as if she still had kittens. She gives her crooning little purr at every sound, in a voice in which she never talked before, curled up on her side with her paws smooth and claws drawn in; after a little she grows restless and lies on her other side, obviously in order to reach the second row of unemployed empty teats. She does exactly as a cat would do surrounded by squeaking and sucking kittens; I should have expected the absence of kittens to upset her, but that is not so. A passion for caresses breaks out in her; she besieges me with requests to be stroked, nursed, and fondled; her body likes to

have something touch it. She purrs in passionate ecstasy when I hold her in the curled-up position of the suckling mother cat. I mean that she plays at doing what in the natural order of things she would have had to carry out to a finish. She does something which does not correspond to the situation, but which corresponds to an order established before that. One tends to think that the mother cat gives her crooning purr because she is talking to her kittens; whereas really she does it because it has been laid down for her in far-off ages how she is to behave in the period of kittening; it is as if a rolling-pin were pre-ordained to roll automatically. This foolish, striped, grey puss is not a crooning mother; in this gently purring mother cat is nature herself, a mother a million times older and more passionate than my puzzled pussy. Nowhere can the blind and consummate function of instinct be recognized so clearly as where its object has been removed; then its undeviating mechanism is suddenly evident. Nature does not trust the individual; therefore she lays down for each one, even to the most subtle details, how he is to act. She leaves nothing to initiative; the rule of instinct is set down with a definite and unchanging force.

And we? We strange and often puzzled humans do not even know how and when we became estranged from this immeasurable web of instinct; a human mother must first find out the movement with which to cuddle her baby to her. Human beings have to learn everything for themselves, even motherhood and life itself. But if man were governed by instinct he would

not be able to do or make anything new, not even to imagine or create anything which had not existed before. That which is creative in man is not instinctive; instinct is conservative, unvarying, impersonal, and eternally recurring, laid down from the beginning for the whole race. If in the world of men there is any real personal initiative, any real research and discovery, any real progress, it is the work of intellect.

And art, too, is the work of intellect and conscious will. Get down, you silly puss! You and I don't understand each other any more!

But as for this first snow blossom (she has no other Christian name and she did her bit anonymously, for the honour and glory of her family) I can testify that it was a very brave thing to throw herself into the work of building spring. She had to bite her way through snow and ice, a regular little ice-breaker; she set out into her own springtime all on her own, taking the risk of night frosts and rime. Say what you will, such blossoming is not an idyll of sunny weather; it is a brave exploit of courage and adventure. Yon catkin is an outpost standing far ahead of the lines, waving a banner. A pioneer and settler. A first conqueror in an inhospitable land. A first white sail on the ocean.

It is a courageous exploit and a thing which we quietly take for granted. It is well so.

* * *

The sprouting is beginning in earnest now; here a plump bud, a sturdy closed bud, is pushing its way out of the earth; yonder a young leaf is unfurling, so beautifully green that nowhere else can you see anything so bright. But that is not all; when you look more closely, you see that this tiny life is threading its way through the dust and rot of last year's autumn; that it is stuck up to the neck in the accumulated burial grounds of the vegetation of former years. Last year's leaf is only buried in the spring; it is only at the time of budding that it returns from the dust and ashes of last year. When we look closely we see that the spring earth is not covered with flowers, it is far more covered with dead leaves and the rot and decay of what was last

year. Last year is only now being buried; only now does life return to the earth from which it fled. It is not a resurrection from the dead, but a resurrection among the dead.

Wait, fresh little leaf among the rotting brushwood; what you come to tell us is the eternal co-existence of life and death.

BIRDS

IT is true that I have seen some rather special birds. I have seen the kingfisher flash over a black pool; I have seen the kingly flight of the eagle over the snow-capped mountains and the lovely swoop of seagulls above a sailing ship at sea; all of which are certainly among the most beautiful memories of my life. But I am thinking now of everyday birds and town birds. It seems that nature is getting less prolific and that birds are slowly dying out; there have actually been years when I have not seen a robin redbreast or a gold-finch or even a titmouse; but sparrows and blackbirds are not decreasing, nor are pigeons; these birds seem to have sized man up and said to themselves that man and his existence do not worry them at all. In the struggle for life only those creatures survive which can get on with man.

Just take the case of the blackbirds. They are tame to the point of impudence and simply whistle at man; they would snap their fingers at him, if they had any, or make a long nose at him. They have their definite department in which they make the law; they have a feeling for the family and for posterity and also a sense of individual property. A blackbird in my garden is a proprietor of four plots of land, that is to say four gardens in which he has the exclusive right to extract the worms, dig up the flowers, and nip off the crocus buds. Being strictly bigamous, he lives most frequently *à trois*; the third is a friend of the family, a one-year-

old philanderer whom in the spring the lawful husband manages to dismiss. In the springtime this blackbird gives expression to his wedded happiness in an obtrusive and even improper manner; he makes a hullaballoo which would wake the dead, simply shouting with glee so that the whole world (and the expelled friend in particular) shall know about it; he babbles all over the place and behaves altogether with the typical, unabashed, uproarious egoism of the newly married. Naturally, when the eggs make their appearance even a blackbird grows more serious; he begins to call his wife "little mother," sits on the eggs himself at times, and feeds his downy young ones with exemplary care. He has his own feeling of family honour, he is industrious and on the whole faithful. He is a healthy egoist, a good father, a reckless opportunist, a bird who knows how to elbow his way through, if I may put it so. Apart from his family he knows no solidarity.

Quite different is the impudence of sparrows. The sparrow is the most human of birds. He has no personal property, he has for other sparrows a feeling of equality and comradeship; as a consequence of this he enjoys fighting and quarrelling with them. His society has no deeper organization; it is only a small group, something like the bunch of regular clients at a restaurant, held together by common ownership of a dung-heap, residence in the same neighbourhood, reciprocal exchange of jokes, sexual promiscuity, and innate love of chatter. Although he has no sense of property, he is a local patriot and flings himself with yells and curses

on sparrows from a couple of streets away; he is full of public interests, his world is the street; he hates to be alone, but is not capable of collective discipline or barrack life. He has a nest of his own, but his life is shared with his fellow-diners. He is too carefree to succeed in developing in himself a more logical egoism. If he shares every dung-heap with his comrades it is not from a feeling of duty but so as to have someone to chat with.

Pigeons are gregarious birds too; they fly out in crowds to take exercise, and in crowds they fly back to the common dovecote. Their reciprocity is not a matter of chance; they are not a small group but a homogeneous whole. Apart from erotic relations they have no private life nor personal interests; the males will fight about a female but never for any other question of morals or opinion. Because they all have the same experience they have nothing to talk about or boast of. A pigeon is not even an individual, he is part of the flock. Perhaps that is why carrier pigeons find their way home with such miraculous certainty—what should they do in a strange dovecote where they do not belong? In his own way the pigeon carries out a certain social ideal of unity; clearly he attains this through the fact that he is not the possessor of anything, he is himself a possession.

THE INNER VOICE

I AM professedly an earthy creature; I have no prophetic dreams; I cannot read thoughts unless they are particularly stupid ones; nor have I ever in my life had success as a clairvoyant; and although there are three spiders in my room (a little spider under the bed, a daddy-longlegs behind the stove, and a great big, black, melancholy-looking fellow on the ceiling), I have not so far discovered that they have any connection with my destiny. But in spite of this incapacity of mine in things transcendental, I do believe in certain Inner Voices. It is like this. I often think of something or say something, or conceive a plan which I wish to carry out. And suddenly an unpleasant, anxious feeling arises in me which without words and without proofs, without sense and without reason simply says that what I said or thought will not do, and that it is no good; that it is stupid and vain and worthless, and that there is a catch in it somewhere. For the life of me I cannot find where the fault lies; I turn the whole thing over and over, I examine it, in vain; I can find nothing to go on. I think each one of you must know this disquieting and unreasonable voice.

Well now, suppose you turn your back on the Inner Voice and carry out your plan or persevere with your intention. It will turn out that the foreboding was not mistaken; there really was a catch in the scheme, and in one way or another it will work out to your

undoing. Or—and this happens very often—you begin to defend yourself against the voice from within. With great force and eloquence you prove to yourself and others that you are right, whatever anybody may say, you just are right. There is nothing that one defends more zealously and energetically than a doubtful truth, particularly to stifle that disquieting and painful misgiving that there is a catch; nothing on which one insists so stubbornly as things about which in one's heart one is not convinced. Honest, self-evident truths are to a man like his glands or his kidneys; he does not even know about them, but they function silently and without stopping. A man does not defend his kidneys; if he were attacked he would defend his life, not his kidneys. The man who believes does not fight for his belief but for his life. But if he admits into his being some thought which does not blend with it as reliably as the glands or kidneys, the organism defends itself by a feeling of misgiving and repudiation. There is no other way of expressing it: it is sheer physical reaction to wrongly functioning ideas.

There are numbers of ideas knocking about the world whose validity lies entirely in exhaustive, fiery, ingenious, or excited proofs. Jesus Christ did not prove anything; he said, "Verily, verily I say unto you," and that was enough. A conviction which needs to be "supported by proofs" is like a pillar which has to be supported by beams; if it were unsupported it would fall. But our inner man likes simple and reliable architecture; what stands must stand as an honest pillar, without beams and without proofs, and

especially without words. The best truths are the most silent.

* * *

There is still another kind of Inner Voice; it has such a bad reputation that I am ashamed to mention it; it is called "prejudice." I know that there are many bad, superfluous, and even harmful prejudices; but there are many which are as useful and sound as any other knowledge. An ordinary dog barks at every tramp from prejudice; but I once knew a fox terrier at a big country house who barked himself hoarse at an archbishop, and at temporal princes too, while he led tramps with joyful caperings right to the kitchen. Human prejudices are no less varied.

"Prejudices" or "fixed ideas" are things which one can only have towards the relatively new or little known, with which one has had up to now nothing to do at close quarters, such as, for instance, a veal cutlet fried in oil or the theory of electrons. It follows from the nature of things that a prejudice is usually negative, distrustful, and full of antipathy. It is perfectly natural that one should distrust unknown things; for the unknown harbours as many bad possibilities as good. Where experience fails us, we have our prejudices to hand; rather anything than nothing.

The drawback of prejudices is that we usually formulate them as a self-conscious opinion. Instead of saying that we do not dare to eat a veal cutlet fried in

WOMAN AND THE PROFESSIONS

WE are always reading in the papers about one of these "firsts": the first woman lawyer or mayor or veterinary surgeon or geometrician or the first woman expert in some other strange male occupation. This either shows that male occupations are not very difficult, or that women can do the same as men if they once set themselves to; neither of which are very important discoveries. I believe that even I, if I had started in time, could have learnt to be a lawyer or a locksmith; but the interesting thing is precisely that I have not done so, that I work in a different medium from those who have, and that there are so many possibilities and activities open to each one of us. But women do not find it interesting to do something different from men; it seems to them more romantic to do the same as men. In so far as they do this from the need to earn money I have nothing to say; for each of us wants to live. But I protest that they act like this from a set idea, and maybe you think me reactionary.

Man is—from innate foolishness—a specialist; once he gets his teeth into his job or his passion, he looks neither to the right nor to the left; his destiny is to become an expert, be it in bacteriology or the production of leather goods or literary history. His mind has a tendency to devour one thing and leave all the rest; he is interested only in his own bit of the world (and perhaps in politics besides), and that is why he

now and then achieves something immense in his own field; just because of this narrow, one-sided, boyish, and passionate absorption. Now, if there were only men in the world, the desolation would be simply awful for innumerable reasons, but among others because the world would contain only experts who had nothing to say to each other. Each would be thinking of his own job and would not even be able to understand the experts in other subjects; for specialization is uncompanionable, non-cultural, frankly unsociable; it would mean definite isolation or restriction or differentiation of species. I grant you that a rabbit is interested in green stuff, but he is not interested in a giraffe or an eagle because he has nothing in common with them. Your true locksmith is interested in castles, but not in archeologists or lyric poets, because he, too, has nothing in common with them. So much for men's occupations.

Woman—from some innate waywardness—is a universal, many-sided soul, not given to intense application but full of surprising interests. You would be oddly put out if a lady were to tell you that she is not in the least interested in music or literature, or that she doesn't know what boxing is; she has to be interested in everything, to know something about everything, to be able to meet each one of our interests, and it is a sad thing if she has no more wit than to talk to a lyric poet about free trade or to an airman about Central European politics. You expect from a woman the many-sidedness and sociability which links you up with the ordinary currents of social life. It lies

with her to help correct the one-sidedness of your profession, to carry herself and you beyond the narrow limits of your professional interests; in a word, to conserve social culture, or rather the sociability of culture, in the midst of you narrow and hardened specialists. I mentioned that your true locksmith is interested in castles but not in archeologists or lyric poets; well, it is quite accurate to say that his wife is less interested in castles but more in the archeologists or poets who may happen to live in the same street, and that she tells her locksmith husband between the soup and the meat that the archeologist's wife is going to have a baby, and that the poet is up to his eyes in debt; all this breaks through the narrow limits of the marital locksmithery and builds a bridge between his workshop and the world. You see, woman has something in common with everything that is going on around her; you are a witness how instinctively she understands her cultural and social vocation; just think what a universal interest she takes each morning in a more or less wide circle of human life around her. When all is said and done it is an honourable and important profession for which man is not too serious but too narrow-minded.

This is a definite division of labour: the man goes out to earn the living, he is a specialist, an inventor, a business man, or something else practical; then he comes home and his wife tells him all the news, everything she has heard, what the neighbours are doing, and all the rest of it. If the woman becomes a specialist, an inventor, or something practical, who will link *her*

up with the universal interests of the world, and what will become of us?

Yes, what will become of us? For don't forget that the so-called woman's question is of vital concern to men's interests.

A GAME WITH A PIGEON

I REMEMBER somewhat indistinctly (for memories from our schooldays are usually a trifle indistinct) this ethical anecdote. It was about St. John the Evangelist, I think, when his disciples and followers caught him playing with a little pigeon (or possibly it may have been a dove). Then his pupils and disciples marvelled that such a learned and dignified man should be playing with a pigeon. And the saint answered them, saying that to play with the little pigeon rested his spirit. "The bow which is ever bent loses its spring"; so spake St. John the Evangelist, they say.

I remember that this little anecdote did not satisfy me. Firstly, I was rather annoyed at St. John for only playing with the pigeon to rest his spirit instead of doing it because it was great fun or because he was an enthusiastic pigeon fancier. Secondly, I was disturbed by the question whether it is really undignified for a saint to play with a pigeon, or with dogs and cats, lizards, frogs, and other beasts of the field. I ruminated that if saints had to be so dignified and serious as all that, then I wanted rather not to be a saint. And I have not become one, but I think for quite other reasons.

To-day what interests me in the story is not so much St. John but rather those disciples and followers of his to whom it did not seem in keeping that such a famous and dignified man should play with pigeons. I think that in these days folk, even if they are neither

saints nor aspirants to sainthood, make far less of a point of dignity than they did in olden times. No one would be surprised if the Rector of the University or the President of the Chamber of Commerce were to play with a pigeon. In these days the disciples and followers of St. John would be more likely to take snaps of him and publish them in the newspapers with the caption, "St. John the Evangelist with his favourite pigeon." And they would even send a man from Gaumont Graphic and let the topical and natural picture of St. John with his pigeons be shown at the cinemas. To-day we are not ashamed of playing with animals, children, or balls. So much the better for us, the children, and the animals. I think we have much less need of dignity than the cave man. I am sure we are much less serious and much more cheerful. The most dignified place is a small town because people get bored there. The bigger the town, the more playfulness and boyish high spirits you can see in people. In a small town people do not play; a village is for the most part deadly serious. Perhaps it needed all those machines and tricks of civilization to make us fond of anything as irrational and amusing as a dog. Perhaps we had to make this enormous circuit through many civilizations in order to find a bit of our childhood again. As for the far distant future, I believe that later people will know more than we and govern the world more wisely; but I cannot imagine them going about in long robes and making high-minded speeches as H. G. Wells describes them. I am more inclined to think that they will get down on all fours like Nebuchadnezzar

to play with puppies or children, dance around, kick balls about, shout at the tops of their voices, and behave in as undignified a manner as possible. This further and endearing step in civilization is needed to free in us the carefree and rollicking animal that God made.

THE BARREL ORGAN

IN the first place, you must not think that it is perfectly easy to play the barrel organ; not only does it make your hand ache but you need a concentrated, coherent consciousness of aim, a sure delivery, and—yes—a certain feeling, that is the word. Like so many other things that I have tried, I had a try at learning to play the barrel organ, and it wasn't a success. It is true that the instrument remained whole, but the tune got broken, scattered, unstuck, and torn into disconnected rags; it was as if I were trying to cut out a dress suit or put a sewing machine together. For instance, while one is turning one must not stop or go faster or slower; the handle must move smoothly, roundly, and at a different pace for each tune; sometimes it is the proper thing to pull out the tremolo, at other times to strike the knob which makes a pause. In other words, there are a whole series of technical dodges and tricks in this trade as in any other.

I am writing this because it just happens that to-day is barrel-organ day in our neighbourhood. For the last hour I have been hearing the old woman grinding the organ, now near at hand, now farther off. I should like to sing you all her tunes, for I know them all by heart. There is one of them that everyone must know: I start singing it and all the servant girls in the neighbourhood sing it back, and the carpenter downstairs, and the cobbler's apprentices across the court at the back; our song even ascends to heaven, and God is

pleased, because we are all singing together. Another one, an old-fashioned dance tune, has a mysterious power and makes you rock to and fro from the hips; during one particularly powerful melodic trill you waggle your behind in gamesome and old-world merriment; all of us within the reach of the organ grinder's hurdy-gurdy simultaneously make that movement of delight, whether we are doing the ironing, or writing, or selling thread behind the counter. Another tune is *The Orphan Child* in a somewhat unusual setting, but each of the dwellers in my block is sometimes an orphan on one side or the other, someone or something is always raking our hair with the comb till the blood comes,[1] life bruises the feet of each of us on the sides of the tub, and each of us has after all somewhere to cry and something to cry for. So the barrel organ speaks to us orphan children and drives away our desolation. Then there are tunes which make you think of love, and tunes that you drink like wine; and some are like a merry girl and others like a consumptive seamstress. I tell you, there is something in each of them which is at least worth the biblical mite.

There are steam-driven barrel organs, veritable gigantophones, roaring, clattering, and raving, a single sound-shower flooding the whole suburb; and there are toothless and asthmatic little barrel organs which utter

[1] The reference is to a folk-tale immortalized by the poet, J. Jaromír Erben, about a poor little girl whose step-mother hated her so much that she combed her hair with such a sharp comb that the blood came and when she washed the child's feet she bumped them against the sides of the tub.—TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

a quavering little coo by the roadside on Sundays; there are jubilant barrel organs, and hurdy-gurdies which sob passionately in superhuman grief. But all of them have one beauty, and that is the bass. No other music in the world has so many curls, such strange accentuation, such amusing bass parts, such dark, disconnected accompaniments as a barrel organ. Sometimes it gives an unexpected moan, sometimes it seems to be making fun of you; sometimes it dodges about terribly, as if some unquiet spirit were shut up inside. Always listen for the second voice of things.

I know you don't like barrel organs, for you are nervy, blasé, and ungrateful folk. If the hurdy-gurdy assaults you at a turn of your Sunday walk, you growl something about beggars; if it comes and plays under your windows you go so far as to shut the window and you say something awful. And yet the quiet and self-evident assumption of every organ grinder is that he is causing you a certain pleasure, that he is selling you something as good as the lemonade vendor in the street; that your thirsty soul needs drink, your heart needs Orphean uplifting. And so he turns the handle to make, at the turn of the path or at the bottom of some utterly wretched court or alley, a little island of delight, a pleasure garden of music in the midst of a desert of rough and commonplace sounds. Even if his barrel organ pipes with only one whistle or drones and whines with no voice at all, the assumption persists that it must please you and that you will gladly give something in exchange for such a treat; that perhaps this magic music will cure you of your melancholy,

will drive away the evil spirits, boredom, and grief, and give you something of worth. For my own part, I cannot help myself; when the old woman strikes up her barrel organ down below I lay down my pen and my book and listen politely till she has finished; for it is not fitting to refuse an ear to anything which applies to us for a hearing.

THE SMELL OF HOME

I AM not thinking of the odour of sanctity nor the steam of the wash tub nor the smell of babies' napkins. I live in a young suburb which is growing to the ringing of hammers, the clatter of girders, and the blows of the carpenter's axe; and if you blindfolded me and led me through the town I should be able to tell by the scent: this is an old street; these are new houses, some of them still untenanted; this is a new and still unplastered building; while here they are only digging the foundations. Until a house smells of man it gives off the smell of the material from which it originates, and it will be a matter of decades before these smells settle down and become weathered in the dry, dusty, accumulated smell of a really old house.

First of all there is the scent of the barren earth; from the deep trenches of the foundations there is wafted the chill, forlorn, almost grave-like breath from subterranean cavities. But round the building there are stacks of bricks, and well-baked bricks have a scent almost like bread, the acrid breath of the kiln is about them, they are covered with a warm, floury dust. Then comes the smoke as they slack the quicklime, making your eyes smart and your throat contract, and giving off the damp, cold, raw, smell of mortar; rough and acrid. The air of new buildings is chill and damp like the breath of caves, and it needs the ceremony of camp fires and eternal lamps to turn them into human abodes.

Then they bring planks and put up scaffolding so that the bricklayers can get up and so as to add another smell, for the odour of wood is good and trustworthy; it speaks of home and of ripeness, and its resinous, sun-drenched breath will overcome the acrid smell of plaster and the earthy smell of concrete. We must not forget the sour smell of iron girders and pipes and wires accompanied by the oily smell of paint; nor the pungent smell of the glowing coal with which they dry the walls. Now it is the turn of the carpenters and joiners; the rafters are tied, floors are laid, windows are put in, and doors hung; wood predominates and its resinous, balmy odour floats out from the noisy building. Added to it is the smell of turpentine, varnish, and oils, and the reek of glue and paint. And on the top of it all the freshly scrubbed house smells of soap and water like a schoolboy on Sunday; through the open windows it exhales the chill, the emptiness, and strange hollowness of newly erected buildings.

And a new house does not lose this scent of its own all at once. Just as new clothes smell of cloth and new boots of leather, a house smells a long time of building materials. It is a long time before the people living in it smell the smell of home. At first the house surrounds them like some temporary building instead of growing on to them like a snail's shell; it juts out here and pinches there like a new suit. There has to take place in it a kind of decline before it can get accustomed to people; one might almost say that it takes some years to ripen. It only becomes really and completely a home when it ceases to be a new house; then it is no longer

the handiwork of the builder but of the people living in it. From its cellars and wash-houses to its smoking chimneys it smells of humanity and warmth. And when one day there come folk with their oddities it at last smells a little like a mill, of flour, mellowness, and a peculiar dryness which recalls the scent of straw and decaying wood.

THE TAMING OF THE HOOP

THE other day I saw a young mother taking her little boy of about four for a walk, and the boy had a circular toy. It was a cane circle, nicely covered with coloured paper and with a wooden handle within which it turned; and how that little man ran, pushing it in front of him! And the circle turned, and that was all. For a long time I could not understand what it was all for, and suddenly I thought of it: a hoop! That is meant to be a hoop!

We boys in our time bowled hoops. But they were not tame circles sitting within wooden handles. They were—well, they were real hoops, wild, romantic, elemental hoops, iron, rusty, heavy, and not offered for sale. A real hoop had first of all to be stolen. It had to be removed from a cask either at home or at some neighbour's, and a hoop like this, slanting in on one side, had an obstinate tendency to run round in a circle. It was, in fact, not easy to prevail upon it to run forwards; it needed a regular whacking with the hoop stick and a tremendous yell. A second, more sublime kind of hoop had to be stolen from the wheelwright opposite; these were heavy wheel bands from tractors or brewers' drays, which ran as straight and as crushingly as a railway engine. We were hardly strong enough to manage them and we bowled them with short strokes of the hoop stick until their glorious career ended between the legs of unsuspecting pedestrians at whom the hoops charged with the force

of a tank attack. The hoops from casks charged in quite a different way, guilefully, on the flank, with inimitable cunning; they took it sideways, turned suddenly to right or left and darted in between the legs of anyone who happened to be passing, though it might be the parson or even the squire. A further requisite was the hoop stick to bowl with, and finally a sporting spirit; for the aim of the hoop-bowling was not merely to crush obstacles but to hold races. There were no motor races in those days, but we boys anticipated them, as we did almost everything else.

The mill owners' sons had cane hoops with proper hoop sticks, but they could not run on the roads, only on the gravel paths in the park behind the railings, and beside them our hoops were like the butcher's dog, Sultan or Nero, beside a bored and quivering flanked greyhound. Ours were, in fact, genuine hoops in their wild state; and we scorned the cane hoops both for their social and their sporting pretensions. And if anyone had shown us then one of these domesticated hoops with a wooden handle, a fettered hoop, held, so to speak, on a lead, tiny, slow, peace-loving, and pasted over with coloured tissue paper, we should have burst out into ribald laughter at such a foolish substitute.

But to-day this tethered hoop is universal. We boys used to beat each other, abuse each other, knock each other over; to-day we let other people fight while we look on; and that is called sport. We look on while other men kick a ball about, run after it, beat each other, push each other over on the ground, and so

and dreadful thing: a small provincial town. The citizen of a large town does not flee on Sundays from the city and its roar but from its provinciality and pettiness, its slow hours and loitering confusion. This suppressed small-town element is hidden on weekdays in workshops, little shops, and homes; its Sundays and holidays are its own to come and take possession of our streets. It is not a Sunday walk, it is almost a demonstration: We are here! We, the old maids, the fathers and mothers, the uncles and aunts. We, the timeless. We, the eternal.

FROM THE LAWS OF THE CATS

THIS is my Man. I am not afraid of him.

He is very strong for he eats a great deal; he is an Eater of All Things. What are you eating? Give me some!

He is not beautiful, for he has no fur. Not having enough saliva, he has to wash himself with water. He miaows in a harsh voice and a great deal more than he need. Sometimes in his sleep he purrs.

Open the door for me!

I do not know why he has made himself Master; perhaps he has eaten something sublime.

He keeps my rooms clean for me.

In his paws he carries a sharp black claw and he scratches with it on white sheets of paper. That is the only game he plays. He sleeps at night instead of by day, he cannot see in the dark, he has no pleasures. He never thinks of blood, never dreams of hunting or fighting; he never sings songs of love.

Often at night when *I* can hear mysterious and magic voices, when I can see that the darkness is all alive, *he* sits at the table with bent head and goes on and on, scratching with his black claw on the white papers. Don't imagine that I am at all interested in you. I am only listening to the soft whispering of your claw. Sometimes the whispering is silent, the poor dull head does not know how to go on playing, and then I am sorry for him and I miaow softly in sweet and sharp discord. Then my Man picks me up and buries

his hot face in my fur. At those times he divines for an instant a glimpse of a higher life, and he sighs with happiness and purrs something which can almost be understood.

But don't think that I am at all interested in you. You have warmed me, and now I will go out again and listen to the dark voices.

WHICH IS THE MERRIER?

WHICH is the merrier, man or woman? We are in the habit of imagining that man is something awfully serious while woman is a smiling and playful creature. In reality woman is for the most part a terribly serious person, while man is an instrument for every kind of fun and frolic. This misunderstanding may have arisen from the fact that man has to earn his living by engaging in things which are mainly serious and gloomy, for instance politics, university lectures, the writing of leading articles, higher mathematics, engineering, and so on. That is true, but seriousness of occupation does not produce seriousness of character.

Further, it really seems that a woman is fonder of amusing herself, that is to say of being amused, than a man. That is true; but does not this need of amusement just show her lack of native and personal merriment? On the other hand, I could overwhelm you with proofs of how few women humorists and comedians there are. One can say that humour is as exclusively masculine a preserve as philosophy, military science, and freemasonry. Let the psychologists explain it *ab ovo* or *ab ovario*; the fact is that the nature of man is fonder of cracking a joke, more fun-loving and uproarious, than the nature of woman.

Wherever two or three men are gathered together fun breaks out. Men have a special inclination to be up to some lark, most probably from inborn filial respect for their father, Mr. Boy, since the child is father to

the man. I have not so far been made a Cabinet Minister and I hope I never shall; but in the depths of my soul I am convinced that at Cabinet meetings the Right Honourable gentlemen fasten the tails of each other's coats to the seats and flick ciphered messages across the table, and that when anyone goes out for a moment they stick love letters or hammy paper or the ten of diamonds into his ministerial portfolio; and if they don't, it must cost them a most awful effort not to. To tease someone, play at something, rig up some practical joke is one of the most devouring of male passions.

Woman, on the other hand, is perhaps a more appreciative spectator of any kind of lark, but God save her from being its originator and perpetrator. In the first place she immensely dislikes being the victim of any joke; she entirely lacks the broad and good-natured grin with which the victim receives the joke played on him. Further—now how on earth does it happen?—if a woman does have a rag with someone, it takes on an unpleasant and personal sharpness, do what you will. And in the third place it is utterly foreign to her, it is not in her, she cannot manage it at all. She has not the light-hearted aggressiveness or the heartiness, if you like to call it that: the superabundant and boisterous merriment.

She laughs readily but she distrusts others' laughter; she avoids arousing laughter willingly and of her own accord; she is obviously afraid that it would endanger her dignity, which has always been her vulnerable point. A person who is afraid of being ridiculous can never be merry to the very core. What a woman can do is

to laugh; but absolute fun, buffoonery for its own sake, eccentricity, the utter offering up of herself to the god of laughter—that is not for her.

Moreover, either from mutual solidarity or mutual distrust, women when they are alone together do not get up to any larks. If a woman carries out a piece of real roguery it is always on some man; if she makes anyone an April Fool, it is a man. (From which it is evident that women are more afraid of each other than of men.) But even that she only does in imitation of us boisterous fellows. In the business of life it is men who are the quickeners of mirth.

No, woman is not a merry soul; and if she goes through life "with a smile on her lips," it is a sham; the creature is as serious as death. It is we bearded and shaggy fellows, obstinate and ugly, who are the laughter of life. We know its value, and during our grave occupations, at our machines and our philosophy, in our professorial chairs and behind our ploughs, let us remember that beneath our skins we have the bones of the Eternal Jester, whom God created that there might be fun and joking in the world. For that was and is His wise will.

NAMES

"AND out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.

"And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field." (Gen. ii. 19–20.)

It is set down in the Scripture; but what is not set down is the simple fact that from the moment when Adam gave names to all the beasts of the field he thought that he had some knowledge of them and knew them as he should. As long as anything has not a name man is dissatisfied; it looms before him, mysterious and closed, unapproachable and uncontrollable; but if it has a name then he feels immediately as if he knew it and need not be afraid of it; it falls into place among other things, known, and under control; he has finished with it. See what a potent and magic thing is a name!

You go to the doctor with your ailment; he taps you all over, writes you out a prescription, and tells you to come back in a week. I will bet that you are definitely dissatisfied; you would have liked to hear from the doctor that you have got, let us say, *hyperacidity of the dorsal rheostat*, and that the drops which you are to take are glyceroamidomethylethyltoluol. Then your mind would have been at rest for you would have

known what was the matter with you, what it will lead to, and what is the best thing for you to do. "He didn't even tell me what it is I've got," I have often heard patients complain. Yes, indeed! how can a fellow be ill with confidence if he doesn't know what his illness is called?

You are in the train and you see a perfectly lovely little baroque town with fish ponds round about it, a little red Bethlehem with a red church in the middle, and on the hill above a little red ruined castle. You shoot out of your drowsiness: how lovely that is! What is it called? And instead of looking at the little red town you hunt for someone or something that will tell you the name. Finally a little station passes with the notice: Mölln. "So that was Mölln," you sigh with relief and you feel so nice, not because you have seen something pretty but because you know what it is called.

You are wandering round a foreign city and you come to a halt in front of a Gothic church. You have a good look at it, you walk round it, somehow or other you cannot tear yourself away; can that great pile be a church? At last someone tells you that it is the church of, let us say, St. Egidias. That's all right; now you can turn your back on it; it's only the church of St. Egidias. If it had been the church of St. Panteleon, it would not have altered things; it's all right so long as there is a name to quiet your dislike of the nameless.

You see a machine the like of which you never saw in your life before: it has a sort of what-do-you-call-it down below and goodness knows what up above,

and a crank here and wheels there; what in the name of all the saints is that? Why, says the expert, that's Rüdner's rotating panteichostat (please don't look this name up in the encyclopaedia!) and at once you feel relieved. Fancy! you say to yourself, that monster is a panteichostat. What it is used for is of minor importance; if it has a name it certainly has some purpose too.

When all is said and done, the feel of the unknown torments each one of us, whatever the unknown thing that we are faced with. A name, a mere sound, a mere word, suffices to range the unknown thing among the known. The Lord himself considered it most important for Adam first to give names to all the beasts, and only after that was there created from his ribs "an helpmeet for him." And when the Lord created Eve, Adam said quickly: "She shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man." So he first of all named Eve; then he ate the forbidden fruit and was driven out of Paradise; and it was only after that that "Adam knew Eve his wife and she conceived and bare Cain." So Adam was—at least at the beginning—particularly thorough, and took trouble to know Eve his wife. In everyday life we usually content ourselves with a mere name. Only that which has a name exists for us fully and satisfactorily; nameless things are ghostly, for their reality is not ranged in the comfortable ranks of words. Unnamed things are unknown, that is natural. But that things which have been named should seem to us, *ipso facto*, known, is a testimony to the magic power of the word which we bow down to

exactly like savages, or like the Platonists of antiquity, or like Adam, who seized dominion over the earth by naming all the beasts of the field. And so it seems that we are more dominated by words than we ourselves dominate them.

RAILWAY STATIONS

THE man who still retains a certain holy horror of the extensiveness of the world and sets out on a journey with the feeling that it is a great adventure, does not travel heedlessly, unconcernedly, and light-heartedly. He arrives at the station at least half an hour before the train is due to start; for waiting at the station is part of the business of travelling; it is part of the ceremony; it is a preparation for the unknown things which are to come.

I am not thinking of your great, noisy, ugly, hurried stations where the wayfarer sits down in the bar, reads the paper, and occupies himself with something altogether different from Mere Waiting. But there are little stations threaded on the lines like beads on a rosary; *they stand in the solitude like a place of pilgrimage*, far from the profane noises of the world; they are the real chapels dedicated to the silent ceremony of Waiting. They are led to as a rule by a country lane with a straggling row of trees; the longer it is the more profound and lasting is the silence which embraces the pilgrim who comes to the station to wait. There are some stations to which the township whose name they bear has laid down a horrid, new, dreadfully long road which is called Station Road and embodies in itself all the boredom, inhospitality, and ugliness in the world; but there are others which you can only reach by a footpath through the meadows, and when you get there you look at your watch and think: Thank

God I have still an hour; at least I have not lost my train.

And now you fall into the depths of waiting. Two or three or four pairs of rails gleam in the sun; nowhere does the sun come scorching down so whitely and nakedly as at a station. Some goods trucks are rusting in the farthest siding; two old boys push one empty, chalk-scrawled truck on to the last siding but one, probably to kill time a little. Between the lines two chickens are pecking among the shining grains of sand. There is a silence, an utter Sunday silence. Heavens, what is there to do?

Č.S.D.[1]

That is written on each of the trucks: Č.S.D.—Č.S.D. —You walk the whole length of the station and see what else there is to read. STATION MASTER.—WASTE PAPER.—WAITING ROOM.—GENTLEMEN.—DRINKING WATER. That is all. Ah, there is one more notice; you go and read the announcement—NO SMOKING. That exhausts all the reading material.

Why look, there are some hanging baskets with flowering cress; it is queer that station masters should like cress, when platelayers have an affection for sunflowers. It seems that railway officials have a mysterious inclination to cultivate flowers; nowhere do you find so many flowers as at country railway stations. A railway bee is buzzing indefatigably round one of the flower-filled baskets. There, now she turns round and away she goes. Whatever is there to do?

[1] Short for Československé Statní Dráhy, meaning Czechoslovak State Railways.—TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

The station master comes out of his office; he has a red cap, lustrous trousers, and hands clasped behind his back; all station masters have their hands clasped behind their backs as soon as they come out on to the platform; it must be necessary to their function. He stands still with legs astraddle, scratches his head under his cap, and because there is nothing happening, goes back briskly into the shadow of his office.

We who are waiting shuffle from one foot to the other, and cough under our breath like worshippers in a chapel; we are dressed in clean clothes and depressed in a Sunday sort of way. One old man's stick falls noisily on to the tiles; he picks it up quickly and uneasily, for we are all looking at him crossly as at a disturber. In the depths of the office the telegraphic apparatus clicks mysteriously. In the station there ensues an office-like silence.

"Mummy!" says the piping voice of a little girl.

"Be quiet," her mother reproves her in a whisper.

"Mummy, when will the train come?"

Be quiet, little girl, we have to wait for the train to come. If you aren't as good as if you were in church, the train won't come, and we shan't go away in it to the ends of the earth. The chickens have crept away out of the heat under the trucks; a strange solitude, the solitude of infinity, lies on the four pairs of shining rails. It seems that time has stopped going; it will start moving again when half-past four comes. Sh! sh! we mustn't move.

A sudden bimbimbim, bimbimbim, the metallic signal from the next station. You would not have been

surprised if we had all knelt down and crossed ourselves as they do when the bell rings in church. We do not kneel down, but we shake ourselves out of the depressing spell of waiting; we put ourselves straight and clutch our bundles.

The station master comes hurrying out on to the platform and takes up his position so as to salute the train carelessly as it puffs in. One more disturbed and restless moment, and it is here. Rattling and puffing the train pulls into the station; the station master salutes carelessly; and we who have waited so gravely, hurl ourselves into the train with undignified haste beneath the hostile gaze of those who are already sitting there; and after these delays the whistle blows and the little train puffs away into the wide world.

Just one last glance at the Station of Waiting: it is empty, the station master goes back into his office with bent head; the baskets of flowering cress do not even stir in the burning stillness. And look! at the first-floor window of the station a young woman is staring after the train. She is young, she is pretty, and she is bored, passionately, idly, and hotly bored with the infinite solitude of four pairs of rails. Ah, what a life! God, what an unwritten novel!

CATS

WILL anyone explain to me why a cat gets so strangely excited if you whistle to her very shrill and high? I have tried it with English, Iralian, and German cats; there is no geographical distinction. When puss hears you whistling (especially if you whistle *Night of stars and night of love* as high as you can), she begins to rub herself against you fascinated, jumps on to your knee, sniffs at your lips in surprise, and finally, in rapturous excitement, she bites passionately at your mouth and nose with an expression disfigured by voluptuousness; on which you, of course, stop, and she begins to purr hoarsely and energetically like a small motor. I have thought about it time and again, and I don't know to this day from what ancient instinct cats adore whistling; I do not believe that at any time in the primeval era there was an age when male cats whistled shrilly instead of yowling in metallic and strident alto as they do to-day. Perhaps in distant and savage times there lived some cat-gods who used to speak to their cat-worshippers by means of magical whistling; but this is a mere hypothesis, and the fascination of music is one of the riddles of the cat soul.

Man thinks that he knows cats just as he thinks he knows people. A cat is a thing which sleeps curled up in the arm-chair, sometimes prowls about its cat affairs, sometimes knocks over the ash tray, and spends the greater part of its life in passionate pursuit of warmth. But the secret essence of cathood I only

realized in Rome; and that because I was looking not at one cat but at fifty cats—at a whole herd of cats in the great cat basin round Trajan's Column. The old excavated Forum lies like a dry basin in the middle of the square; and at the bottom of this basin, among broken pillars and statues, lives the independent cat nation. It lives on fishes' heads which the kind-hearted Italians throw down from above, practises some cult of the moon, and beyond this it clearly does nothing. Now it was revealed to me there that a cat is not simply a cat but something enigmatic and impenetrable; that a cat is a wild creature. If you see two dozen cats walking about it is suddenly revealed to you that a cat doesn't walk at all, she slinks. A cat among human beings is just a cat; a cat among cats is a skulking shadow in the jungle. Puss clearly trusts man; but she doesn't trust cats, because she knows them better than we. We say "cat and dog" as the example of social mistrust; now I have often seen very intimate friendship between cat and dog, but I have never seen an intimate friendship between two cats; this is, of course, not speaking of feline love-affairs. The cats in Trajan's Forum ignore each other most ostentatiously; if they sit on the same pillar, they sit with their backs toward each other and nervously twitch their tails to make it plain that they put up with the presence of these disreputable neighbours against their will. If cat looks at cat, she spits; if they meet, they do not look at each other; they never have a common aim; they never have anything to say to each other. At the best of times they tolerate each other in contemptuous and negative silence.

But to you, a man, puss will talk; she purrs to you, looks up into your eyes, and says: "Man, please open this door for me. Much Eating One, do give me some of what you're eating. Stroke me. Talk to me. Let me come on to my arm-chair." With you she is not a wild, lone shadow; for you she is simply a domestic pussy cat, because she trusts you. A wild animal is an animal which is mistrustful. Domestication is simply a state of trustfulness.

And you know, we human beings are only not wild as long as we trust each other. If when I left home in the morning I distrusted the first neighbour I met, I should edge near to him growling darkly, with every muscle in my thighs tense, ready to spring at his throat at the flicker of an eyelash. If I distrusted the people with whom I travel by tram, I should have to keep my back to the wall and spit like a cat to frighten them; instead of which I hang peacefully on to my strap and read the paper, offering them my unprotected back. When I walk along the street I am thinking of my work or of nothing at all, without giving a thought to what the passers-by might do to me; it would be awful if I had to eye them askance to see that they were not preparing to devour me. A state of mistrust is the original state of wildness; mistrust is the law of the jungle.

A policy which thrives by stimulating mistrust is a policy of wildness. A cat who distrusts a man sees in him not a man but a wild animal; the man who distrusts another man sees in him a wild animal too. The bond of mutual trust is older than all civilization

and culture; and it is more important. You can destroy civilization, and humanity will still be humanity; but if you destroy the state of trust, the world of men becomes a beast-ridden earth.

To show you now, I will go and stroke my own pussy cat. She is a great comfort to me because she trusts me, although she is only a little grey beast who has strayed in from God knows what corner of the unknown wilds of Prague's back alleys. She starts purring and looks up at me. "Man," she says, "do rub me behind my ears."

TWO KINDS OF PEOPLE

PEOPLE are usually divided into two kinds, and this under the most widely differing heads; for instance, those who have money and those who have not; or into thieves and honest men; or—as in the Bible—into those who put their mouths to the stream and those who drink out of their hands. I mean by this that from the time of Maccabaeus it has been the custom to divide folk into two classes.

* * *

There are two types of people: those who throw away all their broken, useless, and worn-out things, and those who stow them somewhere, either for Uncle Chance or because they may some day do for something, but chiefly from a certain sentimentality and pity. They don't like to excommunicate anything from the circle of existing and, as it were, living things and throw it into the maw of the rubbish pit or the dustman's cart; and so they put these invalid objects away into the kind twilight of attics, drawers, and all sorts of corners where they slowly pile up: old nails, knotted pieces of string, letters, broken keys, broken crocks, screws without nuts, nuts without screws, burnt-out electric bulbs, wireless batteries, hooks bent out of shape, broken bits of furniture, ragged neckties, old tram tickets, incomplete series of magazines, a piece of wire or a hoop, one galosh, a broken door handle, half a tape-measure, the most varied

assortment of buttons and burnt-out cigarette holders, and on top of these a whole collection more of all those incomplete, unnecessary, and unclassified things which the alluvium of life deposits around each human being. I have never in my life seen anything among all this lumber laid by "in case" which could possibly be any use for anything; but perhaps that is not what matters; for there are folk who consider it rather unfeeling to throw a thing away simply because it is of no practical use any more.

On the other hand, there are some severe and energetic natures of a Spartan turn who jettison useless things without any compunction. There is an element of cleanliness and discipline in this; I envy such people, and I am always telling myself that I will only shove this burnt-out cigarette holder away in the cupboard just this once; in future I will not tolerate any old rubbish, broken crocks, lumber, or refuse in the house. It is one of my perennial good intentions. But in practice it is almost always as hard to throw away a chipped jug as to condemn an invalid aunt to death. Ordinarily I hide these crippled objects in all sorts of corners and drawers, till one day in a fit of energy and tidiness I throw about a third of them bodily away without looking to see what it is or was that I have flung out.

* * *

There are two types of people: those who carefully untie all the knots and loops in the string when they undo a parcel, and those who cut the string through.

A CLEAN JOB

I CANNOT remember exactly how Sisyphus offended the gods that he should be condemned to roll a boulder eternally up a hill in Tartarus, and that when he had almost got it up to the top the stone would slip from his hands and roll down, so that Sisyphus had to begin pushing it up again. He must certainly have done something awful for the gods to lay upon him such an awful job. If he had been condemned to roll ten thousand boulders up the hill, and if he had only managed to get one of them up after ten thousand tries, even if it had rolled down again, it would have been, as you can see, a cruel task, but it would not have been an infernal penalty. The hellish penalty consisted not in the fact that Sisyphus had to do hard work but that he had to do useless and shoddy work. (Personally, I do not believe that he put up with it for long; I am convinced that one fine day he left the boulder to roll, turned to the gods, and declared that he was not going on like this and that he would rather break stones or build roads or do anything that was some good. This the gods allowed him, and from that time onwards Sisyphus built roads in England and France and various other places, only not in Czechoslovakia. This is just by the way.)

Whenever I have in my hand a poor piece of workmanship, one of those wretched shoddy things, badly made out of bad materials and quickly coming to a bad end like all bad things, I think how disheartening and

depressing it must have been for the workman who had to make such a thing. He was badly paid and bad tempered; he did not whistle at his work, but grumbled at it and cursed; he did not call his work a job, he called it a rotten turn out; he did not joke while he was doing it, but got through it anyhow, and when the whistle blew, he chucked down his tools and went off without looking back; and even when he got home he still felt downhearted at the bondage and injustice of the whole world.

I understand very well that workmen demand better wages for their work; but sometimes I am surprised that they do not demand besides better wages, better work too. I should like, for example, to imagine such a dramatic social rising as the following scene:

The office in a factory: the owner or manager is nervously gnawing his cigar, for there is a tragic feeling in the air, as there is before a strike. A knock at the door and the workers' delegates come in, dour and threatening.

"Take a seat, gentlemen," says the man with the cigar with somewhat unnatural politeness. "And what can I do for you this time?"

But the delegation does not sit down; instead a very frowning man in overalls elbows his way to the front. "We've come here," he begins, "because, well, it's like this, me and my mates have been saying that we aren't going on like this and that's all there is to it."

The group behind the speaker grunts approvingly.

"And how aren't you going on?" asks the man with the cigar, forcing himself to speak in a careless tone.

"We're not going to go on making such mucky stuff," declares the man in overalls. "It's not a job worth doing. Me and my mates have been saying that we aren't going to put up with it any more, having to make such rotten stuff. It's just rubbish that we send out of the factory, stuff it's sheer robbery to sell, junk to be chucked away, that's all it is, and the fellow who buys it is just taken in, that's all. The material's worth nowt, the work's no good either, and the whole thing's just a swindle, just to sell cheap and make a big profit. So we've made up our minds that we're not going on with this rotten job. Unless it's made better, my mates have been saying, we're not on this show and that's that." (Hear, hear!)

"But, gentlemen," bursts out the man with the cigar, "this is unheard of! I thought you only came for a rise in wages, not with impossible demands like this! You'll pardon me, but in the first place our factory does not turn out stuff that it's robbery to sell, but inexpensive articles in general demand; and in the second place it's nothing to do with you because it is I who am responsible for the quality of my goods. Good morning!"

"Come off it!" says the man in overalls. "We're just about fed up with it, I can tell you; this kind of work ain't no joke. It just about feeds a fellow up, making poor stuff when we could be making good. A workman with a bit of self-respect wants to do a decent job and not this rotten mess; it makes a fellow quite ashamed to turn it out. We want to enjoy our work and take a pride in it; a fellow feels quite different when he's got

decent material in his hands and can make a first-class job of it. And we have a social right to it."

"What kind of right?" shouts the man with the cigar.

Ah, if I could prompt the spokesman in the overalls I would whisper to him quickly at this point: "The social right to be gentlemen." But the man with the cigar is not there, nor is the man in overalls; and moreover there is very little prospect of this dramatic scene from the social struggle being staged.

ON THE THRESHOLD OF MYSTERIES

THERE are folk who do not believe in anything, not even that a flea on your hand means that you are going to get a letter. But even these most obdurate unbelievers believe in Fate.

I know that Newton discovered that every object falls vertically to the ground, but it is not true. Everyone knows that a collar stud never falls to the ground vertically but somehow sideways, and that it always lands under the bed or the chest of drawers. No science of physics nor law of gravitation has yet elucidated this fateful proclivity. It is an indisputable metaphysical phenomenon, a simple and mysterious law of Fate.

There are hosts of laws like this. I will adduce, for instance, from thousandfold observation the well-known *Law of Purpose*. A thing which you don't need is always under your eyes; as soon as you need it, it's gone. You hunt for it methodically through all the cupboards and drawers; it is nowhere. Finally you resign yourself and get on somehow without it. At this moment the thing you are looking for appears, either in its proper place as large as life, or somewhere where it has no business to be and will irritate you until you need it again; then with amazing promptness it vanishes. Some people maintain that if they are waiting for a tram, the only trams that come are going in the opposite direction. One friend of mine tried to outwit Fate by deliberately going to wait for the opposite-going tram. But Fate is inexorable: it got

itself out of the tight place of course by causing a break in the electric current so that no trams of any line were running. There are countless cases like this. It is a simple law.

Another phenomenon of this sort is the *Law of the Third Solution.* Usually we expect that a thing will turn out either one way or the other; and lo and behold, in the end it doesn't turn out either one way or the other, but somehow differently and in a way which no one could possibly have foreseen. Supposing I decide: either I shall have some money and then I'll buy a suit, or I shan't have any and then I won't buy it. In that case, of course, either (1) I do have some money but I don't buy a suit because I have to have the stove mended or pay my rent; or (2) I have no money but I buy a suit all the same, and am cheated into the bargain. Without fail. Inevitably. I think: either such and such a thing will happen and that will be all right; or it won't happen and it will be all wrong, God help me! Well, in that case the thing does happen and it's all wrong, God help me! Sheer Fate!

Still another law of destiny is the *Law of Series.* For a whole year you have not met Mr. X, and one day, bother the man, you meet him seven times. For a whole year you have no occasion to go through the Haymarket, and then all at once, do what you will, you find yourself there seven times in one day. No one ever sends you a hare as a present, and suddenly you receive four hares at once from four corners of the earth. Events have a curious and, if I may put it so, unpleasant tendency to come in crowds. Of course

you always have all your bills to pay at once. Fate has a mania for repetition. When you have most work you have seven visitors one after the other. All your life you have hunted for golden ferns, and when you are least thinking of it you find golden ferns everywhere, till it's simply maddening and you are quite bothered about there being so many. There are said to be only six blue Mauritius stamps in the whole world; I bet you that one day I shall suddenly find three thousand of them and that they will all be fakes. That is the law of series.

Human life is thus governed by higher laws which are beyond the sphere of natural order and scientific explanation. Why is it that just to-day I broke a boot-lace three times? Why must I meet four people to whom I have promised things which I have not yet done? Why did I hunt for my tie with cursing and swearing for half an hour, and then, when I had put on another, find it calmly lying on the chest of drawers? Believe me, even the smallest misfortune is obedient to the mysteries of Fate; so that it is fitting to conduct oneself towards Fate with consideration and respect. I know a lady who will have, say, a pair of scissors in her hand, and suddenly they vanish; after a despairing hunt for two days she discovers them by sitting on them. She sees in this the malicious work of sprites. I think she is indulging in idolatry and gross superstition. There are no malicious sprites. There are simply laws. The inscrutable and inexorable laws of Fate.

like an ordinary man. But like a creative man. There is in him something which comes out to his fellow-creatures; to every fellow-creature. An actor cannot act merely before a mirror, a poet cannot write verse just for himself, a painter does not paint pictures simply to stand them with their faces to the wall. In everything at which we humans really play with our whole souls there is also this denial of self, demanding the interest and participation of all you others, the whole dear human pack.

And we, too, can tear ourselves to pieces from sheer zeal.

"*Kind Reader.*"

I don't really know why he is called "kind"; for I don't know whether he is kind any more than I know whether he is as red haired as the Emperor Barbarossa or as bald as a Roman Senator; I can make no clear picture of him, and I am sure he will remain a mystery to me to the end of my days. If you are a writer it sometimes happens that some well-dressed gentleman comes up to you and says: "I'm Mr. So-and-So, and I have read your article about——" The moment that you get to know your reader like this, you lose him; for this gentleman is not the mysterious kind reader, but Mr. So-and-So with definite opinions; he is an acquaintance. With every person whom you get to know, the mysterious reader recedes farther; he is not *this* man; for the Kind Reader is none of the people you know; he is the personification of the people you don't know.

But if I were to sketch in the features of this unknown person I should find that I cannot imagine the Kind Reader as a particularly kind, smiling, and appreciative being; I rather picture him as some very precise and frowning person, carrying my article or book in his hand like a lawyer's brief. I think he has a long beard like Father Time. And the worst thing about him is that he knows everything there is to be known of whatever I write about, for he is of all professions; no mistake, lack of knowledge, howler, or stumble of mine

escapes his eye; he catches me out at everything that I bungle or that he knows better than I. He says nothing; only his eyebrows jerk with evil delight at having caught me: "Aha, my lad, you weren't up to that!" His knowledge is tremendous and probably infinite. If I confuse an Audion lamp with a Davy lamp, he notices it; it does not escape him if in my botanical innocence I confuse a raceme with an ament. You've no idea how scared of him I am! Sometimes when I am writing I stop short and scratch out what I have just written, for I am not sure of myself, of ourselves the Kind Reader. He is terrible, being unknown. [illegible] is called kind, it is from a strange fear; one has to [illegible]ter him.

A Meeting with Oneself.

I am not thinking of a double but of my own picture in the mirror. It happened that I was left alone a moment at my tailor's to undress. While I was doing so with the complete absentmindedness which a man exhibits when undressing, I noticed in front of me a man in profile who was staring at nothingness and unbuttoning his waistcoat like myself. It struck me most unpleasantly, not because the fellow was undressing in front of me, but because his face seen in profile was absolutely strange and at the same time painfully familiar. I stood still and had a good look at him; he left off unbuttoning his waistcoat and stared in a fascinated manner at something which I could not see; I must say that he looked rather silly doing it. It was only when he took off his waistcoat simultaneously with me that I understood that it was I myself in the triple

mirror. A mirror is the most perverse discovery in the world, for it tears away the veil of mystery with which man is concealed from himself. There is something unnatural about being able to see one's own nose in profile. It is ordained that man shall rather measure the height of the Himalayas than gaze on the lines of his own nose. If we do not see the ends of our noses it is not because we are short-sighted, but because the said noses are our own. So long as man does not see his own profile he remains to a certain extent unknown and unknowable to himself; he carries in his face something of whose appearance he is not sure; he knows all sorts of things about himself, but the profound mystery of his nose, which every passer-by can see, is hidden from him. I have just been reading that with the help of microphones or loudspeakers one can hear one's own voice. I am sure that must be as painful as to see one's own profile. It is not I; that unknown person has no right to give himself out as me; he is an intruder who accompanies me everywhere and always keeps out of my sight. God knows how women can bear to sit before their triple mirrors and study that strange and unknown thing which is called one's own face. A man does not like to see himself, and if he wants to imagine Man he has to think of his neighbour.

SNAPSHOTS

Chasing a Moth.

A man is sitting with a book or newspaper in his hands; suddenly he raises his head and his eyes follow something in the air as if in an unseen photo. Then he gives a wild jump and makes a snatch with his hand, after which he falls on his knees and slaps the floor with his palm. Again he jumps, snatching at emptiness with his hand; rushes into a corner clapping his hands; slaps the wall and looks carefully into his hand. Then he shakes his head in a disappointed way and goes and sits down again, looking suspiciously at the corner where he did the slapping just now. Three seconds later he leaps up again, springs into the air, smacks his hands together, flings himself on the ground, thumps the walls and the furniture, waves his arms about madly, dances about, twists his head round, and sits down again. Five seconds later he jumps up again and repeats the whole of the ceremonial dance.

Chasing a Tram.

For this task you need a tram which is just in the act of starting. A man walking to the tram-stop at that moment throws back his head and begins to move his legs faster with a scissor-like motion; after which he gives a playful little jump and changes into a trot, smiling slightly, as if he were doing it for fun. Then he hangs on to his hat with one hand and begins to run with all his might. The tram, which has really been

whole street, he runs smilingly and exuberantly, as if it were his favourite amusement or sport. He would lower his dignity very much if he ran swearing at the top of his voice or with a frightful frown. Chasing a hat must be done light-heartedly and merrily. It is only when you have caught your hat and are dusting it that you can softly call it all sorts of names, though even then your face must preserve an amused and whimsical expression.

MEN AND DOGS

IT is a current saying that a cat has on the whole a feminine character while a dog is by nature rather masculine. I maintain that this view is based on the peculiar natural fact that nearly all domestic cats are of the female sex, while the crushing majority of dogs with whom we have to do are male. Your tom-cat, a rather rare creature, is endowed with qualities as masculine as those of any man I know. If a she-cat is as false as a woman, a tom-cat is as false as a hundred-per-cent he-man—only this time I want to talk about dogs.

What a man values above all in dogs is the breed; at least, he pretends to understand it. "He has good paws," one man will say to another, "but I'm not sure that his ears are right." "What an idea," protests the other, "he has the finest ears you ever saw in your life; look how he's cocking the left one." A man's relationship to dogs is rather that of a stock-breeder, perhaps an atavistic survival from some primeval hunter. A woman chiefly values her dog's attachment to herself: "He's so fond of me!" she says, deeply touched; and she spoils her dog to a shocking extent, making him into a sensitive, capricious, disobedient creature, like all over-loved beings. It's no good your telling me that women can do everything; they cannot evolve philosophical systems, and they cannot bring up dogs.

But the thing which we praise most in dogs is their

intelligence. They only lack speech, we say of them, forgetting that they do really speak, only in a different language. I have often heard a dog growl quite distinctly: "These blasted fleas!" At other times he is obviously calling "Get out!" or "Help!" and sometimes he swears rather coarsely. I believe that if a dog could speak as we often wish, he would express himself crudely, using rough and vulgar expressions. If he could talk he would be perfectly impossible. His character is human and frank; he is a good-hearted fellow, but he is not a gentleman.

When you talk to him he looks into your eyes; it seems at times that he can almost understand what you say; in the end he opens his mouth from sheer attention. Last year I lost my way in the Bohemian Forest, looking for mushrooms; at last I found a little path which led me out of the forest to a game preserve. As I reached it there rushed out upon me an enormous St. Bernard, bigger than I, growling awfully. There was I with one large mushroom in one hand and two in the other, absolutely defenceless. So I addressed the dog and told him all about it: who I was and why I was there and how I really couldn't help it; but the dog swore at me like a madman. Perhaps he doesn't understand Czech, I thought suddenly, and I began to talk to him in German. I confess that I have never in my life spoken to anyone as politely as I did to that St. Bernard. I offered him peace, I overflowed with good intentions, I appealed for reason in our relations. When I had been going on for a bit I noticed that behind the fence all the

inhabitants of the preserve were listening gravely; even the dog stopped barking to open his mouth with astonishment. It was the greatest rhetorical success of my life.

There are folk who feel insulted when a dog barks at them; they will brandish a stick wildly or make as if they were going to throw a stone. Few people preserve their dignity if they are attacked by a small dog. In my judgment the best way is to try to come to a settlement with the dog in question; magical is the power of speech and reason; the most bristling little dog will soon tumble to the fact that he cannot out-bark a man. If dogs could talk, perhaps we should find it as hard to get on with them as we do with people.

PLOUGHLAND

IT would be a nice map that faithfully caught the natural colours of our earth. It would have to give the blackish green of firs, the rich green of young pines, and the light green curliness of the leafy forests. But the greatest number of colours would be in the soil as we see it in the autumn, freshly ploughed, not yet weather-worn or bleached by frosts and drought. A map of this sort would coincide to some extent with a geological map, but it would not be so erudite; it would serve merely as a delight to the eyes. It would be beautifully painted and richly shaded, like the work of the painter who affectionately mixes on his palette these different earths, these durable, unfading colours.

There is a whole scale of colours, from the white sands to the fat black of the richest loam. In some places the ploughed fields are whitish, light grey, as if made dusty and bleached by the drought; there are fields the colour of very weak cocoa, almost blue, or like milk with a dash of coffee. Then clayey-yellow in different shades of ochre and rust; flax-coloured and golden soil, tawny with shadings of Naples yellow, Indian yellow, and burnt ochre. The most extensive is the scale of browns, from light straw-colour to deep and rich tones of sepia, from loamy tints to intense reddish-brown like chocolate; coffee-brown, chestnut-brown, the brown of earthenware jugs or the warm, baked crust of loaves; the dry and bleached brown of shallow, stony fields or the rich shades of the deep

marl and alluvial soil. Then there are soils of auburn, dark purple, from glowing rust to brilliant red, shading into violet; soil in all intensities of sienna, madder; soils the colour of bricks burnt in the kiln. There are rose-red districts and regions dark as blackening blood or blushing as if lit by an eternal sunset. District by district, almost village by village, there is a different colour predominating and a different intensity of tint. Now that the crops are harvested the coloured map of the tilled earth speaks to us to the full.

All sorts of things are buried in it: lumps of lime and heaps of black manure, stubble and refuse and leaf-mould; it is extraordinary that hundreds and hundreds of years of work have not been able to change or dilute the native colour of the soil. For hundreds of years man has been manuring and turning over this thin crust of earth and covering it year after year with the artificial deposit of work; yet a red-brown soil remains a red-brown, and a yellow soil is still yellow; the earth cannot be dyed; even centuries do not alter its language and colour. It cannot be changed by tractor or hoe; through the reddish corn or the dark potato field the brown or yellow earth comes up again with its original tone. The soil will never be standardized; nations and cultures may change and succeed each other, but that on which they tread will not be carried away or interfered with. Perhaps that is why we are so fond of talking of our native soil; we want to hold fast to its durability. Just look, friends, what a solid and fast-dyed material our earth is! It will outlast us.

When we are talking of the colours of autumn do not let us forget the lovely warm colours of the sods turned over by the plough. Here, too, we are wrapped by the blessing of the earth in a bright and changing garment. We are formed of all manner of samples of earth and all the geological centuries succeeded each other to prepare this little bit of clay. Only men with their different colourings and shades do not get on well together, perhaps because, speaking geologically, they were only made yesterday. It will be a long time before folk look on the coloured map of the nations and states with the same pleasure as they do on the coloured map of the earth.

THE GOLDEN EARTH

IT is golden, ruddy, violet, green. And again golden, russet, slate-blue, and brown with the brown of ochre, sienna, or sepia; red with vermilion, carmine, Venetian red, with the colour of Porphyry; cheese-yellow, chrome-yellow, Indian yellow, terra cotta, tawny; blue-green, yellow-green, blue, dark purple. You go by train through the Carpathian forests and you stare your eyes out at October's handiwork. When the sun shines on it, that whole poplar there glows yellow like a great flame; the beeches thrust out their small orange flamelets in all directions; a shrub I do not know shines out like a fiery red furnace. Golden, ruddy, violet, green. Holy, holy, holy! Our Father which art in Heaven, how beautiful it is!

It is sentimental, but I cannot help it. If man looks on Nature in her moments of glory, these other somewhat remote and highly coloured comparisons will occur to him. Certainly a ministry does not fall as beautifully as the leaves of the hazelnut bushes. When the Government falls it does not come with such a cheerful bang as when a chestnut falls from the tree and, bump! the red-brown eye peeps out from the green burr. And a currency does not fall so elegiacally and majestically as this lovely golden foliage. Golden, brown, orange, red.

And you, beautiful affection for old things, give me your blessing. With your face to the face of Nature there are awaking in you, man (and don't deny it),

immensely conservative feelings. Praised be the constancy of old things and of eternal order. Praised be that in man which is not transitory or pioneering, of yesterday or to-morrow, but is eternal and unchanging: youth and age, rest, love, a good table, religion, heroism, sleep, and sundry other old and wise things. Confronting you, fiery forests, literature does not satisfy me; but face to face with you I am content with my few white hairs, my fatigue, and my strength. For it is all in order as it has been through the ages. Golden and green, white and black.

And listen, what is particularly pretty now in October is the villages. They are hidden in their yellow and red apple-trees, their yellow limes and chestnuts, like pretty little toys. Red roofs, grey roofs, and above them a little blue smoke. God! how thoroughly, how perfectly the year takes its way through these villages! How solidly and benevolently each season of the year is glorified. As for us in the cities, we hardly notice that something is happening, that there is a change. Spring and summer, autumn and winter; overcoats are put on and taken off, umbrellas are stood in the corner, gloves are taken off. That is all. We have not stopped Time at all, we have just shot at him on his way. Another year more of life; but it was not four seasons, it was just one year.

Golden, ruddy, bluish, brown. Dry leaves. The enormous lavishness of Nature who formed, notched, curled, and fluted each of these pretty leaves and now is throwing them all away, trampling them and destroying them, to begin it all anew. And I, who shall not be

begun anew, I too form and notch and curl and flute each one of my written pages; to throw them away and destroy them to-morrow. And then she begins to create, notch, and flute something else. It is in order so. What follows in order is good. Green, yellow, and red. Dry leaves.

There are still yellow and purple flowers in the fields, the slender, shivering fennel is still throwing out its perfume above the damp earth, the last apples are still blushing on the trees. Lord God, when I grow old, when I am quite old, grant me such persistence in flower and fruit. Grant me yellow and purple blossoms, let me flower with silent and clear stars; grant that I may bear plentiful hard, red apples which will last behind the windows through the winter. And when the new generation of fruit comes, when the cherries are ripening, these apples will live to see it all; they will be wrinkled, it is true, but they will live to see the new age, firm and red. Grant that I may bear a harvest of a few firm, red apples which will last through the winter till the next summer. Amen.

Golden, scarlet, dappled brown. Lord God, I thank Thee for the lovely journey of the year.

OCTOBER

EVERY season has its signs, not only in the heavens, but on earth, too. The sign of spring is certainly a bird, or, indeed, anything that flies; even the Eros of spring is winged, and each creature which announces the spring to us is a winged thing, be it lark, swallow, butterfly, or Eros himself. Summer is the season of the elements, sun, air, water, and earth; in the symbols of summer you find elemental creatures like fairies, water nymphs, mermen, salamanders, noontide witches, and leprachauns, beings for the most part hairless, without clothes, ethereal, and of such a kind that one cannot reasonably imagine them exposed to storms and bad weather. Autumn has as its token some shaggy creature covered with tawny fur, or brown like Spanish chestnut burrs, like autumn leaves and all ripe autumnal things; it is the season of deer, Fauns, boars, and foxes, the season when men leave off plaguing the wenches and set off hunting some fleet beast. Finally All Souls' comes to remind us that the year has worn round to the signs of familiar things: the spirits of the dead, household brownies, the crackle of the fire, and books.

I have never in my life shot an animal: but whenever I have been in the woods in October and have met a squirrel, a fox, or a stag with his hinds, I have had the feeling that I had suddenly crept into some quite different world, into *their* world. For October belongs to them in some mysterious way, far more than any

other period of eternity. In summer you meet a young roe as you might meet a nice girl; and it's "Hullo, lass, you needn't be afraid of me!" But in autumn you meet a hind as you would meet a goddess, or something immemorially old; you hold your breath and stand still so as not to commit sacrilege; you are ashamed to call your astonishment by its real name, which is reverence.

* * *

Every stag has something of St. Hubert's stag about him. When he stands with head erect, crowned with the glorious, branching arches of his antlers, hoofs planted wide apart, snorting in noble-minded distrust, then it is really as if there gleamed on his forehead something like a cross. Yes, if I were a holy man and a Christian it would certainly be a shining cross; but because I am a puzzled and sceptical man it is not a cross but some great and indistinct symbol. Do not aim at the deer's forehead, hunter, for that would be a sin; aim, aim at the heart and fire away with your own heart clutched by terror and desire! You will not disturb the crown on his head nor smash the token on his forehead; and when you hang his antlers on the wall you will do it like a conqueror who deposits in safety the stolen crown of a murdered king. For even a stolen crown is an object of quite special respect.

* * *

I will tell you a story—not about myself, for from men of my profession folk are apt to expect all sorts of things which seem either childish or exaggerated.

This was a man well set up and rugged, keen as a sword and hard as a stone; few men made of human clay are baked as hard as he. Now it so happened that before his very eyes in a glade one October day there rose twenty, fifty, a hundred golden and peaceful deer, crowned with their royal antlers. And the man caught his breath and almost trembled with ecstasy and reverence, and murmured that it was like something out of a myth, or from some primeval age. He stood so for a long, long time, and then he crept away more softly than he would ever have trodden in any chapel or holy place. And for a good hour after he had seen this thing he talked in a voice far softer than he ever had before. I quote this as evidence that in October animals carry some great and divine mystery within them.

* * *

Perhaps that is the reason why, when hunters come back from stalking, they talk in exaggeratedly loud and ringing voices to shake off this terrible dumb enchantment. "You should just have seen him!" they shout at the tops of their voices. "Coming towards me about a hundred and fifty yards away—a beautiful stag. I stalked him an hour and didn't get within range. I tell you, folks, he was a beauty! And half an hour later I found another—I had hardly got to the spot when there he was crossing the glade. I got him in the heart at seventy paces; but he's not as fine as the other. Boys, I'm going to make a night of it! God, why didn't I get that stag I saw yesterday?"

Yes, but the finest stags are always those which keep

out of range of the hunter. I am certain that St. Hubert saw his finest stag, the stag with the cross, at a hundred and eighty paces; for you may be sure that otherwise he would have brought it down. Even with that flaming cross on its forehead. And right through the heart.

LIGHTS

RIGHT to the horizon, as far as eye can reach, right to the line of the sky, goes that stretch thickly set with the lights of human streets and houses; when it lights up in the evening it looks like fireworks; in the peaceful night it is like a flowerbed of lights; but above all it is as changeable and alive as a human face or as nature itself. When nothing is happening in the whole universe, those lights softly and fixedly wink; but there are overcast nights when they quite distinctly turn and twinkle; and starrily vaulted nights when they tremble with a strange, disturbing flicker. In the bitter frosts they shine with a small, clear, and almost fierce gleam; in the autumn drizzle they shine like lighthouses; through a veil of mist they glow dully and redly, like dying sparks among the ashes. But they are loveliest of all when it is snowing and they blink softly as if shrouded in cotton wool; and in the south wind, heavy with rain and roaring damply, they flare up into the black night with a swift, pathetic passion, fire against water, and almost cry aloud.

* * *

There are familiar light-scapes which look in at one through the window, or wait for one daily on the way home. The night has a different map from the day: a map written in shining points and little squares and lines, with a different population, different dead spots, and spaces differently filled. And sometimes in those

lightscapes of ours we notice a new light, a light which was not there yesterday. Perhaps someone has moved house, or it is just a street lamp.

No. It is a new star on earth. A new piece of the universe.

* * *

When you are passing at night through a large town the first things which come to meet you are strings of lights, branches of lights, claws of light flung out by the city into the desolate outer darkness. And each of these strings has a last lamp. The last lamp on the edge of the town. And after it what seems an abyss. It is as though you must reluctantly creep into the unknown. Certainly there is a road, there are trees and milestones leading out into the world; but that last light is a sad and frightening frontier.

The last lamp on the edge of the town is stranger and more romantic than a desert, a forest, a mountain, or an unpeopled sea.

* * *

As a rule one does not look in at people's windows with special interest; windows are there to be looked out of. But not at night. The lighted window is not for looking out now; it leads inwards; and the passer-by is impelled to look in. A lamp is hanging there, throwing a hot circle of light on to the ceiling, and perhaps people are sitting round the table—they must be happy, living there, thinks the passer-by; it is enough that people

are living there to make it seem pleasant. It would be nice to sit down, too, in that golden and quiet light.

And when he is sitting at home under his own lamp, he does not remember that the light of his home is flinging a warm, golden square into the darkness.

AUTUMN PICTURE

"AT that time Jesus said to His disciples"—but just what the time was like, what hour of the day it was, and what season of the year, of that the Bible says nothing. And yet one would like to know how it really looked at least on one occasion "at that time."

"At that time" was, perhaps, just such a grey November day as this. It was cold, three degrees above freezing-point, and the mist penetrated to the skin. One can imagine Simon called Zelotes with an awful cold, so that he kept on coughing raucously and thinking that he would rather be lying somewhere near the stove. But the Master walked at the head of His apostles, lost in thought, and said nothing; at times He quickened His pace so that they should the sooner reach their inn, and then again He would fall into meditation and forget everything.

One can imagine John kicking a chestnut in front of him, a chestnut in a prickly burr, with the merry, shining kernel peeping out through a crack. He was not thinking of anything at all, and was simply bent on not losing his chestnut. Peter was thinking of his wife and his children, and how there would be a fire burning at home, and how, perhaps, he might take a week off. When he thought of the fire throwing out a shower of sparks he rubbed his numbed hands together till they made a hissing sound.

"Boys," said Bartholomew in a hushed voice, "do you know what I should like to-day? Mutton stewed with spice. It has a way of warming you up——"

"But it mustn't be fat," observed Mark.

"No," said Bartholomew, "fat mutton is better roasted. It must be done at a quick fire——"

"And you add a little garlic," Andrew put in.

"About three bunches," said Thomas. "My granddad used to say that garlic drives out the nine sicknesses. But I don't believe it."

"It's for when you have a chill," explained Andrew. "You make a garlic soup, sweat it out of you, and there it is."

"Or wine with cinnamon," said Mark. "Very hot wine with a little honey. Get them to make it for you, Simon."

Simon grunted something; he was feeling rotten.

"A nicely roasted leg of mutton," Bartholomew went on softly.

"—maybe with peas, or cabbage," said Philip. "*Nice hot vegetables. I like that.*"

"Pea soup," murmured Matthew, as if in a dream. They were all silent.

"I could fancy some millet pudding," pondered Peter. "When you put dried plums in it—and scorch it a bit, you know. It's awfully good. And you keep on adding milk. My wife used to make it—oh, at least once a week."

"I like a goose best," announced Judas.

"Fattened?" asked Thaddaeus with interest.

"No. Not like that—smaller, you know. I don't like goose as the Jews do it. You should just roast it well in a pan . . . nice and brown."

"Do you remember," exclaimed James the son of Alphaeus, "at that wedding . . . in Cana of Galilee

. . . that turkey we had? Boys, I've never eaten such stuffing in all my life!"

"It was made of chestnuts," said Philip, "but you have to put in plenty of eggs."

"Or such smoked tongue . . . with spinach," said Matthew reminiscently.

"You can't satisfy honest hunger on things like that," objected Thaddaeus. "But goose giblets or fritters . . . they must be well greased . . . fritters . . . with goose fat."

There ensued a thoughtful silence. The Master quickened His pace a little, hurrying into the damp, cold mist, and the twelve Apostles after Him. The light was dim, as though dusk were already falling, and it was cold.

"My gosh!" Simon called Zelotes began to cough.

"When I was little," James the brother of Andrew said softly, "my mother . . . used to make batch cakes for me. Do you know what they are? You put a cake . . . made of dough . . . into the oven after the loaves have come out, and you bake it lightly and take it out quite hot."

"With a nice dollop of butter on it," added Andrew with a sigh. Then the Master paused and turned to the Apostles.

"And a pinch of caraway seeds," He said thoughtfully. "They taste better with caraway seeds. My mother used to make them for me, too."

Thus He spake at that time; then He turned and hastened on to redeem the world.

I, a poor sinner, believe that it was more or less like this at that time.

BIG AND LITTLE

I DO not know if anyone has yet explained why it is and how it happens; but it is the sacred truth that folk are particularly fond of small, tiny, and miniature things. If they happen to see a very tiny room, a white and intimate little cubby-hole, into which you could hardly squeeze one grown-up person, they begin to smile blissfully and exclaim rapturously what a nice little room it is. In the Spanish Hall[1] or the nave of St. Vitus's Cathedral[2] no one smiles blissfully; instead they become enormously serious, and measure the huge proportions with respect. If a man finds a tiny cottage he smiles and thinks that life in it would be happy; but no one smiles tenderly at a museum or a barracks, obviously because they are large. One looks on with the kindest smile at a puppy at play, but with grave respect at a lion at play. Things which are small have an amusing and intimate air and arouse an unbridled tenderness in us; things which are very large are strikingly serious and at the same time a little frightening. No one would like to sleep in the Spanish Hall or live under the dome of St. Peter's. One would rather sleep in a watchman's box or live in a gingerbread cottage. I do not believe I could love an elephant and want to take him to bed and cuddle him. I do not think I should like to nurse the whales in the aquarium.

[1] A very large reception hall in Prague Castle.—TRANSLATOR'S NOTES.

[2] The Cathedral at Prague.—TRANSLATOR'S NOTES.

If we breed goldfish it is not only because they are gold, but also because they are little. In the same way we should never keep singing cherubim in cages, because they are too big, but we should certainly keep them if they were as small as canaries. As long as folk built streets to live in and stand about gossiping in, they built them narrow. If some king or bank-director were to build himself a bedroom as big as a station yard, we should say he was mad, and he probably would be. It is small things which appeal to our tenderness; big things only call forth our respect.

Why it is that small things fill us with such special delight and comfort I do not really know; perhaps it is a survival from childhood, when everything little seemed to be childish and therefore ours. As a small boy, when I wanted to feel that I was in a world of my own, I crawled under the table or into a box. The shed did not do, because it was too big, so I built myself a tent in it out of old canvas. A pony appeared to me like a horse's little boy; the dog-kennel seemed to be a little house for children. Perhaps our liking for small things is a last remnant of childhood, but perhaps it is a last remnant of primitive man in us. Old Adam must obviously have been very much afraid of everything larger than himself; he only felt safe with things whose size did not frighten him. One can imagine that he was more inclined to smile at the spectacle of a wild rabbit than at that of a wild bear. He certainly felt more at ease in a small cave than in the wild world. Small things are usually not dangerous. It is only within the small dimensions of safety and intimacy that the strange

blossom of tenderness is able to unfold its buds in man. Clearly he cherishes tenderness towards small things because it is only towards them that tenderness can be allowed. Big things somehow lack humour; if elephants were to play at being kittens, I think they would fill us with horror. If the Colossus of Memnon arose and began to play football it would be an almost apocalyptic spectacle. Big things are condemned to terrible seriousness.

On the whole, it seems that if man is particularly fond of small things it is not because he is bigger and wiser than they but because in intercourse with them he becomes little too. When a man plays with a kitten he does not realize that he is as enormous as a mountain, he rather feels that he is as playful and trusting as the kitten. When he bends down to some tiny flower he makes himself small right to his soul, as he can in no other way. When we flee from the world sometimes, it does us good to be little; that is why we turn to small things for comfort. We feel rested among them; their smallness amuses us. We cannot say that the ocean amuses us, but an aquarium might. We escape from existence in a way by this diminuendo; life is easier and more playful in those moments when it is spent in something very small. It is free of tragedy and silence. The liberating beauty of small things lies in the fact that they are really invincibly comic.

SOMETHING NEW

IT is said that, in contrast to the mature adult, a child is fidgety and changeable and always wanting something new. This may be true, but it is also true that in contrast to the child an adult is restless and fickle and always wanting something new. A child may be as jumpy as a flea, but when he comes to you for a story he wants to be told the same one that you told him yesterday and a score of times before that. You know, the one about the little hares who went hop, hop, hopitty, or the one about the doggie who went for a walk and met the pussy, and what happened then. And beware of disturbing this classic material by any additions or alterations; the child wants to hear exactly the same story that he enjoyed yesterday and the day before; he would feel cheated if the doggie didn't meet the pussy and everything didn't happen in order as it should. Then when he has heard his favourite story through to the end he takes himself off and hurries away to look for something new in the sand-heap or the coal-box.

Now in contrast to the child, it is the adult who demands restlessly always to be told something new, and always about something different. It would be quite nice if I could repeat some article of mine which you like (I don't know which one it would be) word for word each week; if I sat down each Friday, shall we say, cheerfully rubbing my hands, and proceeded to write out again a column which would have already

appeared at least a score of times, and a score of times had met with praise from you; here and there I might perhaps make an improvement, use a different word or alter a sentence a little, but in such a way that you would not even notice. And from Friday onwards you would be looking forward to what I should say, and then you would read it aloud with lively satisfaction that it is always the same and always as nice as it was last time. And then—well, then you would go off and look for something new among the intimate things of your own life.

A grown-up person is unpleasantly restless: he wants a new article every day, a new leader, a new law report, new book reviews; he would think himself cheated if he were not told a new story every day. Either he must be told the same old story in different words, or he must keep on being told something new but always in the same words. Day after day he reads with interest that someone's overcoat has been stolen; only yesterday it was stolen at the Café Slavia[1], and to-day at the Café Union. A child is more consistent and constant; if you were to tell him a story about a stolen overcoat thirty times over, it would have to happen thirty times at the Slavia and nowhere else. We grown-ups want to read fresh results of fresh contests every day; but the child, in his strict confidence in the unchanging order of things, has accepted once for all the result of the contest between Honza and the Dragon and demands by right that this result shall be strictly

[1] The café where the literary figures of Prague meet.—TRANLATOR'S NOTES.

adhered to; if it had to turn out differently each day, or if Honza had to fight with someone different every day, it would be the end of the story. For, in contrast to reality, the kingdom of fairy-tales is not irresponsible and arbitrary, but consistent, reliable, and miraculously regular. That is why a story can be repeated unendingly; it is a place of unchanging values. Your real story must always begin in exactly the same way, just as Homer always had to begin with the words *Ménin aeide, thea;* if he sometimes began differently he would have lost his reputation entirely. You think that you are merely repeating a story to a child; but for the child the story is not being repeated; it is simply continuing; that is why it must not be altered. There are things which must always be the same—prayers, for instance; their secret power lies in the fact that one returns with the same words to the same state of mind; it is really a special sense of security. A song must not be sung just as the fancy takes you; the person who sings it accepts its invariable order of melody and word; if he wanted to be always singing something different he would be said by everyone to sing very badly. That is why we are wrong in complaining that such and such a celebrated politician always sings the same song; if he were to sing a fresh one each time it would cease altogether to be a song for him and his hearers. If we really want to sing a song or tell a tale we must make up our minds to certain invariable elements; if we want to say something new every day we shall begin to say it badly.

Classical literature is the literature of which we do

not expect anything new. That is why we appreciate it so highly, and why we leave it unread. On the other hand we read modern literature as we read newspapers; we want it to tell us something new; as soon as it has told us we throw it aside like yesterday's paper. If we were to let it tell its tale three times over, we might find out what there is in it which is unchanging. But that is a luxury we leave to children.

A COLD

YOU wake one morning feeling rather queer; your head aches a little and your back; there is a scratching at the back of your throat and an itching in your nose, but that is all; only the whole day you are rather irritable and you swear at everything, even when you really have neither cause nor reason. But towards evening a ton weight descends on you from nowhere, all your joints go soft, all your flesh tingles sensitively; the patient sneezes wildly about a dozen times, and here it is! With weeping eyes, crumpled up in a heap of misery, surrounded by wet handkerchiefs which are drying in every corner, the humiliated and streaming creature in slippers by the stove snorts, blows his nose, barks, drinks some infusion or other, sneezes and coughs, skulks about the room, avoids everybody. He has a slight temperature; instead of a head he has a heavy, painful ball; with limbs as though lamed and a handkerchief to his nose he is a dreadful sight. Creep away on tip-toe, all you who see this unhappy man; your noisy and happy gambols torture him; he needs solitude, extinction, and dry handkerchiefs. He would like to take off his head, hang it up by the chimney and dry it; he would like to take his humiliated body apart into its several members and set each piece down in a different place. He would like . . . he would like . . . ah, if he at least knew what he wanted! If there were anything worth wanting! If only there were anywhere in the universe something warm and com-

forting which would give this poor, heavy head the relief of forgetfulness. Sleep? Yes, if there were no chaotic and disagreeable dreams. Play patience? Yes, if it ever came out! Read? Yes, but what? And this pitiful human ruin gets up, turns round, and staggers to his bookshelves.

Bookshelves, many-coloured rows of a thousand backs, I want to find in you a little book which will comfort me, who am accursed. No, to-day, somehow I could not bear you, you fat, scientific book; for my brain is dull and stupid. I should like to read something which will not remind me of my dullness and slow-wittedness; something easy, amusing, to pass the time away. . . . Away with you, humorous tales, out of my sight! To-day I could not bear the vulgar malice with which you hold up a stricken man to ridicule; I, too, am stricken by fate and I could not enjoy the spectacle of us unfortunates suffering from ridicule and exposed to the whim of the scoffers. And you, heroic romances, would you not carry me off to distant ages and epic times when there were no colds, among whole and glorious men, who slay a base rival in less time than I blow my nose? But the hand held out to the heroic book trembles weakly; I could not believe in great and magnificent deeds to-day; man is a small, weak creature, severely tried and loving peace. . . . No, leave me in peace to-day, heroism and honour, noble sentiments and laurels of fame; away with you, amorous passions and intoxicating kisses of royal beauties. How can a man think of such things with a wet handkerchief to his nose? Good heavens, no,

that's not what I want. Give me a detective novel for me to sharpen my wits on; give me an absorbing shocker which will carry me breathlessly along the exciting trail of some dreadful secret—No, that is not what I want, either; to-day I do not care for crimes and underground passages and evil people. Show me the gentler face of life, reveal people to me in their intimate everyday life. Only for God's sake no psychology! I have not the patience to linger over feelings and motives; for some obscure reason psychology is always rather painful and harrowing; as if we had not enough suffering of our own! Why do people write books at all?

And that one there—it's too realistic for me; I want to forget life to-day. That one is sad and disillusioned at bottom. That one is cruel towards humanity and demands all manner of self-torture and redemption. That one over there is superficial, pretentious, and clever—away with it! That one is too high up. And that yellow one is bitter and jaundiced. In each of them is something which hurts. Why are books almost all written by wicked and unhappy people?

The man with a cold hesitates in front of his many-coloured bookcase, shivering with chilliness and self-pity. Where can he find something . . . something really good . . . genial towards us unfortunates . . . and comforting? Something which does not wound in any way . . . does not hurt a man in his smallness and humiliation . . .?

And then he reaches to the end of the shelf and takes out a book which he has read at least a dozen times

before when he was thus depressed by the suffering of body and mind, snuggles down in his arm-chair, takes a dry handkerchief, and heaves a sigh of relief before he begins to read.

What is the book? Perhaps our old friend Charles Dickens.

THE SWITCH

I CAME one evening in the dark into a room in which it had once been my lot to spend many years. With infallible certainty I avoided my old bed, accurately and clairvoyantly I dodged round my one-time table and, with one unerring movement of my hand, found the switch and put on the light. And my old bed was not there, nor my one-time table, but another table in a different place and another bed in a quite opposite corner. I cannot tell you what a shock it gave me. There was something awful about it.

"To feel at home" is an enormously complicated feeling, and one cannot even calculate all there is in it: moral confidence and bodily comfort, poetical experience and practical motives, custom and a certain pagan mysticism; but one may put it briefly that "to feel at home" means to be able to find the switch in the dark at the first touch. I am not thinking only of the various physical and geographical advantages, such as, for instance, that you do not bark your shin against a chair on the way, or upset the pendulum clock, or bang your head against the corner of the wardrobe. I am thinking of the blind and mystical trust that the switch is where it is; that it is where it ought to be; that it is in its place and a particularly convenient one; that it is neither too high nor too low; that it is exactly where you stretch out your palm; that it is waiting for you and eagerly holding out its hand to you; that it leads you safely and does not leave you to grope your way

in an abyss of uncertainties; that you do not find yourself suddenly in cosmic void where the infinite, the unknown, and other terrors of the darkness are lying in wait for you. In fine, it is a good and trusty switch, devoted and unfailing, a matchless domestic switch.

I am, like the ancient Gauls, a lover of novelty; but not even the most fanatical Gallic novelty-hunter would want to have his electric light switch, and let us say his bed, and five or six other fundamental objects of his life change their places daily on their own initiative or moved by some diabolical will. Something of this sort probably happens in hell and belongs to the most grievous torments. We are all dreadfully conservative in regard to electric light switches and some few other indispensable possessions. A room in which I can find my way about in the dark is as much contained in me as I am contained in it; but by all the gods, it is easier to change the place of a chair in the room than to change the idea of the chair in my brain; the chair does not put up too much of a defence, but the brain does. The brain wants to have the chair in its old place, firstly because it is accustomed to it, and secondly because it wants to be devoting its attention to something other than chairs and switches. Things function more smoothly and economically if they are in their proper places. From one point of view it is easier to try to alter the social system or the order of the universe than the order or disorder on one's writing-desk. Personally, I would rather reorganize the League of Nations, about which I have no ideas at all, than the

contents of my desk drawers, about which I have only an indistinct idea. And I must own that wherever I have been in the world I have always looked for the electric light switch of my room in the dark; I have put my hand on it accurately to a hair, but it has not always been there, just as many other good things have not always been there.

A man feels at home if he is surrounded by things which are in a specially real sense completely and firmly in their places, or, to put it another way, the idea of home is inevitably and incorrigibly conservative. I dare even assert that without a certain conservativeness there can be no home; you are not at home if you are where nothing matters enough to you to be worth keeping in its place. I will go further and say that, when you get down to rock bottom, folk are all patriots at heart, because they are all conservative at heart, because they don't declare, for instance, that the Vltava is not in its place and that the Powder Tower[1] ought to be moved over to where the Žižkov viaduct is; for these dreadful opinions would only disrupt the idea of home. I think that in our fixed, conservative ideas we should all be able to understand each other and get on together tremendously well. Folk will certainly quarrel violently as long as they exchange opinions on what new things the future will bring forth; but if they tried to work out which of the things from former times and the present day will remain in the

[1] A very beautiful late Gothic tower and archway in Prague at the entrance to the old part of the town. Žižkov is a slum to the north of the city.—TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

PRAGUE IN THE SNOW

I do not wish to interfere in the business of Mr. Šimon, Mr. Stretti-Zamponi, and the other artists who make their living out of black-and-white sketches, etchings, aquatints, snow, tiles, the Charles Bridge, and other winter requisites. I only want to use the snow for one article; for, alas, I cannot now build whole snowmen as I used to. Snow castles were very beautiful, too; you poured water over the ramparts and left it to freeze overnight; then in the morning you made snowballs and a war broke out with sieges and terrific shouting and all the rest of it. We used to have particularly heroic battles with the boys of the next village for territorial, legal, and social reasons. But to-day I cannot challenge even my greatest enemy, if I have one, to come and settle his quarrel with me by a gallant snowball fight. And that is why I am just using the snow for my article.

* * *

When the snow comes down, Prague at once becomes a little old-world town; overnight we go back fifty or a hundred years and it is suddenly all countrified and old-fashioned, all quaintly baroque, straddling, naïve, and antique; for no reason at all one thinks of old women with seven petticoats, apples baked in their jackets, the smell of burning wood, old interiors, and flowered curtains. The folk in the street are happy, stamping their footprints in the snow, crunching it

and waving their hands as they did a hundred years ago. And it is so still! the stillness of a little country town. Even the Vltava does not move; the tram tinkles like a sledge, and one would not be a bit surprised if motor cars began sounding little bells as sleighs used to once upon a time. Old world! Suddenly it is a world of old things and old dimensions. The charm of the quaint little town. The weather which brings old times back.

That is why, as you will understand, the only real snow is what we get on Malá Strana.[1] That is why it lasts there longer than in other places; and when it is all blown away from other parts of the town (because there it is nothing special, just idle and good-for-nothing) on Malá Strana, thank God, it still lies in banks and drifts just wherever it can. For here it has a special right, here and up yonder round the Castle.

* * *

But there are things no artist could render: the charm of a flake of snow in a girl's hair, or the tracks left by blackbird and sparrow on a snow-covered roof. It looks for all the world like a poem written in Chinese or Cuneiform script. It is only one line, but it is a complete poem. I wish I knew how to translate it.

* * *

Then when the moon shines on it all, what happens

[1] Malá Strana, "the small side," is the old, picturesque quarter of Prague running steeply down from the Castle to the river Vltava.—TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

cannot even be expressed: Prague crouches down and makes herself quite little; she holds her breath; the snow rings like glass under-foot, the roofs press themselves down to the ground, everything huddles together icily, and it is so light, so strangely light, that you are startled at the darkness within you.

* * *

And you, red fire in the stove, you emphasize by your tawny accompaniment the blue of the winter twilight. And added to it is the duet of silence and roaring!

* * *

In summer we see trees, clouds, water, and all manner of things; but in winter when the snow has fallen we see something which we have hardly noticed in summer —the roofs. It is only when a roof is covered with snow that it becomes real, solid, and above all visible. It is only then that it becomes to the full a human framework. It is only in winter that we see that our living is a living under roofs. We build a framework over our heads.

Praised be the snow which reveals to us the importance of our roofs.

THOSE GREY DAYS

THE time hurries by so quickly between the morning lamp and the evening lamp; you have hardly sat down to work when the time has come for you to be called to supper. And the night comes, and you have not even time to grasp your muddled dreams; again you are lighting the lamp to begin another day, as short and as grey as yesterday. Before you realize it you are having to get accustomed to write a new date at the head of your letters. Time hurries by so quickly between the lamps on New Year's morning and the lamp on New Year's eve.

I don't know how it comes about, but when I was young the day was longer. There is no doubt about it! While we were being swindled in every kind of way during the war, they must somehow have swindled us over the time as well; perhaps the earth is revolving more hurriedly and the clocks are ticking faster, but we know nothing about it because by evening we are just as tired as we used to be. I only know this much with complete certainty: the day used to be much longer. Why! when I was a boy it used to be simply endless! Those childish days were like a wide lake with unexplored shores; in the morning one put out on it with full sails, and it was not possible to calculate the hours, each one of them was so long and glorious. Each of those days was like a voyage across the ocean, a victorious campaign, a whole life-time of impressions, adventures, and undertakings; it was as far-flung as

Ilium, long as a year, rich and inexhaustible as the cave of the Forty Thieves. To-day I can understand all the joys and sorrows of those days, but I cannot understand how there was time for them. If I tried to go shooting with a bow and arrows again to-day, I know that midday would catch me before I had fairly started; but there used to be time between breakfast and dinner for me to break a window-pane with my arrow, gorge myself on black plums, have several skirmishes with hostile clans, read *The Secret Island* sitting in a tree, smoke the pipe of peace in a shed, get a well-earned cuffing from someone, catch crickets in a matchbox, have a bathe on a forbidden spot, crawl through the fence, go round to all the neighbours at their businesses and have a look how they were getting on, and on top of all that to carry out a whole series of campaigns rich in spoils, discoveries, and the delights of power. No, there is no doubt about it: time used to be at least ten times as long as it is to-day.

And when my follies and the sphere of my life grew with the years, the possibilities of a single day were immeasurable and inexhaustible. To sit at the feet of professors and suck wisdom from their breasts, to hurry under the windows of my first love, to write verse, to dream, stroll about, dance, stare in at the windows of a dozen curiosity shops, read like a wild thing, and waste time in a dozen different ways—how is it possible that a single day was enough for so many absorbing things? I try to puzzle out this riddle; I think that I have not changed, it is time which has somehow shrunk.——There, you see, it is getting

dusk again already; it is time to light up the evening lamp. The day has finished again—God knows where it goes to so quickly. It has given nothing new, it has brought forth nothing, and it has simply been no length at all. I might have been able to embark on this or that, go somewhere, enjoy myself a bit, see something; but somehow there has not been time.

As you see, the day has hurried by again and has left me nothing behind but this essay on my table. Another year has drifted by and left nothing behind it—but no, wait; the day is short, but all the same you do get something done; the year is short, and yet you have got through a bit of work. You live less but you do more. And even if it was not worth much, it was work, and that is the thing which shortens life the most.

You may think that you are wasting your days. Well, don't grumble. Perhaps you are not wasting them but distributing them.