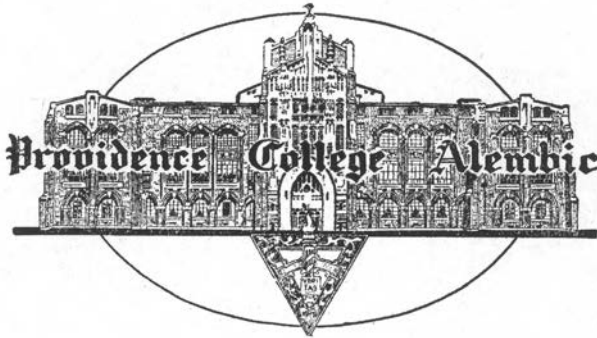


THE ALEMBIC



JANUARY 1948

THE ALEMBIC



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Editorial

SINCE the revival of the ALEMBIC in the fall of 1946, we have continuously faced one annoying difficulty in our attempts to produce a literary magazine worthy of our alma mater. It seems that the students of Providence College are bashful or backward or at least very reticent to give themselves to literary expression. There are only a few who are extrovert enough to brave the literary stage for a few moments to say what they have to say and take what comes.

Immediately, someone will say that most Providence men evidently have nothing to say. Well, we thought of this, too: however, a few moments in the library or the cafeteria will suffice to rid anyone of that notion. Providence men have a great deal to say, and we suspect that the talk does not always concern matters of sport or feminine society. Thus it seems that something else must be the cause of their coyness when it comes to writing for the ALEMBIC.

A rather nasty suspicion has arisen in our minds to account for this reticence. Every time the ALEMBIC comes out it is greeted by what we shall call a mixed reception. We have to call it mixed because, at the same time that our ears burn with the caustic remarks cast at our work, our eyes note that the ALEMBIC copies certainly go fast. So, what do we think? We think that there are those among our critics who think they could do better, but are probably too proud (or lazy) to do so.

We hurl a challenge, therefore, to these dwellers above the crowd to come down and meet us in equal combat. There is no vested interest in the ALEMBIC. If you can do better, the job is yours.

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Three for a Dime

By A. R. POUTRAY, '49

LET me take you back several years, nine to be exact—that makes it 1938 or thereabouts—and start this story on a lonely sidewalk in a large city—any city of your random choice will do. Actual names mean little to the story. It is the desolate part of a great thriving city, the part that lives and toils by day and sleeps by night, quite alone beneath its silent buildings; the blood of its life, the rush of its people is gone. The swift flow of progress has stopped, the shuttling vehicles are silent; the smoke and dust have faded into the darkness; the long rumbling noise of a starved city filling its endless pouch is still; the noise of the thousand lesser things that draw from it their mean existence is stopped. The arteries, the streets of the sleeping city, heave only at long intervals with the swift passage of a small clot of life. The barren stone foliage of the city looms magnificent and pensive in the timeless silence of sleep.

A little man and, by comparison, a rather large woman are walking along the sidewalk at an uneven gait; pausing, going on; pausing again, going on. They're arguing. The woman is speaking in the loud, throaty voice of an abundant woman.

"It's no use, Henry, I won't listen to any more. I've taken all I'm going to take from you. I've lived with you as long as I can possibly stand it. Now let go of me, I'm through! Get away from me!"

“But Lillian, honey, listen to me. Please! I’ll change, I promise. I’ll change right now. Please! I’ll be a different man from now on, honest I will. Wait and see! Don’t turn me away just like that, Lillian.”

“What’s the use, Henry, it won’t work, we’ll only go back to the same thing. It gets worse every day. As far as I’m concerned you’ve had your last chance, tonight was the end. When you came at me with that poker I promised myself I’d get away just as soon as I could because I’m afraid if I don’t do it now I might not be able to later. Now let go of me!”

“But I wouldn’t have hit you, dear, you know that. I just lost my temper for a minute. I didn’t think . . .”

“Well, if I make you that mad, we’d better just break up before one of us gets killed.”

“But Lillian, honey! I need you.”

“No, you don’t need me, you don’t want me, you don’t have any use for me at all, all you want is Ben’s money—rest the poor man’s soul—that’s what you want. That cursed blood money! Ever since he left it to me you’ve been a changed man.”

Ben was Lillian’s brother. He had left the family to make his fortune some thirty-five years ago, she had not seen him since she was a little girl and had thought him dead until she received a letter from his attorney two years ago saying that Ben had been killed in a mine explosion. He had never married and Lillian, as his sole heir, inherited the estate and insurance, a bit of stock—enough to make her a moderately wealthy woman. It is true Henry had changed since then. As far back as he could remember he had been too poor for luxury, sometimes even for the necessities. There had been many lean years for him and he resented having to grind his little bit so fine; he envied all those others who lived so fat

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and full—who drove while he walked; vacationed, wined and dined while he worked, ate dry mealy sandwiches and drank water just to sweat it out again.

The inheritance raised his hopes and when Lillian refused to spend it as he wanted, it had hurt far more than the struggle of the years past because, now there was a possibility, a straw, where for many years there had been only a lonely bit of hope.

Lillian's heavy heels clacked along the pavement. The bare sound echoed against the dark buildings. Nothing but an occasional automobile disturbed the emptiness of the night and its passage was momentary and swift.

Henry rubbed his nose quickly with the back of his hand and sniffed. He was a little man, slight and rather nervous. He had a sharp thin nose, straight and very pointed, his eyes were small, dark and set very close together under his hard, narrow brow. He followed Lillian and pulled at her arm cautiously, with a deference born probably from a justified fear of the big woman. She shook his hand off and walked along faster.

Lillian was of a conservative sort, a cool woman, rather plump and one who called a spade a spade. She had just hurt Henry and he didn't like it.

Walking over to the curb to use the light of a street lamp, she opened her purse. Henry, curious, craning his neck, came closer, crowding to see. She withdrew her handkerchief and a coin fell out of the little handful of cloth, clinked on the curb and rolled into the street. Lillian made an instinctive start for it just as one of the hurtling automobiles came from nowhere and struck her with a hard unwholesome thud. She spun around and fell into a loose black heap on the street. The car—perhaps a drunken driver—disappeared as quickly

as it had come. Like a strange thing of fate, thrust through the dark to do a prefigured deed, it was again withdrawn.

Henry, sniffing, wringing his hands frantically, crouched beside her.

"Lillian, honey, Lillian! Speak to me! Lillian! Lillian!"

He lost what little self control he had left and, dazed by the terrible speed of it all, ran up and down the street, first one way then the other, confining himself to the yellow circle of light from the street lamp, like a man in a cage. Just then a figure came into the light and Henry rushed to it babbling:

"What can I do! Oh, what can I do! She's dead! She fell! You must have been here. Help me, please help me! You saw it, you must have!"

"Saw what?" The voice of the figure asked from within a dark bulky coat and drawn hat.

"Why, the accident of course!"

"Accident?"

"Of course, my wife dropped . . . Here, I'll . . . I'll show you, wait . . ."

He ran off toward the body and rubbed the street on his hands and knees for a moment. An exclamation came from his throat and he was on his feet stumbling back to the stranger.

"See, here it is! It's a dime! A dime! See! Here!" He held out his hand, trembling and dirty.

The stranger looked. "So?"

"So you're a witness, you're the only one here, you saw it! You *did* see it didn't you?" Henry asked anxiously of the figure.

"Yeah, I saw it," said the stranger without moving.

"And you saw her run after the money." One hand had been squeezing the other nervously, he stopped and made

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a gesture toward the body in the street.

"Did I?", asked the figure, still motionless, his face lost in the shadow between his coat collar and hat brim.

"You said you did!", Henry resumed, his hand squeezing and drew nearer the figure.

"Oh, did I?", the stranger asked, taking his right hand out of his pocket.

"Well, you said you saw the accident!" Henry was now close, trying desperately to see the man's face.

"I'm not quite sure it was an accident—yet. Maybe you pushed her—could be you know. You were arguin' just before it happened, remember?" He spoke slowly and deliberately—his voice, raspy and coarse.

"Yes, yes, but I wouldn't, I couldn't do a thing like that!", Henry said raising his hands to his face.

"Couldn't you? I heard somethin' about money. People do funny things for money. Everyone knows that." Again he spoke slowly as he had before.

"Now look here you!" Henry waved his finger threateningly in the stranger's face.

"You know little man, I wouldn't talk like that to me if I were you," he said, pushing Henry's hand away slowly. He was a powerfully built man and stood several inches taller than Henry even though he stood carelessly, with slumped shoulders.

Here another imposing figure rose, almost where one had fallen. Henry dwindled and his spirit bowed.

"Well, I mean what is it? What do you want?" His nervous lips formed a weak sickening smile.

"Money," the stranger replied.

"But I haven't any," Henry said, shrugging his shoulders and opening his hands, palms upward.

“You will have, soon—if I say it was an accident. If I don’t . . .” The stranger now shrugged his shoulders.

Henry thought as best he could with the scattered faculties of his frightened mind. He knew that everyone in the close little neighborhood where he and Lillian lived was aware of the continual bickering that went on between them. They also knew about Ben’s money. They always knew everything. He knew he wasn’t guilty but who would believe it if a witness said he was or even if there were no witness at all. What else could he do?

“All right, you win. I’ll pay you.” He had been beaten.

“A very wise decision little man. Now you’re as good as clear. Just think, you can live like a king from now on. You’ll never have to worry about anything except how to spend money.” It was very dark around the stranger’s face but if Henry could have seen it he would have seen a smile.

Lillian was buried, the man testified for Henry and he got the money. He paid the stranger, whose name was written into the court records as Alfred Bronson and he heard no more from him, that is—for a few months. Then Al came back and wanted more money for keeping quiet.

Henry had given up his job and prepared himself for a gentleman’s life of leisure.

In the following months, Al came back several times and each time Henry went through the same thing, he struggled and argued with Al stubbornly, sometimes violently but Al always got what he came for. Henry moved but Al always found him somehow. This went on for several long years. Al hung on, draining Henry bit by bit. Henry moved from bad neighborhoods to worse, from cheap rooms to rotten holes in the ruining buildings that hive about the water fronts and warehouses of the city.

for for

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The little man was at his wits' end, his hands were worn from wringing and to crown his bitterness, he was almost penniless.

Al came to Henry's room one afternoon for what had now turned into a monthly payment.

Henry's home was a single room on the third floor of a dried out wooden frame building. The room measured about twelve feet square and contained all the things necessary for existence and nothing more. Against the wall opposite the door stood a multicolored iron bed. Several coats of paint, chipped off at varying depths gave it a sort of tragicomic appearance. On top of its iron spring was a knot of soiled bedcovering; over it, hung a string on the other end of which was a light with a newspaper shade, suspended from the ceiling. To the left of the bed a grimy sink was fastened to the wall. Several worn slivers of soap and a black towel lay on the wash stand beside it. To the right of the bed, on a bare wooden rack was a two burner gas stove with a battered, scorched coffee pot and a saucepan covering its burnt iron grating. The right wall held the only window; soot-streaked and gray, it admitted what light it could. A torn paper shade hung lifelessly from its roller. Before the window a gray table, chipped and worn to the bare wood in numberless places, sat between two high backed chairs, each of a different style and color. In the center of the left wall hung a 1933 calendar from a city milk company. The walls, like the bed were of many colors. The layers of paper, peeled to different depths revealed many shades and designs—the naked plaster shown in spots. The floor boards were dry and splintered and splattered with multitudinous kinds of dirt. In front of the bed a square black patch which was once a linoleum piece had been ground and worn into the floor.

Al had become chatty over the long period of time and spoke freely to Henry now.

"Hello, Henry old man." Al said smilingly. "I just happened to be in the neighborhood and all of a sudden I thought of you—it's been a long time so I figured I'd just drop in and say hello and maybe say how much I appreciate all you've done for me. I haven't forgotten you, I don't think I ever will. I want us to be real friends, Hank. I'll be yours and you be mine. We'll do things for one another. You know the old saying, Hank: A friend in need is a friend indeed. Well, here I am indeed and in need, Hank old pal." Al took out a cigarette and lit it, blowing the smoke playfully at Henry.

Henry sat in the corner and didn't answer nor did he break off the stare he had fastened on the floor. His eyes burned in their sockets like little raw circles when he did raise them, slowly, upon the leech that had taken from him everything he had ever hoped for; whatever little peace he might have had or dreamed of. Henry had been rubbed raw. He sat and stared at Al, fidgeting nervously with the edge of the table. Suddenly he came to his feet. He flushed red, the veins stood out sorely on his neck, his eyes bulged, his hands trembled, one of them found the table again and pounded, pounded!

"Get out!" He cried.

"Now, Henry." Al said, waving his fingers reprimandingly.

"Get out! Get out!" He ran at Al with all of a little man's fury. Al stopped him with two strong hands and threw him into the chair. He turned to go.

"I see I can't talk sense to you today, you little fool! But I'll be back tomorrow. Calm down before then or I'll

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take you where you can—for a long time, nice 'n' slow!" He slammed the door so that the room shook. The 1933 calendar swung back and forth and the pages rustled from the gust of air. Henry sat where Al had thrown him, staring at it for several long minutes; then his lips began to move.

"Little fool! Little fool!" The words rolled through the muddled gray inside Henry's head. "Little fool! Ha, ha! little fool eh! I'll show him who the fool is."

He rushed to the table drawer, grabbed something from within and stumbled disjointedly down the stairs. His legs wouldn't work fast enough—he fell, stumbled, tripped; it was like running in a dream. At last he issued into the street and ran, panting, for two or three blocks—maybe more, he didn't know. Everything seemed to be on a roaring, rolling disc, dipping and soaring; the stores, houses, streets, people, cars, revolved and revolved.

The evil dizzy topheavy world had burst for the little lost man—lost in the fermenting, restless world of people—frightened and pinned like a helpless creature by fear and circumstance in this web of life he had knotted about himself tighter and tighter.

When he overtook Al he stopped and fell against the front steps of a building. He raised his arm and fired twice. Al Bronson fell to the sidewalk slowly, like a bag of cloth. At last, the leech was dead. Henry, for the first time in his watered life felt big, he had conquered something.

The people swarmed about him, buzzing, murmuring, prying—the curious eternal people. He neither heard nor saw them. He was too weary to struggle, too weary, too exhausted to care anymore. He was taken to prison, tried by the twelve, sentenced by all and hanged.

To Saint John of the Cross

By GEORGE HUNTER COCHRAN, '51

Watcher of the soul,
Who coursed the heights of darkened night
And sped the slopes of sweet despair,
Do thou to me thy heart incline,
That I may live, and living, love.
Seeker for the Truth,
Who sought through tortuous pathways dim,
Or soared on wings of sudden sight,
Direct thine ear to halting lips,
That I may know, and knowing, love.

Design for Intellectuals

By JOHN J. O'BRIEN, '49

IT is my design to set down here a few of those rare mental and aesthetic acquirements one so needs to be able to carry oneself among a present day society of scholarly people. From my observations of the student department generally and, sad to say, of the faculty department particularly, I have concluded that there is a tragic need for such an enumeration. Not to know how to carry oneself in a learned and sophisticated society is a regrettable ignorance when found among the members of a liberal arts college such as this. Frankly there can be no excuse for it. Therefore, you should pay attention to my admonitions.

It is by a man's gestures and speech that he must portray himself to the world as being cultured. Since all men use gestures and occasionally speak, but all are by no means cultured, it remains for us to consider only those gestures and speeches which give evidence to the world that one is above the common sort of mankind. To illustrate, let us imagine that a person has been invited to a gathering of learned people for cocktails and stimulating conversation. Upon entering his hostess' salon, he notices that Picasso is hanging over the fireplace. The proper thing for him to do is to approach the painting, raise his arm in a graceful gesture and exclaim, "Ah! Picasso, how exquisite." Then he may reach for the cocktail she has ready for him. A poor unlettered fellow would

probably not notice the painting at all—at least not until after he had had a few and then his only response to it would be a resolution to stop drinking. Never, never allow Picasso to go unnoticed in intellectual gatherings.

Having dispensed with the subject of art, we now come to the subject of books. Never tell a group of intelligent people you have read a book. Only the most stupid and naive people read books, cultivated people read authors. “I have read Mary Rondell and although she was a trifle abstruse, her portrayal of the horrible social plight of the Cornish tin miners was ever so adequate” is a type of intelligent comment you may make.

Mention of the Cornish tin miners brings to my mind an achievement which should be fundamental to a man of wisdom and that is a social conscience. By all means acquire a social conscience and display it whenever the horrible living conditions anywhere enter a conversation. But be very careful lest you go too far. The poor “numskull” who blurts out that since conditions are so bad, man’s common humanity should be the basis for his charitable aid, only betrays his illiteracy; for had he read Steinbeck, Caldwell, or Farrell, he’d know that the vast majority of the human race is stupid, depraved and prejudiced, hence beyond redemption. The only way to display your social conscience is to cast your eyes earthward, grasp your cocktail glass a little more tightly and murmur with bated breath—“The poor devils—the poor devils.” This is all you need do; it is all you can do.

The best means for developing a social conscience is the theatre. Every true intellectual should visit the theatre. Unfortunately, this cannot be done by those who live too far from a sizeable city in which there is no legitimate or at least no adequate stage. It is this sad plight which condemns the

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inhabitants of Fieldsboro Ohio, and Boston Massachusetts, to incurable provinciality. There is no stage at all in Fieldsboro and the stage in Boston is wholly inadequate owing to the narrowness of that city's police department. If you are faced with a like situation, by all means take an occasional trip to a large city to see a play. It will help your social conscience immeasurably. But here again, while in the theatre, you must watch your conduct because not all those who attend plays are intellectuals.

Let us suppose the play you are seeing is a modern comedy. As a modern play, it is written as a study of horrible social conditions; as a comedy, it contains witty lines thoroughly in keeping with these conditions. When these lines are spoken, you must never emit a loud guffaw. Properly, you must titter with your hand over your mouth and slyly glance at your companion and say, "I would never speak like that myself, but I do think it so very clever for the author to use such humour here. It is so very natural."

By supposing the play is a tragedy, we meet another problem. In modern tragedies the author has gone all out to help develop social consciences by portraying life in all its pitiless degradation. The proper response of the intellectual to the horror of a tragedy is to be pleasantly shocked. To become too shocked is to admit your ignorance of the state of society. Not to be shocked at all—Well!!! The ideal is to be pleasantly shocked, shocked at the vulgarity of life, pleased that the author has portrayed it so well.

With this sound advice, we can now turn to philosophy, a subject which is bound to bring sighs of ecstasy from the lips and cause a transcendental light to beam in the eyes of the long-haired boys and the short-haired girls. But here again one must use caution before he courageously plights

his all for the philosophical ideal. Philosophy is very dynamic; the ideal is always changing. A few years ago, enlightened people were giving their all to the revolution of the proletariat. If you were to go among them today giving your all to this ideal, you would be giving all to nothing. It would serve you right too, for had you read your "New Yorker" magazine lately, you would have known that Marxism was utterly defeated by a young, new, vibrant philosophy called Existentialism in public debate in Paris some months ago. Consequently, everyone today is existentialist which to those of you who are philosophical dullards means that from the cafes of Montmartre to the bistros of Greenwich Village all are existing. It goes with the new look. You cannot be an intellectual if you simply don't exist.

Immediately the question arises. How am I to become an existentialist? How does one go about existing? Again if you have been reading your "New Yorker" you would know. Jean Paul Sartre, the father of this philosophy, has received a favorable review there which gives him the official imprimatur. In the "New Yorker's" review you would have discovered that there is in existentialism a lot of metaphysical jargon which need only concern the dilettante and the connoisseur. All the average philosopher need concern himself with is giving his all to existing which is done by modeling his personal life after Jean Paul's or his fictional characters'. First you must read all the authors that Jean Paul has read. This puts you in a proper frame of mind. Next study the life of your ideal and begin to imitate it. Jean Paul spends most of the time sitting in the corner of some bohemian dive sipping aperitifs and ruminating over life's meaning. You must do likewise. Jean Paul has taken to himself a mistress.

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Probably many of you will never reach the intellectual level of Jean Paul Sartre, but, nevertheless, it is hoped that some by following the instructions contained herein, will go at least part of the way. Some will find themselves living in a garret someday, giving their all to art, poetry and philosophy. Others will not heed my advice. They will be content to follow the mediocre, bourgeois pattern of American life. They will delude themselves into thinking that a wife, children, a steady job, an occasional book or fishing trip, all enhanced by the rosy glow of ancient superstitions, are all that life need afford. O well! who am I to shock them out of their complacency?

Austrian Interlude

“ . . . and never the twain shall meet”.

—Kipling

By ROBERT E. DOHERTY, '49

THE brakes of the black Opel screamed protestingly at the abrupt halt. A tall, well-dressed, young man leaped from the driver's seat and ran furiously up to the modest villa. The personification of impatience, he banged long and loudly upon the door until it was opened by another older man. The door closed and both were withdrawn from the light of a jaundiced Austrian moon.

Inside, the visitor maintained his impatience.

“They are coming, professor!” he whispered between heavy gasps. “They left Vienna a short time ago.”

The professor was by contract somewhat of a pathetic figure because of his many years. He appeared weary, feeble and resigned. At his age almost any inconvenience had to be considered inevitable. Yet, a grave crisis was at hand. Tonight he had his back to the wall and he was determined to preserve whatever vestige of dignity the last two years of fugitive-life had left to him. Now, he bore that dignity as if it had been engraved on his genes.

“Ja, ja. I know, Franz. They come. But with us it was only a matter of time.”

Franz, still leaning against the door, was not yet a fatal-ist.

good boy, Franz. Your life is before you. And after you have been delivered from *them* your talents and diligence will earn you fame."

Then, leaning backwards so that his grey hair brushed against the top of his chair, the professor continued:

"Franz, someday, many years from now and with the grace of God, you will be what I now am—an aged history professor and political lecturer. All over the world, Franz, there are thousands of such; but, still, in the world we are but a handful. You, my boy, will someday realize our heritage—and like us, you may become a skeptic and a cynic. Endowed with an historian's perspective, Franz, you will agree that there is nothing new under the sun. Wars will not excite you and revolutions you will acknowledge as repeat performances."

Leaning forward, the old gentleman looked Franz in the eyes.

"We are a strange cult, Franz," he continued. "Whatever is new to most people is ancient to us. We can find parallels for every most recent event and plan. Xerxes, Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon—the entire galaxy of the Great are almost realities to us. And we are stoics—void of emotion."

Pausing a moment, he puffed violently on his pipe. Meanwhile, Franz stirred not a finger but waited in fixed anticipation.

"Perhaps," the professor went on, "we have time for just one more lecture. You should listen attentively, mein leiber Freund, for it is a strange sort of lecture that I have in store for you."

The young man nodded his willingness to comply. The light in his eyes and the expression on his face told only too well that he idolized this ancient sage who had taken him into personal custody three years ago.

Austrian Interlude

From behind the wreath of smoke which swirled before his seamed and wrinkled face, the professor spoke as if from the distance of many yesteryears.

“First, I will repeat to you, dear friend, that professors like us who love the subject which we teach are always in danger of insisting that that subject is the most important and cultural of all the rest. Secondly, once we have mentally donated such esteem to the subject, we are further endangered by allowing ourselves to become susceptible to grave disappointment. For you see, since we are convinced that our field of study stands head and shoulders over the other fields, then we are easily discouraged when no great enthusiasm for that study is exhibited by our students.”

He waited for his logic to sink in. However, one look at Franz told him that there was no call for waiting.

“Wohl, after a few years pass by during which this situation dominates, this attitude of disappointment becomes firmly entrenched in a professor’s mind. Therefore, feeling that none of his students will ever show great enthusiasm, and being studiously attached to the subject himself, the professor is inclined to present his lectures after a strict fashion. After examinations, the fittest will survive.

“He, himself, has unconsciously resigned himself to the dull conviction that each semester will only usher into him another batch of indolent pupils. Of course, he must seek nourishment of some sort and consequently in his off hours he dwells in research in the attempt to perfect himself in his specific field.”

Here, as Franz took a silver cigarette case from his pocket, the speaker again paused momentarily. From the case Franz extracted an elongated Polish cigarette. Half of the shoot was hollow while the other half was loosely packed with

inferior tobacco. The type was common as the smoker's ration in all currently occupied countries.

Franz exhaled as he spoke. "You are telling me this by way of offering precaution, professor?"

"You are to take it for its worth, Franz. But, hear—I say that a good educator, that is, one who is sincere and who necessarily is devoted to his field is subject to disappointment. Yet, he is always sustained by hope.

"It is the undying hope of every professor that someday, from out of the vast sea of student faces, there will appear a promising youth whose nature will render him a potential redeeming factor for the professor's long disappointment."

Franz furrowed his forehead. He was puzzled.

The professor smiled. "Let me illustrate, Franz. I, for example, always loved my field of history and political science. But year after year I grew more disappointed because so few of my pupils shared my enthusiasm. I too, Franz, tossed my lectures at them and permitted the fittest to survive. And also, I hoped that sometime at least one of my pupils would go out into the world and reform evil or merit universal fame.

"You see," the old man laughed, "I had rather assumed the role of a 'talent scout'. I waited vainly for some forty years until you came along."

Franz colored.

"Oh there were a few others," the elder added, "but their sincerity was not valid. And for a short while I was taken in by the semblance of it."

"Are you advocating that I align myself to this philosophy," Franz inquired. "Or do you desire that I break away from it?"

His ancient idol rested his pipe on the small rack next to the chair.

Austrian Interlude

“Patience, my boy. I have a story for you also. A lecture and a story—the narration of each is an incredible way to spend time in our predicament, some would think. You will hear my story, Franz; and then you will answer your own question.”

The young man agreed.

“Thirty-five years ago I was hardly the prominent educator that some believe me to be today. At that time I was the Schullemeister of the Staatsrealschule in Setyr. Already I had suffered disappointment from the immaterial attitude of the teen age scholars, sons and daughters of agrarian peasants. However, there were then two factors in which I found solace. The first rested in the fact that I had been notified by the University of Berlin that I had earned my Doctor’s degree and I was anxiously waiting to be appointed to the faculty of a larger and more prominent school. The second factor which comforted me was the slight interest which I had in one of my pupils.

“This boy was sixteen, Franz, and not what you would call a diligent scholar. But he was an individual. At first his non-reluctance to interrupt me during my lectures in order to question me on current events was annoying. But perhaps I never would have paid any real attention to him had it not been for the request of his father.

“All of the town-folk knew that the father was gradually dying. He coughed incessantly and occasionally spat blood. Yet, he was one of the patriots with whom I often chatted in the Ratskellers.

“Again, perhaps those forceful essays that the boy submitted to me which advocated revolutionary ideas would have deserved some attention. And, although I was attempting to restrain myself from becoming personal with the students, I

found myself entertaining the notion that I might 'adopt' the boy. I certainly disagreed with his ideas but I might be able to reform him to reason along the right political principles . . . "

"What do you mean, 'adopt', mein Herr?" Franz asked.

"My wife had died six months after we had been married, Franz. I vowed never to remarry. But it was lonely. And the idea of guiding this youth appealed to me."

"I see," Franz said sympathetically.

"Well," the old man continued, "after what I *now consider* to have been a feeble attempt, I decided that the boy was not to be influenced. He had his own personality and was conscious of it. Rather than to beg him to permit me to tutor him, I preferred to maintain my dignity. So, neither of us would really forsake our individuality.

"Around the middle of that year, after I had discarded my notion of modeling the boy along the right lines, his father reported to me that the boy was attending meetings which were being held by the advocates of the Hapsburg revolution.

"I'm sure you are familiar with this period, Franz. This was the era in which millions of European peoples had been inspired by the gospel of nationalism. The principles of the French Revolution were still afire. Naturally, the Germans in Austria took up the cry. It was Heim ins Reich (Home to the Reich.) which of course meant away from the Hapsburgs and back to the new Prussian German Reich. All of educated Germany was drunk with Hegel's world spirit and dreamed of a future master state."

"Yes, mein Herr. I am well acquainted with our own history," Franz confirmed. "But do go on."

"Well, when I heard this news I realized why the boy's speech and essays—indeed, his attitude in general—was so

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full of conviction. Unfortunately he had been innoculated with the venomous drippings of Hegel and Herder.

"Later, when I asked him what he desired to do after his education at the Staatsrealschule was completed he replied simply and forcibly that he wanted to become a great man. I was afraid. But then he explained that he wanted to become a great painter."

Again Franz furrowed his forehead. He couldn't anticipate the conclusion to which these details were driving.

The professor chuckled. "A painter is not so great, eh, Franz? Ah, but, my boy, at the end of the nineteenth century the painter or the poet was a kind of king."

The young man beamed knowingly. "Yes, of course, professor. At that time the poet-prince and the royal artist ruled society. I recall now, born of the Renaissance, they became highly esteemed. So this is what your problem child aspired to become."

"Yes," the professor declared, "such was his desire. And I must say that it relieved me for I had expected that he would reply fanatically that he was avowed to exert all his efforts towards the attainment of success for the *Heim ins Reich* movement.

"Questioning him on his interest in this matter he explained to me that politics were too confused at present. And that to enter them would be a waste of time."

Franz glanced nervously at his watch. His aged patron, while lighting up his pipe again, noticed the movement.

"Yes, I know," he said, "they'll be here momentarily. But first I finish our last lesson, ja?"

"By all means, sir."

"If only for curiosity's sake, Franz, I made it my business to mark his progress after he left Satyr. I followed his

dismal career steadily. I knew that he had not been admitted to the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna although he had submitted drawings three times. I often met him in that city and bought him meals and coffee. From a distance I watched for four years while he stubbornly tried to prove to his family, to the professors at the Academy, to the heartless city of Vienna and most of all to himself that in spite of everything, Heaven had chosen him to be an artist-prince. Sinking lower and lower he drew and painted for anyone. For the Jewish merchants he made posters in oil, advertising a talcum powder; a Santa Claus selling bright-colored candles and Saint Stephen's Church over a mountain of soap. He slept on the park benches and was always unshaven. He hardly ever seemed alive at all until he spoke of politics.

"Well, my dearest student, to end my lesson before *they* come, suffice it to say that my ex-pupil, he whose powers lay dormant for thirty years, he who attracted no real attention from me when I was assuming the role of a 'talent scout' finally entered politics—and today he is a famous man indeed, for he, Franz, is acclaimed as Der Fuehrer!"

"Der Fuehrer!", Franz exclaimed. "You taught the leader!"

The professor spoke rapidly. "Yes, yes. Such is life. The head of the Nationalsozialistische regime, the alleged leader of the German nation, the potential personality of this era was the boy that I chose to ignore rather than to fight against his character so as to bring his mind to righteousness."

The professor's voice acquired an almost regretful tone.

"The sad thing, Franz, is the fact that, had I not restrained myself so much, I might not have been blinded to the potentialities of his character. But I was a 'talent scout' and therefore could not perceive other great characteristics.

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For one year the young, unripe character of the current world's nemesis sat before me. Who knows but that with a bit of extra attention, with a sincere attempt to reform in him those traits which I knew to be wrong,—I, a comparatively insignificant man, might have prevented so much chaos and evil.”

The young man rose to his feet and laid his hand on his patron's bony shoulder.

“Nonsense, mein Herr. You would accept too much blame. The man is insane. Evidently he always has been. An eccentric ‘would be’ artist who became disgusted with the routine of shoveling snow from the Danube bridges, exchanged his palette for a platform and established himself as the god of every discontented rabble-rouser in Germany.”

“Yes, yes, dear boy, you would defend me to myself. But . . .”

They were interrupted by the knock on the door. They looked at each other for a moment and then the young man patted his friend reassuringly, crossed the room and opened the door.

Three men stood on the threshold. Behind them more men could be seen by the moonlight as they swarmed around Franz's auto.

Of the men at the door, two of them were typical arrogant exponents of Himmler's black shirted Schutz Staffel. The third person was a small man in a long, slick, tightly belted raincoat. He was flanked by the S.S. men. His straight black hair hung low over his right eye and as he spoke his minute moustache seemed to juggle on his lip.

“Good evening, professor Gröber,” the newcomer smiled. “Would you and your companion be kind enough to accompany me?”

Young Franz assisted the old professor from his chair. "In as much as I have no other alternative, Herr Hitler, I consider the journey inevitable," he replied.

But Franz was not so easily controlled.

"Why don't you leave him alone, you madman! Haven't you caused people enough misery? You have burned his works—he can't hinder your progress any more. Look at him," Franz pleaded, "can't you see that he is absolutely helpless!"

A fierce light gleamed from the small man's eyes. But he said nothing. He didn't have to. The two troopers had already entered the room and had separated the student from his beloved patron.

At the threshold the newcomer stopped them.

"Professor Gröber, it would give me great pleasure to know that you have abjured your convictions. Would you repeat after my supporters?"

To the two S.S. men he ordered, "Salute me!"

They immediately clicked their booted heels, outstretched their right arms and complied.

"Heil Hitler!"

The small man smiled. "And now you and your friend, professor."

It is not reported that they complied. It is reported that Franz sneered and that a short while afterwards two black cars sped through the night towards Vienna.

How Far We've Come

By GEORGE EAGLE, '50

YESTERDAY by the Sumida in Tokyo I met an old man —perhaps he was a boy, I forget—and maybe it happened on the Champs-Élysées in Paris, I can't remember. Anyway, this man was a stranger, but I had met him many times before. Did I say it happened yesterday? Perhaps it was tomorrow, I'm not sure. At any rate, I remember exactly what he said and I've written it down verbatim:

This is a wonderful century and sometimes I think how terrible it must have been to be living in the thirteenth, say, when they really didn't have much at all. You don't have to look far to see the tremendous advantages of living in the twentieth century. For instance, yesterday my brother flew from Frisco to New York and he said it took him only seventeen hours, maybe less. And it doesn't take any longer to fly to London. You wouldn't believe it, but that's what my brother said. And now with jet planes it's going to be even faster. I think someone flew from New York to Washington in something like twenty minutes, maybe less. Pretty soon we'll really be able to fly to Cairo for a drink, as the song puts it.

And songs, that's another thing. I guess we must get several hundred new songs a year, in the twentieth century. Why, when you think of that little trickle of folk tunes, and some church music, that they had in the middle ages, it really shows you how far we've come. And it's not as though you have to travel to hear this music. You don't even have to leave

the house—all you do is switch on the radio, on Saturday night, say, and you hear the absolutely top songs of the nation.

The radio is a wonderful thing, a real blessing in the twentieth century. The other day I just happened to tune in on a discussion of the new Sartre novel. One critic was arguing for it and the other against it, and it really gave you an insight into the book. Ordinarily you'd just read it and forget it, but this way you really think about what the author is trying to say. It's something cultural and you really get something out of it, without even leaving the house.

It's not that I hadn't already read the book. I read it, as a matter of fact, in its first month of publication, when everyone was still talking about it. It came in the mail from a book club, I didn't even have to leave the house—you just check a card and send it in and then the book comes when it's still new and everyone is still talking about it. The book club is a wonderful thing, a real institution in the twentieth century. You don't have to take everything they put out, but the more you take the more they send you free, as a sort of bonus. They're all the best books, too, the books that everyone is talking about, and just reading them keeps you in touch with things, so you really never feel uninformed.

And nowadays, of course, a set of the encyclopedia is within the reach of almost everyone. I guess you can get a set for as little as forty dollars, maybe less, so there's no excuse for ignorance on anyone's part. An encyclopedia is a real necessity for anyone with children, because children are always asking questions, and within a few seconds you can get the height of the Empire State Building or a short biography of Madame Du Barry.

It's the same way with newspapers and magazines, they keep you up on what's going on in the world. I subscribe to

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Life and *Collier's* and they come every week in the mail, I don't even have to leave the house. If you read a couple of magazines like these, every week, you really keep abreast of things and you're alert to what everyone is talking about. Why, there's more printed matter being put out in the twentieth century than ever before, and a lot of it is illustrated with photographs. Take the wedding of Princess Elizabeth in Westminster Abbey. We had the pictures here the next morning, when everyone was still talking about it. And pictures of the Texas City explosion, too.

Sometimes I get scared, señor.

It was really photography that led to the entire motion picture industry, which, I understand, is one of the largest industries in the world, not as large as oil and steel, of course, but really up there. I usually go to the movies once a week, maybe twice, and it's really a twentieth-century marvel, the way the movies take you anywhere, places you'd never get to see without the movies. Last night I saw a picture that took you right into an opium den on the Left Bank in Paris, things like that. And last week I saw a picture all taking place in ancient Rome, the sort of thing only the movies could do. Then, of course, the newsreels are really more wonderful in a way. Maybe you saw those pictures of the Republican rally in Chicago, or the rodeo in Madison Square Garden, it's just like being on the spot. And those shots of the student riot in Shanghai, with people getting killed in the plaza, right there before your eyes.

Mister, sometimes I get scared.

Of course, movies aren't you only entertainment. It's always nice to have people in occasionally, for a game of cards, perhaps, and a few drinks. That way you keep in touch with your neighbor, so to speak, and I've always found that social

mixing is not only relaxing but broadening. It doesn't pay to cut yourself off from everyone by just coming home at night and reading the paper and then falling off to sleep with the radio on. After a while you can get very stagnant doing that, no matter how busy and successful you are in business. As a matter of fact, I had a very good friend who held a responsible position in an insurance company in Hartford but he never had anyone in at night, even for cards, I mean, or just for a few drinks. Something to keep him on his toes, so to speak. No, he just came home and sat down to read the paper and then fell asleep, evening after evening, no stimulation or activity of any kind. I mean it wasn't natural. Well, he lost all his vitality and got fat and it was a pity to see how that man lost hold of himself and he was by no means what you'd call an old man. Well, he finally lost interest in everything altogether, never went out, never had anyone in, didn't even putter in the garden, and I wasn't a bit surprised when his heart gave out.

My wife and I always have a few people in on holidays and especially on New Year's Eve—not a crowd, not really a party, just a few people in for cards and a couple of drinks. That way you keep in touch with people and it keeps you from stagnating. On New Year's Eve we turn on the radio and maybe dance a little and then at midnight everyone shouts in the new year and kisses everyone. Everybody's singing about a new year coming but sometimes I can't forget that it's also an old year going. Of course, it would be very queer to say that out loud, so I just kiss the nearest woman, because everyone is kissing the nearest woman. It's good to have people in occasionally, you keep in touch with things.

But sometimes I get frightened, mein Herr.

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Speaking of my friend's heart, it's really wonderful what they're doing in medicine in the twentieth century, the advancement they're making, and the progress. I was reading the other day that all things being equal a new-born baby has a very good chance of living a hundred years without any trouble at all. It's a new drug or something, I forget exactly what, and of course it doesn't allow for accidents or cancer or anything like that, just normal living, all things being equal. Medicine is really one of the miracles of the twentieth century. It's bringing out all kinds of drugs — drugs to check diseases within a week, drugs to kill pain like nothing before, and all kinds of drugs. Even dentistry is bringing out new pain-killers. I was talking to a woman last week who had just had three extractions from her upper jaw. She had gone to the dentist merely for a filling, but the dentist said, "Look, Mrs. Feeney, there's no point in your putting off those extractions any longer." Well, she went white, because, while it had been building up for years, she had kept putting it off. But he shot something into her gum and she not only didn't feel the extractions, she didn't have any pain afterwards either, like you do with novocain. And I understand childbirth isn't the ordeal it used to be, and when someone is dying of something painful, they just blot him out for the last awful days, and he doesn't feel a thing. It just shows you what they're doing in medicine in the twentieth century.

But I'm scared, signor.

The other day I was feeling a bit down and I just happened to run into the Reverend Ellsworth on the street and he said something that made me realize how far we've come in the twentieth century. He's a grand old gentleman and when I remarked to him about how mixed-up everything is in the world today, he said yes, he understood, but that we've

always got to keep in mind how nice it's going to be when we're all in Heaven. Then I said something I'm a little ashamed of now, I said that it didn't look as though we're all going to get to Heaven, all of us, that is. But the Reverend Ellsworth wasn't offended or impatient or anything, he just put his hand on my arm and reminded me that while superstitious men of the middle ages believed in hell fire we today know that hell is the unhappiness you make for yourself right here on earth. When you're feeling low it really takes an enlightened man like the Reverend Ellsworth to lift you up, so to speak, to make you realize how far we've come in the twentieth century.

You know, a real achievement of the modern world is the shorter working day. Why, early in the industrial revolution in England some workers never saw daylight, even the women and the young children. They went to work before dawn and they got out after dark. Today the working man has time to enjoy life a little, to spend some time with his family, to watch the seasons, so to speak. You really miss half of life if you miss the seasons as they come and go. Any well-rounded man thrills to the first little movements of spring, to the new colors, and to the coming of summer. It's part of living, noticing these things, and the shorter working day really makes it possible to keep in touch with nature. You can watch all the colors as they become muted, so to speak, and the humming of the insects in summer gives you a sort of lazy feeling, and when the sun shines on the sleeping cat, her fur becomes iridescent, like oil on water. And in autumn the leaves are brilliant and there's a sort of splendor in them, but pretty soon they begin to drop.

I hate the fall and winter. When I was ten my grandfather died and they took me to the funeral. It was a bleak day in November and the wind swept across the cemetery and

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I could feel the damp leaves slapping against my legs. I don't mean that this has anything to do with my hating the fall, I just don't like it, it depresses me. I guess it depresses everyone. The days are dismal and cold and it's a let-down after summer, that's all.

Of course, you notice it most up North here. I guess it's different down South. They don't have any fall down there, only summer. Well, someday I'll have money, and then each year come September, I'm going to get out of Berlin, out of Stockholm, out of Toronto, and go South. Maybe I'll go to Miami. Or maybe Sacramento. It'll be different there. There won't be any winter.

I'm afraid, monsieur, I'm really quite afraid.

The Twelve Steps

By WALES B. HENRY, '50

THERE are twelve steps or paces from the fore rail to the after rail on the flying bridge of a Liberty Ship. The ship was the *George Poindexter*. The time was the latter six months of 1945. The place was an area bounded by Boston, Halifax, England, France and New York. Within this expansive space I found myself confined, for the most part, to the limited area of the twelve steps on the flying bridge of the *Poindexter*. A ship is a mechanical island concerning which there is movement within movement; the movements of the people aboard in relation to the movement of the ship. But movement aboard a ship is restricted to space and space is a rare item on a loaded cargo ship. So it was that the discovery of twelve unimpeded steps in a straight line was considered by me a blessing however trivial it might seem to those who are accustomed to wide latitudes.

At night, when the work of the day was over or when duty called others to their tasks, it became my habit to go to the bridge and there to begin my nightly trip. How many miles I covered in this manner, beginning and walking to nowhere, I will never know. Neither do I know what caused me to keep track of the exact number of steps I took in covering the distance. I suppose that it was one of the many things that came into my mind and unconsciously I took note of it. For you see I never considered that all this time and energy was expended for no good purpose.



I WOULD LIKE TO RECOLLECT IN TRANQUILLITY

At night, up there on the bridge, I could be alone; to think a thousand thoughts, to meditate, to see the phenomenon of the sea, and even engage in a bit of *Walter Mitty* imagination.

During the day, the bridge was the focal point of all maritime and military operations. It was the nerve center of our mechanical island; a place where courses were plotted and orders were given, where decisions were made that affected our lives and where it seemed that often our lives were lived in the passing of a minute. To walk those twelve steps, day or night, was to walk in a different world.

The sea is a wonderful thing; in my mind perhaps the most awesome of God's creations. I like it and I like to be near it. I appreciate what old sailors mean when they talk of the *call of the sea*, for the *call* becomes implanted in your mind like a wonderful memory that you want to live again, over and over again. It is powerful and heady stuff and the appetite for it can only be appeased by going to sea. It is a man's world and there is a rugged beauty in it, and yet, like the thin line of the horizon, there is a delicate, fragile appeal that strikes to the heart of the most hardened. Perhaps it was because I appreciated all this to such a high degree, that I allowed my mind to dwell on a variety of subjects. Remembering, hoping and mostly pondering on impressions; that's what it was. Recalling duty and being called to it; that was a great part of it. There were twelve steps, you see, but they were the most wonderful path a man ever walked.

And now, far from the sea and what it meant, I would like to recollect in tranquillity. Some of the recollections have been dimmed by time, and tranquillity is a scarce commodity in these days, but perhaps I could give you a thought for each step that I took, there on the flying bridge of the *Poindexter*.

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This is an amorphous bit of writing; there is no plot, no moral, no point to be made or absorbed, but the thinking and writing of it has given satisfaction to me and perhaps the reading of it will give pleasure to you.

THE FIRST STEP

“Stand by to cast off. Tug lines secure. Cast off ya bow line, suh. Half astern now, easy, steady as she goes. Sta’bo’rd ya helm suh. Hard ta sta’bo’rd.”

So this is good-bye Boston. Heigh-ho and a voyage to sea. Next stop, Halifax. From there—Newport? Cardiff? Liverpool? Southampton? or maybe France. I hope it’s France. We have no ports in France yet, just a strip of land, but by the time we get there, perhaps Cherbourg or LeHarve. Bust loose Patton-boy and let me see France. *C’est la vie. C’est la guerre. Je suis un soldat Americaine. Avez-vous la liquer.* My high-school French ought to come in handy now. It ought to be France. It ought to be France. The orders say so—if we have a port there. “Vessel has been loaded to discharge at a Northwest France Port. The Port will be designated prior to your arrival . . .” I wonder how many of the stevedores on the dock know that. It’s uncanny how they can tell the port a ship is going to by the type of cargo they stow aboard. Yet, in actuality, only a very few people know where we are headed, or the sailing date, or the convoy route.

. . . information affecting the National Defense of the United States within the meaning of the Espionage Act, 50 U. S. C., 31 and 32, as amended. Its transmission or the revelation of its contents in any manner to an unauthorized person is prohibited by law.

The law of the tight lip is the first law of the survival of the fittest these days. Zip your lip and save a ship.

“Well Henry, we’re on our way at last.”

"Yes, so we are, Russ. I wonder how long it will be before we get back here again?"

"Three to six months I guess. Last run to Beni-Saf took seven months. If we hit England it will be a quick turnover. If we hit France it will take time. I was talking to a fellow on the *Livermore* and he said they were sending the ships to the beaches and unloading them with ship's gear into LCTs. That takes time."

"Of course if the weather holds . . ."

"That's an unknown factor."

"We're pulling into the stream fast."

"Yeah. Look, there's your blonde on the dock."

"Where?"

"Over by the crane. See her? Did you go out with her last night?"

"I see her. Yes, I went out with her."

"Good time?"

"Good and expensive. Four dollar taxi fare out to her house."

Four dollars to her house. It was a big house set out almost in the country; a rambling, old-English type of place. I unlocked the door for her and she invited me in. We went to the kitchen where we foraged in the ice-box and she made coffee and I made the sandwiches along with the small talk. Why is it that pretty girls, even Radcliffe girls, are content with small talk? It was a quick snack. Time always goes fast when you don't want it to. Just when I was beginning to appreciate Boston and blondes and aquavit and beer at the Viking. I didn't tell her I was leaving today but I guess she knew. I guess she knew that it was our first date and our last date for quite a while but she had sense enough not to mention it. In the hallway it was warm and dark and I wanted to stay

The Twelve Steps

but I knew I had to go. I opened the door a bit and the cold came in like a gentle breath. I kissed her and she said, "I'll see you soon again?" I lied and said, "Yes" and kissed her again and walked three blocks till I got a taxi back to the Base. Now that she sees the ship pulling out, she knows that I lied to her last night, but

"Pardon me. I didn't hear you Russ."

"I said the ship in Berth 3 is pulling out too. She must be going to join our convoy."

"Good thing. I hope we have plenty of company. Here comes the pilot boat."

"Well you have no more need of me Captain. Good trip."

"Ya. Tank you. This is goot ship. Ve haf goot voyage. Mate, put de Yacobs ladder over de side for de pilot. Goot day, sir."

So we leave Boston. Destination uncertain. Length of voyage uncertain. Probability of arrival uncertain. Route uncertain. Method of discharge uncertain. Weather uncertain. From here on in it's up to God and the commanding general. We're passing through the gates.

"Red, signal our identification numbers."

"Yes, Mr. Miller."

BO-765

BO-765

BO-765

* * * THE SECOND STEP * * *

"How is Halifax?"

"Fair, Fred. You didn't miss much though by staying abroad."

"Well, it was the last chance to get ashore and stretch my legs a bit."

"You would have stretched them climbing up the hills, Fred."

"How did the conference go? The old man started to tell me but the chief came in and interrupted."

"It was pretty interesting, Fred. We went to the Naval College and they gave us passes. Sparks was taken to some other building and we went to the main conference room. When we got there it was pretty well filled. Finally they locked the doors and called the roll. This is a big convoy, Fred; about eighty ships. A Canadian Commander briefed us on the situation at sea. We leave here tonight; head out on the great circle route and after two days pick up a convoy from St. Johns. On the third day a large convoy from New York joins us. That will put us over one-hundred eighty ships."

"What have we got for protection?"

"A fleet of corvettes and an aircraft carrier. She is one of those reconverted merchant jobs, carrying a part cargo of grain. But she will have five or six planes and scout for us in clear weather. Outside of that they will give us air coverage from Halifax and Greenland as far as possible."

"That's sweet of 'em. No destroyers?"

"They claim we're lucky to get what we have."

"Lucky, hell. Do you know when I went to Murmansk we had a carrier, destroyers and a Limey battlewagon."

"Times are different and so is the situation."

"Any report on subs?"

"They triangulated one off the banks and they know of a couple going into the Irish Sea."

"Good. That makes everything cozy. What position did we draw?"

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"We were fortunate Fred. Third column in from the left, fifth ship; the carrier in the middle rear and the ammo ships in the center. The outboard ships are carrying rations. When the other convoys join us we will be well into the center."

"That's a break."

"Yes. The commodore will be the carrier. The Commander said they lost three ships last crossing but they don't expect trouble this time."

"They don't. Well that's fine. That's just fine."

"You don't sound too optimistic, Fred."

"Me, I'm always optimistic. I'm even happy when the rest of the crew has channel fever. But between you and me and the bulkhead, I always feel best when we put back into port and I see the wife again. That's why I like a nice center spot and plenty of protection on the horizon; just to make sure I get back to Boston after every trip. This stuff of being a hero and riding the outside lane is for the single guys. There's no thrill to this business, not after the first few trips. That's why I always take the good-luck predictions with a grain of salt. Sure, they always say no trouble but they don't tell that to the sub skippers."

"I agree with you Fred."

"They're not sure of a port?"

"They say Cherbourg is open but it's a mess. The Germans still have LeHavre and are blowing the docks. If we don't unload in England they will work us on the beaches."

"I hope it's England."

"We'll know when we get there."

"Sure. Here comes Danny to relieve me. Let's go below and see if the steward left any meat in the ice-box. It's getting cold up here."

“I could use a cup of coffee, Fred. A fresh cup. I’ll make it.”

* * * THE THIRD STEP * * *

Feel the ship as it shudders and plunges into the trough of the waves. Hear the propellor as it beats vainly, searching for the solid feel of the water and finding only the void of air. The sea has gone mad and is churning itself into fury. Nature is rampaging in protest against Man. The water swells to massive heights and breaks to canyon depths. White foam, like beaten egg froth, caps the green madness and slides over and around each sharp contour. The ship snaps and rolls and one moment I am held far above the jagged fury and in the next I am plunged into it. Spray beats through the air, stinging my eyes, wetting my face. The taste of salt is in my throat. There is noise and sound. The wind whines and shrieks in rising crescendo. Nature and the sea are singing a wild unrestrained aria in mixed and hoarse voices. This is madness. How can we hope to survive this mighty force? Rather I wonder when we shall be plunged far down into the cold depths in forced search of placid water. The bow drives into the yielding wall and rears up again like a wild colt. There is no gun watch there tonight for the deck is awash with a swirling torrent that could suck a man into the fathomless, watery wastes. The wind and the sea and nature and the whole world have gone insane. I feel a mad impulse to scream into the shrieking, whipping wind.

* * * THE FOURTH STEP * * *

“ . . . and despite the fact that Patton is going up . . . ”

“Hey steward, where is the sugar?”

“Why I had some over in the . . . ”

The Twelve Steps

What's that? We're hit. We're heeling over. There goes my coffee, all over me. Straighten out. Straighten out. Watch the others. I've got to get topside.

"We're hit!"

"Torpedo!"

". . . get the hell out of here!"

Where are they all goin'? We can't all get out one door. Out this way. There! Good! No, I'll try to get to my room. We've straightened out. Up the stairs, ladder, stairs. Funny nobody cares about nautical terms now. The door is locked; where's the key? It's about half a minute since it happened. Where in hell is the key? No time to waste. There! Now what do I want? The papers? Here they are. Pistol? No. Cigarettes? Life preserver? Let's get out of here. Let's get out of here. I won't need the rubber suit. We're near to shore. It must be a minute now. I guess I have all I need. A minute is all I can risk. Keep a cool head. Keep a cool head. Parka will keep me warm. Put it on outside. Outside! Outside! Get outside! At last! It looks all right here. Nobody by the life boats. I had better go to the bridge. Up this ladder. There! Good!

"What happened, Russ?"

"That Liberty rammed our bow. See her off our port. Looks like she is ripped open."

There she is. Her plates are all torn out. I can see into her engine room. There are men in there. If she is ever shipping water into her engine room . . . I guess we are all right. The bow Russ said. The mate is down there.

"Vat is de damage, Chief. Confound dat idiot. He cut right across our bow."

"Here comes another one, Captain. He is going in front of us."

“Illuminate de ship! Full astern! Full astern! Look at dat idiot. Where he tink he going? I can’t move mit both anchors down. He bound to be carried on us. Yumpin yimminy look at him come!”

CRRRRRAAASSSHHH!!!

“Watch out below.”

Hang on! Hang on! Forty-five degrees. We can’t go all the way. I hope nobody is in the forepeak. Easy! Easy! Back to normal. She’s sliding past us. Sure is riding high in the water. There are no more out there. Two collisions in four minutes. Nothing the old man can do about it. I’ll have to go down into the hold to check the cargo, to see if we’re shipping water. The mate will be going down. The locomotives on deck; if they ever come loose they will tear the ship apart.

“We’re ripped to the waterline in the forepeak compartment. We aren’t taking any water. Our port anchor is gone and you better take a check, Captain, because I think we’re drifting.”

“Red, get dat blinker from de Capetown. No, Chief, ve’re holding fast. Ah, Russ, nobody down there vas there? Is the gun all right?”

“The gun tub is bent but the gun is all right. There was one kid in the bow but he’s not hurt. Just scared. I’d like to have some of your whiskey for him.”

“Ya, here is de . . .”

Thank God, we’re all right. I had better bring this stuff back to the room and check the cargo. The deck looks all right.

“Tall them ya, ve can go Southampton for repairs. In de morning, ya, ve go then.”

The Twelve Steps

* * * THE FIFTH STEP * * *

Southampton!

It hardly seems possible that we are leaving this city. We spent such a short time here; so short and so enjoyable. Twelve days ago we limped in at half speed, our bow ripped to the waterline, our anchor gone and our nerves pretty much on edge from forty-five days at Utah beach. Now we are leaving with a new bow, a new anchor, less some cargo and in good spirits. We're leaving to return to the beach.

Southampton!

The long docks, the flour mills, the landing craft floating about in organized confusion; all these things seem such a familiar part of the scene about us. And now it's all turning into a memory. It's turning into a memory just as fast as this ship moves along the channel to the sea.

Southampton!

I am filled with good memories and bad ones. Remember the dances at the Guild Hall where the English girls tried in vain to keep in step with the exuberant American sailors—and the LST loaded with American wounded from the continent; reddened and limbless bodies on dirty stretchers? Remember the train ride to Swindon with the two R. A. F. pilots when you were searching for Father Kelly and the Catholic paratrooper chaplain who let you sleep on a cot in front of the altar and drank beer with you that night—and the blocks of rubble, half cleared, where homes used to stand? Remember the dinner dance at the Polygon Hotel with the Lord-Mayor of Southampton presiding and the Lords and Ladies in the same room with you; your first look at royalty—and the sullen faced German prisoners who spat on the ground as you walked by? Remember how you laughed when you saw the Scotch soldier in kilts—and how your laughter stuck in your throat

when you saw an empty sleeve where an arm should have been?
Southampton!

The last part of the city I can see as dusk comes to claim it is the tall, thin tower of the Civic Center. That was where I met Beryl. Just in jest I met her. Remember?

"Red, I'm in a good mood tonight. Point out a pretty girl and I'll dance with her."

"O. K. How about that one over there; the one talking with the Limey soldier?"

"May I have this dance?"

"The music has stopped."

"I'll sing."

"Heaven forbid."

"Heaven forbid that the beginning of such an interesting acquaintance should be terminated by the whim of an orchestra leader. There, the music has started again. And now . . ."

"Now we shall dance."

And how we danced that night, Beryl, you and I. When the dance was over I got your coat and we walked out into the blackness. Someone stepped between us and I thought that I had lost you for I could not see. I called to you and you laughed and shone a torch on the ground. "You Americans know how to fight a war but it takes an English civilian to manage in a blackout." I held your hand and we walked; through the park, past the rubble, between the air-raid shelters and down the narrow streets till we came to your house. It was a small house that had lost its identity in a row of exact neighbors. We sat on the porch and talked of you and of myself, of England and America. Did we talk of shoes and ships and Sir Stafford Cripps? I don't remember, Beryl, because the moon came out and you turned to look at it.

The Twelve Steps

So we spent our days together and we saw Southampton; the ruins, the old wall, the gate and the fort. We went to the Guild Hall, the Polygon and the cinema and danced at the Court Royal. You were happy and you made me that way. It was good to see you laugh, Beryl; your mother said you seldom laughed since the day only you and three others left your bombed schoolroom. It made me sad to see you cry when I gave you those two dresses because I had ration coupons and you did not. And Beryl, I know what your father meant when he said, "We old people can live like this, but it's not right for the children to be brought up in the blackness."

Last night I almost missed you, Beryl. I went to the Guild Hall and counted out two shillings admittance but the doorkeeper said the hall was filled and they were admitting no more. I stood back while he told two R. A. F. pilots the same. They left, dejected.

"It's a fine night out, Sir."

"Aye, it is that now."

"Two bad those two boys couldn't get in. Great bunch, that R. A. F. Credit to England."

"Aye, they are that."

He was a bit proud of them, I could see.

"Have a smoke?"

"Don't mind if I do."

"You know, I had hoped to meet a young lady inside. Told her I'd see her here tonight. But I guess I'm too late. Here, have a couple of smokes. I've, ah, I've plenty."

"Blimey, thanks Yank."

"So there's no chance of getting in?"

"Well now I . . . you see they told me . . ."

"I understand. Here, you take the rest of the pack."

Won't do me any good seeing as how I have to go back to the ship."

"You wouldn't be bribin' me, would ya?"

"I might be—but that wouldn't be right. Would it?"

"It wouldn't be right that I'd let you in either, but get along. Keep your shillin's and buy a drink. Yanks ain't got morals at all."

"No sir. Just gum and cigarettes. Many thanks."

You laughed, Beryl, when I told you about it. You said, like you often did, that the Yanks were "Impossible." You laughed last night and were so happy that when I left you I could not tell you that time had run out. So I said, "I'll see you tomorrow." Well, right now is tomorrow for me, Beryl, and for you tomorrow never came. But your brother left like this one night. And that young British corporal left in the same manner—and never returned. So I know you will understand that tonight we are slipping down to the sea. I won't be back this way again, Beryl, but some day, when they turn the lights on again, you will know it was for the best.

Southampton!

I can see no more of you and the fog is setting in.

* * * THE SIXTH STEP * * *

It is so quiet out here. I can see so far into the night—way out to the horizon. There, there is a corvette edging along on the rim of the earth. It is cold and the night breezes waft the air into my lungs with a moist freshness flavoured with salt. The roof of the sky is black and peppered with stars. It is grey, silver, ghostly grey, where the moon slides through the fleece. It is all so big and I am so small as I stand here on the slippery deck plates and look into space—or is it eternity? It seems that as I look into this great vastness, I under-

The Twelve Steps

stand better the Divine Plan. But for Him I would be as nothing in the midst of all this grandeur, this cold, damp grandeur. Nothing, nothing at all. It is on nights like this that I feel I can almost see God out there somewhere just beyond the brink of the sea-line, somewhere between the earth and the moon, watching all this going on, seeing me, knowing me, caring for me.

Look! There is a star falling, describing a great arc across the heavens, a flaming trajectory. So too Satan in his fall, a great light extinguished for all time. Is this God's way of showing us the temporary span of our lives? Will some yet unborn scientist realize His Will as he surveys the molten meteor?

This is a great cathedral composed of space and the ships of the convoy are communicants approaching a distant altar rail somewhere far ahead. It is impossible to be here and see all this and doubt in God. Man of himself could never compose such silent, awful beauty.

* * * THE SEVENTH STEP * * *

I wish something would happen. Something, anything; it's too quiet here tonight. Perhaps Sparks—no, Mr. Miller is with him. Two days now. It's choppy tonight. Barometer falling. They won't work us tomorrow. DUCWs won't attempt it. This place is folding up. It's too dark to see the breakwater. Why don't they give us some word? I'm getting tired of . . .

"Red! Red! There it is! Over there, just astern of that coaster. Are they calling us?"

Clack-de-clack-de-clackety-clack

"Yeah!"

BO-765-BO-765-Pro-ceed-H-M-S-Cape-town-Utah-Prairie-at-zero-five-zero-zero-tomorrow - - - - -

"Fred, this is for us to proceed. Get the old man and Mr. Miller. Never mind, here's the skipper. Get Mr. Miller."

Re - ceive - rout - ing - instr - uct - ions - to - Cher - bourg - operations - sus - pen - ded - here - - - - -

"That's all. What do you want me to tell 'em?"

"Have 'em repeat it, Red, and then tell 'em to stand by. Did you get that, Captain? 0500, proceed to the Capetown for instructions to Cherbourg. Here you are, Russ. We head for the Capetown in two hours and then Cherbourg. Anything you want to tell them ashore?"

"Yeah! Have 'em ask Jones where he will get his liquor when we're gone? I haven't anything to tell them. Everything all right by you, Captain?"

"Ya, by yumpin yimminy I bane ready for month now."

"O. K. Red, signal them that we understand and will comply."

"Yes sir."

Clack-de-clackety-clack-clack-de-clack

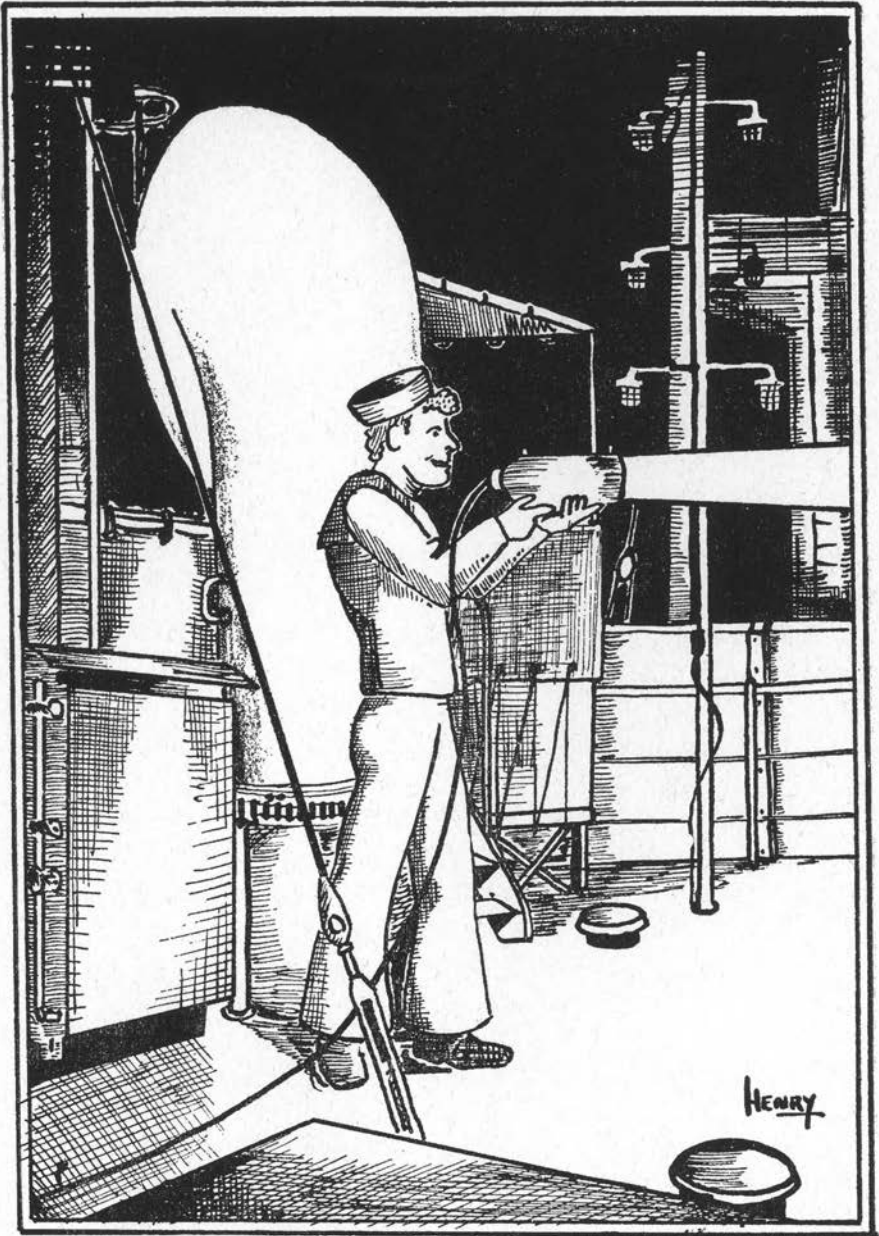
"Mr. McBride, tall de chief to gat op steam. Ve veigh anchor at 0500. Und have de first mate come to de chart room right away."

"I'm going below for a cup of coffee. How about it?"

"I'll be with you in a little while, Russ. I want to see if Hank sends any word."

"O. K."

Cherbourg! Cherbourg tomorrow! After five months we are finally on the move again. Hank will most likely head for Antwerp. I wonder if he will ever get back to Mae? She'll be waiting. Waiting. That's all we ever do now. A month here, a month there, three months somewhere else. I wonder how long it will be in Cherbourg? I wonder what Suzy is doing tonight? Dear Suzy, you'd love to see Cherbourg; Cher-



"SIGNAL THEM THAT WE UNDERSTAND AND WILL COMPLY"

bourg and Reykjavick and Milford Haven and a hundred other places I've gone without you. Not really without you, Suzy, because you have been in my mind; like last night when I showed Fred your picture. I told him that if I thought you cared a whit I'd—. Well there is no sense in reaching for the moon is there? There's no sense in it and yet—. Well.

"Red, if anything else comes, Mr. Miller and I will be in the salon. Call us will you? Do you want a cup of coffee or a sandwich or anything?"

"No. I get relieved in half an hour. I'll call you if anything happens."

"Thanks, Red."

* * * THE EIGHTH STEP * * *

The mist rolls on over the water, and the shadowy outline of ships is darkly visible as the full moon tries to illuminate the chill drear of the night.

The fields stretch out to meet an invisible horizon, while the little groups of houses crowd each other for warmth in the vastness of flat earth around them.

Clouds gather in the gloom and seem to trust that their silver fleece hides within their bosoms the glowing, roaring terror of inanimate things that exist as a cruel afterthought bred of human baseness.

The ground does not long show the ragged scars that were inflicted on it; but it looks richer and more fertile for the blood of devotion of some willing but bewildered youth, that was shed there such a short time ago.

It is so serene here that one forgets, but listen—hear the constant rumble, see the intermittent flashes that illuminate the distant sky, and quite suddenly make one conscious of the weight of a pistol by one's side.

The Twelve Steps

Peace seems so logical as I stand here in the cool, cool night and I wonder at the mysteries of the holocaust before me and anticipate the feelings I will know, when we go to meet the constant rumble and the intermittent flashes.

Distance and time are not unreal. The conscience, mind, heart and soul that is me seems so infinite in the vast grandeur of the cool, peaceful night.

* * * THE NINTH STEP * * *

“ ‘Morning, Fred. It’s cold up here.”

“Huh. Cold he says. It’s freezin’.”

“Agreed. Remember, Fred, it was on a morning like this that we met Hank Jones. Just as cold and just as foggy.”

“It was. Hank was a good fellow. You and he became pretty good buddies. But the rest of them—I don’t know. It must have been a matter of personality.”

“I guess so, Fred. When the other men came aboard the ship the first thing they said was, “I was here on D-day”, or something like that, and then they asked for a drink and then they started to work. But Hank was different. He didn’t mention D-day, started to work first and *then* had a drink. I can remember my first meeting with him —

* * * * *

“The name is Jones, Hank Jones. 519th Port Battalion.”

“Henry.”

“Glad to meet ’cha. Now if you’ll give me your loading plan we’ll start in.”

“The booms are rigged over two, three and four, Hank. You can start those right now.”

“What’s the matter with one and five?”

"You can work one if you want to. I'll get the mate to rig the booms."

"And five?"

"Not now."

"Why?"

"Loaded with whiskey. I'll need M. P.'s."

"Whiskey?"

"Medical Corps supplies."

"Damn!"

"That's the way I feel too, Hank, but I'll have to have guards before I can crack it open."

"Sergeant, put the crew on two, three and four. Uncover the hatches and I'll get the loading plans to you. Let's see the mate about number one."

"I suppose you could do with a drink, Hank. Something to warm you up before you start on the hatches."

"I can always use a drink—but later. First we see the mate. Where's the Navy?"

"I signalled ashore for them. Looks like two LCTs coming over now. Are you going to use your DUCWs?"

"I'll use the lifeboats if I have to in order to get the stuff off."

"Good. The light cargo for the DUCWs is in number three. The LCTs pull abreast of two and four. When did you arrive in France, Hank?"

"I got here with the rest of the tribe. A day too soon."

"Hank, you and I are going to get along."

"I know we are. I'm easy to get along with."

* * * * *

"— and that's the way it went, Fred. He was a terrific worker. No bluff at all. He produced. Got more tonnage off per day than any other man they sent out.

The Twelve Steps

"What hatch did he work the best?"

"Oh. I guess it was number five. The one with the whiskey."

* * * THE TENTH STEP * * *

"Fred, did you ever stop to think that a service record might be a good thing to have when this is all over? Like right now you are making good money and you have a good job and responsibility and all that sort of thing, but it would be just as easy for you to be in the Navy and do the same job there and have a record to boot."

"Service record! Huh! What good is a service record to me? Sure, I know you fellows will get the bonus and the G. I. Bill and all that, and us suckers out here will be told that we made our pile during the war and we can't expect much more. But that's not the only thing that counts. See, I like the business of going to sea. I want to make a career out of it. I want to learn something and I can do it best on a merchant ship with the Merchant Marine. Take the Navy now; one guy learns to drop the hook, another learns to navigate, this guy learns to push a radio key, that guy learns to man a gun. The war is over. I walk into the Waterman Steamship Lines office and say, "I want a job." So they ask my experience and I tell them I was in the Navy. They tell me to come back later. But as it is, I have my ticket. I'm the second mate on this ship. In a couple of months I'll be a first mate. After the war I can go into a steamship company and produce a bill of goods. They know I know my job. I have to know it or I don't get the ticket to be a mate in the first place."

"There's a whale of a lot of first mates floating around, Fred."

"Sure, but not all of them are going to stick it out. Look at it this way. With a first mate's ticket I can still sail as sec-

ond or third mate, but with a service record and no ticket I stay at home. No, that's not for me. Some day I'm going to be up there on the bridge of a big ship; not a *George Poin-dexter*, but a big job. You don't get up there but what you do it the hard way. This is the hard way right here. Let the people talk about being in the service. I'm doing my part and I'm not particular who knows it. I have an end in mind and this is the best means."

"I know what you mean, Fred. I wish I were certain of what I am going to do after I get out. But with me it's just a matter of going along and hardly knowing what to expect from tomorrow. The ship will go somewhere and I'll go with it. So far, two and a half years in the service; just like time out the window and maybe it will be another year or two before I get out. What happens from there is beyond me. You stick with the sea, Fred. Other fellows go back to good jobs. I don't want to go back to my old job. Some fellows want to be lawyers, some want to be doctors. I don't know what I want to do. So I'll go to school I guess. At least there I can lay the groundwork for something better. The only thing that bothers me about that is I'll be pretty old when I get out; twenty-eight, twenty-nine or thirty. You're lucky, Fred. You know what you want and you can go after it. You've a goal, something to work for, something to look forward to. I wish I were as certain about the future."

* * * THE ELEVENTH STEP * * *

New York. Somewhere a muted trumpet whines; I know it does for that is part of this great city, part of the Rhapsody in Blue—street lights and taxi horns and opening nights somewhere along the glitter. But who cares about us on the North River tonight, who knows the exhilaration of "coming home again"? The bulk of this ship is a noiseless thing as it

The Twelve Steps

slips back to civilization. Thousands of lights in myriad banks cluster along the river front, reaching up to man-made heights—red and green neon refracting through the settling snow. Busy tugs bleat their horny signals as they bustle briskly about us in the half-light of the stream. Oily river—ship shapes not moving from their anchor chains as we glide by—when do you leave in convoy for the Beach or the town; broken, beaten towns with remains of wharves to spew your guts on.

Who cares about this shipload of anxious men who will be absorbed into the life stream of the Big City—to pollute it, with grease from the engine room and rotten liquor from the crew's quarters, somehow saved till the last day? The night air is cold and my cigarette smokes my eyes as I look at the scene—is it smoke—or is it tears at the sight of this portal to home. Tonight we lie here on the cold North River, till tomorrow. But New York goes on and on and does not recognize us. There have been too many of us coming and going along the dark, cold river of late, sneaking like thieves to the sea and coming back.

People live up there among the lights—people like myself, full of the ambitions and love of living. Do they know about me down here as I lean on the rail of this ship and look up to them and wonder about them. I hope that they will look out of their windows and say to themselves, "There is another, I wonder where she comes from?"

Here is Fred, standing into the wind, spitting the loose ends of his cigarette from his lips. He has piloted us through many hard watches and tomorrow will bring its reward when he phones his wife from the dock and the months of waiting will be nullified for both. Mr. Zybkowski will go ashore to the ever-new delights of his adopted country and the livid scar of the thought of his ravished Poland will heal a bit in the joyous atmosphere of Christmas-time. Captain Pedersen will

discharge the companies' business in a downtown office and come back to his love—his ship. Sparks will enter the city with many good resolutions; he will bide his time till the day he encounters the eventful bout of intoxication. He will spend his money, lose it or give it away and then he will go back to sea again.

And I will part from this company tomorrow and pass quickly through the city to Grand Central and home. In my gear will be a box of cigars for Dad and a bottle of gin for Mr. C——, and I will be home for Christmas eve.

But tonight we anchor on the cold, dark river.

* * * THE TWELFTH STEP * * *

Well, we're tied up. We're home again at last. Let's see, there ought to be some cabs up that street. I'll try it. Gear all packed? Papers disposed of? No, I've got to call Boston. I'll do that from the station. Customs cleared and I've got my receipt for meals. I guess that's about all except to say good-bye. I wonder what the next bunch of fellows will be like? I wonder if the next ship will be as good as this one? Perhaps this will be my last ship. I wouldn't mind that. Ah well, it can't last much longer. I'll miss this ship. It's a good ship; the *George Poindexter*, BO 765 out of Boston. Better than five months aboard and how much of that time did I spend right here on the bridge? Let's see, it's ten o'clock. If I get a cab now I can get to the station in a half hour, eat and get a train about twelve. A good deal of time, right up here on the bridge, thinking and working and talking and seeing things that I may never see again. Those were good hours. Perhaps all this time hasn't been wasted.

Well, it's good to be back.

So long, *George Poindexter*. Happy sailing.

I'd better get going.

The Commander's Husband

By RAYMOND L. SCUNGIO, '50

I SUPPOSE I should have known what I was letting myself in for when I married Edythe. But it was one of those things. The war ended. My job packing gas masks had folded leaving me out of work. Then the girls started coming home.

Perhaps the uniform got me, but when a not-unattractive WAC asked me to help push her stalled Buick, how could I refuse? It was the least I could do for a veteran, I thought.

Putting my shoulder to the car, I pushed with all my strength. The car moved, and I slipped down into a puddle of water. I was wet and embarrassed, but the WAC was very kind. She made me sit at the wheel, and she got out and pushed. After the car started, she drove me home as I was rapidly catching cold. That's how I met Edythe.

A period of courtship followed. That is, Edythe courted me. She phoned every day while I was sick with the cold. When I had recovered, I proceeded to entertain the returning veteran by showing her the town. Or perhaps it was the other way around. I showered her with gardenias (the small ones), and she showered me with war souvenirs. We were very happy. And then one night I found that I had proposed. I am still not sure of how it happened.

I was against a large wedding, which I'm told is natural on the part of the male, but Edythe was firm. And since it

The Commander's Husband

kitchen briskly, wearing her new uniform. I snapped to attention.

"No, dear, you don't have to do that," she laughed, "not when we're alone."

I prepared the commander's breakfast on the double.

If I thought the house had had the air of an army camp before, it was nothing compared to what it became then. The commander no longer walked — she marched! Everywhere and all the time. The girls in blue completely invaded our home. The house was cluttered with legion standards, legion literature, and other legion paraphernalia. The living room had become general headquarters.

The commander and her lieutenants were always holding secret meetings—usually in the small hours of the morning. I was never allowed to sit in on these conferences. Nevertheless, I had to sit in the kitchen ready to serve coffee and sandwiches whenever one of the commander's aides shouted an order. After the meetings, the commander and her cohorts would troop out. Presumably they were going on some secret mission.

When the commander attended her post meetings, it was necessary, she said, for me to be present. I attended, but only as a bystander. In fact, the women went out of their way to avoid me. Whenever I approached a group of happily chatting girls, they would suddenly stop talking, and one would invariably mutter:

"Watch it; here comes the commander's husband."

During elections for the city's new mayor, Edythe joined the party backed by the legion. Campaigning day and night, she gave speeches both over the radio, and on the city squares. For a while I wondered if she were running for office herself. When the election returns came in, her candidate had lost.

The Commander's Husband

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Whatever civic problem came up, there was Edythe. Saving fats, relief for Europe, Community Chest, Clean-Up-The-City week, and More-Milk-For-Orphans week. It began to look as if she were the controlling factor in the city.

Then one afternoon when I returned home from work, I found the commander and her loyal group assembled in the living room. The air was tense. The commander was at her desk writing dispatches industriously. One by one her lieutenants would step forward to receive the folded sheets of paper and then regain their positions around the room.

The commander said at last: "All right, you girls have your instructions. Meet here tonight at eleven to make your reports."

With that, the girls bustled out, brushing past me in the hall as they would a hat rack. After they had gone, I felt it was safe for me to talk to the commander.

"Well, my sweet," I said, "what's new on the western front?"

"This is no time for jokes, dear," she said, smiling indulgently. "My term as commander is almost over. Elections for new officers are being held next month, and I'm a bit worried."

"You're running for a second term?"

"Why, yes. I feel that it's the least I can do for the organization. Who else is there to take my place?"

I said nothing.

The next few weeks were ones of feverish activity on the part of the commander and her lieutenants. The girls rushed in and out of the house at all hours. I kept the coffee flowing for the girls—by order of the commander. Besides the legionnaires, many other people came to visit the commander during the campaign. Among them was a strange man

The Catholic Novel: Its Problems

indeed, for the author of that book to bear criticism from a viewpoint which concerns only a few of the reading public.

An examination of this problem brings to light a number of formidable obstacles in the path of developing a fiction which is integrally Catholic without detracting from its essential character as fiction.

To me it seems that the most important of these obstacles to be faced is the absence of anything like a tradition in Catholic letters as far as the English novel is concerned. Montgomery Carmichael, himself a successful English author, states in a symposium on the novel that "Besides starting late, the novel began under difficulties unexperienced by those who worked in poetry. One of the most notable . . . was the complete absence of a guiding tradition. Patmore could and did turn for help and guidance to Dante; Thompson and Hopkins to Southwell and Crashaw. But to who could Benson, Ayscough, Mrs. Ward turn—to what Catholic novelists?"

Without some guidance of a Catholic nature, our novelists have of necessity turned to what models exist. Being what it is, the modern novel has scarcely provided an apt frame for picturing life as it is viewed in the light of the Faith. Its beginnings were under Protestant and Humanitarian auspices, it has been influenced profoundly by "scientism" and psychological determinism, and, under the pressure of modern publishing and advertising techniques, its flavor and even its style have worked into a groove wherein the Catholic author cannot possibly turn out a Catholic novel.

The last mentioned influence on the modern novel, i. e. that of the publishing and book-selling demands, has created a problem even for non-Catholic authors, who complain about the steadily declining tastes of the reading public. It would seem that even naturalism has reached its saturation

point for authors. But as long as the public continues to provide a market for the type of "best-seller" now being put before them, authors who wish to sell their books have to write for that market.

Out of this comes the most pressing concern for those attempting to generate a Catholic fiction to offset the influence of modern popular fiction. Without doubt, the meager return to be realized upon the production of even a good Catholic novel has served to discourage many a really capable Catholic author. For side by side with this seemingly unprofitable venture of writing Catholic fiction, there exists the highly profitable career awaiting those capable men and women who can write for the current public taste. There is no doubt but that this has largely accounted for the failure of good Catholic novelists to turn out novels reflecting their religious background. The complaint of many authors throughout literary history that they have to eat has even greater force in the case of Catholic authors.

Even if there were to come about any appreciable improvement in the writing of Catholic novels, there exists one handicap upon the part of the reading public which would mitigate against their popularity. This is the appalling lack of appreciation which the reading public has for any fiction in which the attempt is made to plumb the problems of life to any depth. Fed for a generation by shallow and sentimental portrayals of life, the American reader seems unable to maintain interest in anything which goes deeper than the page it is written upon. In addition, on the part of Catholics, the general conception of Catholic literature is that the term applies to prayer books, missals, and religious magazines. Catholics seldom think of turning to Catholic books for their fiction.

¹ *Fiction by Its Makers*, by Francis X. Talbot, S. J.

The Catholic Novel: Its Problems

As with their business, Americans consider religion somehow barred from the field of reading for pleasure.

Thus we are faced with a threefold hamper upon all efforts to turn out Catholic fiction which will be good, will sell, and be read. Catholic authors lack a guiding tradition; there is little demand for the type of novel which we would like to see: and there is a barrier of understanding limiting appreciation of such a novel, were it produced.

Obviously, such tremendous handicaps will not easily be overcome. We *can* argue for a return to what literature there is that reflects the Christian way of life. If not in England or America, certainly on the European continent works have been produced which can really be called Catholic. To mention two of these: there are Sigrid Undset, whose *Kristin Lavransdatter* certainly stands head and shoulders above anything that England or America has produced either in its Catholic or its non-Catholic fiction; and Paul Bourget, a French novelist, whose success at portraying the result of living up to "scientism's" doctrines, was admirable.

A comprehension of these works and others might at least provide us with a new direction and some inspiration which reading the fiction of our own countries can never do.

The economic problem admittedly is a much tougher nut to crack. That something is at least being attempted in that direction, however, is evidenced by the awards currently offered by the Bruce Publishing Company of Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and The Christophers of New York, an organization devoted to promotion of Catholic activity in all fields of endeavor. The latter group seems to be enjoying some initial success in enlisting tangible support for its effort to provide financial rewards for Catholics who sacrifice more profitable ventures to write in a Catholic vein.

As to the public attitude toward Catholic literature, indeed, toward penetrative literature of any kind, we can only say that nothing will be achieved by catering continually to a public taste which we deplore. That taste must be improved and it will only be improved by a concerted effort to produce the kind of literature we wish to see them read. Success will certainly not be immediately forthcoming. Yet, if we are to admit that we cannot break out of the bonds which modern publishing practices has tied about us, we may as well fold our tents and steal away. It is to be doubted that we have yet reached that low a spirit.

