

CHAPTER ONE

MISS MATHILDA HOCKERSNICKLER of Upper Little Puddlepatch sat at her half opened window. The book she was reading attracted her whole attention. A funeral cortege went by without her shadow falling across the fine lace curtains adorning her windows. An altercation between two neighbours went unremarked by a movement of the aspidistra framing the centre of the lower window. Miss Mathilda was reading.

Putting down the book upon her lap for a moment, she raised her steel-rimmed spectacles to her forehead while she rubbed at her red-rimmed eyes. Then, putting her spectacles back in place upon her rather prominent nose, she picked up the book and read some more.

In a cage a green and yellow parrot, beady-eyed, looked down with some curiosity. Then there was a raucous squawk, 'Polly want out, Polly want out!'

Miss Mathilda Hockersnickler jumped to her feet with a start. 'Oh, good gracious me,' she exclaimed, 'I am so sorry my poor little darling, I quite forgot to transfer you to your perch.'

Carefully she opened the door of the gilt wire cage and, putting a hand inside, she lifted the somewhat tattered old parrot and gently drew him through the opened cage door. 'Polly want out, Polly want out!' squawked the parrot again.

'Oh, you stupid bird,' replied Miss Mathilda. 'You ARE out, I am going to put you on your perch.' So saying, she put the parrot on the crossbar of a five foot pole which at its distal end resulted in a tray or catch-pan. Carefully she put a little chain around the parrot's left leg, and then made sure that the water bowl and the seed bowl at one end of the support were full.

The parrot ruffled its feathers and then put its head beneath one wing, making cooing chirping noises as it did so. ‘Ah, Polly,’ said Miss Mathilda, ‘you should come and read this book with me. It’s all about the things we are when we are not here. I wish I knew what the author really believed,’ she said as she sat down again and very carefully and modestly arranged her skirts so that not even her knees were showing.

She picked up the book again and then hesitated half-way between lap and reading position, hesitated and put the book down while she reached for a long knitting needle. And then with a vigour surprising in such an elderly lady—she gave a wholly delightful scratch all along her spine between the shoulder blades. ‘Ah!’ she exclaimed, ‘what a wonderful relief that is. I am sure there is something wrong with my liberty bodice. I think I must have got a rough hair there, or something, let me scratch again, it’s such a relief.’ With that she agitated the knitting needle vigorously, her face beaming with pleasure as she did so.

With that item behind her, and her itch settled for the moment, she replaced the knitting needle and picked up the book. ‘Death,’ she said to herself, or possibly to the unheeding parrot, ‘if I only knew what this author REALLY believed about after death.’

She stopped for a moment and reached to the other side of the aspidistra bowl so that she could pick up some soft candies she had put there. Then with a sigh she got to her feet again and passed one to the parrot which was eyeing her very fiercely. The bird took it with a snap and held it in its beak. Miss Mathilda, with the knitting needle now in one hand again and candy in her mouth and the book in her left hand, settled herself again and continued her reading.

A few lines on she stopped again. ‘Why is it that the Father always says that if one is not a good Catholic—a good Church—attending Catholic—one is not able to attain to the Kingdom of Heaven? I wonder if the Father is wrong and if people of other religions go to Heaven as well.’ She lapsed into silence again except for the faint mumbling that she made as she tried to visualize some of the more un-

familiar words. Akashic Record, astral travel, the Heavenly Fields.

The sun moved across the top of the house and Miss Mathilda sat and read. The parrot, with head beneath a wing, slept on. Only an infrequent twitch betrayed any sign of life. Then a church clock chimed away in the distance and Miss Mathilda came to life with a jerk. 'Oh my goodness me—oh my goodness me,' she exclaimed, 'I've forgotten all about tea and I have to go to the Church Women's Meeting.' She jumped rapidly to her feet, and very carefully put an embroidered into the paperback book which she then hid beneath a sewing table.

She moved away to prepare her belated tea, and as she did so only the parrot would have heard her murmur, 'Oh, I do wish I knew what this author really believed—I do wish I could have a talk with him. It would be such a comfort!'

On a far off sunny island which shall be nameless, although, indeed, it could be named for this is true, a Gentleman of Colour stretched languorously beneath the ample shade of an age-old tree. Lazily he put down the book which he was reading and reached up for a luscious fruit which was dangling enticingly nearby. With an idle movement he plucked the fruit, inspected it to see that it was free of insects, and then popped it in his capacious mouth.

'Gee,' he mumbled over the obstruction of the fruit. 'Gee, I sure doan know what this cat is getting at. I sure do wish I knew what he really believed.'

He stretched again and eased his back into a more comfortable position against the bole of the tree. Idly he swatted at a passing fly, missing he let his hand continue the motion and it idly picked up his book again.

'Life after death, astral travel, the Akashic Record.' The Gentleman of Colour rifled through some pages. He wanted to get to the end of the stuff without the necessity of all the work involved in reading it word by word. He read a paragraph here, a sentence there, and then idly turned to another page. 'Gee,' he repeated. 'I wish I knew what he believed.'

But the sun was hot. The hum of the insects soporific.

Gradually the Gentleman of Colour's head sank upon his chest. Slowly his dark fingers relaxed and the paperback book slithered from his nerveless hands and slid down to the gentle sand. The Gentleman of Colour snored and snored, and was oblivious to all that went on about him in the mundane sphere of activity.

A passing youth glanced at the sleeping Negro and looked down at the book. Glancing again at the sleeper the youth edged forward and with prehensile toes reached and picked up the book which with bent leg he quickly transferred to his hand. Holding the book on the side away from the sleeper he moved away looking too innocent to be true.

Away he went into the little copse of trees. Passing through he came again into the sunlight and to a stretch of dazzling white sand. The boom of the breakers sounded in his ears but went unnoticed because this was his life, the sound of the waves on the rocks around the lagoon was an everyday sound to him. The hum of the insects and the chittering of the cicadas were his life, and, as such, unnoticed.

On he went, scuffling the fine sand with his toes for there was always a hope that some treasure or some coin would be unearthed for hadn't a friend of his once picked up a golden Piece of Eight while doing this?

There was a narrow strip of water dividing him from a spit of land containing three solitary trees. Wading he soon traversed the interruption and made his way to the space between the three trees. Carefully he lay down and slowly excavated a little pit to hold his hip bone. Then he rested his head comfortably against the tree root and looked at the book which he had filched from the sleeper.

Carefully he looked around to make sure that he was not observed, to make sure that no one was chasing him. Satisfied that all was safe, he settled back again and rubbed one hand through his woolly hair while with the other he idly turned over the book, first to the back where he read what the publisher had to say, and then he flipped the book over and studied the picture through half-closed slitted eyes and with furrowed brows and puckered lips as he muttered things incomprehensible to himself.

He scratched his crotch and pulled his pants to a more comfortable position. Then, resting on his left elbow, he flipped over the pages and started to read.

‘Thought forms, mantras, man-oh-man, ain't that shore sumpin! So maybe I could make a thought form and then Abigail would have to do whatever I wanted her to do. Gee man, yeh, I shore go for that.’ He rolled back and picked at his nose for a bit, then he said, ‘Wonder if I can believe all this.’

The shadowed recesses of the room exuded an atmosphere of sanctity. All was quiet except that in the deep stone fireplace logs burned and sputtered. Every so often a jet of steam would shoot out and hiss angrily at the flames, steam generated by moisture trapped within imperfectly dried logs. Every so often the wood would erupt in a little explosion sending a shower of sparks upwards. The flickering light added a strange feeling to the room, a feeling of mystery.

At one side of the fireplace a deep, deep armchair stood with its back facing the door. An old fashioned stand lamp made of brass rods stood beside the chair, and soft light was emitted from the medium powered electric light bulb concealed within the recesses of a green shade. The light went down, and then disappeared from sight because of the obstruction of the back of the chair.

There came a dry cough and the rustling of turning pages. Again there was silence except for the sputtering of a fire and for the regular fingering of paper as read pages were turned to reveal new material.

From the far distance there came the tolling of a bell, a tolling of slow tempo, and then soon there followed the shuffling of sandal-shod feet and the very soft murmur of voices. There was a clang of an opening door, and a minute later a hollow thud as the door was shut. Soon there came sounds of an organ and male voices raised in song. The song went on for some time and then there was rustling followed by silence, and the silence was destroyed by mumbling voices murmuring something incomprehensible but very well rehearsed.

In the room there was a startling slap as a book fell to the floor. Then a dark figure jumped up. 'Oh my goodness me, I must have fallen asleep. What a perfectly astonishing thing to do!' The dark robed figure bent to pick up the book and carefully opened it to the appropriate page. Meticulously he inserted a bookmark, and quite respectfully placed the book on the table beside him. For some moments he sat there with hands clasped and flurried brow, then he lifted from the chair and dropped to his knees facing a crucifix on the wall. Kneeling, hands clasped, head bowed, he muttered a prayer of supplication for guidance. That completed he rose to his feet and went to the fireplace and placed another log on the brightly glowing embers. For some time he sat crouched at the side of the stone fireplace with head cupped between his hands.

On a sudden impulse he slapped his thigh and jumped to his feet. Rapidly he crossed the dark room and moved to a desk concealed in the shadows. A quick movement, a pull at a cord, and that corner of the room was flooded with warm light. The figure drew back a chair and opened the lid of the desk, and then sat down. For a moment he sat gazing blankly at the sheet of paper he had just put before him. Absently he put out his right hand to feel for the book that wasn't there, and with a muttered exclamation of annoyance he rose to his feet and went to the chair to pick up the book deposited on the chair side table.

Back at the desk he sat and rifled through the pages until he found that which he sought—an address. Quickly he addressed an envelope and then sat and pondered, sorting out his thoughts, wondering what to do, wondering how to phrase the words he wanted to use.

Soon he put nib to paper and all was quiet except for the scratching of a nib and the ticking of a distant clock.

'Dear Dr. Rampa,' the letter commenced, 'I am a Jesuit priest. I am a lecturer in the Humanities at our College, and I have read your books with more than the normal interest.

'I believe that only those who follow our own form of religion are able to obtain Salvation through the blood of

Our Lord Jesus Christ. I believe that when I am teaching my students. I believe that when I am within the Church itself. But when I am alone in the dark hours of the night, when there is none to watch my reactions or analyze my thoughts then I wonder. Am I right in my Belief? Is there no one except a Catholic who may be saved? What of other religions, are they all false, are they all works of the devil? Or have I and others of my Belief been misled? Your books have shed much light and enabled me greatly to resolve the doubts of the spirit in which I am involved, and I would ask you, Sir, will you answer me some questions so that you may either shed some new light or strengthen that in which I believe.'

Carefully he appended his name. Carefully he folded the letter and was inserting it in the envelope when a thought occurred to him. Quickly, almost guiltily, he snatched out the letter, unfolded it, and indicted a postscript: 'I ask you of your honour as one devoted to your own Belief not to mention my name nor that I have written to you as it is contrary to the rules of my Order.' He initialled it, dried the ink, and then quickly inserted the folded letter in the envelope and sealed it. He fumbled among his papers until he found a book, and in that he made a note of the postage to Canada. Searching in drawers and pigeonholes eventually produced the appropriate stamps which were affixed to the envelope. The priest then carefully tucked the letter in the inner recesses of his gown. Rising to his feet he extinguished the light and left the room.

'Ah Father,' said a voice out in the corridor, 'are you going into the town or can I do anything for you there? I have to go on an errand and I should be happy to be of service to you.'

'No thank you, Brother,' replied the senior professor to his subordinate, 'I have a mind to take a turn in the town and to get some much needed exercise, so I think I will just stroll down to the main street.' Gravely they took a half bow to each other, and each went his own way, the senior professor went out of the age-old building of gray stone stained with age and half covered with climbing ivy. Slowly he walked

along the main drive, hands clasped about his crucifix, mumbling to himself as was the wont of those of his Order.

In the main street just beyond the great gate people bowed respectfully at his appearance, and many crossed themselves. Slowly the elderly professor walked down the street to the letter box outside the post office. Guiltily, surreptitiously he looked about him to see if any of his Order were nearby. Satisfied that all was secure he removed the letter from his robes and flicked it into the letter box. Then with a heartfelt sigh of relief he turned and retraced his steps.

Back in his private study, again by the side of the sparkling fire and with a well-shaded light casting illumination on his book, he read and read deep into the hours of the night. At last he closed the book, locked it away, and went off to his cell murmuring to himself, 'What should I believe, what should I believe?'

The lowering sky gazed dourly upon night-time London. The teeming rain swept down upon the shivering streets scurrying passers-by with grimly held umbrellas braced against the wind. London, the lights of London, and people hurrying home from work. Buses roared by, great giant red buses scattering water all over the sidewalks, and shivering groups of people trying to avoid the dirty spray.

In shop fronts people huddled in groups waiting for their own buses to come along, dashing out eagerly as a bus came along and then slinking back despondently as the indicators showed the wrong numbers. London, with half the city going home and another half coming on duty.

In Harley Street, the heart of London's medical world, a gray haired man paced restlessly on a bearskin rug in front of a roaring fire. Back and forth he strode, hands clasped behind his back, head bowed upon his chest. Then on impulse he flung himself into a well-padded leather armchair and pulled a book out of his pocket. Quickly he flipped through the pages until he found the passage he needed, a passage about the human aura. He read it again, and having read it turned back and read it once more. For a time he sat gazing into the fire, then he nodded in resolution and

jumped to his feet. Quickly he left the room and went into another. Carefully he locked the door behind him and went to his desk. Pushing aside a lot of medical reports and certificates yet to be signed, he sat down and took some private notepaper from a drawer.

‘Dear Dr. Rampa,’ he wrote in an almost indecipherable handwriting, ‘I have read your book with absolute fascination, a fascination heightened very greatly by my own belief — by my own knowledge — that what you write is true.’

He sat back and carefully read what he had just written, and to be quite sure he read it once again before resuming, ‘I have a son, a bright young fellow, who recently had an operation to his brain. Now, since that operation, he tells us that he is able to see strange colours around human bodies, he is able to see lights about the human head, but not only the human head, not only the human body - animals as well. For some time we have thought deeply on this matter, wondering what it was that we did wrong in the operation, thinking perhaps that we had disorganized his optic nerve, but after reading your book we know better; my son can see the human aura, therefore I know that you write the truth.

‘I should very much like to meet you if you are in London because I think you may be able to be of enormous assistance to my son. Yours very sincerely.’

He re-read what he had written, and then, like a priest before him, was about to fold the letter and insert it in an envelope, but his eyes fell upon the bust of a medical pioneer. The specialist started as if he had been stung by a bee and quickly grabbed his pen again and added a post-script to his letter. ‘I trust that you will not reveal my name or the contents of this letter to anyone because it would injure my status in the eyes of my colleagues.’ Carefully he initialled it, folded it and put it in its envelope. Carefully he extinguished the lights and left the room. Outside his very expensive car was waiting. The chauffeur jumped to attention as the specialist said, ‘To the post office in Leicester Square.’ The car drove off and soon the letter was dropped into the letter box and eventually reached its destination.

And so the letters came in, letters from Here, letters from There, letters from Everywhere, from the North to the South, and from the East to the West — letters, letters, letters, an unending shoal of letters all demanding an answer, all asserting that their own problems were unique and no one ever before had such problems. Letters of condemnation, letters of praise, letters of supplication. From Trinidad came a letter written on the cheapest form of school exercise paper in an absolutely illiterate handwriting; ‘I am a Holy Missionary, I am working for the good of God. Give me ten thousand dollars and a new station wagon. Oh yes, and while you are about it send me a free set of your books and then I shall believe what you write.’

From Singapore came a letter from two young Chinese men: ‘We want to become doctors. We have no money. We want you to pay our first class air fare from Singapore to your home, and then we will talk to you and tell you how you can give us the money so that we may be trained as doctors and do good for mankind. And you might send us extra money so we can see a friend of ours in New York, America. Do that for us and you will be doing good for people, and then we will believe.’

The letters came in, in their hundreds, in their thousands, all demanding an answer. Few, a pitiful few, even thought of the expense of writing, of stationery, of postage. They wrote, ‘Tell us more about what happens after death. Tell us more what IS death. We don't understand about dying, you don't tell us enough, you don't make it clear. Tell us everything.’

Others wrote, ‘Tell us about religions, tell us if we have a hope after this life when we are not Catholics.’ Yet others wrote, ‘Give me a mantra so that I can win the Irish Sweepstake, and if I win the first prize of a million in the Irish Sweepstake I'll give you ten percent.’

And yet another person wrote, ‘I live in New Mexico, there is a lost mine here. Tell me where is the lost mine — you can go into the astral and find it — and if you tell me where it is and I find it and make it mine I will give you a present of some money for your services.’

People wrote that I should tell them more, tell them all, tell them more than all so that they would know what to believe.

Mrs. Sheelagh Rouse sat grimly at her desk, her gold rimmed glasses were perched precariously on the bridge of her nose and every so often she would put a finger up and push them back into place.

She looked at the wheelchair passing her door and said, somewhat fiercely, 'You've only written sixteen books, why not write another, the seventeenth, telling people what they CAN believe? Look at all the letters you've had asking for another book, asking you to tell them what they can believe — I'll type it for you!' she concluded brightly.

Miss Tadalinka and Miss Cleopatra Rampa sat in the corridor in front of the wheelchair and smiled contentedly. Miss Taddy, deep in thought, had to scratch her left ear with her left foot while she concentrated on the implications of yet another book. Satisfied she rose to her legs and waddled away back to her favourite chair.

Mama San Ra'ab Rampa looked up with a rather pale bemused expression on her face. Without a word — perhaps she was speechless! — she handed me a piece of blue card with a heading of 'Mama San Ra'ab Rampa, Pussywillow', and then in the centre of the page I saw my own face in blue just as if I had been dead for too long and dug up too late. And below that, the weirdest looking Siamese cat face I have ever seen. Well, for a time it left me speechless, but I suppose that it is nice to see the first cover of one's first book. I am biased because this is my seventeenth and there is no longer any novelty. But, 'Mama San,' I said, 'what do YOU think of another book? Is it worth all the effort with me stuck in bed like a stupid dummy, or shall I give it up?'

Mama San metaphorically uncrossed her eyes after the impact of her first book cover, and said, 'Oh yes, of course you should write a book. I am thinking of writing my second!'

Miss Cleo Rampa and Miss Taddy Rampa took a good sniff at the cover and walked away with their tails in the air. Apparently it met with their approval.

Just then the telephone rang and it was John Henderson, away in the wilds of the U.S.A., at the confluence of many waters. He said, 'Hi Boss, I've been reading some very good articles in praise of you. There's a good one in the magazine I've sent on to you.'

'Well, John,' I replied, 'I couldn't care two hoots, or even one hoot what magazines or newspapers write about me. I do not read them whether they are good or bad articles. But, what do YOU think of another book, a seventeenth?'

'Gee, Boss,' said John H., 'that's what I've been waiting to hear! It's time you wrote another book, everyone is anxious, and I understand the booksellers are getting many inquiries.'

Well, that was quite a blow; everyone seemed to be gang-ing up, everyone seemed to want another book. But what can a poor fellow do when he is approaching the end of his life and he has a ferocious tax demand from a wholly un-sympathetic country - and something has to be done to keep the home fires burning, or to keep the income tax jackals from the front door.

One of the things I feel bitter about — the income tax. I am very disabled and most of my time is spent in bed. I am not a charge on the country but I pay a most vicious tax without any allowances because I am an author working at home. And yet some of the oil companies here do not pay any tax at all because some of them are engaged upon entirely mythical 'research' and, as such, are tax exempt. And then I think of some of these crackpot cultists who set up as a non-profit organization paying themselves, their relatives and their friends high salaries, but they pay no tax because they are registered as a non-profit organization.

So it came about that unwillingly it was necessary for me to write a seventeenth book, and so the consensus of opinion was, after perusal of letter after letter after letter, that the title should be 'I believe'.

This book will tell of life before birth, life on Earth, and the passing from Earth and return to Life Beyond. I have the title of 'I believe', but that is wholly incorrect; it is not a question of belief, it is KNOWLEDGE. I can do everything I write about. I can go into the astral as easily as another

person can go into another room - well, that's what I cannot do, go into another room without fiddling about on crutches and a wheelchair and all the rest of it, but in the astral one does not need crutches, wheelchairs or drugs. So what I write about in this book is the truth. I am not expressing an opinion, but just telling things as they REALLY are.

Now is the time to get down to it. So — on to Chapter Two.

CHAPTER TWO

ALGERNON REGINALD ST. CLAIR DE BONKERS fell to the floor of the bathroom with a soggy scrunch. Algernon lay upon the floor and from him there came bubbling, mewling sounds. Out in the corridor a chambermaid who was passing stopped in her tracks and felt the icy fingers of fear crawl up and down her spine. Tremulously she called through the door, 'Are you all right, Sir Algernon? Sir Algernon, are you all right?' Receiving no reply she turned the door handle and entered the bathroom.

Immediately her hair stood up on her neck, and drawing a tremendous breath she let go with the most marvellous scream of her career, and continued to scream, getting higher and higher up the scale as she did so. Thoroughly out of breath, she collapsed in a dead faint by the side of Algernon on the floor.

There came the sound of excited voices. There came the sound of pounding feet up the stairs and along the corridor. The first-comers stopped with such abruptness that they tore the carpet from its fastening, then clustered together as if to give each other confidence they peered in the open doorway.

Algernon Reginald St. Clair de Bonkers lay upon his face on the bathroom floor, blood pouring from a gash across his throat and soaking the unconscious body of the chambermaid lying beside him. Suddenly she took a quick gasp, twitched, and opened her eyes. For seconds she looked at the pool of blood beneath her, shuddered, and then with an eldritch scream which jarred the nerves of those around she slumped again into her faint, this time her face well immersed in the alleged blue blood of her employer.

Algernon lay upon the ground. He felt that everything

was spinning, everywhere was fantastically unreal. He heard a keening, mewling noise and then hideous bubblings which gradually became less bubbly as the blood seeped out of his mutilated body.

Algernon felt very strange workings within him. Then there was a terrific screech and the chambermaid fell down beside him, bumping his body in the process. With the sudden jar Sir Algernon was pushed right out of his body and jumped upwards like a balloon on a string.

For some seconds he looked about, amazed at the strange, strange viewpoint. He seemed to be floating face down from the ceiling, and then, as he gazed down at two bodies beneath him he saw a Silver Cord extending from his 'new' body to the old one lying supine. As he watched the Cord turned dark gray, hideous spots appeared where it joined the body on the floor, and then it withered and dropped away like an umbilical cord. But Algernon stayed there as if glued to the ceiling. He made loud shouts for help not realizing that he was out of a dead body and into the astral plane. He stayed there, stuck against the ornamental ceiling of the ancestral home. He stayed there invisible to the gawking faces which peered into the bathroom, took an inordinate time to look around, and then disappeared to be replaced by others. He saw the chambermaid recover consciousness, gaze at the blood into which she had fallen, screech and faint again.

The heavy studied voice of the butler broke the silence. 'Now, now,' he said, 'let us not have panic. You, Bert,' pointing to a footman, 'go and call the Police, call Dr. Mackintosh, and I think you should call the Undertaker as well.' Having concluded that oration, he gestured imperiously to the footman and turned to the two bodies. Pulling up his trousers so they should not crease over his knees, he stooped down and very gingerly caught hold of the wrist of the chambermaid, exclaiming in extreme distaste as his hand encountered blood. Quickly he removed his hand and wiped the blood off on the chambermaid's skirt. Then, grasping the poor maid by one leg — by one ankle — he pulled her straight out of the bathroom. There were subdued titters as the poor maid's skirt rolled up around her waist and up to her

shoulders, titters which were quickly suppressed at a glare from the butler.

The housekeeper stepped forward and demurely bent down, and in the interests of modesty rearranged the chambermaid's skirts around her. Then two menservants lifted the chambermaid and hurried down the corridor with her, trailing blood from her blood-soaked clothes as they did so.

The butler eased further into the bathroom and looked cautiously around. 'Ah, yes,' he said, 'there is the instrument with which Sir Algernon ended his life.' He pointed to a blood-stained open razor which had skidded along the floor to the side of the bath.

He stood like a monolith in the bathroom doorway until the sound of galloping horses was heard outside. Then there came the footman who said, 'The Police are here, Mr. Harris, and the doctor is on his way.'

There were excited voices in the hallway and then a very heavy, very majestic tread came up the stairway and down the corridor.

'Well, well, and what have we here?' said a rough voice, 'I understand that there has been a suicide, but are you sure it is not murder?' The speaker, a policeman in blue uniform, poked his head into the bathroom, automatically reaching for the notebook ever-ready in his breast pocket. Taking the stub of a pencil, he licked it and then carefully opened the notebook. Then there came the sound of a fast-trotting horse, and more commotion at the doorway, followed by a much lighter, much quicker tread on the stairs. A slim young man came along carrying a black case: 'Ah, Mr. Harris,' said the young man who was, in fact, the doctor, 'I understand you have some illness here, some tragedy maybe, eh?'

'Now, now, doctor,' said the red-faced policeman, 'we have not finished our investigations yet. We must find the cause of death—'

'But, sergeant,' said the doctor, 'are you sure that he really is dead? Shouldn't we see to that first?'

Mutely the sergeant pointed to the body and to the fact that the head was almost cut off from the neck. The wound

gaped wide now that all the blood had drained out of the body and seeped all over the bathroom floor and all along the carpet in the corridor. The sergeant said, 'Now, Mr. Harris, let's have your account of it. Who did it?'

The butler licked his nervous lips as he was not at all happy at the way things were turning. He felt as if he were being accused of murder, but even the meanest intellect would have seen that the injuries on the body were self-inflicted. But he knew he had to keep in with the Law, and so he started:

'As you well know, my name is George Harris. I am the head butler to this household. The staff and I were startled to hear a chambermaid — Alice White — screaming, her voice going higher and higher until we thought that our nerves would break under the strain, and then there was a thud and nothing more. So we raced up here and we found—' he paused dramatically, and then thrust his hands in the direction of the bathroom and said, 'this!'

The sergeant mumbled to himself and chewed at his moustache, a long drooping affair which had trailers at each side of his mouth. Then he said, 'Produce this Alice White. I will interrogate her now.'

The housekeeper came bustling down a corridor saying, 'Oh no you won't, sergeant, we are having to bath her, she is covered in blood and she has a fit of hysterics. Poor soul, I don't wonder at it either. Now don't you think you can come here bullying us because we did not do this thing, and I'll have you remember all the times you've come to my back kitchen of a night to have a good meal!'

The doctor moved forward very gingerly, and said, 'Well, we'd better have a look at the body, we seem to be wasting a lot of time and getting nowhere in the process.' So saying, he stepped forward and carefully took the links out of his starched cuffs, put them in his pocket, and then rolled up his sleeves, after passing his jacket to the butler for his care.

Stooping down, the doctor carefully examined the body without touching it. Then, with a quick movement of his foot, he flipped the body right over until it was facing up with the staring eyes gazing up.

The entity who had been Sir Algernon was looking down in fascination at all this. He felt very strange about it, for a moment he could not understand what had happened. but some force kept him pinned to the ceiling upside-down, the living Algernon gazing down into the dead, glazed, bloody eyes of the dead Algernon. He rested upside-down against the ceiling in rapt attention, spellbound at the strange experience. His attention was riveted at the words of Mr. Harris.

‘Yes, poor Sir Algernon was a subaltern in the Boer War. He fought very nobly against the Boers and he was badly wounded. Unfortunately he was wounded in a most delicate place which I cannot describe more adequately in front of the ladies present, and increasingly of late his inability to — ah — perform has led to bouts of depression, and on numerous occasions we and others have heard him threaten that life without his necessities was not worth living, and he threatened to end it all.’

The housekeeper gave a sniff of commiseration, and the second housemaid sniffed in sympathy. The first footman muttered assent that he, too, had heard such things. Then the doctor gazed at all the towels so neatly arrayed on the racks and with a quick movement spread them all on the bathroom floor. With a foot he swept away the blood which even now was commencing to coagulate. Then, turning his eyes to the bath rail, he saw a bath mat there, quite a thick thing. He placed it on the floor beside the body and knelt down. Taking his wooden rod stethoscope he unbuttoned the clothing of the corpse and put the wooden button end to the chest and applied his ear to the recess shaped in the wood at the other end. Everyone was still, everyone held their breath, and then at last the doctor shook his head in negation saying, ‘No, life is extinct, he is dead.’ With that, he removed his wooden stethoscope, tucked it inside his trousers in a special pocket, and stood up, wiping his hands on a cloth handed to him by the housekeeper.

The sergeant pointed to the razor and said, ‘Doctor, is that the instrument which ended this body's life?’ The doctor glanced down, moved the razor with his foot, and then

picked it up through the folds of the cloth. 'Yes,' he said, 'this has severed from the carotid through the jugular and on to the carotid. Death must have been almost instantaneous. I estimate that it took about seven minutes to die.'

Sergeant Murdock was very busy licking his pencil and writing copious notes in his book. Then there came a heavier rumble as of a wagon being drawn by horses. Again the doorbell pealed in the kitchen. Again there were voices in the hall, and then a dapper little man came up the stairs, bowed ceremoniously to the butler, to the doctor, and to the sergeant in that order. 'Ah, is the body ready for me?' he asked. 'I was asked to come here and collect a body, the body of a suicide.'

The sergeant looked at the doctor, the doctor looked at the sergeant, then they both looked at Mr. Harris. 'Do you have anything to say about this, Mr. Harris? Do you know if any of the corpse's relatives are coming?' asked the sergeant.

'No, sergeant, they would have no time to come here so quickly. I believe the nearest relative lives about half an hour's journey by fast horse, and I have already sent a messenger. I think it would be in order to have the undertaker take the body away to his parlour because, obviously, we cannot have the relatives seeing Sir Algernon in such a deplorable condition, can we?'

The sergeant looked at the doctor and the doctor looked at the sergeant, and then simultaneously they said, 'Yes.' So the sergeant as the representative of the Law said, 'All right, take away the body, but let us at the Station have a very full report at the earliest possible moment. The Superintendent will want it before the morning.'

The doctor said, 'I shall have to inform the Coroner of this, it is probable that he will want to conduct an autopsy.' The doctor and the sergeant moved away. The undertaker gently shooed away the butler, the footmen, the house-keeper and the maids, and then two of his men came up the stairs carrying a light casket. Together they put the casket on the floor outside the bathroom and removed the lid. Inside it was about a quarter full of sawdust. Then they

moved into the bathroom and lifted up the body, dropping it unceremoniously into the sawdust in the casket, carefully putting the lid back into position.

Perfunctorily they rinsed their hands under the tap and, not finding any clean towels, they wiped their dripping hands on the curtains. Then out they went into the corridor, treading half congealed blood all over the corridor carpet.

With many a grunt they lifted the casket and proceeded towards the stairs. 'Bear a hand here, you men,' called the undertaker to two footmen, 'take the lower end, we mustn't tip him out.' Two men hurried forward, and carefully the casket was eased down the stairs and out into the open, and slid into a black covered wagon. The undertaker got inside, the two assistants got up on the box, the reins were picked up and the horses ambled off at a leisurely pace.

Sergeant Murdock moved ponderously up the stairs again and went into the bathroom. With a cloth he picked up the open razor and put it aside. Then he carried out an inspection to see if anything else of use as evidence could be found.

The spirit of Sir Algernon, glued to the ceiling, looked down in utter fascination. Then for some reason Sergeant Murdock turned his eyes to the ceiling, emitted a bellow of fright, and fell down with a honk that cracked the toilet seat. With that the spirit of Sir Algernon vanished, and he himself lost consciousness, being aware only of a strange humming, a weird swirling, and clouds of rolling blackness like the smoke from a paraffin reading lamp which had been turned too high and left unattended in a room.

And so darkness fell upon him, and the spirit of Sir Algernon took no further interest in the proceedings, at least for the time being.

Algernon Reginald St. Clair de Bonkers stirred uneasily in what seemed to be a deeply drugged sleep. Strange thoughts swarmed across his half-submerged consciousness. There came bursts of heavenly music followed by wild outpourings of hellish sound. Algernon stirred fretfully, and in one period of greater consciousness he stirred and found to his astonishment that his movements were sluggish, torpid, as though he were immersed in a gooey mess.

Algernon Reginald St. Clair de Bonkers woke up with a start and tried to sit erect but found his movements constricted, he could only move in slow motion. Panic struck and he tried to flail about in his anguish but found his movements were slow, turgid, and it calmed him down quite a lot. He felt for his eyes to see if they were open or shut because he could see no light. It did not matter if his eyes were open or shut, there was no sensation of light. He put his hands down to feel the texture of the bed, but then he shrieked in shock because there was no bed beneath him, he was suspended — as he himself put it — ‘like a fish stuck in syrup in a fish tank’.

For a time he feebly flailed with his arms as does a swimmer, trying to push against something so he would have the satisfaction of getting somewhere. But as hard as he pushed with his wide-spread hands and arms and his thrusting feet, so did ‘something’ hold him back.

To his astonishment all his efforts failed to make him breathless, failed to make him tired, so, having seen the uselessness of an attempt at physical effort, he just lay still and thought.

‘Where was I?’ he thought back. ‘Oh yes, I remember, I decided to kill myself, I decided that it was useless going on as I had been going on, bereft of female society because of the nature of my disability. How unfortunate it was,’ he muttered to himself, ‘that the filthy Boers should have shot me THERE!’

For some moments he lay there thinking of the past, thinking of the bearded Boer who had raised his rifle and deliberately, quite deliberately, aimed at him not with a view to killing him, but with the definite objective of what must politely be termed robbing him of his manhood. He thought of the ‘dear Vicar’ who had recommended Algernon's house as a very safe refuge for servant girls who had to earn a living. He thought, too, of his father who had said while the young man was still a schoolboy, ‘Well, Algernon, m'lad, you have to get to learn the facts of life, you have to practice on some of the servant girls we have here, you'll find them quite useful to play with but be sure you do not

take things too seriously. These lower classes are there for our convenience, aren't they?'

'Yes,' he thought, 'even the housekeeper had smiled a peculiar little smile when a particularly comely young maid servant was engaged. The housekeeper said, "You'll be quite safe here, dear, the Master will not bother you at all, he's like one of those horses in the field, you know, they've been doctored. Yes, you'll be quite safe here," and the housekeeper had turned away with a sly little chuckle.'

Algernon reviewed his life in some detail. The shattering impact of the bullet and how he had doubled up and vomited in anguish. Still in his ears he could hear the raucous laughter of the old Boer farmer as he said, 'No more gels for you, m'lad, we'll stop you from continuing the family name. Now you'll be like them there eunuchs we used to hear about.'

Algernon felt himself grow hot all over with the shame of it, and it reminded him of the long-term plan he had made, a plan to commit suicide following the decision that he could not go on living under such strange conditions. He found it quite intolerable when the Vicar called upon him and made oblique references to his ailment, and said how glad he would be to have such a safe young man help with the Women's meetings and the Sunday afternoon sewing sessions and all that sort of thing because — the Vicar said — 'We cannot be too careful, can we? We must not impugn the good name of our Church, must we?'

And then there was the doctor, the old family doctor, Dr. Mortimer Davis who used to ride up of an evening on his old horse Wellington. Dr. Davis would sit down in the study and together they would have a comfortable glass of wine, but the comfort was always ruined when the doctor would say, 'Well, Sir Algernon, I think I should examine you, we have to make sure you do not develop feminine characteristics because unless we exercise the most extreme supervision you may find that your facial hair will fall out and you will develop — ahem - female breasts. One of the things for which we must be most observant is for any change in the timbre of your voice because now that you have lost

certain glands the chemistry of your body has changed.’ The doctor looked at him most quizzically to see how he was taking it, and then said, ‘Well now, I think I could do with another glass of wine, you have most excellent wine here, your dear father was a great connoisseur of the luxuries of life especially with the distaff side of the luxuries, heh, heh, heh!’

Poor Algernon had all that he could take when one day he heard the butler talking to the housekeeper, ‘A terrible thing, you know, how it happened to Sir Algernon, such a lively virile young man, such a credit to his class. I know well how, before you came here and before he went to the War, he used to ride to hounds and made a very favourable impression on the matrons of the district. They were always inviting Sir Algernon to parties, they always looked upon him as a most eligible young man and a very desirable suitor for a daughter who had just come out. But now — well, the mothers of the district look upon him with commiseration but at least they know he doesn’t need a chaperone when he goes out with their daughters. A very safe young man, a very safe young man indeed.’

‘Yes,’ thought Algernon, ‘a very safe young man indeed. I wonder what they would have done in my place, lying there on the battlefield bleeding with my uniform breeches soaked in red, and then the surgeon coming along in the field and cutting off my clothing and with a sharp knife just amputating the tattered remnants of what made him different from a woman. Oh! The agony of it. Nowadays there is this thing they call chloroform which is stated to relieve pain, to give one surcease from the agony of operations, but on the field, no, nothing but a slashing knife and the bullet between one’s teeth so one can bite down on the bullet and stop oneself from screaming. And then the shame of it, the shame of being deprived — THERE. The sight of one’s fellow subalterns looking embarrassed and, at the same time, uttering salacious stories behind one’s back.

‘Yes, the shame of it, the shame of it. The last member of an old family, the de Bonkers who came over with the Norman invasion and who settled in that very salubrious

part of England and built a large manor house and had tenant farmers. Now he, the last of the line, impotent through service to his country, impotent and laughed at by his peers. And what is there to laugh at?' he thought, 'in a man becoming maimed in the service of others? He thought that now, because he had fought for his country, his line would fall into desuetude.'

Algernon lay there, neither in the air, neither on the ground. He could not decide where he was, he could not decide what he was. He lay there flapping like a newly-landed fish, and then thought, 'Am I dead? What is death? I saw myself dead, then how am I here?'

Inevitably his thoughts turned again to events since his return to England. He saw himself walking with some difficulty, and then carefully noting the expressions and the actions of his neighbours, of his family, and of his servants. The idea had grown that he should kill himself, that he should end a useless life. He had at one time locked himself away in his study and got out his pistol, carefully cleaned it, carefully loaded it and primed it. Then he had put the muzzle to his right temple and pulled the trigger. Just a sodden thunk had resulted. For moments he had sat there bemused, unbelieving, his trusty pistol which he had carried and used throughout the War had betrayed him at last, he was still alive. He spread a sheet of clean paper on the desk in front of him and lowered the pistol on to it. Everything was as it should be, powder, ball, and cap, everything was perfectly in order. He assembled it again, powder, ball, and cap, and without thinking he pulled the trigger. There was a loud bang, and he had shot out his window. There came running feet and a pounding on the door. Slowly he had risen to his feet and unlocked the door to admit a white-faced, frightened butler. 'Oh, Sir Algernon, Sir Algernon, I thought some dreadful mishap had occurred,' said the butler in considerable agitation.

'Oh no, it's quite all right, I was just cleaning my pistol and it went off — get a man to replace the window, will you?'

Then there had been the attempt at horse riding. He had taken an old grey mare and had been riding out of the

stables when a stable boy had tittered and murmured to an ostler, 'Two old mares together now, eh, what d'you think of that?' He turned and struck at the boy with his riding crop, and then flung the reins over the horse's neck, jumped to the ground and hastened back to his home, never to ride a horse again.

Then another time he thought of that strange plant which had come from the almost unknown country of Brazil a plant which was supposed to give instant death to those who chewed its berries and got the poisonous juice down one's throat. He had done that, he had such a plant which had been presented to him by a world traveller. For days he had carefully watered the plant, nourished it like a first-born child, and then when the plant was blooming and healthy he had taken off the berries and stuffed them in his mouth. 'Oh! The agony of it,' he thought, 'the shame of it. No death, but things a thousand times worse than death. Such a gastric disturbance! Never in all history,' he thought, 'had there been such a purge, such a purge that he could not even take himself in time to the littlest room. And the shock of the housekeeper when she had to take his very soiled clothes and pass them to the laundry woman.' His face burned red at the mere thought of it.

And then this latest attempt. He had sent up to London to the finest sword smith of that city, and there had been obtained for him the best and sharpest of razors, a beautiful instrument deeply engraved with the maker's name and crest. Sir Algernon had taken that wonderful blade and stropped it and stropped it and stropped it. And then, with one quick slash, he had cut his throat from ear to ear so that only the support of the spine in the neck had kept his head upon his shoulders.

So he had seen himself dead. He knew he was dead because he knew he had killed himself, and then he had looked from the ceiling and seen himself on the floor with rapidly glazing eyes. He lay there in the darkness, in the turgid darkness, and thought and thought and thought.

Death? What WAS death? Was there anything after death? He and his fellow subalterns and other officers in the

Mess had often debated the subject. The Padre had tried to explain about the life immortal, about going to Heaven, and one dashing Hussar, a major had said, 'Oh no, Padre, I am sure it's absolutely wrong. When one is dead one is dead and that's all there is to it. If I go and kill a Boer are you telling me that he'll go straight to Heaven or the Other Place? If I kill him with a bullet through his heart and I am standing there with my foot on his chest, I can tell you that he's very much under me, dead, dead as a stuffed pig. When we're dead we're dead and there's nothing more to it.'

He thought again of all the arguments for life after death. He wondered why anyone could say there was life after death. 'If you kill a man — well, he's dead and that's all there is to it. If there was a soul then you'd see something leave the body at death, wouldn't you?'

Algernon lay there and pondered the whole matter, wondering what had happened, where was he? And then he had the terrible thought that perhaps it was all a nightmare and he had had a brainstorm and was confined in an asylum for the mad. Carefully he felt about him to see if there were any restraining straps. But no, he was floating, that's all there was to it, he was floating like a fish in water. So he returned to wonder what it was. 'Death? Am I dead? Then if I am dead where am I, what am I doing in this strange condition floating idly?'

Words of the Padre came back to him: 'When you leave your body an angel will be there to greet you and to guide you. You will be judged by God Himself, and then you will have whatever punishment God Himself decrees.' Algernon wondered about that whole matter. 'If God was a kind God why did a person have to be punished as soon as he was dead? And if he was dead how could a punishment affect him? He was here now; he thought, 'lying quietly, no particular pain, no particular joy, just lying there quietly.'

At that moment Algernon started with fear. Something had brushed by him. It was like having a hand put inside one's skull. He got an impression, not a voice, but an impression, a sensation that someone was thinking at him, 'Peace, be still, listen.'

For a few moments Algernon flailed away, trying to run. This was too mysterious, this was too unsettling, but he was stuck there. And so once again he had the impression, 'Peace, be still, and be freed from this.'

Algernon thought to himself, 'I am an officer and a gentleman, I must not panic, I must be an example to my men.' So, confused though he was, he composed himself and let tranquility and peace enter within him.

CHAPTER THREE

ALGERNON suddenly shuddered with shock. Panic took hold of him. For a moment he thought that his brain was going to burst out of its skull.

About him the blackness grew even blacker. Although he could not see in the total darkness he could inexplicably FEEL turgid clouds of blacker than blackness swirling around, enveloping him.

Through the darkness he seemed to see a brilliant ray of light, pencil-thin, reaching out to him and touching him, and along the pencil-thin ray of light came the impression 'Peace, peace, be still and we will talk to you.'

By superhuman efforts Algernon got a grip on his panic. Gradually he calmed down and once again rested more or less placidly awaiting developments. They were swift in coming; 'We are willing to help you — we are very anxious to help you but you will not let us.'

Algernon rolled the thought around in his brain. 'You will not let us,' he thought, 'but I haven't said a word to them, how can they say that I won't let them help me? I don't know who they are, I don't know what they are going to do, I don't even know where I am. If this is death,' he thought, 'well, what is it? Negation? Nothingness? Am I to be condemned for eternity to live in darkness like this? But even that,' he thought, 'poses a problem. Live? Well, do I live?' Thoughts swirled about him and his brain was in turmoil. Teachings of his early youth came to him: 'There is no death — I am the Resurrection — In my Father's house there are many mansions, I go to prepare a Way for you — If you behave you will go to Heaven — If you misbehave you will go to Hell — Only Christians have a chance for Heaven.' So many contradictory statements, so much misunderstanding,

so much of the blind teaching the blind. The priests and the Sunday School teachers, people blind themselves trying to teach others who they thought were even blinder. 'Hell?' he thought. 'What IS Hell? What is Heaven? IS there Heaven?'

A strong thought broke in on his cogitations: 'We are willing to help you if you will first accept the premise that you are alive and that there is life after death. We are willing to help you if you are prepared unreservedly to believe in us and believe in that which we can teach you.'

Algernon's brain railed at the thought. What was this rubbish about accepting help? What was this stupid nonsense about believing? What COULD he believe? If he was to believe then it implied there was a doubt. He wanted facts not beliefs. The facts were that he had died by his own hand, and the second fact was that he had seen his dead body, and the third fact was that he was now in total blackness apparently immersed in some sticky, turgid substance which prevented much movement. And then stupid people from he knew not where were sending thoughts into his head saying that he should believe. Well — WHAT should he believe?

'You are in the next stage after death,' the voice, or thought, or impression, or whatever it was, said to him. 'You have been misinformed, mistaught and misled upon the Earth, and if you want to come out of your self-imposed prison then we will get you out.' Algernon rested quietly and thought over the matter, and then he thought back. 'Well,' he thought strongly, 'if you want me to believe, first of all you should tell me what is happening to me. You say I am in the first stage after death, but I thought death was the end of everything.'

'Precisely!' broke in the thought or the voice very strongly. 'Precisely! You are surrounded by the black clouds of doubt, by the black clouds of unreason. You are surrounded by the blackness of ignorance, and this isolation is self-made, self-imposed and can only be self-destroyed.'

Algernon did not like that a bit. It seemed to be blaming him for everything. Then he said, 'But I have no reason to believe, I can only go by what I have been taught. I have been taught various things in churches, and while a mere

boy I was taught by Sunday School teachers and by a Governess, and now do you think I can scrap all that just because some unknown, unidentified impression comes to my mind? DO something to show me that there is something beyond this blackness.'

Suddenly a break appeared in the darkness. Suddenly the blackness rolled aside like curtains on a stage rolling aside that the actors could make their debut. Algernon was almost struck senseless by the influx of bright light and by the wondrous vibrations in the atmosphere. He almost screamed in the ecstasy of the moment, and then — doubt, and with the doubt came the rolling in of the blackness again until once more he was engulfed in turgid darkness. Doubt, panic, self-recrimination, railing against the teachings of the world. He began to doubt his sanity. How could things like this be possible? He was certain by now that he was insane, certain that he was suffering hallucinations. His mind went back to that very potent Brazilian plant which he had ingested; supposing there had been side-effects, supposing he was suffering from long-delayed hallucinations. He had seen his dead body on the floor — but had he? How could he see himself if he was dead? He thought of looking down from the ceiling, he thought of the bald spot on the top of the butler's head. Well, if it were true why had he not noticed that bald spot before? If it were true why had he not noticed that the housekeeper obviously wore a wig? He pondered on the problem and wavered between the thought that life after death was possible and the thought that he was undeniably insane.

'We will leave you to come to your own decision because the Law is that no person may be helped unless that person is willing to receive help. When you are ready to receive help, say so and we will come. And, remember, there is no reason whatever for you to continue this quite self-imposed isolation. This blackness is a figment of your imagination.'

Time had no meaning. Thoughts came and went. But what, Algernon wondered, was the speed of thought? How many thoughts had he had? If he knew then he could work out how long he had been in this position and in this con-

dition. But no, time no longer had meaning. Nothing had meaning as far as he could see. He reached his hands down and could feel nothing beneath him. Slowly, with infinite effort, he swept his arms up at full length. There was nothing, nothing at all that he could feel, nothing except the strange dragging as if he was pulling his arms through syrup. Then he let his hands rest upon his body and felt. Yes, his head was there, his neck, his shoulders, obviously his arms were there because he was using his hands to feel himself. But then he really jumped. He was naked, and he started to blush at the thought. What if some person should come in and find him naked? In his strata of society one simply did not appear naked, it was 'not done'. But so far as he could tell he still had his human body. And then his wandering, probing fingers stopped suddenly and he came to the definite conclusion that he was indeed mad — mad — for his searching fingers encountered parts which had been shot at by that Boer marksman and the remnants removed by the surgeon's knife. So he was intact again! Obviously it was imagination. Obviously, he thought, he had looked down at his dying body and he was still dying. But then the inescapable thought occurred to him that he had looked down. Well, how COULD he look down if he was indeed the body that was dying? And if he could look down then obviously some part of him, his soul or whatever one calls it, must have got out of the body, and the mere fact that he could look down upon himself indicated that there was 'something' after death.

He lay there pondering, pondering, pondering. His brain seemed to be clicking like a machine. Gradually little bits of knowledge picked up in various parts of the world slipped into place. He thought of some religion — what was it? Hindu? Moslem? He didn't know, one of these outlandish foreign religions which only the natives believed in, but still, they taught that there was life after death, they taught that good men who died went to a place where there were unlimited willing girls available. Well, he could not see any girls available or not available, but it set him on a train of thought. There MUST be life after death, there must be

something, and there must be someone otherwise how could he have got such a searchlight-bright thought in his mind? Algernon jumped with amazement. 'Oh! The dawn is coming,' he exclaimed. Indeed the darkness was less dark now, the turgidity around him was less as well, and he found himself sinking down gently, gently until his outstretched hands hanging down below the body felt 'something'. As the body sank even lower he found that his hands were clutching — no, it couldn't be! But further probings confirmed that, yes, his hands were in contact with soft grass, and then his unresisting body was resting upon short, cropped turf.

The realization flooded in that he was at last in some material place and there were other things besides darkness, and as he thought, as he realized this, so the darkness became less and he was as one in a light mist. Through the mist he could see vague figures, not clearly, not enough to distinguish what the figures were, but 'figures'.

Looking up he found a shadowy figure looming over him. He could just see two hands raised as though in benediction, and then a voice, not a thought inside his head this time, but an undeniable honest-to-goodness English voice obviously from one who had been to Eton or Oxford!

'Rise to your feet, my son,' said the voice. 'Rise to your feet and take my hands, feel that I am solid like you, and in so feeling you will have one more item of proof that you are alive — in a different state admittedly, but alive, and the sooner you realize that you are alive and that there is life after death then the sooner will you be able to enter the Great Reality.'

Algernon made feeble attempts to get to his feet, but things seemed to be different somehow, he didn't seem able to move his muscles as he used to, but then the voice came again: 'Picture yourself rising, picture yourself standing.' Algernon did that and, to his amazement, found that he was standing upright being clasped by a figure which was becoming brighter and plainer and brighter and plainer until he could see before him a middle-aged man of remarkably bright aspect and clad in yellow robes. Algernon gazed

down at the length of the figure and then his range of vision encountered himself. He saw that he was naked. Immediately he let out a shriek of fright, 'Oh!' he said, 'where are my clothes? I cannot be seen like this!'

The figure smiled at him and gently said, 'Clothes do not make the man, my friend. One is born to the Earth without clothes, and one is reborn to this world without clothes. Think of the type of clothes you would like to wear and you will find them upon you.'

Algernon thought of himself as a gay young subaltern clad in dark navy blue trousers, the legs reaching right down to the heels, and a bright red jacket. Around his waist he pictured a dazzlingly white blanched belt with ammunition pouches. He pictured the brilliant brass buttons polished so sharply that one could see one's face in each. And then upon his head he pictured the dark pill box hat with the leather strap going down his cheek, beneath his chin, and up the other cheek. He pictured the scabbard at his side, and then he smiled to himself a secret inward smile as he thought, 'Let them produce THAT!' To his ineffable astonishment he found his body constricted by uniform, by the tightness of a belt, by the tightness of military boots. He found the tug at his side where the weight of the scabbard and the weight of the pistol holster tried to drag the belt down. He felt beneath his chin the pressure of the chinstrap. And then, as he turned his head, he could see the glittering epaulets upon his shoulders. It was too much — too much. Algernon fainted and would have tumbled to the turf had not the middle-aged man gently lowered him.

Algernon's eyelids fluttered and weakly he murmured, 'I believe, oh Lord, I believe. Forgive me my sins, forgive me the trespasses which I have committed.'

The man with him smiled benignly upon him, and said, 'I am not the Lord, I am just one whose task it is to help those who come from the Earth life to this, the intermediate stage, and I am ready to help you when you are ready to receive the proffered help.'

Algernon rose to his feet, this time without difficulty, and said, 'I am ready to receive such help as you can give me.'

But, tell me, did you go to Eton, were you at Balliol?’

The figure smiled and said, ‘Just call me friend, and we will deal with your questions later. First you have to enter into our world.’

He turned and waved his hands in a sweeping motion, as if he were drawing curtains, in fact, and indeed the result was the same. The clouds of darkness dissipated, the shadows vanished, and Algernon found that he was standing on the greenest of green grass. The air about him was vibrant with life, pulsating with energy. From unknown sources there came impressions — not sounds, but impressions of music, ‘music in the air’ he would have described it, and he found it remarkably soothing.

People were walking about just as people would walk about in a public park. It gave him, at first glance, an impression that he could have been walking about in Green Park or Hyde Park, London, but a very specially beautified Green Park or Hyde Park. Couples were sitting on seats, people were walking about, and then once again Algernon had a terrific impulse of fear because some people were moving along inches above the ground! One person was absolutely racing across the countryside at about ten feet above the ground, and was being chased by another person, and there were joyful shouts of happiness coming from both of them. Algernon felt a sudden chill along his spine and he shuddered, but his Friend gently took him by the arm and said, ‘Come, let us sit over here because I want to tell you a little of this world before we go any further otherwise the sights that you will see beyond might indeed impede your recovery.’

‘Recovery,’ said Algernon. ‘Recovery indeed! I am not recovering from anything, I am perfectly healthy, perfectly normal.’ His Friend smiled gently and said, ‘Come, let us sit over here where we can watch the swans and the other water fowl, and we can give you an insight into the new life which is before you.’

Somewhat reluctantly, and still bristling with anger at the thought that he was ‘ill’, Algernon permitted himself to be led to a nearby seat. They sat down and the Friend said,

‘Rest comfortably, I have much to tell you because now you are upon another world, you are now in another plane of existence, and the more attention you pay to me the more easily will you progress through this world.’

Algernon was highly impressed that the park seat was so comfortable, it seemed to be form-fitting, quite unlike the parks he had known in London where, if one was unfortunate, one could obtain a splinter if one shuffled about on the seat.

Before them the water shone blue and on it dazzling white swans glided majestically. The air was warm and vibrant. Then a sudden thought struck Algernon, a thought so sudden and so shocking that he almost jumped from the seat; there were no shadows! He looked up and found there was no sun either. The whole sky was glowing.

The Friend said, ‘Now we should talk about things because I have to teach you about this world before you enter the Rest Home.’ Algernon broke in, ‘I am absolutely amazed that you should be wearing a yellow robe. Are you the member of some cult or society, or of some religious Order?’

‘Oh good gracious me, what an extraordinary attitude of mind you have! What does it matter the colour of my robe? What does it matter that I wear a robe? I wear a robe because I want to wear a robe, because I find it suitable for me, because it is a uniform for the task I do.’ He smiled and pointed at Algernon's attire. ‘You wear a uniform, dark blue trousers, bright red jacket, and a peculiar pill box hat upon your head. You wear a white belt around your waist. Well, why are you dressed in such a remarkable fashion? You dress as you want to dress. No one here will take you to task for the way you dress. Similarly I dress in the style which suits me and because it is my uniform. But — we are wasting time.’

Algernon felt definitely chastened by it, and as he looked about he could see certain other yellow-robed persons in conversation with men and women who wore quite outlandish attire. But his companion was speaking: ‘I must tell you,’ said his companion, ‘that upon Earth you are gravely misinformed about the truth of life and about the truth of

life hereafter. Your religious leaders are like a gang of people who have got together, or like a gang of advertisers, each advertising his own wares and everyone of them completely oblivious to the truth of life and after life: He paused and looked about, and then continued, 'Look at all these people here, can you tell who is a Christian, who a Jew, a Buddhist or a Moslem? They all look the same, don't they? And, in fact, all these people that you see in this park except those with yellow robes have one thing in common; they have all committed suicide.'

Algernon recoiled in shock — all committed suicide— Then, he thought, possibly he was in a Home for the insane and perhaps the man in the yellow robe was a Keeper. He thought of all the strange things that had happened to him and which imposed a strain upon his credulity.

'You must be aware that to commit suicide is a very, very grave crime. No one should commit suicide. There are no reasons whatever for suicide, and if people knew what they have to endure after suicide they would have more sense. This,' the companion said, 'is a reception centre where those who have committed 'felo de se' are rehabilitated, counselled, and returned to Earth in another body. I am going to tell you first about life on Earth and in this plane of existence.'

They settled themselves more comfortably on the seat, and Algernon watched the swans idly gliding about on the pond. He noted there were many birds in the trees, squirrels too, and he also observed with interest that other yellow robed men and women were talking to their charges.

'Earth is a school of learning where people go to learn through hardship when they will not learn through kindness. People go to Earth as people on Earth go to school, and before going down to the Earth the entities who are going to take over an Earth body are advised on the best type of body and the best conditions to enable them to learn that which they have gone to learn, or to be more precise, to learn that for which they are actually going to Earth because, of course, they are advised before departing. You will experience this yourself, so let me tell you about this particular plane. Here we have what is known as the lower astral. Its

transient population is made up exclusively of suicides because, as I said, suicide is a crime and those who commit suicide are mentally unstable. In your own case you committed suicide because you were unable to become a father, because you had been mutilated, but that is a condition which you went to Earth to endure and to learn to surmount. I say to you very seriously that before you did go to Earth you arranged that you would be mutilated, and so it means that you have failed your test, it means that you have to start again and go through all that suffering once more, or more than once if you fail another time.'

Algernon felt decidedly gloomy. He had thought that he was doing the noble thing in terminating what he imagined to be a useless life, and now he was told he had committed a crime and would have to atone for it. But his companion was speaking—

'This, the lower astral, is very close to the Earth-plane. It is about as low as one can get without actually returning to the Earth. Here we shall place you in a Rest Home for treatment. It will be an attempt to stabilize your mental state, it will be an attempt to strengthen you for your quite definite return to Earth as soon as conditions are suitable. But here on this astral plane you can walk about if you want to, or if you so desire you can fly through the air by merely thinking of it. Similarly if you come to the conclusion that your attire is absurd, as indeed it is, then you can change that dress merely by thinking of what you would like to wear.'

Algernon thought of a very nice suit which he had once seen in a hot clime. It seemed to be off-white, lightweight and smartly cut. There was a sudden rustle and he looked down in alarm as his uniform vanished from him leaving him naked. With a shout of alarm he jumped to his feet clasping his hands over a strategic area, but no sooner was he on his feet than he found that other clothing adorned him, the clothing of his imagination. Sheepishly, blushing profusely he sat down again.

'Here you will find that you need no food although if you have gluttonous impulses you can have food, any food you wish. You merely think about it and it is materialized out of

the nourishment in the atmosphere. Think, for instance, of your favourite dish.'

Algernon pondered for a moment or two, then he thought of roast beef, roast potatoes, Yorkshire pudding, carrots, turnips, cabbage, a very large glass of cider, and a big cigar with which to end the repast. As he thought about it a vague shape appeared in front of him, solidified and hardened into a table covered with a dazzling white table cloth. Then hands and forearms appeared and dishes were placed before him, silver tureens, crystal decanters, and one by one the lids were lifted from the tureens and Algernon saw before him — and smelled — the food of his choice. His companion just waved his hands, and all the food and table disappeared.

'There really is no need for such theatrical things, there is no need for this coarse type of food because here upon this astral plane the body absorbs food from the atmosphere. There is, as you see, no sun shining in the sky, but the whole sky is glittering and from the sky every person gets all the nourishment needed. Here we have no very thin people, no very fat people, but everyone is as the body demands.'

Algernon looked about and found that that was undeniably correct. There were no fat people, there were no thin people, there were no dwarfs, there were no giants, everyone appeared to be remarkably well formed. Some of the people strolling by had deep furrows of concentration on their foreheads wondering, no doubt, about the future, worrying about the past, and regretting foolish actions.

The companion rose to his feet and said, 'Now we must go to the Home of Rest. We will continue our talk as we stroll along. Your arrival was somewhat precipitate and, although we are always alert for suicides, you had thought about it for so long that you — ah — took us rather unawares when you made that last desperate gash.'

Algernon rose to his feet and reluctantly followed his companion. Together they strolled along the path flanking the pond, together they went by little groups of people engaged in conversation. Every so often one pair would rise to their feet and walk off just as Algernon and his companion had risen to their feet and walked off.

‘Here you have comfortable conditions because in this stage of the proceedings you have to be, as it were, reconditioned for a return to the hardships and the sufferings of Earth, but remember that life upon Earth is just as the blink of an eyelid in what is actually the Real Time, and when you have completed your life upon Earth, completed it successfully, you will note, you do not return to this place again but you bypass it and go to another phase of the astral planes, a plane depending upon your progress on Earth. Consider going to school on Earth; if you just get through your examinations you may be retained in the same class, but if you make a more successful grade in the examinations then you can be promoted, and if you make what we might term a cum laude then, indeed, you might be promoted even two grades. The same applies in the astral planes. You can be removed from the Earth at what you call “death” and taken to a certain astral plane, or if you do extremely well you can be taken to a much higher plane, and, of course, the higher you rise the better the conditions.’

Algernon was greatly diverted by the changing scenery. They left the area of the pond and passed through a gap in a hedge. Before them stretched a beautifully kept lawn and sitting in chairs were groups of people listening to someone standing before them and obviously lecturing. But the companion made no pause, he continued straight on and soon they came to a rise in the ground which they ascended, and before them there was a most beautiful building, not white but slightly green-tinted, a restful colour, a colour that engendered tranquillity and peace of mind. They arrived at a door which opened automatically in front of them, and they went into a well lighted hall.

Algernon looked about him with vast interest. He had never seen such a beautiful place, and he, one of the upper crust of English society, thought he was rather a connoisseur of the beauty of buildings. There seemed to be soaring columns and many corridors leading off this main reception vestibule. In the centre of the space there seemed to be a round desk at which a number of people were sitting. The companion with Algernon went forward and said, ‘This is

our friend, Algernon St. Clair de Bonkers. You were expecting him and I believe you have assigned a room to him.'

There was a quick riffling of papers and a young woman said, 'Yes, that is correct, sir, I will have him shown to his room.' Immediately a young man got up and walked towards them. 'I will take you to your room, please follow me,' he said. The companion bowed briefly in Algernon's direction, turned and left the building. Algernon followed his new guide along a softly carpeted corridor and then turned into a very spacious room, a room which contained a bed, table and had two other smaller rooms adjoining.

'Now, sir, you will kindly get into bed and a medical team will come and examine you. You are not permitted to leave this room until the doctor assigned to you so permits.' He smiled and left the room. Algernon looked about him, and then went into the other two rooms. One seemed to be a living room with a comfortable couch and chairs, and the other — well — it was a very bare little room with a hard floor and a hard chair, and nothing more. Algernon suddenly thought, 'Oh, apparently there are no toilet facilities here.' And then the thought occurred to him why should there be toilet facilities — he certainly had not felt any urge to use such facilities and perhaps they did not do such things in this place!

Algernon stood beside the bed and wondered what to do. Should he try to escape from the place? He went to the French windows and found that they would open freely, but when he tried to move out — no — there was some invisible barrier preventing him. Incipient panic departed from him and he moved back to the bed and started to remove his clothing. Then he thought, 'What shall I do without night attire?' As he thought that he heard and felt again that rustling, and looking down he found that he was dressed in a long white nightgown suitable to the period of his sojourn upon Earth. He raised his eyebrows in considerable astonishment, and then slowly, thoughtfully, got into bed. Minutes later there was a discreet knock at the door. Algernon called 'Come in', and three people did so, two men and a woman. They introduced themselves as members of a rehabilitation

team assigned to him. They sat down, and to Algernon's astonishment no stethoscope or sounding sticks were used, no pulse was felt. Instead they just looked at him and one started to talk:

'You are here because you have committed the grave crime of suicide whereby the whole of your life upon Earth has been wasted, and so you will have to start again and undergo fresh experiences in the hope that this next time you will succeed without committing the crime of suicide.' The man went on to say that Algernon would be subjected to special soothing rays in the hope that his health would speedily improve. He was told that it was necessary for him to return to Earth as quickly as possible. The sooner he returned to Earth the easier it would be for him.

'But how can I return to Earth?' exclaimed Algernon. 'I am dead, or at least my physical body is dead, so how do you think you can put me back in it?'

The young woman answered, 'Yes, but you are under grave misconceptions because of the perfectly appalling stuff you have been taught upon the Earth. The physical body is merely a garment which the spirit dons in order that specially low tasks may be accomplished, in order that certain hard lessons may be learned because the spirit itself cannot experience such low vibrations and so has to take on garb which permits it to experience things. You will go to Earth and be born to parents who will be chosen for you. You will be born in conditions which will enable you to most profit by your Earth experience, and,' she said, 'remember that what we imply by profiting does not necessarily mean money because some of the more spiritual people on Earth are poor, while the wealthy are wicked. It depends on what one has to do, and it is thought that in your case you have been brought up to such wealth and comfort and it failed you that this time you should have poorer conditions.'

They talked for some time, and Algernon gradually got a grasp of the very different conditions from those which he had been led to believe. Soon he could realize that Christianity was just a name, Judaism was just a name, as were the names of Buddhism, the Moslem, the Islamic and other

beliefs, and really there was only one religion, a religion which as yet he could not comprehend.

The three people departed, and within the room the light faded. It was as though night had closed in on Algernon. He rested comfortably, he lost consciousness, and slept, and slept, and slept for he did not know how long, it may have been minutes, it may have been hours, it may have been days. But Algernon slept, and as he did so his spirit was revived and health flowed into him.

CHAPTER FOUR

ALGERNON awakened in the morning to bright sunshine and the sounds of birds singing in the branches of trees - bright sunshine? Algernon remembered with a start that this was not sunshine. Here there was no sun, the air itself was alive. He pushed aside the coverlet and swung his feet out on to the floor, and walked to the window. Outside everything was as bright and as cheerful as it had been yesterday — WAS it yesterday? Algernon was completely disoriented, he did not know if there were days or nights, there seemed to be no record of the passing of time. He went back to his bed and lay down upon the coverlet with his hands at the back of his head while he thought of all that had happened.

Again there came a discreet knock at the door, and at his bidding a man entered, a very serious looking man, one who appeared most thoroughly to know his duties. 'I have come to talk to you,' he said, 'because we fear that you are in grave doubt as to the reality of what you are experiencing.'

Algernon put his hands by his side and with his military training he almost 'lay to attention' as though he were in a military hospital. 'Everything I have seen, sir,' he said, 'contradicts the teachings of the Christian Church. I expected to be met by angels, I expected them to be playing harps, I expected to see Pearly Gates and cherubim, but instead I find that the place might well be a glorified Green Park or Hyde Park, or any well-kept park. I might also,' he said, 'have been experiencing hallucinations in Richmond Park.'

The new doctor laughed and said, 'Well, you are not a particularly strong Christian. If you had been, let us say, a Roman Catholic and you really BELIEVED in your religion then you would have seen angels when you came here, and you would have seen those angels until the falsity of their

appearance made you instead realize that they were but phantoms of your imagination. Here we deal in reality. Because you are an experienced man of the world, because you have been a soldier and have seen death as well as life, you could see us as we really are.'

Algernon thought of some of the scenes from his past. 'Death,' he said, 'I am most intrigued by this matter because death is such a thing of terror on Earth, people are desperately afraid to die. And a matter which has always amused me greatly is that the more religious a person, the more greatly they feel terror at even the thought of death.' He smiled and clasped his hands and continued. 'I have a very revered friend, a most ardent Catholic, who, whenever he hears that a person is ill and near death will always say how glad he is that poor Mr. So-and-So is getting better and is in such good health! But tell me, sir,' said Algernon, 'why is it that if there is life after death that people fear death?'

The doctor smiled at him rather quizzically and said, 'Well, I should have thought that a man of your education and experience and perceptions would have realized the answer. As obviously you have not, let me explain; people go to Earth to accomplish certain things, to learn certain things, to experience certain hardships that the spirit or soul or Overself — call it what you will — may be purified and strengthened thereby. So if a person commits suicide then it is a crime against the program, against the plan of things. And if people saw how natural death is and how it is just birth into another stage of evolution then they would be wanting to die all over the place and the whole purpose of Earth and other worlds would be lost.'

Certainly this was a new thought to Algernon although, indeed, a logical one. But still he was not satisfied; 'Then am I to understand that the fear of death is artificially induced and is wholly illogical?' he asked.

'Yes indeed,' said the doctor. 'It is a provision of Nature that everyone shall fear death, everyone shall do everything they can to preserve life so that the experiences on the Earth may be maintained and carried through to their logical and predetermined result. So if a person commits suicide then

they are throwing everything out of gear. Mind you,' he said, 'when the time for a natural death comes there is normally no fear, there is normally no pain because people in another realm of the astral can say when a person is due to die or, as we prefer, undergo transition, and as that time approaches a form of anaesthesia is generated and instead of the pangs of death there are pleasant thoughts, thoughts of release, thoughts of going Home.'

Algernon started up in some indignation. 'Oh, but that cannot be,' he said, 'for people who are dying often twitch and throb about and are obviously in very great pain indeed.'

The doctor shook his head sadly; 'No, no,' he said, 'you are in error. When the person is dying there is no pain, but release from pain. The body may twitch, the body may groan, but that is merely an automatic reaction from certain stimulated nerves. It does not at all mean that the person is enduring pain. The onlooker usually is no judge of what is going on. The conscious part which is about to undergo transition is divorced from the physical part which is the mere animal being. So — wait!' he said, 'when you committed suicide you felt no pain, did you?' Algernon rubbed his chin deep in thought, and then he replied hesitantly, 'Well, no, I suppose I did not. I cannot remember having felt anything except an extremely cold sensation and then nothing more. No sir, perhaps you are right, come to think of it, no, I did not feel any pain, I felt bemused, I felt wondering.'

The doctor laughed and wrung his hands saying, 'Ah, now I have you! You admit you felt no pain, and yet you were screaming like a stuck pig. And, by the way, with a stuck pig all you get is the air in the lungs being expelled rapidly and agitating the vocal chords so that one gets a high pitched squeal. There was the same sort of reaction with you, a long high pitched squeal interrupted by the bubbling of your blood as it emerged copiously from the slash in your throat. It was the high pitched squeal which brought the unfortunate serving maid into the bathroom.'

Yes, it seemed logical enough now. Algernon was beginning to see that this was not hallucination but fact, and

then he said, 'But I understood that when a person died he would immediately be taken before God to be judged. He would immediately see Jesus and perhaps the Holy Mother and the disciples.'

The doctor shook his head sadly, and replied, 'But you say you thought you would see Jesus; supposing you had been a Jew, supposing you had been a Moslem, supposing you had been a Buddhist, would you still expect to see Jesus or do you think that in Heaven the place is divided up into separate countries where people of each religion go? No, the whole idea is absurd, nonsense, criminal folly, and foolish preachers on Earth really pollute the population with their horrendous legends. People come here and they think they are in hell. There IS no hell — except Earth!'

Algernon really jumped. He felt his body twitch as though on fire. 'Oh, then am I in Heaven?' he asked.

'No, indeed not,' replied the doctor. 'There is no such place. There is no Heaven, there is no hell, but there is purgatory. Purgatory is a place where you purge your sins and that is what you are doing here. Here you will shortly be met by a committee who will help you to decide what you are going to do when you return to Earth. You have to return to Earth to live out the plan which you yourself have made, and, actually, that is why I came here now, to see if you are ready to be presented before the committee.'

Algernon felt a twinge of fear, he felt as though icy fingers were going up his spine. It sounded worse than an army medical board in which doctors probed and prodded and asked the most embarrassing questions about one's reactions to this and that, and how one was going to manage about a sex life, and was he married, had he a girl friend? No, Algernon could not summon any enthusiasm whatever for going before a board of — what?

'Well,' he said, 'surely I am to be given time to recover somewhat from the extreme trauma of passing over from life to This. Admitted that I came here of my own volition through committing suicide which appears to be such a heinous crime, but I still think that I should be given some time to recover and to see what I want to do. And while I

am on the subject,' he said, 'how can suicide be such a heinous crime if people do not know that they are committing a crime? I always understood that if a person was not conscious of doing ill then he could not be punished for so doing.'

'Oh nonsense!' exclaimed the doctor. 'You are like all those of your ilk who think that because you come of a higher class you are entitled to special consideration. You always try to rationalize. It seems to be a vice of your type. You knew perfectly well that it was wrong to commit suicide, even your own peculiar form of religion as taught down there instils in you that self-destruction is a crime against the person, against the state, and against the church.'

Algernon looked frightfully sour and said, 'Then how do you account for Japanese who commit suicide if things go wrong with them? If a Japanese man thinks he has lost face then he disembowels himself publicly. That's suicide, isn't it? He is doing what he believes, isn't he?'

The doctor looked most distressed and replied, 'It does not alter the matter in the slightest that it has become a social custom in Japan to destroy oneself rather than face embarrassment. Let me tell you; let me get this rammed into your sub-conscious; suicide is NEVER right. Suicide is ALWAYS a crime. There are never any extenuating circumstances for committing suicide. It means that a person is not evolved enough to continue that which they took on of their own volition. But let us waste no more time,' he said, 'you are not here for a holiday, you are here so that we may help you make the most of your forthcoming life on Earth. Come!'

He rose abruptly and stood over Algernon who bleated plaintively, 'Well, don't I get a chance to have a bath? Don't I have any breakfast before I am dragged away?'

'Bosh!' exclaimed the doctor in irritation. 'Here you do not need a bath, here you do not need food. You are cleansed and fed by the atmosphere itself. You are begging the question because you appear to be not much of a man, just one who tries to evade all his responsibilities. Come with me.'

The doctor turned and made for the door. Very, very

reluctantly indeed Algernon rose slowly to his feet and followed him. The doctor led the way out. They turned to the right and entered a garden which Algernon had not previously seen. The atmosphere was wonderful, there were birds in the air and many pleasant animals lying around, and then as the doctor and Algernon turned a corner there appeared another building. It looked as though it were a cathedral, there were spires to it, and this time instead of a ramp going up there were many, many steps. They climbed the steps and went in to the cool recesses of a mighty building. Many people occupied the entrance, there were people sitting on comfortable benches around the walls. Again, in the centre of the vestibule, there was what seemed to be a reception desk, circular as before but this time it was staffed by much older people. The doctor led Algernon up and said, 'We have come to go before the Council.'

One of the assistants rose to his feet and said, 'Please follow me.' With the assistant leading the way, the doctor and Algernon followed. After a short walk down a corridor they turned left into an ante-room. The assistant said, 'Wait here, please,' while he continued and knocked on a door and entered when bidden to do so. The door closed behind him and there could be heard the very faint murmur of voices.

Some moments later the assistant came out again and held the door open, saying, 'You may enter now' The doctor jumped to his feet and took Algernon by an arm and led him in.

Involuntarily Algernon stopped in astonishment when he entered the room. It was a very large room indeed, and in the centre there was a globe slowly turning, a globe with blues and greens. Instinctively Algernon knew that this was a simulacrum of the Earth. He was both fascinated and intrigued to see that the Earth-globe was turning, turning without visible means of support. He seemed to be in space gazing down upon the Earth which was illuminated by some unseen sun.

There was a long table, very highly polished, very intricately carved, and at one end of the table a very old man was sitting, white-haired, white-bearded. He looked benign

but yet at the same time he gave an impression of sternness. He gave the impression that should the occasion warrant it he could be a very tough person indeed.

Algernon took a fleeting glance, and there seemed to be eight other people sitting at the table, four were men and four were women. The doctor led him to a seat at the foot of the table. The table, Algernon saw, was so arranged, so shaped that the other members could all see him without even turning in their chairs and briefly he wondered at the craftsmanship which could have worked out such intricate geometry.

The doctor said, 'This is Algernon St. Clair de Bonkers. We have determined that he has reached a state of recovery which will enable him to profit by your advice. I present to you Algernon St. Clair de Bonkers.'

The old man at the head of the table nodded briefly for them to sit down. Then he said, 'Algernon St. Clair de Bonkers you are here because you have committed the crime of suicide. You killed yourself in spite of the plans you had made and in defiance of Higher Law. Do you wish to say anything in your defence first?'

Algernon cleared his throat and shivered. The doctor leaned across and whispered, 'Stand up!' Reluctantly Algernon got to his feet and said rather defiantly, 'If I made an arrangement to do a certain task, and if conditions not of my choosing made it impossible for me to do that task then surely, my life being my own, I have every right to terminate it if I so choose. I did not decide to come to this place. I decided merely to terminate my life.' So saying he sat down with a defiant thump.

The doctor looked at him sadly. The old man at the head of the table looked at him with great sorrow, and the four men and the four women looked at him with compassion as if they had heard it all before. Then the old man said, 'You made your plan, but your life is not your own. Your life belongs to your Overself — that which you call your soul — and you have injured your Overself by your recalcitrance and by your foolish method of depriving your Overself of its puppet. Because of this you will have to return to Earth and

live a whole life again, and this time be sure you do not commit suicide. Now we have to decide the best time for you to return, and the best type of conditions for you, and to find suitable parents.'

There was considerable rustling of papers, and one member rose from his seat and moved closer to the globe. For some moments he stood there looking at the globe but saying nothing. Then, still silent, he moved back to his place at the side of the table and made a notation on his papers.

'Algernon,' said the old man, 'you went down to Earth in conditions of great comfort. You went down to an old established family where all your creature comforts were attended to. You had every possible consideration. Money was no object. Your education was of the very best obtainable in your country. But have you thought of the harm that you have done in your life? Have you thought of the brutality, have you thought how you used to strike servants? Have you thought of the young maid servants you have seduced?'

Algernon jumped to his feet in indignation. 'Sir!' he exclaimed heatedly, 'I was always told that the maid servants were there for an unmarried son's convenience, to be his playthings, to learn about sex. I have done no wrong no matter how many maid servants I have seduced!' He sat down, fairly seething with indignation.

'Algernon, you know better,' said the old man, 'you know yourself that class, as you believe in it, is merely an artificial thing. On your world if a person has money or comes from an old family which has been favoured then they have a lot of concessions. Whereas if a person is poor and has to work for one of these other families they are denied concessions and treated as inferior creatures. You know the law as well as anyone, for you have lived many times and you have all this knowledge within your sub-consciousness.'

One of the women sitting at the table pursed her lips as though she had just tasted an extremely sour gooseberry, and she said primly, 'I wish to put on record my opinion that this young man should restart his life as one of the under-privileged. He has had everything his own way. I

think he should start again as the son of a lesser tradesman or even the son of a cowherd.'

Algernon jumped to his feet in fury. 'How dare you say things like that!' he shouted. 'Do you know that blue blood runs in my veins? Do you know that my ancestors went on the Crusades? My family is one of the most respected families.' He was interrupted in mid-stream of his speech, as it were by the elderly chairman who said. 'Now, now, let us not have arguments here. It will do you no good at all. It will merely add to the load which you have to bear. We are trying to help you, not to add to your Karma, but to help you to lessen it.'

Algernon broke in truculently, 'Well, I am not having anyone say things about my forebears. I suppose yours,' pointing an irate finger at the woman who had spoken, 'came from brothel keepers or whore house managers, or something. Pah!'

The doctor firmly grasped Algernon's arm and pulled him down into the chair, saying, 'Be quiet, you clown, you are making things so much worse for yourself. You don't know the first thing about this place yet, keep quiet and hear what is said.'

Algernon subsided with the thought that he was indeed in purgatory as he had already been told, but then he listened to the chairman who said, 'Algernon, you are treating us as though we were your enemies. Such is not the case. You are not here as an honoured guest, you know. You are here as one who has committed a crime, and before we go any further in this matter there is one thing I want to make clear; there is no such thing as blue blood in one's veins. There is no such thing as inheriting class or caste or status. You have been brain-washed, you are bemused by the legends and fairy tales that you have been told.' He stopped for a moment to take a sip of water, and then he looked at the other members of the Board before continuing.

'You must have in your mind the definite, definite thought that entities from many, many worlds, from many, many planes of existence go down to Earth, one of the lowest of the worlds, to learn by hardship that which they seem

incapable of learning by kindness. And when one goes down to the Earth one adopts the body most suited for the fulfilment of one's task. If you were an actor you would realize that you are just a man, the actor, and you may be called upon to play many, many parts in a lifetime. So during a lifetime as an actor you may have to dress as a prince or a king or as a beggar. As a king you may have to pretend that you are of the Blood Royal, but it is pretence only. Everyone in the theatre really knows it. Some actors get carried away so much – as you have – that they really believe they are princes or kings, but they never want to be beggars. Now no matter who you are, no matter how high your degree of evolution, when you come here it is because you have committed the crime, and indeed a crime it is, of suicide. You come here so that you can atone for your crime. You come here so that we, in touch with higher planes, and also in touch with the Earth itself, can suggest how best that atonement may be fulfilled.'

Algernon did not look at all happy. 'Well, how did I know it was wrong to commit suicide, and what are you going to say about the Japanese who commit suicide for honour?' he asked, still with considerable truculence. The chairman said, 'Suicide is never the correct thing to do. It is not even correct when Buddhist priests or Shinto priests set themselves on fire or disembowel themselves or throw themselves off cliff tops. Manmade laws can never override the laws of the Universe. But listen to me.'

The chairman looked down at his papers and said, 'You were going to live until you were a certain age, and you ended your life on Earth thirty years before that age, and thus it is that you have to return to Earth to live thirty years and then die to the Earth, and the two lives, the one which you terminated and the one to which you are now going, will merely count as one – what shall I call it? Let us call it a class session.'

Another of the women fluttered a hand to attract the chairman's notice; 'Yes, madam?' he queried. 'You have a comment?'

'Yes I do, sir,' she said, 'I think the young man doesn't at

all realize his position. He thinks he is so terribly superior to everyone else. I think perhaps he should be told of the deaths he has caused. I think he should be told more of his past.'

'Yes, yes, but as you are so very well aware, he is going to see his past in the Hall of Memories,' said the somewhat irritated chairman.

'But Mr. Chairman,' said the woman, 'the Hall of Memories interlude comes after, and we want this young man to listen to us now sanely – if such a thing is possible in such a young man,' she said, darting a dark glance at Algernon. 'I think that he should be told more of his position now.'

The chairman sighed, shrugged his shoulders, and said, 'Very well, as it is your wish we will alter our routine and I suggest that we take the young man to the Hall of Memories now so that he can see what makes us less than enamoured of his self-styled attainments.'

There was a shuffling of chairs as they were pushed back, and the members of the Board rose to their feet. The doctor also rose in some dismay and said, 'Come on, you've asked for it,' to Algernon. Algernon looked quite indignantly from one to the other and rasped, 'Well, I didn't ask to come to this place. I don't know what you are all making such a commotion for. If I have to get back to Earth let me get back and get on with it.'

The chairman said, 'We will now accompany you to the Hall of Memories. There you will be able to judge whether we are exceeding our authority as you seem to imagine, or whether we are being lenient. Come!' So saying he turned and led the way out of the large chamber, and into the open again. It was so refreshing out in the open, the living atmosphere, the birds and the friendly bees which went buzzing by. Here there were no insects to bite or to pester, but only insects which added what one might term a familiar music to the surroundings.

The chairman and the other members of the Board let the way, almost like a school treat, thought Algernon, except that it's no treat for me. And then he glanced sideways at the doctor and said, 'It seems you are my gaoler, eh?' The doctor

did not reply. Instead he just grasped Algernon's arm more firmly and together they walked on.

Soon they came to another building. Algernon at first sight exclaimed, 'Oh, the Albert Hall, how did we get back in London?' The doctor laughed — he really was amused — 'This is no Albert Hall,' he said, 'look at the difference in architecture. This place is BEAUTIFUL!'

Together they entered the Hall, and it was, as the doctor had said, 'beautiful'. The chairman led the way in to some inner recesses. Algernon guessed from the time that they were walking that they must be right in the heart of the building. Then a door was opened and Algernon gasped and drew back in such a hurry that he bumped into the doctor who laughed and said, 'Oh no, this is not the edge of the Universe, you can't fall, it's perfectly normal. Just compose yourself, there is nothing dangerous to happen.'

The chairman turned to Algernon and said, 'Walk forward, young man, walk forward, you will know when to stop, and pay great attention.'

For a moment Algernon stood stock still, really frightened that he was going to fall over the edge of the Universe and tumble down along the stars at his feet. Then a very firm push in the small of his back propelled him forwards, and having started he found he couldn't stop.

Algernon walked forward, propelled by some force beyond his ken. He moved and as he did so shadows, forms and colours slid by him, shadows becoming more solid until in the end there was a definite obstruction. He came to a dead stop, again of no volition of his own. He looked about him in some confusion, and then a voice said, 'Enter.' Again through no conscious effort on his part Algernon moved forward and through what had seemed to be an impenetrable wall. There was a terrible traumatic feeling of falling. Then Algernon seemed to be disembodied, he was looking down at a scene. A nurse was holding out a baby which had just been delivered of his mother. A fierce looking gentleman was looking down at the baby, and then suddenly he twirled his moustaches and said to the nurse, 'Hmm, horrible little creature, isn't it? Looks more like a drowned rat than what I

hope will be a man. All right, nurse, take him away.' The scene swirled, and then Algernon saw himself in a class room being taught by a tutor. He saw himself playing rather mean tricks on the tutor who could not say much about it because Algernon's father was an extremely autocratic aristocrat who regarded tutors and governesses and all employed people as menials beneath contempt. Algernon looked down with horror at some of the things he had done, things which made him blush now. Then the picture changed again. He was older now, perhaps fourteen — he guessed himself to be between fourteen and fifteen — and he saw himself looking somewhat furtively out of a doorway in what was a fairly deserted part of the family manor. A pretty young maid servant came along and Algernon ducked back, and as she passed the door he leapt out and grabbed her around the throat, dragging her into the room. Quickly he locked the door and, still holding the maidservant by her throat to stop her from screaming, he ripped off her clothing. Algernon grew hot at the thought of what he had done. Then again the scene changed. He was standing in his father's study, the weeping maidservant was standing there as well. Algernon's father was twirling his moustaches and listening to what the girl had to say, and then he laughed harshly and said 'My good heavens, woman, don't you understand that a young gentleman has to find out about sex, why do you think you are here? If you cannot accept a little thing like that get out of my house!' Imperiously he raised his hand and slapped the girl across the face. She turned and ran weeping from the room. The father turned to Algernon and said, 'Hmm, so you've been blooded, young man, you are no longer a virgin, eh? Well, keep up the good work, get in your practice. I want to see many strong sons born to this house before I depart this world.' So saying the father dismissed Algernon at a gesture.

The picture changed, and changed again. Eton, rowing on the river. Oxford, the Army, drilling men, and then overseas. War against the Boers. Algernon looked with horror at the pictures, he saw himself giving orders to his men to mow down a defenceless frightened family who did nothing but

fail to understand an order in English because they spoke only Afrikaans. He saw the bodies flung in the ditch at the side of the road, and he saw himself laughing callously as a young girl was speared through the abdomen with a bayonet and tossed aside.

The pictures continued. Algernon was bathed in cold perspiration. He felt sick, he felt the most urgent desire to vomit but could not. He saw the total of deaths mount, seventy, seventy-four, seventy-eight. Seventy-eight deaths, and then just as he was going to kill the seventy-ninth another man, a sniper rose up and shot Algernon so that he was no longer a man.

The pictures went on until they seemed to have no more meaning for Algernon. He reeled away and leaned against a wall, and then without knowing how, without having made a movement of his own volition, he found himself again in company of the doctor and the members of the Board. They looked at him quizzically and then for a moment a flicker of compassion crossed the face of the chairman. But he merely said, 'Well, let us get back to our discussion.' He turned and led the way out of the Hall of Memories and back to the Board Room.

Again in the room the chairman said, 'You have seen incidents of your life. You have seen that, blue blood or red blood, you have committed many crimes ending up by the crime of suicide. Now we have to decide, or rather we have to help you to decide what will be the best vocation by which you can atone for the harm that you have done in the viciousness of war and the crime which you have committed in suicide. Do you have any ideas what you would like to be?'

Algernon was very chastened. He felt very shaky, he felt worse than he could ever remember feeling before. He took his head in his hands and leaned his elbows on the table. The room was silent completely silent. Algernon sat there for an indefinite time thinking of all that he had seen, worse, thinking of all the things that he had seen of the acts which he had done, and he pondered what should he be? The thought occurred to him that possibly he should become a priest,

clergyman, possibly a bishop, and with a bit of influence he might even rise to be an archbishop. But then from somewhere he got such an impelling feeling of negation that he changed his line of thinking very quickly.

A veterinarian, he thought. But no, he did not like animals that much, and there wasn't much status in being a veterinarian, was there? It would be such a come-down, he thought, to one of his caste to be a mere veterinarian.

From somewhere he got the impression of silent laughter, laughter which mocked him, laughter which indicated to him that he was still on the wrong track. And then he thought that he would become a doctor, a fashionable doctor, he would work among the nobility, and possibly he could save seventy or eighty lives in his career and then he would have a clean sheet with which to start another life at the end of this, the impending one.

One of the men spoke for the first time. 'We have, of course, been watching your thoughts in this globe,' and he gestured to a globe let in to the table which Algernon had not seen before because it had been covered up, but now it was glowing and showing Algernon's thoughts. As Algernon blushed deeply at the realization that all he had thought had been revealed so the image in the globe blushed deeply also.

The chairman spoke, 'Yes, I can thoroughly recommend that you become a doctor but I do not at all recommend that you become a society doctor. This is the plan which I would recommend in your case'

The chairman stopped and riffled through some papers, and then said, 'You have taken life you have maimed and mutilated others.' Algernon rose to his feet. 'No! I have not maimed, I have not mutilated—' The chairman interrupted, 'Yes, by your orders others have been killed, others have been maimed and mutilated, and you bear the blame quite as much as the persons who actually did the acts. But you are listening to me, and you had better listen carefully for I shall not repeat what I am saying. You should become a doctor, but a doctor in a poor district where you can work among the poor, and you will start your life under poor conditions, no longer a member of the aristocracy but one who has to

claw his way up. And in the thirtieth year of that life your life will be ended and you will return here if you repeat your suicide, or, if not you will go to a higher plane of the astral where you will be prepared according to how well you have performed in the life which you are about to undergo.'

There was considerable discussion for some time, and then the chairman knocked with his gavel and said, 'We will meet again to plan the parents you will have, to plan the area to which you shall be born, and to arrange the date. Until that time you may return to the House of Rest. The meeting is now adjourned.'

Algernon and the doctor walked somberly along the garden paths, neither saying a word, and then the doctor took Algernon into the House of Rest and showed him a suitable room, saying, 'I will come back for you later when I am so instructed.' With the briefest of nods he turned away and left, and Algernon sat in a chair with his head in his hands, the picture of misery, thinking of all that he had seen, thinking of all that he had done, and thinking, 'Well, if this is purgatory thank goodness there is no hell!'

CHAPTER FIVE

ALGERNON ruffled his hair between his clenched fingers. He felt decidedly unhappy. Yes — well - he had committed suicide. Fine, he did it, now he was paying for it and he was going to pay for it some more. He sat there wondering where it was going to end, how it was going to end. He reviewed in his mind all the incidents which had occurred since he arrived on this, the plane of purgatory.

‘So it's wrong to be an aristocrat, eh? It's wrong to be of blue blood, eh?’ he muttered aloud to himself glowering down at the floor. Then he spun around at the opening of the door. At the vision which entered - a most attractive nurse — he rose to his feet his face beaming like the morning sun. ‘Ah!’ he exulted, ‘an angel come to take me away from this benighted place!’ He eyed the nurse with unconcealed eagerness saying, ‘What pulchritude in a place like this. What—’

‘Stop!’ said the nurse, ‘I am quite immune to your blandishments. You men are all the same, you think of one thing only when you come to this plane, and I can tell you we women are thoroughly tired of all the come-ons which you try.’

‘Sit down,’ she said, ‘I have to talk to you and take you to a different place. But first of all I could not help hearing what you were mumbling about when I came in.’

‘After you, miss,’ said Algernon with much gallantry. The nurse sat and Algernon hastened to take his seat beside her. He was most piqued when she quickly moved her seat away so that she was facing him.

‘Now, Fifty-Three,’ she said. Algernon held up his hand. ‘You are mistaken, miss, I am not Fifty-three; I am Algernon St. Clair de Bonkers,’ he said. The nurse sniffed audibly and

tossed her head, 'Don't be stupid,' she replied, 'you are not in a play now, you are here on this plane between acts as one might phrase it.' She held up her hand to stop him from speaking, and then said, 'There are two things in particular which I want to talk to you about first. One is that here you are not Algernon Whatever-It-Is but you are Number Fifty-Three. You are near enough a convict here, you have been convicted of the crime of suicide, and here you are referred to by the last two figures of your basic frequency, in your case Fifty-Three.'

Poor Algernon felt his mind boggle. 'Basic frequency?' he said, 'I am afraid you are talking completely above my comprehension. I have not the slightest idea of what you are talking about. My name is Algernon and not Fifty-Three.'

'You have a lot to learn, young man,' the nurse retorted with some asperity. 'You seem to be remarkably ignorant for a person who professes to be of near-royal blood, but let us deal with that first. You seem to think that because a particular act upon Earth made it necessary for you to be as a titled person that you carry it on over here. You do not!'

'Oh!' Algernon burst out, 'you must be a Communist or something. You are adopting a Communist theme if you think that no one is entitled to their status — that all men are equal!'

The nurse sighed with resigned exasperation, and then tiredly said, 'You are indeed ignorant, I am going to tell you here and now that Communism is a crime at least the equal of suicide because, whereas a person who commits suicide commits a crime against himself, yet Communism is a crime against the whole race, a crime against humanity. Communism, in fact, is as a cancer in the body of the world. We are not in favour of Communism, and in time — after much time — Communism will eventually be stamped out because it is founded on false precepts. But that is not what we are discussing.'

She referred to some papers in her hands, raised her head and looked straight at Algernon saying, 'We have to get you away from this dreadful idea that you have that because you were a titled person once you are always going to be a

titled person. Let us consider things in the terms of the Earth. Think of a writer who was down on that world some time ago; his name was Shakespeare. He wrote plays which are very familiar to you, and people act the parts which he wrote. Sometimes there will be a villain in the play, sometimes there will be a king portrayed, but I am going to put it to you quite bluntly that people would laugh to scorn any actor who, having played the king in Hamlet, went about for the rest of his life imagining that he was still a king in reality. People go down to the Earth to take that particular part in the play of life which will enable them to learn the tasks which they have to learn, and having learned their task and returned to the astral world, then, of course, they discard the imaginary identity and revert to their own natural identity which is determined by their own superior Over-self.'

Algernon — or rather, Fifty-Three from now on — shuddered, and replied 'Oh dear, oh dear! I really do dislike blue-stockings. When one has a beautiful young girl who starts preaching and teaching then really my emotions become quite turned off.'

'Oh, how delightful!' said the nurse, 'for I found your thoughts to be highly unpleasant, and I am glad indeed that I have dampened your very obvious lust.'

She again referred to her notes, checking one paper against another, and then she said, 'You have been sent to the wrong Home of Rest. I have to take you to another one which is of a more temporary nature because you are having to go back to the Earth at the earliest possible moment, you are, in fact, just a transient here and there is little that we can do for you except pass you on as quickly as we may. Please follow me.' With that she rose to her feet and led the way to the door. Fifty-Three — ex Algernon! darted ahead of her and held the door open with a slightly mocking bow; 'After you, madam, after you,' he said.

The nurse swept in high dignity through the door and bumped into the doctor who was just about to enter. 'Oops! Oh, I am so sorry, doctor, I did not see you,' exclaimed the nurse.

‘Oh, think nothing of it, nurse, think nothing of it. I was coming to collect number Fifty-Three because the Board wants to see him again. Do you have anything to say to him first?’

The nurse smiled at the doctor, and replied, ‘No, I shall be glad to get rid of him. He seems to be rather fresh for a man in his position. I have been trying to teach him that blue blood does not count here but at least it is a bit higher than one with Communist blood. But, doctor,’ the nurse said quickly, ‘after the Board has finished with him he has to go to the Home for Transients, there was a mix-up in the orders and I believe that that is why you brought him here. Will you see that he goes to the Home for Transients?’ The doctor nodded and said, ‘Yes, nurse, I will attend to it.’ Then he nodded to Fifty-Three and said, ‘Come along, we are late already.’ With that he turned and led the way down another corridor which Algernon? No, Fifty-Three, had not seen before. He, poor fellow, looked decidedly downcast and muttered, ‘Purgatory? This is purgatory all right, I’m sure I shall be several inches shorter by the time I get out of here. I’ve walked myself down to my knee joints almost!’ The doctor, who had caught his mutter, laughed delightedly and retorted, ‘Yes, indeed, you will be very, very much shorter when you leave here because you will be an infant inside its mother!’

The doctor and Fifty-Three turned into a long corridor. Two guards sat one on each side of the entrance. One nodded briefly to the doctor and said, ‘Is this Fifty-Three?’

‘Yes it is,’ said the doctor. ‘Are you the one who is going to accompany us?’

The guard on the right-hand side rose to his feet and replied, ‘I am the one who goes with you so let’s not waste any more time, shall we?’ Turning he strode down the corridor at quite a smart pace. Fifty-Three and the doctor had to step out briskly in order to keep up with him. They walked for quite a long way, Fifty-Three was horrified to see that no matter how far they walked the corridor seemed to stretch on endlessly, endlessly. But there came a diversion; there was a branching of the corridor. The guard, or guide,

Fifty-Three wasn't sure which he was, took the left turn and went on a little further and then knocked smartly at a door, and stood back. 'Come in,' said a voice, and the guard quickly threw open the door so that first the doctor, then Fifty-Three and lastly the guard entered, the latter shutting the door firmly behind him. 'Come and sit here, please,' said a voice. Fifty-Three moved forward and took the seat indicated.

'Now we have to discuss your future. We want you to get back on Earth at the very earliest possible moment compatible with a woman's biological functions!' said the voice.

Fifty-Three looked about him — he had been rather dazzled by the amount of light in the building, it seemed to be a very light building indeed and there were many flashing lights all over the place. One wall, he saw with some astonishment, appeared to be of frosted glass over which at intervals flickering coloured lights passed quickly and vanished. He saw that he was in a room, the like of which he had never before envisaged. It appeared to be of a clinical austerity, not white but a very restful shade of green. About him there were five or six — he could not count them precisely — people dressed in greenish overalls. He was quite uncertain of the exact number of people about because it seemed at intervals some people came into the room and others disappeared from the room, but this was no time to be paying attention to trivia because the first man was speaking again.

'I have very carefully examined and considered all the information which has been put before me. I have gone very thoroughly into your past, your past before you went down to the Earth, and I find that although according to your lights you did fairly well on the Earth yet according to the mores and penates of the real life you were a failure and you compounded your failure by committing the crime of suicide. So now we want to help you.' Fifty-Three looked dreadfully sour, and could not help bursting out, 'Help me? Help me! Since I have been here I have been criticized, I have been reprimanded for almost everything, I have been reprimanded for being one of the upper class and I have been reprimanded for saying that perhaps I should have

been a Communist. What AM I to believe? If I am here for punishment then why not get on with it?’

The elderly slender man with the gray hair sitting in front of Fifty-Three looked really distressed, and remarkably compassionate. ‘I am so sorry indeed that you feel like this,’ he said, ‘it is your attitude which is making everything so difficult for us because we have come to the inescapable conclusion that as you went to the Earth as a player in a rather exalted status that has affected your psyche, and so that makes it necessary that when you are sent back you will have to be sent back to rather poor conditions otherwise you are going to be quite intolerable and you are going to give your Overself absolutely false impressions. Do I make myself clear?’ he asked.

Fifty-Three glowered and retorted, ‘No, definitely not, I just don't know what you are talking about when you talk about the Overself and all that. So far all I have been told is just a mass of gibberish, and I have no sense of guilt for what I have done. Therefore, according to English law, I have done no wrong!’

The elderly man felt his determination harden. It seemed to him that this man — this number Fifty-Three — was just being difficult for the sake of being difficult. ‘You are completely wrong in your reference to English law,’ the interrogator said, ‘Because if you knew anything at all about English law you would know that one statement is to the effect that ignorance of the law is no excuse, so that if you break the law of England and then you claim you did not know there was such a law then you are still found guilty because you should have acquainted yourself with the existence of such a law. And please do not try to be truculent with me because I am one of those who hold your destiny in my hands, and if you antagonize us too much then we can make your conditions hard indeed. Just pay attention and keep your truculence in check.’

Fifty-Three shuddered at the tone of the voice and recognized when he was defeated. He said, ‘Sir, but what am I to do when terms are used which have no meaning for me? What, for instance, is the Overself?’

‘Later,’ said the interrogator, ‘you will be taught all about this. It will suffice for the moment if I say that your Overself is what you would refer to as your eternal, immortal soul, and you now are just a puppet or extension of that Overself, almost, as one might say, like a pseudo pod — an extension from your Overself materialized into material substance so that you may learn by actual hard physical experience that which is unobtainable to the far more tenuous Overself.’

Poor Fifty-Three felt his head reeling. He did not really understand any of this but he thought that as he had been told he would be instructed later he had better cut things short and now he should just listen. So he nodded dumbly in answer to the interrogator’s raised eyebrows.

The interrogator, or perhaps a better word to use would be counsellor, looked down at his papers and then said, ‘You have to return as a child of poor parents, those who are without social status, because the act which you have been called upon to play in your previous life seems seriously to have warped your understanding and your perceptions, and you place yourself into a class to which you are not entitled. We are going to suggest — and you have the right to refuse - that you are born to parents in London, in the area known as Tower Hamlets. There are some very suitable parents-to-be near Wapping High Street. You will have the advantage of being born quite close to the Tower of London and to the Mint and to very famous dock areas where there is shocking poverty and suffering. Here, if you agree, and if you have the moral and mental fibre, you can work your way up to be a physician or surgeon, and in saving the lives of those around you, you can atone for the lives that you have taken and caused to be taken. But you will have to decide quickly because these women who we have chosen as prospective mothers for you are already pregnant, and that means we have no time to waste. I am going to show you,’ he said, ‘the area which will be your locale.’

He turned and waved his hand to the wall which Fifty-Three had taken to be of glass, of frosted glass. As he did so it sprang into life, life in colour, and Fifty-Three could see an area of London which he knew only indifferently. The River

Thames, yes; Southwark Bridge London Bridge, and then the Bascules of Tower Bridge moved on to the screen. And to the side the Tower of London itself could be seen. He sat there quite enthralled, looking at the absolutely clear pictures, seeing traffic on the streets. He was most intrigued to see horseless carriages and very, very few horse-drawn vehicles indeed. He exclaimed on the matter, and the counsellor said, 'Oh yes, horse-drawn traffic has almost disappeared, things have changed considerably since you have been here, and you have been here quite a time, you know. You were unconscious for about three years. Now everything is motorised, motor buses, motor vans, and motor cars. Things are supposed to have improved but I personally deplore the passing of the horse from the streets.'

Fifty-Three turned his attention to the picture again. Mint Street, Cable Street, Shadwell, East Smithfield, the Highway, Thomas More Street, St. Catherines, Wapping High Street, and Wapping Wall.

The counsellor said, 'Well, we have five women who are pregnant. I want you to choose which area you prefer of that shown. Of the five women one is the wife of an inn keeper, or I believe you might call him a publican. The second is the wife of a greengrocer. The third is the wife of an ironmonger. The fourth is the wife of a motor bus driver. And the fifth, she is again a lodging house keeper. I say again because the first one is an inn keeper. Now, you have a right of choice and no one will influence you. I can give you a list of them and you will have twenty-four hours upon which to meditate over this matter, and if you need any advice you merely have to ask.'

Fifty-Three sat back and gazed at the living pictures on that wall, seeing people move about, seeing the strange costumes that women were now wearing, marvelling at the horseless carriages going along, marvelling too at the amount of building going on. Then he turned to the counsellor and said, 'Sir, I would ask you particularly that I be permitted to see the ten people, five fathers and five mothers, from whom I am expected to pick my parents. I would like to see them, I would like to see their home conditions.'

The counsellor, or interrogator, shook his head slowly with real regret: 'Ah, my friend,' he mourned, 'that is a request beyond my ability to grant for we never, never do such a thing. We can merely give you the details and you make your choice. You are not permitted to see your parents for that would be an invasion of their privacy. Now I suggest you return to your Transit Hotel and think about the whole matter.' So saying he bowed slightly to the doctor and to Fifty-Three, picked up his papers and left the room. The doctor said, 'Come, let us go,' and rose to his feet. Fifty-Three rose reluctantly and followed him from the room. Together they retraced their steps accompanied by the guard. Together they went along that corridor which seemed so endless and which now seemed even longer.

At last they came out into the open again, and Fifty-Three took a deep breath inhaling energy and life as he did so.

The guard left them to return to his post, and the doctor and Fifty-Three continued on to a fairly dull gray building which Fifty-Three had vaguely noticed before but passed off as of no interest. They entered the front door and a man at a desk said, 'Third on the left,' and took no more interest in them. They went on to 'third on the left' and entered a bare room. There was a bed and a chair, and a small table on which Fifty-Three was interested to observe a large folder with the number 53 stamped on.

'Well, there it is,' said the doctor. 'You have twenty-four hours from now to ponder upon your decision and after that time I shall come for you and we will have to go and see what can be seen, and prepare you for going back to the Earth. Good-bye!' The doctor turned and made his way out of the room, shutting the door behind him, shutting the door on Fifty-Three who stood disconsolately in the middle of the room apprehensively fingering the pages enclosed within the folder marked 53.

Fifty-Three glowered at the closing door and put his hands behind his back. With head sunk upon his chest he paced the room, and paced, and paced. Hour after hour he walked about the room and then quite tired with the exertion he flung himself into a chair and gazed dourly through the

window. 'Fifty-Three, eh?' he muttered to himself. 'Like a convict, and all for doing something which I thought was good. What was the point of living a life as neither man nor woman?' He put his chin in his hands and crossed his legs and looked a typical picture of misery. Then he thought, 'Or DID I think I was doing the right thing? They may have something in what they say, after all. I think it's very likely that I was giving way to self-pity, but here I am now given a number like a convict at Dartmoor and saddled with the decision of saying what I am going to be next. I don't know what I'm going to be. I don't know that it matters at all anyway, I shall probably end up again in this place.

He jumped to his feet again and went to the window, and thought he would take a walk around the garden. Carefully he pushed and the window swung open easily to his touch. He went to step outside and it was like stepping into a thin invisible sheet of rubber. It stretched enough to prevent him from getting a bruise, and then to his astonishment it just contracted and he was propelled gently and effortlessly back into the room. 'Convict after all, eh.' he said to himself. And then he sat down in the chair again.

For hour after hour he sat there thinking, wondering, in a state of complete indecision. 'I thought that after death I would go to Heaven,' he said to himself, and immediately followed by it, 'Well no, I suppose I didn't think it at all. I didn't know what to think. I have seen so many people die and there has been no sign of a soul leaving the body, so I came to the conclusion that all this that the parsons yammer about, life after death etc., was hogwash.' He jumped to his feet again and started the endless marching up and down the room thinking all the time and unconsciously talking to himself. 'I remember in the mess one evening we were discussing it, and Captain Broadbreeches expressed the very determined view that when you were dead you were dead and that's all there was to it. He said of the men, women, children and horses he'd seen killed, but never, he told us, had he seen a soul rise out of a dead body and get winging heavenwards'

In his mind's eye he saw again life as it was in England

while he was a schoolboy, and then when first he was a cadet. He saw himself as a newly commissioned officer, proudly getting on a ship to go and fight the Dutch. He used to think of the Boers as the Dutch because that was their original ethnic group — Dutch. But as he looked back he could see that the Boers were merely a group of farmers fighting for what they believed to be the right to choose their own way of life unfettered by domination from England.

The door opened and a man came in: ‘I do suggest, Number Fifty-Three, that you try to get some rest. You are merely wearing yourself out with this endless pacing around. In a few hours you will have to undergo a quite traumatic experience. The more rest you get now the easier will it be for you later on.’ Fifty-three turned sullenly towards him and in his best military manner said, ‘Get out!’ The man shrugged his shoulders, turned and left the room, and Fifty-Three went on with his brooding and his pacing.

‘What was this about the Kingdom of Heaven?’ he said to himself. ‘The parsons always had this talk about other mansions, other planes of existence, other forms of life. I remember our Padre saying that until Christianity came to the Earth everyone was condemned to damnation, to eternal suffering, to eternal torments, and that only the Roman Catholics would go to Heaven. Now, I wonder how long the world has been in existence and why should all those people before Christianity be condemned when they didn't know that they had to be saved?’ March — march — march. He went across the room, back again, across again, and back again endlessly. If he had been on a treadmill, he thought, he would have covered quite a number of miles going up steps, at least that would have been harder work than walking backwards and forwards across the room.

At last, angry and frustrated, he flung himself on the bed and lay there sprawling. This time no darkness descended, he just lay there full of hatred, full of bitter resentment, and the hot salt tears came spurting from his eyes. Furiously he tried to brush them away with the back of his hands, and

then at last he turned on his face and had a spasm of sobbing into a pillow.

After what seemed to be several eternities there was a knock on the door which he ignored. The knock came again, and again he ignored it. After a decent interval the door was slowly opened and there was the doctor. He glanced in for a moment, and then said, 'Ah, are you ready? Twenty-four hours have now elapsed.'

Fifty-Three put a leg over the side of the bed, then lethargically put the other one over. Slowly he sat up. 'Have you decided to which family you are going.' asked the doctor.

'No dammit, no, I haven't given it a thought.'

'Ah!' said the doctor, 'so you are fighting every inch of the way, eh? Well, it doesn't matter to any of us, you know, although you will find it hard to believe. We are indeed trying to help you, and if you, by your procrastination miss this opportunity you will find that opportunities are fewer and fewer and the families get less and less'.

The doctor went to the table and picked up the folder marked 53, and idly he flipped through it. 'You have a choice of five families here,' he said, 'and some get no choice at all, some are just directed. Let me tell you something.' He eased himself into the chair, leaned back and crossed his legs gazing sternly at Fifty-Three. Then he said, 'You are like a spoilt child giving way to immature rage. You committed a crime, you messed up your life, now you have to pay for it, and we are trying to arrange that you pay for it on the most comfortable terms. But if you will not co-operate with us, and if you just insist on behaving like a spoilt baby then eventually you will come to the point when you have no choice where you can go. You may find yourself as the child of some under privileged black family in Mombassa, or possibly sent as a girl-child to a family in Calcutta. Girls in Calcutta are not worth much, people want boys — they can help - and as a girl-child you might find yourself sold into prostitution or into conditions where you are a virtual slave.'

Poor Fifty-Three sat bolt upright on the edge of the bed, his hands very tightly grasping the edge of the mattress, his

mouth wide open and his eyes wild and staring. He looked much like a wild animal that had just been captured and put in a cage for the first time. The doctor looked at him, but there was no sign of recognition, no sign that Fifty-Three had heard the remarks.

‘If you persist in your stupid recalcitrant attitude and make it so much more difficult for us, then as a last resort we may send you to an island where only lepers live. You have to live out the other thirty years which you skipped before, there are no two ways about it, there is no way of overcoming it, it is the Law of Nature. So you'd better come to your senses.’

Fifty-Three sat there in an almost catatonic state. So the doctor got up, went to him and slapped his face, first one side and then the other. Fifty-Three jumped to his feet in rage and then slumped. ‘Well, what CAN I do?’ he said, ‘I am being sent back to Earth as a member of one of a deplorably low form of life. I am not used to being of such low status.’

The doctor looked truly sad, and then sat down on the bed beside Fifty-Three saying, ‘Look, my boy, you are making a grave mistake, you know. Supposing you were on Earth now and you were a member of the theatrical community. Suppose that you had been offered the part of King Lear, or Hamlet, or someone like that; well, possibly you would jump at such an opportunity. But then after the play was over, after the audience had gone, and after the producers had decided upon a new production, would you insist that you were King Lear or Othello or Hamlet? If you were offered the opportunity of being, for example, the Hunch back of Notre Dame or Falstaff, or someone of lesser status, would you say that such was unworthy of a person who had been King Lear or Hamlet or Othello?’ The doctor stopped speaking. Fifty-Three sat on the bed idly scraping the floor - scuffling the carpet - with a foot, and then he said, ‘But this is not play-acting, I was living on Earth, I was a member of the upper class, and now you want me to be — what is it? The son of a publican, the son of a bus driver, or whatever!’

The doctor sighed, and then said, ‘You were upon Earth to live out a part. You picked, before you went to Earth, what

you thought would be the best conditions for you to enable you to be a successful actor. Well, you failed. The act was a flop, so back you go to a different condition. You've gotta choice, in fact you have five choices. Some have no choice.'

He jumped to his feet saying, 'Come, we have dallied too long already and the council will be becoming impatient. Follow me.' He moved to the door and then, on an impulse, turned back to the table and picked up the file marked 53. Tucking it under his left arm he reached out his right hand and grasped Fifty-Three by the arm, shaking him roughly. 'Come!' he said, 'be a man. You are thinking all the time of how important you were as an officer. Surely an officer and a gentleman doesn't behave like this cowardly slobbering person that you have become?'

Sullenly Fifty-Three got to his feet and together they went to the door. Outside a man was just coming down the corridor. 'Oh!' he said, 'I was coming to see what had happened. I thought perhaps our friend was so overcome with sorrows that he couldn't get off his bed.'

'Patience, friend, patience,' admonished the doctor, 'we have to show tolerance in a case like this.'

Together the three men walked along the corridor, back through that long tunnel again, past the watchful guards who this time just inspected them, and then they went on to the door.

'Come in,' said the voice, and the three men entered the room. This time there was the elderly gray-haired man sitting at the head of the table and on either side of him there were two other people, one man and one woman, dressed in their long green coats. The three turned to look at Fifty-Three as he entered. The man at the head of the table raised his eyebrows and said, 'Well? Have you decided which you should be?'

The doctor nudged Fifty-Three who was standing there in sullen silence. 'Speak up,' he whispered. 'Can't you see they are losing patience with you?' Fifty-Three stepped forward and without being invited to do so slammed himself down in a chair.

'No,' said he. 'How can I decide? I have only the briefest

details of these people. I have no idea of what conditions I will encounter. I know I find a publican as extremely distasteful, but possibly an ironmonger would be even more distasteful. I am quite ignorant of such people, never having encountered them on a social basis in my life. Perhaps you, sir, with your undoubted experience, would be prepared to advise me.' Fifty-Three looked insolently at the man at the head of the table, but he just smiled tolerantly and said, 'You are extremely class conscious, and I agree with you that the honourable trade of inn keeper or public house manager or ironmonger would be too much for your sub-conscious. I could indeed, though, very strongly recommend that eminent public house in Cable Street, but for one of your type given to too much snobbishness I will, instead, suggest another family, that of the greengrocer. The father is Martin Bond and the wife is Mary Bond. Mary Bond is almost of full term and if you are to take over the body of her as yet unborn child you must lose absolutely no more time, you must come to your senses and decide, for only you can decide.'

'Greengrocer!' thought Fifty-Three. 'Rotten potatoes, stinking onions, overripe tomatoes. Faugh! However did I get in a mess like this?' He twiddled his fingers, scratched his head and squirmed miserably in the chair. The others in the room kept quiet, they knew of the desperate state which one got into at having to make such a decision. At last Fifty-Three raised his head and said defiantly, 'Well, I will take that family. They might find they've got a better man in their family than they ever had before!'

The woman sitting at the side of the table said, 'Mr. Chairman, I think we should run a series of checks on him again because we have to see that he is still compatible with the mother. It would be a terrible thing for the woman if after all she has gone through her baby was stillborn.'

The man at the other side of the table said, 'Yes,' and he turned to look at Fifty-Three. 'If the child is stillborn that still does not help you because you would be returned here on the grounds that your lack of co-operation and your intransigence will have caused the woman to lose her child. I

do suggest for your own sake — it really doesn't matter to us — that you co-operate more, that you try to make a more equable temperament, or you may find that we shall have to send you anywhere like garbage being thrown out.'

The woman rose to her feet, hesitated a moment, then turned to Fifty-Three and said, 'Come with me.' The chairman nodded and also rose to his feet. The doctor touched Fifty-Three's arm and said, 'Come along, this is it.'

Reluctantly, like a man facing execution, Fifty-Three climbed sluggishly to his feet and followed the woman into a side room. Here things were very different. The whole walls seemed to be flickering lights behind frosted glass. There seemed to be a remarkable number of knobs and buttons and switches. Fifty-Three thought for a moment that he had got himself into an electric power station, but then directly in front of him was a peculiarly shaped table, a very peculiarly shaped table indeed. It seemed to be the outline of a human figure, arms, legs, head and everything. The woman said, 'Get on that table.' For a moment Fifty-Three hesitated, then shrugging his shoulders he climbed on to the table brusquely brushing off the kindly hand of the doctor who tried to assist him. As he lay on the table he found a most peculiar sensation overtook him; the table seemed to mould itself to him. He had never felt more comfortable in his life. The table was warm. Looking up he found his sight was not so good as it had been, it was blurry. Faintly, indistinctly, he could make out shapes on the wall in front of him. Vaguely and strangely uninterested he gazed at the wall and thought he could distinguish a human form. It seemed to be a female form. At a rough guess Fifty-Three thought she was in bed, then as he watched through lacklustre eyes he had an impression that someone was pulling back the bedclothes.

A distorted voice came to him, 'It seems to be all right. I say he is compatible.' It was very strange, very strange indeed. Fifty-Three had an impression that he was 'going under' an aesthetic. There was no struggling, no apprehension, there was not even clear thought. Instead he lay there on that form-fitting table, lay there and gazed up uncom-

prehendingly at the people whom previously he had known so well. The doctor, the chairman, the woman.

Vaguely he was aware that they were saying things: 'Compatible basic frequency.' 'Temperature inversion.' 'A period of synchronization and stabilization.' And then he smiled drowsily and the world of purgatory slipped away from him and he knew no more of that world.

There was a long sounding silence, a silence which was not a silence, a silence when he could feel but not hear vibrations. And then suddenly it was as though he were thrust into a golden dawn. He saw before him a glory such as that which he could never remember having seen before. He seemed to be standing bemused and half-conscious in a glorious, glorious countryside. In the distance there were tall spires and towers and about him there were many people. He had the impression that a very beautiful Figure came and stood beside him saying, 'Be of good heart, my son, for you are going down to the world of sorrow again. Be of good heart for we shall be with you keeping contact. Remember you are never alone, never forgotten, and if you do that which your inner conscience dictates no harm will befall you but only that which has been ordained, and at the successful conclusion of your time upon the World of Sorrows you will return to us here triumphant. Rest, be tranquil, be at peace.' The Figure turned away and Fifty-Three turned over in his bed or table, or wherever he was, and slumbered, and was at peace. And he knew no more in his consciousness of that which had happened.

CHAPTER SIX

ALGERNON shuddered violently in his sleep. Algernon? Fifty-Three? Whoever it was now, he shuddered violently in his sleep. No, it was not sleep, it was the most terrible nightmare he had ever in his life experienced. He thought of an earthquake which had happened near Messina, Salonika, where buildings had toppled and where the earth had yawned and people had fallen through to be squashed flat as the earth, yawning, closed again.

This was terrible — terrible. This was the worst thing he could ever experience, the worst thing he had ever imagined. He felt that he was being mashed and squashed. For a time in his confused nightmare state he imagined that he had been caught by a boa constrictor in the Congo and was being forced willy-nilly down the snake's throat.

All the world seemed to be upside-down. Everything seemed to be shaking. There was pain, convulsions, he felt pulverized, terrified.

From a distance away there came a muffled scream, a scream as heard through water and thick swadding. Barely conscious in his pain he made out, 'Martin, Martin, get a taxi quickly, it's started.'

He mulled over the name. 'Martin? Martin?' He had a vague, but only a very vague recollection that at some time somewhere in some life he had heard that name before, but no, try as he would he could not bring back into his memory's recall what the name meant or to whom it was applied.

Conditions were just terrible. The squeezing went on. There was the horrid gurgling of fluids. For a moment he thought he had fallen into a sewer. The temperature increased and it was truly a shocking experience.

Suddenly, violently, he was upended and he was conscious of terrible pain in the back of his neck. There was a peculiar sensation of motion, nothing that he had ever experienced before. He felt suffocated, stifled, he felt as though immersed in fluid. 'But that can't be, can it?' he thought, 'Man can't live in fluid, not since we emerged from the sea anyhow.'

The joggling and jolting continued for some time, and then at last there came a jolt and a very muffled bubbly voice snarled, 'Careful man! Careful! Do you want her to have it here in the taxi?' There was some sort of mumble in reply but it was all dreadfully muffled. Algernon was nearly out of his mind with confusion, none of this made any sense to him, he just did not know where he was, did not know what was happening. Things had been quite fantastically terrible of late and it was no longer possible to act as a rational being. Dim memories floated into his consciousness. Something about a knife somewhere, or was it a razor. That had been a terrible dream! He had dreamt that he had half hacked off his head, and then he had looked at himself while he was hanging half-way through the ceiling, upside down he was, too, looking at himself lying dead on the floor. Ridiculous, completely absurd, of course, but — and what was this other nightmare? What was he now? He seemed to be some sort of a convict accused of some sort of a crime, he did not know what it was at all. The poor fellow was nearly out of his mind with confusion, with distress, and with fearful apprehension of impending doom.

But the joggling went on. 'Careful now, careful I say, go easy there bear a hand behind will you'. It was so muffled, so unreal, and the tones were so coarse. It reminded him of a costermonger he had heard once in some back street of Bermondsey in London. But what had Bermondsey got to do with him now, where was he? He tried to rub his head, tried to rub his eyes, but to his horror he found there was some cable or something encircling him. Once again he thought that he must be in a lower astral because his movements were constricted - this was just too terrible for contemplation. He seemed to be in a pool of water. Before it had

seemed to be a sticky mess when he had been in the lower astral - or had he been in the lower astral? Dazedly he tried to force his reluctant aching mind to search along the paths of memory. But no, nothing was right, nothing would focus with clarity.

‘Oh God!’ he thought worriedly, ‘I must have gone mad and be in an asylum for that condition. I must be having living nightmares. This just can't possibly happen to any person at all. How could I, a member of such an old and respected family, have come down to this? We have always been respected for our poise and our sanity. Oh God! What has happened to me?’

There was a sudden jolt, a most inexplicable occurrence, a sudden jolt, and then the pains came again. Dimly he became aware of someone screaming. Normally, he thought, it would have been a high-pitched scream but now everything was muffled, everything was so incredibly strange, nothing made any sense any more. He lay back in wherever he was and found that this time he was on his face, and then a sudden convulsion of ‘something’ whirled him about, and then he was on his back again shuddering with the whole fibre of his being, trembling in terror.

‘I tremble?’ he asked himself in horror. ‘I am nearly out of my mind with fear, I am an officer and a gentleman? What is this evil thing which has befallen me? Of a verity I must be suffering from some grave mental affliction. I fear for my future!’

He tried to clear his mind, he tried with all the mental power at his command to think what had happened, what was happening. All he got was confused improbable sensations, something about going before a Board, something about planning what he was going to do. And then he had been resting on a table — no, it was useless, his mind recoiled at the thought, and for a moment went blank.

Again there came a violent movement. Again he was convinced that he was in the coils of a boa constrictor being prepared for crushing and digestion. But there was nothing he could do about it. He was in a state of utter terror. Nothing seemed to be going right. How had he got in the

clutches of the boa constrictor first, and how would he be in a place where there were such creatures? It was all beyond him.

A terrible screech muffled badly by his surroundings shook him to the core. Then there came a violent wrenching and tearing and he thought that his head was being torn from his body. 'Oh my God!' he thought, 'then it IS true, I DID cut my throat and my head is now falling away from me. Oh my God, what shall I do?'

Shockingly and with terrifying suddenness there was a gushing of water, and he found himself deposited on something yielding. He found himself gasping and struggling. He seemed to have a warm wet blanket over his face, then to his horror he found pulsations, pulsations, pulsations, strong urgings were forcing him through some very narrow, cloying, clinging channel, and something — it seemed to be a cord fixed around his middle — tried to hold him back. The cord he could feel twisting around one of his feet. He kicked violently to try to free it because here he was suffocating in humid darkness. He kicked again, and a wild screech, louder now, burst out from somewhere above and behind him. There was a further terrific convulsion and twisting and he shot out of the darkness into a light so dazzling bright that he thought he had been struck blind on the spot. He could see nothing but from the very warm surroundings he had had now he was precipitated on to something rough and cold, the cold seemed to seep into his bones and he shivered. To his amazement he found that he was sopping wet, and then 'something' grasped him by the ankles and whisked him up into the air upside-down.

There was a sharp 'slap, slap!' across his buttocks and he opened his mouth to protest at the indignity, at the outrage perpetrated upon the helpless body of an officer and a gentleman. And with his first scream of rage all memory of the past faded from him as a dream fades at the opening of a new day, and a baby was born.

Of course not every baby has experiences such as this because the average baby is just an unconscious mass of protoplasm until it is born, and only when it is born does consciousness take over. But in the case of Algernon, or

Fifty-Three, or whatever you want to call him, the matter was somewhat different because he had been a suicide, because he had been a very difficult 'case' indeed, and there was an extra factor; this person - this entity — had to return with a special purpose in mind, he had to take up a special vocation and so the knowledge of what was that vocation had to be passed on from the astral world through the being-born baby and straight on to the mental matrix of the new-born baby.

For some time the baby lay, or was moved about. Things were done to the baby, something attached to its body was cut away, but the baby was oblivious to it all. Algernon had gone. Now there was a baby with no name. But after a few days in the hospital vague shapes came and moved in front of the infant's blurry vision. 'Coo,' said a somewhat crude voice, 'runty little devil, ain' 'e? What you going to call 'im, Mary?'

The mother, fondly gazing down at her first born, looked away and smiled up at the visitor and said, 'Well, Alan I think we are going to call him. We decided if it was a girl we'd call her Alice, and if it was a boy we'd call him Alan, so Alan it's going to be.'

After a few more days Martin called for his wife at the hospital and together they left carrying the small bundle which was starting out a fresh life upon the Earth, a life which none of them knew at that time was destined to end thirty years on. The baby boy was taken away to a home in what was a fairly presentable part of Wapping, well within sound of the hooting of the tugs on the Thames where the great ships in the Pool of London came and hooted their welcome at getting back into a port, or screamed farewell with their sirens as they left the Port of London to go out again on a journey perhaps to the other side of the world. And in that little house, not too far from Wapping Steps, a baby boy slept in a room above the shop where later he was going to wash potatoes, toss out bad fruit, and cut away rotten leaves from cabbages. But now the baby boy had to rest, had to grow a little and learn a different life style.

Time went on as time will — it has never been known to

stop! — and the little boy was now four years of age. On this warm Sunday afternoon he was sitting on Grandpa Bond's knee when suddenly Grandpa leaned down towards him and said, 'Well, what are you going to be when you grow up, boy?'

The boy mumbled to himself and carefully examined his fingers, and then he said in a childish treble, 'Doctuh, doctuh.' Having said that he slithered off his grandfather's knee and ran shyly away.

'Well granfer,' said Mary Bond, 'it's a funny thing, you know, and I don't understand it at all, but he seems dead keen on anything to do with medicine and 'im just four years of age. When the doctor comes he won't let go the doctor's — you know, thing around the neck, that tube thing.'

'Stethoscope,' said grandpa.

'Well, yes, that's what I said — stethoscope,' quoth Mary Bond. 'Can't understand what it is. He seems to have got a real obsession about it and how can he think of being a doctor with us in our position?'

Time still went on. Alan Bond was now ten years of age, and for a boy of ten years of age he was studying quite hard at school. As a teacher said, 'I don't understand about Alan, Mrs. Bond, he really does study and it's absolutely abnormal, it's not natural for a boy to study like this. All the time he is wanting to talk about doctoring and things like that. It's a tragedy really because — no offence intended, Mrs. Bond — but how can he expect to be a doctor?'

Mary Bond thought about it all the time. She thought about it in the long stillness's of the night when only the roar of traffic — to which she was immune — and the hooting of craft upon the Thames — to which she was accustomed — broke the night stillness. She thought long and hard and then, at last, in conversation with a neighbour she had an idea come to her. The neighbour said, 'Well, you know Mary, there's a scheme out nowadays that if you get 'em young enough you can get a child insured. You pay so many pence every week, every week for sure you've got to pay, and then at a certain age, you decide that with your insurance man, at that certain age a boy can get a big sum of

money which will put him through medical school. I know there's such a scheme, I know of a boy who's done it already, he's a lawyer. I'll get Bob Miller to come along and see you, he'll talk to you about it, he knows all there is to know about these insurance schemes.' The neighbour rushed away full of good intentions, full of planning another person's future for him.

The years went on, and at last Alan Bond entered a grammar school. The Headmaster interviewed him on the first day at school, 'Well, my boy, and what do you propose to be in your life when you leave school?'

'I am going to be a doctor, sir,' said Alan Bond confidently looking straight at the Headmaster.

'Oh well, my boy, there's no harm in having these high aspirations, but you will have to study very hard to be a doctor and you will have to get many scholarships because your parents definitely cannot afford to pay your way through medical school and provide all the extra expenses which are incurred. I suggest, my boy, that you try to have something as a second string, as it were, to your ambitions.'

'Damn you, boy!' said Martin Bond, 'Can't you put down that blasted book for a minute? Haven't I told you to scrub those potatoes? Mrs. Potter will take her custom elsewhere if we let her have potatoes with great gobs of soil on them. Put your book down, I say, put it down, and get busy with them there spuds. I want 'em spotless and when they're spotless you go and deliver them to Mrs. Potter up in the High.' The father moved away in exasperation muttering to himself, 'Damn it all, why do kids have ideas all the way beyond their station nowadays? That's all he thinks of, thinks of nothing else but being a doctor. How the devil's 'e think I'm going to get the money to pay for 'im being a doctor? Still, though' he thought to himself, 'e's a real whizz at school they say, and when it comes to brains he was in the first line when they were handing 'em out. Yes, 'e's working hard at school studies, really trying to get a scholarship. Guess I've been a bit hard on 'im. 'E can't study properly when 'e's got a book propped up in front of 'im and I make 'im scrub the spuds. I'll go and give 'im a hand.'

Father Bond went back to where his son was sitting on a three legged stool in front of a bath. In his left hand the boy had a book, with his right hand he was groping wildly to find a potato and then he would just drop it in the bath of water and swish it around a bit and then flip it out on to some folded newspapers.

‘I’ll give you a hand for a bit, boy, then we’ll get these things done up and you can go off and do your studying again. I’ve no wish to be hard on you, boy, but I’ve got a living to get. There’s you to keep, there’s your mother to keep, and there’s me as well. And we’ve got to pay our rent, we’ve got to pay our taxes, we’ve got all manner of things to pay and the Government don’t care a damn about us. Come on, let’s get ‘em cleaned up.’

It was the end of the school term. The Headmaster and the teachers stood upon a dais. There were members of the School Board there, too, and in the Great Hall children sat done up in their very best Sunday clothes, scrubbed, uncomfortable, and embarrassed. Beside them fidgeting in the unaccustomed surroundings sat parents and relatives. Here and there a thirsty man would sneak longing eyes out of the window and across at a nearby pub, but this was Prize Day, Speech Day, and all the rest of it and they had to stay here. One man thought to himself, ‘Well, bejabbers, I’ve only got to come here once a year, the brats, they’ve got to come here every day!’

The Headmaster rose to his feet and carefully adjusted the glasses upon the bridge of his nose. He cleared his throat and gazed blindly at the congregation before him. ‘I have much pleasure,’ he intoned in a most scholastic voice, ‘in telling you that Alan Bond has made quite phenomenal progress during this last school year. He has proved to be an absolute credit to our tutorial methods, and it gives me much pleasure to announce that he has been awarded a scholarship to the pre-medical school of St. Maggots.’ He stopped, waiting for the wild applause to die down, and then raising his hand for silence he said again, ‘He has been awarded this scholarship which is the first to be so awarded to any boy in this parish. I am sure that all of us wish him the very best of

success in his career for, in the four years he has been at this school, he has consistently and persistently asserted that he was going to be a Doctor of Medicine. Now he has his chance.'

He fumbled at the papers on the lectern before him, and a whole bunch of papers fell off and the sheets became airborne and went fluttering over the dais. Teachers hurriedly bent down and retrieved the falling sheets, carefully sorting them and placing them again on the lectern.

The Headmaster riffled through some papers and then seized upon one. 'Alan Bond,' he said, 'will you come to me to receive this Diploma and the Award of the Scholarship which has just been confirmed.'

'Ay, ah dunno!' said Father Bond when they got home and Alan was showing them the recommendation. 'It seems to me, Alan me boy, that you're getting ideas far above your station in life. We are just greengrocers, we don't have no doctors nor lawyers in the family. Dunno why you get these wild ideas.'

'But father,' cried a despairing Alan, 'I've been talking about becoming a doctor for as long as I could speak, and now all my school life I've worked, I've slaved, and I've denied myself all pleasures to study and to win scholarships. And now I've got a scholarship and you are raising objections again.'

Mary bond, Alan's mother, sat silent. Only the way her hands could not keep still betrayed the difficulty she was having. Father and mother looked at each other and then the father said, 'Look, Alan, we are not trying to keep you back, boy, we are not trying to harm your chances, but 'ere you got a bit of paper, well what's that paper mean? It just means that you can go to a certain school and your schooling will be free, but how about all the other stuff, how about all the books, all the instruments, and all the rest of it?' He looked helplessly at his son and then went on, 'Oh sure, you can still live with us, boy, you won't have to pay us board, you can work a bit when you come back from school and eke things out that way. But we just don't have the money to pay for a lot of expensive things. We're living hand to

mouth now, barely making a do of it, so think it over, boy, think it over. I think and your mother thinks it'd be a wonderful thing if you could be a doctor, but it would be an awful thing to be a poor doctor because you haven't got enough money to keep going.'

Mary Bond said, 'Alan, you know what happens to failed doctors, don't you? You know what happens to doctors who are struck off, don't you?'

Alan looked at her sourly and said, 'I only know what rumours I have been told to try to discourage me. I have been told that if a medical student fails or if a doctor is crossed off he just becomes a hack traveller for some scruffy pharmaceutical firm. Well, what of it?' he queried. 'I haven't failed yet, I haven't even started, and if I do fail I still have to earn a living and if I can earn a living as a medical salesman then it will be a darn sight better living than slinging potatoes in a bag and weighing them up, or counting pine-apples, or muck like that!'

'Stop it, Alan, stop it,' said his mother. 'You are making fun of your father's trade, and it's your father who is keeping you now, remember, you show no respect at all, you are getting way above yourself. Why not come down to earth?' Then she said after a long pregnant silence, 'Alan, Alan, why not take that job Uncle Bert offered you in the insurance office. It's a real steady job, and if you work hard at it you might even be able to work your way up to be a claims adjuster. Think about it, Alan, will you?'

The boy morosely left the room. His parents silently looked at each other and then there was the sound of his footsteps going down the wooden stairs beside the shop. There came the slamming of the street door and the sound of his feet on the sidewalk outside. 'Dunno what got hold of that boy,' said Martin Bond. 'I don't know how we came to produce such a fellow. Ever since 'e could talk 'e's been on and on endlessly, monotonously about becoming a doctor. Why the hell can't he settle down like other boys and do some decent job? That's what I want to know, why the hell can't he do it, eh?'

His wife silently went on with her task of darning the

already much-darned socks, and there were tears in her eyes as at last she looked up and said, 'Oh, I don't know Martin, I sometimes think we're too hard on him. It's right, after all, to have an ambition and there's nothing so dreadful about being a doctor, is there?' Martin snorted and replied heatedly 'Well, I dunno about that, the good earth and the produce thereof is good enough for me. Never did 'old with these boys muckin' about with a woman's innards. Don't seem right to me. I'm going down to the shop.' With that he angrily jumped to his feet and stamped down the back stairs.

Mary Bond threw down her darning and sat still gazing out of the window. Then at last she got up and went into the bedroom and got down on her knees by the side of the bed, praying for guidance and for strength. After many minutes she rose to her feet again sniffing and saying to herself, 'Funny thing, all the parsons say about praying when one is in trouble, and I do just that but I've never in my life had a prayer answered. Guess it's all superstition, that's what I think.' Sniffing she left her bedroom, and then wiping her eyes upon her apron she started preparing the supper.

Alan walked gloomily along the sidewalk. Idly he kicked a can which was in his way. By chance — or was it chance? — he kicked a bit hard and the can flew up at an angle and made a tinny clank as it hit a metal plate. Alan looked guiltily around and prepared to run for it, and then he looked at the metal plate. 'R. Thompson, M.D.' he read. He went to the metal plate, the brass plate with the incised black wax-filled letters, and rubbed it caressingly with his hands. For some time he just stood there, bowed in thought over the plate let into the wall.

'What's the matter, old man?' asked a kindly voice, and a warm hand fell lightly to his shoulder. Alan jumped off the ground in fright and spun around to look up to the smiling face of a big doctor.

'Oh, I'm so sorry, Dr. Thompson, I wasn't meaning to do anything wrong,' said the boy in some confusion.

The doctor laughed at him and said, 'Well, well, what a

face of misery. Have you taken on all the cares of the world, or what?’

‘Just about, I guess,’ replied Alan in a tone of deep despondency.

The doctor glanced quickly at his watch and then put an arm around the boy's shoulder. ‘Come on, lad, come inside, let's talk about it, what have you done? Got a girl in trouble, or something? Is her father after you? Come inside, let's see what we can do about it.’ The doctor gently led the hesitant boy through the gate, up the little path and into the surgery. ‘Mrs. Simmonds,’ he called going to the door, ‘how about rustling up some char for us and have you got any of those sweet biscuits or has that lazy husband of yours scoffed the lot?’ From somewhere in the depths of the house a muffled voice answered. The doctor went back into his surgery and said, ‘Okay, boy, get yourself composed, we'll have a cup of tea together and then we'll see what there is to be done.’

Mrs. Simmonds soon appeared with a tray on which were two cups, a jug of milk, a basin of sugar and the very best silver teapot plus, of course, the inevitable silver jug of hot, hot water. She had thought long on the question of should she produce the best silver teapot or an ordinary china one, but then she thought — well, the doctor obviously had something of great importance there or he would not have called down like that, it wasn't surgery time or anything, not yet, she didn't even know what the doctor was doing at home at such a time. So — the best china and the best teapot, and the best smile on her face as she entered the room. But then her jaw dropped, she thought there would be a lord at least there, or perhaps a lady, or perhaps one of the big businessmen at the Pool of London, but what she saw was a remarkably despondent looking, underfed schoolboy. Well, she thought, he was a schoolboy in spite of the fact that he was getting on to be an old schoolboy, but she thought firmly it wasn't her business, so carefully she put down the tray in front of the doctor, bowed a little in her confusion, and went out shutting the door behind her.

The doctor poured out some tea saying, ‘How do you like

it, lad, milk first? Or do you like it like me, anything so long as it's wet and warm and fairly sweet?

Alan nodded dumbly. He did not know what to do, he did not know what to say, he was so engulfed in misery, so overcome with the thought that had he failed again? Then he caught himself — again? — now what did he mean by that? He did not know. There was something pressing at the back of his mind, something he ought to know, or was it something he ought not to know? Bemused he rubbed his head between his hands.

'What is it lad? You ARE in a state, aren't you? Now just drink this tea and nibble a few of these sweet biscuits and tell me what it's all about. There's plenty of time, I'm supposed to be having a half day off, so let's make it a project to see what's wrong with you and what we can do for you.'

Poor Alan was not much accustomed to kindness nor to consideration. He had always been considered as the odd one in the family, the odd one in the district, referred to as 'that young son of a greengrocer who's got such grand ideas'. Now the words of the kindly doctor 'got through' to him and he burst into bitter tears. Sobs wracked his frame. The doctor looked at him with great concern, and said, 'All right, boy, all right, have out your tears, there's nothing wrong in that. Get it out of your system, go on, weep all you want to, there's nothing wrong with it. Do you know, even old Winny Churchill sheds tears, and if he can you can, eh?'

Shamefacedly Alan mopped his face with his handkerchief. The doctor was impressed to notice how clean the handkerchief was and, as the boy held the handkerchief to his eyes Dr. Thompson also noticed that his hands were clean, his nails were trimmed and there was no dirt in the nails either. The boy went up several points in the doctor's estimation. 'Here, lad — drink this,' said the doctor as he put a cup of tea in front of Alan. 'Stir it up well, there's a great dollop of sugar in it. The sugar will give you energy, you know. Come on get with it.'

Alan drank the tea and nervously nibbled a sweet biscuit. Then the doctor filled up the cups again and moved beside the boy saying, 'If you feel like it, lad, get the load off your

mind, it must be something dreadful, and a load shared is a load halved, you know.'

Alan sniffed and wiped away errant tears again, and then everything tumbled out of him. How since the very first thing he had known he had the strongest of strong impressions that he had come to be a doctor, how almost the first words he had been able to string together in a sentence had been, 'I be doctor.' He told Dr. Thompson how all the time he had put aside boyish things, he had studied and studied. How instead of reading adventure stories and science fiction and all that he had got technical books from the library to the consternation of the woman librarian who thought it was most unhealthy for a young boy to want to know so much of anatomy.

'But I couldn't help it, doctor, really I couldn't.' said Alan in dismay. 'It was something beyond me, something driving me on. I don't know what it is. I know that all the time I get the urge, an impossible urge, that I've got to be a doctor, no matter what, and tonight my parents have been at me, telling me I've got above myself, that I'm no good.' He lapsed into silence again. The doctor put a hand on the boy's shoulder, and softly said, 'And what started the outburst tonight, lad?'

Alan squirmed in his seat and said, 'Doctor, you'll never believe it but I'm top boy of the class, top boy of the grammar school. This has been the end of term and the Headmaster, Mr. Hale, has told me that I have been recommended for a special scholarship at St. Maggots pre-med school and my parents – well,' then he nearly broke down again and twisted his handkerchief into knots between his fingers. 'Eh lad, it was ever thus.' said the doctor. 'Parents always think that they can control the destiny of those whom they produce, sometimes as the result of an accident too. But never mind, lad, let's see what we can find out — you said you were at grammar school? You said the Headmaster, Mr. Hale — well, I know Mr. Hale very well indeed, he's one of my patients. Okay, let's see what he can tell us.'

The doctor looked up his index and soon found the name of the Headmaster and the telephone number, and then

quickly he made a phone call. 'Good evening Hale,' said Dr. Thompson, 'Thompson here. I've got a young lad in front of me, he seems a very bright young lad and he tells me that you have recommended him for a special scholarship — good heavens!' said the doctor in some amazement, 'Hale, I've forgotten to ask the boy's name!' At the other end of the line the Headmaster chuckled and said, 'Oh yes, I know him, Alan Bond, a very bright lad indeed, exceptionally bright. He's worked like a slave throughout his four years here, and I thought he was going to be a failure when he joined in the first case but I was never more wrong. Yes, it's quite true, he is the top boy in the school, the highest marks we have ever had, and the most progress this school has seen, but—' and the Headmaster's voice faded for a moment, and then he continued, 'I am sorry for the boy. His parents, his parents you know, they are the trouble. They've got that little green-grocer's shop down the street, they are making hard going of it, they are strapped for money and I can't see how that boy is going to manage. I wish I could do something to help him. I've helped him to get a scholarship but he needs more than that.'

'Well, thanks a lot, Hale, I appreciate your remarks,' said Dr. Thompson putting down the phone and turning to Alan.

'Boy,' he said, 'I had much the same sort of trouble as you have had, I had to fight every bloomin' inch of the way, scratch with tooth and nail to make a do of it. Okay, tell you what we'll do, let's go along now and see your parents. I told you it's my half day off and what better way to spend what's left of it than helping some other poor devil who also is having a bad time. Come on lad, stir your stumps.' The doctor rose to his feet and Alan got up as well. At the door Dr. Thompson gave two rings and then said, 'Oh, Mrs. Simmonds, I shall be out for a time, just take any messages, will you?'

Down the road they strode, the big tall doctor and the under-nourished boy who was making a late approach to manhood. Down the street they went and as they approached the shop they saw the light was on. Through the window they could see Father Bond weighing out bags of

produce. The doctor strode to the door, rapped sharply, and put his hands beside his face so he could peer in free of reflections.

Martin Bond looked up sourly and then shook his head in negation. He mouthed the word 'Closed,' but then he saw his son there and he thought to himself, 'Oh my God, what's the boy done now? What trouble has he brought us now?' And then he hurried to the door and drew back the bolt. The doctor and Alan moved inside, and Martin Bond hastened to slide the bolt shut again.

'Good evening, so you're Martin Bond, eh?' said Dr. Thompson. 'Well, I'm Dr. Thompson and I live down the street, you know, I've got my practice there. I've been talking to your boy and he's a bright young lad, too. I think he deserves a chance.'

'All right for you to talk, doctor,' said Martin Bond truculently. 'You don't have to scabble for money in a place like this, you're set up pretty good I reckon. You get enough from your fees and from the Friendly Societies to keep you living high off the hog, I've got to dig in the ground. But anyway, what's the boy done now?' he asked.

The doctor turned to Alan and said, 'You told me you got this special diploma, you told me you got a special letter from Mr. Hale, the Headmaster, will you slip upstairs and get them and bring them down for me?'

Alan darted away and could be heard running up the wooden stairs. Dr. Thompson turned to the father and said, 'Bond, you've got a bright boy there, he might even be a genius. I've been talking to his Headmaster.' Martin Bond turned on him in a fury, 'And what's it got to do with you? How do YOU come into it? You leading the boy into trouble, or something?' he asked. For a moment the doctor's face clouded with wrath and then controlling himself with an effort he said, 'Every so often, Bond, somebody comes to this Earth perhaps with some carry-over from a previous life, I don't, know what it is, but people have strong impulses, very strong impressions — well, they don't get it for nothing. Your son seems to be one of those. His Headmaster was very emphatic that the boy was bright and that he was born to be

a doctor. If you think I'm leading him astray, well, you think again. I'm trying to help him.'

Alan dashed into the shop again, just about breathless with the speed of running. Meekly he held out to the doctor the diploma and the copy of the letter from the Headmaster together with the acceptance of the Headmaster's recommendation from the Dean of the pre-med school of St. Maggots. Without a word the doctor took the papers and read them from start to finish. There wasn't a sound except the rustling of papers as he turned over a page and put the read page on the bottom. Then, finished, he said, 'Well, this convinces me, I think you ought to have your chance, Alan. We'll see what we can do.'

He stood for a few moments wondering what was the best course to take, and then he turned to the father and said, 'Why can't you, your wife and I have a talk about this? The boy is brilliant, the boy definitely has a mission. Can I talk to you somewhere?'

Martin turned sourly to Alan and said, 'Well, you started all this, you brought all the trouble here, get on with that weighing up and I'll have the doctor talk to your mother and me.' So saying he led the way out of the shop and up the stairs, being very careful to close the stair door after him and calling up, 'Mother! I'm bringing Dr. Thompson up, he wants to talk to us about Alan.'

Upstairs Mary Bond hastened to the top of the staircase muttering to herself. 'Oh, heavens, oh my God, what HAS that boy done now?'

CHAPTER SEVEN

Mary Bond felt all fluttery inside as if a whole load of butterflies had got into her somehow. She looked with apprehension from the doctor to her husband and then to Alan who had crept up the stairs behind them. Helplessly she showed the doctor into their sitting room where only favoured visitors ever went. Father Bond said, 'Okay, Alan, off to your room.'

The doctor instantly interrupted saying, 'Oh, but Mr. Bond, Alan is the most interested person in this arrangement. I definitely think that he should be here in this discussion. After all, he's not a child now, he's approaching an age when many others would be at college and we hope that he's going too!' Reluctantly Martin Bond nodded his head in acquiescence and the four of them sat down, the mother with her hands folded demurely in her lap.

'Dr. Thompson seems to think our boy has got a lot of goods up in his attic,' said Martin Bond, 'he wants to talk to us about him because he thinks Alan should become a doctor. I dunno what to say about it.'

The mother sat still and said nothing, and then Dr. Thompson spoke, 'You know, Mrs. Bond,' he said, 'there are some very strange things in life and people get impressions that they have to do a thing without knowing why. Alan here, for instance,' he gestured in the boy's direction, 'has a very, very strong impression that he has to enter medicine. The impression is so strong that it is almost an obsession, and when we get a boy, or a girl either, for that matter, who insists on a special career almost from the first words they can utter then we have to be convinced that the Good Lord maybe is getting a message through or is trying to work a miracle or something. I don't profess to understand it, all I

know is this,' he looked around at them to see if they were following him, and then continued, 'I was an orphan, I was brought up in an orphanage and, to put it in its mildest form, I had a very hard life in the orphanage because the people there thought that I was different in some ways because I, too, had a definite vocation, and that was that I should enter medicine. Well, I did enter medicine and now I'm doing quite well at it.'

The parents sat still, their brains almost obviously clunking over as they tossed thoughts around inside their skulls. At last Martin Bond said, 'Yes, doctor, yes I agree with everything you say, the boy should have his chance in life, I had none neither and I'm having to fight to pay bills. But, tell me doctor,' he looked really hard at Dr. Thompson and continued, 'we are poor people, we have a hard job to pay our bills every month and if we don't pay our bills every month then we don't, get our supplies, and if we don't get our supplies then, by golly, we're out of business. So tell us, how are we going to provide for Alan? We can't afford it and that's all there is to it.' Martin Bond slapped his knee vigorously to emphasize that here was 'finis', 'the end', and all the rest of it. Alan sat there downcast, looking glummer and glummer.

'If I was in the U.S.A.,' he thought, 'I'd be able to take a part time job and study the other part time and I'd get through that way, but this country — well, there doesn't seem much hope for poor lads like me.'

Dr. Reginald Thompson was thinking. He put his hands in his trouser pockets and stretched out his legs, and then he said, 'Well; as I told you, I've had a hard life and I've done what I believe I had to do. Now, it may be that I've got to help Alan, and so I'll make this offer to you.' He looked around to see if they were paying attention, and indeed they were; Alan was looking straight at him, Father Bond was looking less dour, and Mother Bond had stopped fiddling with her fingers. Satisfied with what he saw the doctor continued, 'I am a bachelor, never had any time for the women, you know, been too interested in study, research, and all the rest of it, so I stayed a bachelor and I saved a lot of money

by doing so. I am prepared to invest some of that money in Alan if he can convince me that he really will make a good doctor.'

Mary Bond said, 'That would be a wonderful thing, doctor. We tried to take out an insurance policy which would help Alan pay expenses but there was no such policy suitable to people of our means, or rather, lack of means.' The doctor nodded silently, and said, 'Well, he's all right in the educational line because the Headmaster of his school spoke very highly indeed about him, and he has a free scholarship to enter St. Maggots pre-med school — just the same as I had, but that doesn't pay his living expenses, and it would be better for him to live in college, and it doesn't pay for various other expenses. So this is what I'll do.'

He sat there sucking in his cheeks and blowing them out, then he turned to Alan and said, 'This is what I'll do, Alan. I'll take you to the Hunterian Museum up at the Royal College of Surgeons and we'll spend a day going through the Museum and if you can stick it out without fainting or anything then we can be sure that you will make a success as a doctor.' He was silent for a few moments and then continued, 'I can take a step more than that. I can take you to a dissecting room where they have bodies and bits of bodies all over the place. If you go and be sick all over them then you're out of the doctor line. If you can convince me, okay, we'll have a partnership — you've got your scholarship, I'll pay all the expenses. And when you are a qualified doctor able to pay back then you do the same for some other unlucky soul who is trapped between what he knows he has to do and his inability to do it through lack of money.'

Alan nearly fainted with relief and happiness, but then Father Bond said slowly, 'Well now, doctor, we rely on the boy to do our deliveries for us, you know. We've kept him all this time, it's only right he should do something for us and if, as you say, he's going to be stuck away somewhere in some college living in luxury then what about his poor parents? Do you think I'm going out after hours and deliver?'

Mrs. Bond looked shocked and said, 'But Martin! Martin!

Surely you remember that we managed before Alan came on the scene?’

‘Yes, of course I know,’ said Martin angrily, ‘I’m not likely to forget, but I’m also remembering all the boy’s been to us all these years. We’ve had to provide for him, and now when he’s had all he can get from us he’s going to rush off and be a doctor if you please, and I suppose that’s the last we shall ever see of him. Bah!’

Martin Bond’s hands were working together as if he was longing to strangle somebody and then he burst out, ‘And what do YOU get out of it Dr. Reginald Thompson? Why have you suddenly taken such an interest in the boy? That’s what I want to know. People just don’t do things for others, you know, unless they’ve got some motive behind it. What are you getting out of it?’

Dr. Thompson laughed out loud and then said, ‘My goodness me, Mr. Bond, you’ve convinced me that your son is quite exceptional. All you think about is what you can get out of things, and all he thinks about is how he can help others by being a doctor. You want to know what I’m getting out of it, Mr. Bond? Well, I’ll tell you; I have impressions just the same as your son has impressions. I have the strongest impression that I’ve got to help him. Don’t ask me why, I don’t know why, and if you think that I am after him sex-wise well, then, Mr. Bond you are a bigger fool than I thought you were. I can get plenty of boys, and girls too, if I want them, but this time I want to help Alan for the sake of something that I know, something at the back of my mind and won’t come forward. But if you don’t want to have him helped, Mr. Bond, then we will wait until he is twenty-one and, although it will be a bit late, well, we’ll take it from there. Now, I’m not here to argue with you. If you don’t want to go on with this, say so and I’ll get out.’ Dr. Thompson got to his feet looking a very truculent individual indeed. His face was red and he looked as if he would like to throw Martin Bond through his own front window.

Martin Bond twisted his hands about and fiddled with the end of his jacket, and then he said, ‘Well, maybe I was a bit hasty in what I said, but I’m wondering how we can manage

to get the spuds taken out at night and things like that. We've got to live, you know, as well as the boy.'

Mary Bond broke in very hurriedly: 'Shush, Martin, shush, we can arrange that all right. We can soon get a schoolboy come along and do it for us. It won't cost much, it won't cost as much as keeping Alan here.' Martin Bond slowly nodded his head. 'All right, all right,' he said with some reluctance. 'You can go. You're not twenty-one yet and I still have control of you, and you make a success of that doctoring job you're going to do or you'll hear from me about it.' With that the father turned abruptly and clattered down the stairs to the shop. Mary Bond turned apologetically to Dr. Thompson and said, 'I am so sorry about this, doctor. My husband sometimes is a bit impetuous. He is Aries, you know!'

So it was arranged. Dr. Thompson would take Alan to the Hunterian Museum on his day off next week. With that arranged the doctor went home and Alan returned to his room to study.

'Hello there, Alan,' said Dr. Thompson as Alan presented himself at the surgery a week later. 'Come on in, we'll have a cup of tea and then we'll get in the car and we'll go off to Lincoln's Inn Fields.' They had their tea and some biscuits, and then the doctor said, 'You'd better go in there, boy, all the excitement might stir you up and I don't want you taking a leak in my nice clean car!' Alan blushed and hurried off to the littlest room where, we are told, even a king must go on foot!

Dr. Thompson led the way out around a path going along the back of the house. There he had his car parked, a good old Morris Oxford. Unlocking the doors he said, 'Get in,' and Alan thankfully got in the passenger seat. Alan was not very used to private cars, all his travelling had been done on clattering trams or rattling buses. He watched with avidity as the doctor started the engine, waited a few moments for it to warm up and then checked the charge rate and oil pressure, and drove out. 'Do you know the best way to go Alan?' asked the doctor quizzically.

'Well sir,' replied Alan, 'I've looked it up on a map and all

I can say is you go along the East India Dock Road and then go over London Bridge, and I suppose.’ he said rather tremulously, ‘we have to go over Waterloo Bridge as well.’

‘Nope,’ said the doctor, ‘I’ve got you this time, we’re not going across any bridges, you follow the route carefully because if my plans come right you’ll be doing this journey quite a few times.’

Alan was quite enthralled looking at all the places outside his own locale of Tower Hamlets. He had not been able to move about much, and yet he had a most uneasy feeling that many of these districts through which they were driving had been well known to him at some time. At last they turned right and went up Kingsway in Holborn, up Kingsway for quite a distance, and then they turned into Sardinia Street which led to Lincoln's Inn Fields. Dr. Thompson suddenly drove through some iron gates to the right and parked his car smartly. Switching off the engine and taking out the key he said, ‘Here we are, lad, out you get.’

Together they walked into the entrance of the Royal College of Surgeons' building and Dr. Thompson nodded with easy familiarity to one of the uniformed people standing inside. ‘Okay Bob?’ he asked one of them, and then nodding cheerfully he went on into a dark entrance lobby. ‘Come on, we turn left here — oh, wait a minute, I forgot, I’ve got to show you this.’ He stopped and grabbed Alan's arm saying, ‘Now, here's something which will make your teeth ache. Here are some early dental instruments. D’you see them there in that glass case? Now how would you like to have your molars yanked out with things like that?’ He slapped Alan playfully on the back and said, ‘Come on, let's get in here.’

‘Here’ was a large space, quite a large space, littered with cabinets and closets and, of course, shelf after shelf of glass bottles. Alan looked about in awe at the bottled babies, floating foetuses, and all the extremely peculiar organs which surgeons had thought it advisable to save for the purposes of examination and student tuition.

They walked down one room and stopped at a well-polished walnut case. Dr. Thompson pulled out a drawer and

Alan could see that it was two sheets of glass sandwiched together, and inside between the two sheets was an awful mess of 'something'. Dr. Thompson laughed and said, 'This cabinet represents a brain, a brain which has been sliced up so that you can open a drawer and look down and you can see any particular part of the brain. Look at this—' he reached for another drawer and pulled the handle and out came another glass sandwich, and the doctor pointed at it saying, 'That is supposed to be where you get psychic impressions. I wonder what's going on in yours?' Then he added, 'I wonder what's going on in mine too!'

The doctor and Alan spent all the morning in the Hunterian Museum and then Dr. Thompson said, 'Well, I guess it's time we had something to eat, don't you?' Alan had been feeling rumbling pains and he nodded as he thoroughly agreed. So they left the Museum and got in the car and drove off to a club where Dr. Thompson was obviously well known. Soon they were sitting at a table having lunch. 'After this we'll go along to a hospital and I'll take you into a dissecting room and we'll see what we can see there.'

'Oh, can one just walk into a dissecting room like that?' asked Alan in some astonishment.

Dr. Thompson laughed and said, 'Oh dear me, no, of course not but I am known as a specialist and I had a place in Harley Street for some time but I just couldn't stand all the bowing and scraping there, I couldn't stand a lot of the old matrons who thought that if they paid enough money they would be cured immediately. And anyway, they treat doctors as the lowest form of life,' he said as he finished his meal.

Soon the car drove up to a hospital entrance and parked in the space reserved for doctors only. Dr. Thompson and Alan got out and walked into the main entrance to a reception desk. Dr. Thompson went forward and said to one of the staff there, 'I want to speak to Professor Dromdary-Dumbkoff,' he said. The attendant turned away and spoke into a telephone returning to Dr. Thompson and saying, 'Yes, sir, the professor has asked me to bring you and your visitor to him. Will you come this way, please?' Together

they walked through hospital corridors for what to Alan seemed to be endless miles. At last they reached an office with the professor's name on the outside. The attendant knocked and pushed the door open. Dr. Thompson and Alan entered. The first thing they saw was half a human on a table and two people in white coats were busily cutting down into it. For a moment Alan felt strange things happening inside him, but then he thought quickly that if he were to be a doctor he would have to become used to sights like this, so he swallowed quickly, closed and opened his eyes two or three times, and then everything was all right.

'This is the boy I told you about, Prof, he's good stuff, you know,' said Dr. Thompson introducing Alan. The professor gazed hard at him and said, 'Ach, right it is that you may be already, we shall see what we shall see, eh?' and then he broke into such a girlish chuckle that poor Alan felt highly embarrassed.

For some time they just stood there chatting while the professor watched the two students at work, and then Alan was taken down to a dissecting room, a huge room remarkably cold and frightfully smelly. For a moment poor Alan thought that he was going to disgrace himself by either fainting or vomiting on the floor, but again he remembered that he had a job to do and the spasm of nausea quickly passed. The professor moved from body to body - it was not lecture time so no students were here — pointing out various things of interest, and Dr. Thompson was closely observing Alan's reactions.

'Ach, de dunderheaded fool!' exclaimed the professor angrily as he stooped down and picked up a severed arm which had dropped off a table and rolled beneath it. 'Students nowadays, they are not as they were in Germany, they are so careless. How would they like to have an arm dropped?' Mumbling to himself and grumbling away he moved to another body and reaching out a hand caught Alan by the arm and said, 'Take that scalpel and make an incision from here to here, you should know what cutting flesh is like.' Alan numbly took the proffered scalpel and

then with an inward shudder which he hoped was not too obvious he pressed the point of the knife on to the dead flesh and pulled it down. 'You have the touch, you have the touch,' said the professor excitedly. 'Yes, you will be all right as a medical student.'

Later Dr. Thompson and Alan had tea, and the doctor said, 'Well now, so you can still eat in spite of all you've seen. I half expected to see you rolling under the table green in the face or something. What are you going to do when you get kidney on toast next time? Throw it up?' Alan laughed. He was very much more at ease now, and he said, 'No sir, I feel quite at home.'

Slowly they drove back to Wapping through the evening crowds, Dr. Thompson talking all the time saying what he wanted to do, how he was getting old and he was tired, saying how he would look after Alan and provide him with his own bank account so that he would be independent of his parents. He said, 'I never knew my parents, I was an orphan, but if my parents had gone on like your parents did — well, believe me, I think I should have run for it!'

That evening there was great talk in the Bond household. Father Bond was trying not to show his interest but at the same time he was listening with avidity to everything being said, and then at the end he said gruffly, 'Well, you can go when you like, lad, we've found a boy to take over when you leave us.'

And so, speedily, it was all arranged. Alan was to go to the pre-med school of St. Maggots Hospital, and after that if he was successful he would become a medical student at St. Maggots. And Alan was successful at pre-med school, he did well, he was of the first three and became a well-favoured student beloved of his tutors. And then the time came for him to leave pre-med and enter the hospital as a proper medical student. He did not really look forward to that which was to take place on the next day because change is ever strange and there had been many, many changes in Alan's life.

St. Maggots was an old hospital built mainly in the shape of a 'U'. One arm of the 'U' was for medical cases, and what

would be the bottom of the 'U' was for psychiatric, paediatric and similar, while the other arm of the 'U' was for surgical cases. Of course Alan during his pre-med studies had been into the hospital on many occasions but it was with a decided feeling of trepidation that he went there on that first Monday morning. He went up to the main entrance and said who he was, and the attendant sourly remarked, 'Oh, one of them, eh?' Then he turned to a ledger and took his time fumbling through the pages, licking his thumb and leaving decided nicotine stains on the paper. Then at last he straightened up and said, 'Ah yes, I know all about you. Go straight up them stairs, turn right, turn left, and it's the second door on the right. It's Dr. Eric Tetley that you have to see, and you'd better be careful, he's in a poor mood this morning.' With a shrug of his shoulders the attendant turned away. Alan paused for a moment in some astonishment, he thought there would be a bit more respect for a man who was going to serve in the hospital for three or four years as a medical student. But he, too, shrugged his shoulders, picked up his cases, and walked up the stairs.

At the top of the staircase in a little vestibule around to the right there was a table and a man was sitting at it. 'Who are you?' he asked. Alan identified himself and the attendant checked through a book and then wrote something on a card, saying, 'You can leave your cases here, just take this along to Dr. Eric Tetley's office, knock once — not too loud, mind! — and then enter. What happens next is up to you.' Alan thought this was a most peculiar system of dealing with new entrants, but he took the card from the man and went to the office as directed. He knocked, waited a discreet second or two, and then quietly entered. There was a desk littered with papers, surgical instruments, and photographs of women. A black nameplate lettered in white, 'Dr. Eric Tetley', stood on the corner of the desk and the doctor himself sat square in an office swivel chair. He had his arms out wide, big fat hands spread on the edge of the desk.

Alan walked forward to the desk being somewhat unnerved by the unmoving stare of Dr. Tetley, then he said, 'Sir, I have come to join St. Maggots. I have to give you this card.'

The doctor made no move to take it, so Alan put it on the desk in front of him and stood back under that quite unnerving stare.

‘Hrmp!’ grunted the doctor. ‘Yes, old Thompson was right, I think you’ve got the makings of a good man in you, but you need straightening out a bit, eh?’ Then he raised his voice, not in song, but to bawl, ‘Paul! Bond is here, come in will you?’ Only then did Alan see that the doctor had his finger now pressed on a button and was using an office intercom system. Soon there was a flurry of noise and a small untidy looking doctor with hair all over the place bounced into the room. He had on a white coat which reached down to his ankles and his sleeves were so long that they had to be rolled and rolled again. He did look a rag-bag of a doctor. ‘Oh, so this is Bond, eh? What am I supposed to do with him — kiss him?’ Dr. Eric Tetley snorted and said, ‘You get a go at him first, you’ve got to make a good man out of him.’ Dr. Paul grunted as he leafed through Alan’s papers and said, ‘Oh, so now St. Maggots has come down to this, eh? We’ve got the son of a spud seller who is going to be a specialist surgeon or practicing physician, or something. What do you make of that? No more old school ties, spud sellers, bah!’

Alan was shocked. He really was shocked down to the core of his being to think that this scruffy untidy looking wretch could say such unkind things, but he was there to learn, he thought, so he said nothing. But then he turned to look at Dr. Paul and saw the twinkle in the gray eyes. The doctor said, ‘But there it is, boy, they say that Jesus was the son of a carpenter, don’t they? Don’t place much faith in ‘em myself, I’m a good follower of Moses.’ And with that he laughed and held out his hand.

Shortly after Alan was shown to a room right up in the centre tower of the building, right over the main door. He had to share that with two other student doctors, and the conditions were cramped in the extreme. All they had to sleep upon was canvas camp beds.

The attendant who had shown him to the room and let him put his cases down on a bed said, ‘Okay doc, now I’ve

got to take you to the Maristow Ward over in the medical wing, that's a thirty-five bed ward, by the way, with two beds in a private room attached. Sister Swaine is in charge, and boy oh boy, is she ever a bitch. Mind your p's and q's there!

Sister Swaine in charge of the Maristow Ward did indeed appear to be a formidable dragon, about six foot tall, about two hundred pounds in weight, she scowled at everything and everybody. Her skin was so dark that she looked almost like a half-caste, but she came from a very old English family and it was astounding to Alan when she opened her mouth and spoke and the voice was that of one of the most cultured people he had met. But familiarity with Sister Swaine soon showed that she was no dragon, and when she saw that a student was working hard then indeed she went out of her way to help that student. For shirkers she had no time whatever, and really hastened to the Matron's office to report a student who fell down on the job.

A medical student's life in a hospital is always much of a muchness, much the same. Alan worked hard, he loved to work, and he made a very favourable impression. At the end of his third year he was called in by Dr. Eric Tetley. 'You're doing well, my boy, better than I thought you would. I thought first, no matter what old Thompson said, you'd be back scrubbing spuds. You've got a good record all the way through, and now I want you to be my personal assistant in the coming year. Take it?' He looked up at Alan and, not waiting for a reply he said, 'Okay, take a half day off and go and tell old Thompson from me that he was right, I owe him a case of—' he said.

Alan walked to the door and then was called back. 'Hey — you — wait a minute!' Alan turned back wondering what was happening now, and then Dr. Tetley said, 'Got a car?'

'No sir,' said Alan. 'I'm just an ex-spud seller turned medical student. I can't afford a car.'

'Hrmp!' grunted Dr. Eric Tetley. 'Well, I suppose you can drive?'

'Oh yes, Dr. Thompson taught me, and I've got my licence.'

‘Well then,’ said Dr. Tetley, fiddling about in the right hand drawer of his desk, mumbling about and saying shocking words as he turfed out all manner of papers, instruments, etc., at last pouncing with glee upon a ring with two keys attached. ‘Here it is, the key to my car. I want you to drop a parcel in to a lady — here's the address, can you read the writing? — well, okay, drop this in to her and don't stop and have any chit chat with her, mind, and then go straight on to old Thompson. Be sure you're back here by nine o'clock tonight. My car is in bay 23, that's just below the Matron's office. Oh!’ he said, ‘I'd better give you a note saying that you can take the car otherwise some bally copper will come along and pinch you for stealing it or something, I had it happen once before.’ He scribbled something on a piece of paper, put his official stamp on it, and then thrust it at Alan saying, ‘Now beat it, don't come around here until nine o'clock tonight.’

The years went by, years of great success for Alan Bond, but years of trouble as well. His father died; he had an attack of rage one day and just dropped dead in the shop because a customer was complaining about the price of asparagus. So Alan had to provide for his mother because there was nothing left worth selling in the shop, and, of course, the property had been rented. So Alan put his mother in a couple of rooms and made sure that she was adequately looked after. Unfortunately his mother took a violent dislike to Alan, saying that he had killed his father by running out on him and trying to live in a station above himself, so, apart from providing for her, Alan never went to see her. Soon there came talk of war. The awful Germans, as was the awful Germans wont, were sabre rattling again and boasting with all their bumptious brashness of what they were going to do to the rest of the world. There came the invasion of this country, and the invasion of that country, and Alan, now a fully trained doctor with M.D. after his name, tried to join up but he was deferred because of the good work he was doing in his locality and for shipping companies near the Pool of London.

One day Dr. Reginald Thompson phoned Alan at the

hospital where he was now on the hospital staff and said, 'Alan, come over and see me when you've got a few moments, will you? I want to see you urgently.'

Alan, of course, looked upon Dr. Thompson with real love so he soon arranged with the ageing Dr. Tetley to go off for the rest of the day. Now he had his own car and soon he was back parking his car in Dr. Thompson's driveway.

'Alan,' said Dr. Thompson, 'I'm getting old, boy, I haven't much longer to live. Give me a check-up, will you?'

Alan stood there in stupefaction, and then Dr. Thompson said again, 'What's wrong with you, boy, forgotten you're a doctor or something? Get with it, will you.' And he started taking off his clothes. Alan soon got hold of Dr. Thompson's instruments, ophthalmoscope, blood pressure apparatus and all the rest of it, and, of course, he always carried his own stethoscope. A check of Dr. Thompson revealed hypertension and acute mitral stenosis.

'You'd better look after yourself,' said Alan, 'You're not in such good shape as I thought. Why don't you come into St. Maggots and we'll see what can be done for you?'

'No, I'm not coming into that flea-ridden dump,' said Dr. Reginald Thompson. 'What I want to do is this; I've got a very successful practice here, it brings in a lot of money, so Tetley tells me that you work for him very well and have done for five years, and I say now is the time for you to take over my practice while I'm here to help you and to show you the ropes. You've been stuck in St. Maggots so long that you're getting round-shouldered and you're almost myopic. Snap out of it and come and live with me.' Then he said, 'Oh, of course, I shall be leaving this practice to you and until I kick the bucket you and I can work as equal partners. Okay? Shake on it.'

Alan felt quite upset. He had been for some time definitely in a rut, he'd got an obsession, the obsession that he had to save life, save life at all costs no matter how sick, no matter how incurable the patient. Alan was not much good as a surgeon, he had no interest in that, but ordinary medicine, that was his forte and he was on the way to making a big name for himself. And now his friend and benefactor, Dr.

Reginald Thompson, wanted him to enter private practice. The doctor broke in on his thoughts saying, 'Go back to St. Maggots, talk about it to Eric Tetley and ask your friend Dr. Wardley what he thinks about it. You can rest assured that that pair will give you honest advice. Now get out of my sight until you've made up your mind, you're looking almost seasick there.'

Just then Mrs. Simmonds, now quite elderly, came in with the tea on a wooden trolley saying, 'Ah, Dr. Thompson, I saw that Dr. Bond was here so I thought I'd save you the trouble of shouting down for the tea, here it is,' and she smiled broadly at Alan who was now very much her favourite for the good job he was making of his life.

Back at St. Maggots Alan was able to discuss things with Drs. Tetley and Wardley. Dr. Wardley said, 'Well, I shouldn't be telling you this, Alan, but Reginald Thompson has been a patient of mine for years, he's been having series of cardiograms and he could go out like a light. You owe everything to him. you know, and you'd better think seriously if you shouldn't go to him.'

Dr. Tetley nodded his head in agreement and said, 'Yes, Alan, you've done a good job here at St Maggots but you're too limited, you're becoming too institutionalized. We're going to have a war and it needs somebody to get out there in the streets, we can always call you back in emergency. I'll release you from your contract.'

So it came to pass that a month later Dr. Alan Bond became an equal partner with Dr. Reginald Thompson, and they made a very successful practice. But all the time in the papers and on the radio there was talk of war, talk of bombings, reports of the failure of one country after another to withstand the attacks of the hated Huns, who with typical Boche brutality were sweeping across Europe. At last Neville Chamberlain returned from Germany with a lot of inept, inane, asinine talk about 'peace in our time', and from Germany, of course, there came reports of loud raucous laughter at the lanky Englishman who had come there with his furred umbrella thinking that he could settle the peace of the world. Soon after a ranting Hitler went on radio full of

brash bombast and a day or two after England declared war. Months rolled by, and the war was not getting anywhere, it was the period of the phoney war. One day a policeman came to Alan, carefully ascertained that he was Dr. Alan Bond, and then said that his mother, Mary Bond, had committed suicide and the body was now in the Paddington Mortuary.

Alan was shocked almost out of his mind, he did not know why but this was the most terrible thing he had ever heard. Suicide! For years he had been preaching against suicide and now his own mother had committed such an insane act.

Soon there came a stepped-up war with bombs dropping on London. All the time there were reports of German successes, the Germans were winning everywhere and in the Far East the Japanese were sweeping all before them. They took Shanghai, they took Singapore. Again Alan tried to join one of the Services, and again Alan was rejected being told he was of more use where he was.

The raids became worse. Night after night German bombers came across the coast and made for London. Night after night the dock areas were bombed and the East End of London was set afire. Alan worked very closely with the A.R.P. people — the Air Raid Precautions people — and indeed had an A.R.P. post in the basement of the house. Night after night the raids continued. Fire bombs rained down, thermite bombs bounced off rooftops, and sometimes going right through to set an entire house on fire.

There came the night of a very bad raid indeed. The whole area seemed to be on fire, the wailing, moaning of the sirens went on continuously. Hoses from fire appliances snaked over the roads and made it impossible for the doctors to use their cars.

The night was a moonlit night, but the moon was obscured by the red clouds going up from the fires, showers of sparks flying about everywhere and all the time the hellish scream of falling bombs, some fitted with sirens to their tail fins to increase the din and increase the terror. Alan seemed to be everywhere, helping pull bodies out of wrecked shel-

ters, crawling through holes which had been forced in basements to bring relief from pain to shattered bodies inside. On this particular night Alan stood getting his breath and getting a cup of tea from one of the emergency canteens. 'Whew!' The A.R.P. warden with him looked up and said, 'That was a close one.' Alan looked away and saw the whole skyline in flames, billowing smoke was everywhere. Above it all there came the 'thrum-thrum-thrum' of the uneven, unsynchronized engines of German aircraft. At times there came the 'chatter-chatter-chatter' of British night fighters shooting their machine guns at the invaders outlined by the fires below.

There was a sudden 'Woomph' and the whole world seemed to tilt. A whole house leapt up in the air, disintegrated and came down in pieces. Alan felt screaming agony envelop him. The air raid warden who was untouched looked around and screamed, 'Oh my God, the doc's hit!' Frantically the A.R.P. men and the rescue squad tried to pull blocks of masonry off Alan's legs and lower abdomen. Alan seemed to be in a sea of fire, the whole of his being was apparently being consumed by running fire. Then he opened his eyes and said weakly, 'No point in bothering with that, men, I'm finished, just let me be and go on and look for someone not so badly injured.' With that he closed his eyes and lay for a time. He seemed to be in a peculiar state of ecstasy. 'his isn't pain,' he thought to himself, and then it occurred to him that he must be hallucinating because he was floating above himself upside-down. He could see a bluish-white cord linking his body in the air to the body on the ground, and the body on the ground, he saw, was completely smashed from the navel down, he was just a smear as though raspberry jam had been spread on the ground. And then it flashed across his mind that today was his thirtieth birthday. With that the silver cord seemed to wither and fade and Alan found himself floating up just as though he were in one of the barrage balloons floating above London. He floated upwards, he could see shattered London receding from his gaze, he was upside-down. Suddenly he seemed to bump into a dark cloud and for a time he knew no more.

‘Fifty-Three! Fifty-Three!’ a voice seemed to be dinning into his head. He opened his eyes and looked about, but everything was black. He seemed to be in a black fog. Then he thought to himself, ‘I don't know about this, seems familiar somehow, wonder where I am? Must be having an anaesthetic or something.’ And as he thought that the black cloud became gray and he could see shapes, moving figures, and then it all came back to him. He was in the astral, so he smiled, and as he smiled the clouds, the fog and the mist all vanished and he saw the glory of the real astral plane. About him were his friends for only friends could be on such a plane. He looked down at himself with shock for a moment and then hastily thought of the first garment he could think of — the white coat he had used in St. Maggots. Instantly he was clad in a white coat, but he was shocked for a moment at the gales of laughter which greeted him, then he looked down and remembered that his last white coat had been waist length because in the hospital he had been a specialist.

The real astral was very, very pleasant. Alan was taken off by joyous friends to a Rest Home. Here he had a room which was a very pleasant room indeed, he could look out on to glorious parkland with trees such as he had never seen before. There were birds and tame animals wandering about, and no one harmed any other creature.

Alan soon recovered from the trauma of death on Earth and rebirth into the astral, and then a week later, as was always the case, he had to go to the Hall of Memories where alone he sat and watched everything that had happened in his last life. At the end of that period of time which could not be measured a gentle voice said from ‘Somewhere’, ‘You have made good, you have done well, you have atoned. Now you may rest here for a few centuries before planning what else to do. Here you can do research or anything you wish. You have done well.’

Alan walked out of the Hall of Memories to be greeted again by his friends, and together they went off so that Alan could find a home where he could enjoy himself and think what would be the best to do.

I believe that all people, no matter who they be, should be

taught that there is no death, only transition. And when the time of transition comes a beneficent Nature smoothes the way, eases the pain, and makes conditions tranquil for those who BELIEVE.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE old house was still, as still as an old house ever can be. Occasionally in the darkness of the night there came a mutter from an aged floorboard as it rubbed against its neighbour and apologized for the intrusion into its privacy. The old house was at rest after a trying day. No longer was it possible for it to slumber its life away through a warm noontide. The old house had fallen upon evil times, taxation, demands, expenses for expensive restorations. The old house was unhappy at the throngs of mindless visitors who came surging through the corridors, flocking through the rooms like, a herd of demented sheep. The old house felt its floorboards groan and its timber sag slightly under the unaccustomed load after so many years of quietude. But The Family had to go on and had to raise the money somehow, so after much soul-searching and much internal strife parties had been taken to tour the historic mansion.

Hundreds of years ago the house had been built as a manor for a man of high class, a man who had served his king nobly and well, and had been elevated to the peerage for his devotion. The house had been built lovingly and well by sturdy workmen who lived upon ale and cheese and hunks of bread, and who did everything properly for the pride of doing a proper job. So the house survived, survived the baking heat of summers and the chilling draughts of winter when every timber wanted to shrink away in the icy blasts which swept around it. Now the gardens were still well-kept, the main fabric of the house was still well secured, but some of the boards began to creak, some of the archways had the sag of old age, and now after a day of being trodden on and littered by the sticky papers of careless children the old house had reverted again to quietude.

The old house was still, as still as an old house ever could be. Behind the wainscot little mice squeaked and scampered in their play. Somewhere, high above, an owl hooted at the moon. Outside the chill night wind rustled among the eaves and occasionally tapped a long branch of a tree against the windows. But no one lived in that wing, 'The Family' lived now in a smaller house in the grounds, a house where in more prosperous times the head butler and his wife had had their domain.

The highly polished floor shone in the moonlight making weird reflections against the panelled walls. In the sightless eyes as they had peered down throughout the centuries.

At the far end of the Great Hall the stately grandfather clock chimed the quarter to twelve. Somewhere on a sideboard cut glasses tinkled gently as in echo they whispered the chimes to each other. From another room not so far away there came the higher tones of a granddaughter clock repeating the quarter to the hour.

All was still for a moment and then the grandfather said, 'Granddaughter clock, are you there, can you hear me?'

There was a click and a whirr as a cog slipped, and then came the high voice of the Grandfather clock: 'Yes, Grandfather, of course I can hear you. Do you have aught to tell me this night?'

The grandfather clock carried on its muted voice, 'tick tock, tick tock, tick tock', and then raising his voice he spoke, 'Granddaughter, I was born at the end of the seventeenth century, my long case was polished first in 1675, and since my pendulum was first set swinging I have pondered on the mystery of life, long have I lived, long have I pondered. The humans around us have such a short span of life, they have no time to think, really, of all that there is to know about life. Are you interested, granddaughter?' The granddaughter clock, sitting in state in a ladies retiring room, nodded her head slightly to the tremor of a passing heavy locomotive and its attendant trail of freight cars. And then she said gently, 'Of course, grandfather clock,

of course I am interested in hearing of that of which you have thought so long throughout the centuries. Tell me and I will listen, and I will not interrupt until such time as my Purpose makes it necessary for me to call the hours. Speak, grandfather clock, knowing that I am listening.'

The grandfather clock muttered in his throat, his long case was magnificent, more than seven feet tall he loomed in the semi-darkness above the highly polished floor. No finger-marks marred his case for a special footman had the task of keeping these wonderful antiques in good health, clean and of strong voice. Grandfather clock had his face to the moonlight. Looking out of the window beside him he could gaze over spacious parklands with age-old trees spaced like rows of soldiers on parade. Around the trees were the close cropped lawns and here and there bushes, rhododendrons, and many bushes brought from far, far lands.

Beyond the bushes, although grandfather clock had never seen so far, there were pleasant meadows where the horses and the cows of the estate cropped the sweet grass and, like the old house, dreamed their life away.

Closer, just out of sight of grandfather clock, there was, he had been told, a very, very pleasant pond about thirty feet across, it was, so a travelling clock had told him. The surface had many broad lily pads on which at the right time of the year fat frogs sat and croaked. Grandfather clock had indeed heard their croaking and thought maybe their mechanism needed oiling, but the travelling clock had explained it all to him, had explained, too, about the fish in the pond, and abutting the far end of the pond there had been a large enclosed aviary, some thirty feet long and about ten feet high, in which multi-coloured birds led their life.

Grandfather clock mused upon all this. He looked back along the centuries seeing the lords and the ladies coming towards him in their gorgeous garb so different from the drab denims with which humans seemed to be uniformly clad during these decadent days. Grandfather clock pondered until he was aroused from his reverie by, 'Grandfather clock, grandfather clock, are you well? I am waiting to hear from you, grandfather clock, you were going to tell me

many things of the past, of the present and of the future, and of life and of the meaning thereof.'

Grandfather clock cleared his throat and his pendulum went, 'tick tock, tick tock, tick tock', and then he spoke: 'Granddaughter clock,' he said, 'humans do not realize that the swinging pendulum is the answer to the riddle of the Universe. I am an old clock and I have stood here for so many years that the base of my case is becoming warped and my joints creak with the change of the weather, but I want to say this to you; we, the clocks of ancient England, know the riddle of the Universe, the Secret of Life, and the Secrets Beyond.'

The tale which he told to the granddaughter clock was a new tale, a tale which had been in the making for centuries, a tale which started far, far beyond living memory. He said that he had to blend modern technology with ancient science because the modern technology is as yet ancient science. 'The trees told me,' he said, 'that many, many thousands of years ago there was another science, another civilization, and all that which is now considered to be modern and modern inventions and developments were even then obsolete.' He stopped a moment, and then said, 'Oh, I must strike the hour. The time has come.' So he stood firm and tall in the Great Hall and from his long case there came the preliminary click and the whirring and the chimes, and then he struck the midnight hour, the hour of twelve when a day dies and a day is born, when yet another cycle starts. And as he finished the last stroke of twelve and his hammers stopped and quivered he waited patiently for granddaughter clock to repeat her message to all who listened in the stillness of the night.

Granddaughter clock was tall and slender, not more than about a hundred years of age. She had a very pleasant voice and a remarkably clear chime, free of unwholesome vibrations, free of clatters and clicks. But, of course, that is as one would expect from just a young person who had endured not much more than a hundred years. Now she stood with the beams of moonlight partly filtered by the waving branches outside making their way through the tall

window, and flickering fingers of light over her case, embellishing the ornaments on her pinnacles, and at times touching the hands which stood together upright like hands of a person in prayer praying for help during the newborn day. She gave a little cough and then her wheels started to revolve, the hammers raised and fell upon the rods. She hammered out the notes of her song. That completed, the strike of the hours came, one, two, three, and all the way on to twelve. At the final twelfth stroke she quivered slightly with all the effort she had expended, her hammers shivered and the weights at the end of her chains rumbled a bit as they sought a fresh footing in the case. She said meekly, 'Sorry, grandfather, I am sorry I have kept you waiting, I am a minute late I know, but soon that will be put right. Will you continue?'

Grandfather clock smiled to himself, 'It was right; he thought, 'that young people should pay respect and should show deference to those who were so much older.' He smiled and said, 'Yes, granddaughter clock, I will continue.

'Throughout the ages,' said grandfather clock, 'humans have sought religion to console them in the hardship of their unnatural life. They have always sought a God to be as a personal Father looking after them, watching over them, looking at them only and giving them preferential treatment over all other humans. There always has to be a God,' he said, 'someone who is omnipotent, someone who can be prayed to and from whom one hopes to obtain a favourable answer to the prayer.'

Granddaughter clock nodded her agreement, nodded in sympathy with passing distant heavy traffic, and somewhere a clumsy mouse bumped into an ornament and sent it skittering upon the table. With a squeak of terror the mouse jumped off the table and raced for the nearest hole, diving down with tail waving frantically in the air.

Grandfather clock resumed his story: 'We must also bring into consideration,' he said, 'modern technology which, of course, is merely a recrudescence of old technology. Everything that exists, everything that IS, is just a series of vibrations. A vibration is a wave which first goes up and then

goes down, and goes up again and down again throughout eternity just as our pendulums keep swinging first to one side, where it stops for a fraction of a fraction of a second, and then swings down to the other side.' Grandfather clock was silent for a moment, then he chuckled to himself as the chain moved down one tooth over the brass wheel inside and the weight at the bottom gave a little jiggle of joy at being one tooth further down toward the ground.

'I know,' he said, 'that all things that exist have their positive and their negative phases, first to one side and then to the other side. I know,' he said with increasing solemnity, 'that at one period of time when the Pendulum of Life is to one side of its swing the God in charge is the God of Good. But the God of Good in such a position gets lulled into complacency and he doesn't pay enough attention to what is going on around him and the Pendulum of Life, which was stopped for its change of swing, starts again and swings down. The God of Good is lulled into a sense that all is well, but the Pendulum goes down and starts up to the other side of its swing, and there the God of Ill, whom the humans call Satan, is waiting with avidity the swing of power which is now his turn. Evil is such a strong force,' said grandfather clock, 'it is such a very, very strong force. Good will not believe the bad which evil is, so Good doesn't fight hard enough, doesn't struggle hard enough, and so we have the bad force that we call Satan making the most of its opportunity. The Pendulum of Life swings up, and at the end of its swing, as with the end of all swings of all pendulums, it stops for the fraction of a fraction of a second before starting down again, and the God of Evil does his greatest evil during such time. And then when the Pendulum starts down again gradually he loses power, and as the Pendulum goes up again towards Good then Good takes the throne once more.'

'Ah, grandfather clock,' said a small voice from the shadows, and like a shadow itself a sleek black and white cat eased out from the blackness and sat in a moonbeam gazing up at the old, old clock. Moving forward the cat reached up and with soft paws rubbed at the bottom of the case. 'Grandfather clock,' said the cat, 'I could climb up your case and sit

on your head, but I like you so much I would not be disrespectful. Tell us some more.' The cat moved back to the moonbeam and sat facing the clock, but not to waste any time she decided to wash her face and her ears. From time to time she looked up at the old clock who, gazing down fondly at the cat, said, 'Wait little cat, I am a clock and my time is circumscribed. I have to wait now and chime the quarter so that all humans who are conscious may know that we are fifteen minutes into the newborn day. Little cat, hear me, and then a minute later hear my granddaughter. We will tell the time and then we will talk again.'

On the still night air the chimes of fifteen minutes past the hour rang out. Outside the window a stealthy poacher who was moving silently to try to steal eggs from the nearby hen roost froze in his tracks for a moment, and then smiled complacently as he moved on, moved on towards the window where granddaughter clock was ready. As the shadow of the poacher crossed her window she, with much higher voice, chimed the minutes. Once again the poacher stopped and then, with hands shielding his face from the side-light, he tried to peer into the room. 'Bloomin' clocks,' he said, ' 'nuff to scare the livin' daylights out of any good thief!' So saying he moved on past the window and into the shadows, and some minutes after there came the sleepy murmur and protests of disturbed hens.

There was silence in the house, as much silence as there could be in such an old house. Boards creaked, stairs whispered their complaint at having to remain in such a position so long. Throughout the house there was the vague scurry of tiny feet, and, of course, the ever-present ticketty, ticketty, ticketty, and tock, tock, tock. Or the bigger tick tock, tick tock of the grandfather clock. All these were the normal sounds of a living house.

The night wore on. Outside the moon went on her way leaving dark shadows around the house. Night creatures came out and went about their lawful occasion. Small foxes ventured out of their dens and took an early look at nightlife upon earth.

Night wore on, with the night civilization of nocturnal

creatures going about their allotted path. Stealthy cats stalked their prey, and often there was a sudden spring and a muttered curse in feline as the unlucky cat missed.

At last the eastern sky showed a lightening of the shadows, and then faint streaks of red appeared as the probing fingers of the sun felt out the way ahead, lighting up the tops of distant hills and even exaggerating the darkness in the valleys beneath. Then nearby a rooster crowed raucously at the first sign that there would be another day. For a shocked moment all Nature stood still, and then there was a sudden rustle and scurry as the creatures of the night accepted their warning that dawn was about to break, accepted and hastened off to their homes in various parts of the undergrowth. Night birds found their perches in dark corners, bats returned to steeples, and the creatures of the day started that uneasy stirring which preceded the full awakening.

In the Great Hall grandfather clock went 'tick tock, tick tock, tick tock.' He was not talking now, this was the wrong time of the day to talk, there might be humans about and clocks did not reveal their secret thoughts to unheeding, unbelieving humans.

In the past grandfather clock had commented about humans saying, 'Oh humans always want proof of everything, they even want proof that they are humans, but how can you prove a thing?' asked grandfather clock. And then he continued. 'If a thing is true it needs no proof because it is self-evident that the thing is there, but if a thing is not true and if it is not there then no amount of "proof" will prove that it is there so there is no point in trying to prove anything.'

The light became brighter, the day became older. Soon there was much activity about the house, cleaning women came and with mechanical devices brought uproar to the quiet old mansion. There was the clatter of dishes and the hum of voices from the servants' quarters below the main floor. Then well-known footsteps came along the hall, a footman: 'Good morning, grandfather clock,' he said, 'I am going to give you your daily rub and wipe your face for you.' The footman went to the old clock and carefully

cleaned the glass and checked the time. Then he opened the front of the long case and gently raising the weights one by one he pulled on the chains so that the clock should be wound without placing undue strain upon the antique teeth. Closing the clock case he patted it lovingly and then set to work to polish an already highly polished surface.

‘Well, grandfather,’ he said, ‘you’re all done up nice and tidy ready for the gaping idiots who will come. I’ll just put the barrier in front of you and then we’re done.’ He picked up his cleaning cloth and his polish and moved back, and then very carefully he put one eye of the red rope into a hook in the wall and went across to place the other eye in the corresponding hook at the other side so that no one could approach grandfather clock without stepping over or under the red rope barrier.

The day moved on as days usually do, and soon there came the roar of motors and the yelling of undisciplined children, accompanied by shrieks from bad-tempered mothers and slaps to try to keep the children in order.

The main doors were opened. The footmen stood back, and there was a surge of smelly humanity reminiscent of a herd of elephants during the period of must, which of course, is the elephants’ mating season and when they go very wild indeed. The tide of humanity surged into the Great Hall.

‘Mama, Mama, wanna go, wanna go!’ yelled a small boy.

‘Sssh!!’ cautioned the mother. Then suddenly there was a much louder yell from the child, ‘Mama, Mama, gotta go, gotta go!’ Mama just reached down and gave the boy a sound slap with the fat flat of her hands. For a moment there was silence, and then a strange trickling sound. Sheepishly the little boy said, ‘Mama, I’ve bin!’ and he stood there with dripping trousers and a spreading puddle around him. From the side one of the footmen, with a resigned sigh, moved forward with a mop and a bucket as if such things were everyday occurrences.

From the darkness beneath a deep over-stuffed sofa two green eyes peered out with interest. The black and white cat had her favourite station there, beneath that sofa, and almost every day she would watch with fascinated interest

the undisciplined children and the sluttish matrons who thronged into this old house commenting upon this, ruminating about that, and all the time leaving chocolate papers, cardboard cups — anything — on the furniture and on the floor regardless of the work it caused to others.

Grandfather clock at the end of the Great Hall looked on with an impassive face. He was somewhat disconcerted, though, when another small boy rushed up the hall and was stopped only by the red braided cord stretched across its width. An attendant moved forward quickly and grasped him by his collar just as he was about to duck under the rope. ‘Get out of it, can't you!’ growled the man, turning the boy about and giving him a shove in the back to get him moving.

The throng grew thicker, thicker mentally too. They gazed at the pictures on the wall, mouths wide open, chewing and chewing the great gobs of stuff dangling from rooftop to tongue. It was all strange to them, they could hardly believe that they were having a great privilege in getting a glimpse of the past. All they wanted was a glimpse of next week's pay check!

All things must end, even bad things, although bad things seem to last much, much longer than do good things. One has a good experience and it seems to be over almost before one knows it has started, but a bad experience — ah! that is something different. It seems to be prolonged, it seems to be dragged out unendingly. But, of course, an end to it does eventually come. So it was on this day. As the darkening shadows fell across the windows the crowds thinned and there was the roar of many motors as great chartered buses pulled away. Then the mass of people grew thinner still until there were two or three, and then one or two, and later none. Thankfully the cleaning staff moved like a swarm of locusts throughout the building, picking up papers, cartons, Popsicle sticks, all the variegated litter which untidy humans want to deposit on any available spot.

Outside in the grounds much broken glass had to be picked up, soft drink bottles, cartons, and from under certain well favoured bushes ladies' underwear could be hooked

out. The animals who looked on often wondered how a person could remove certain garments and then be so careless as not to put them on again. But then, of course, the animals wondered also why people should have these garments in the first case. They were born without them, weren't they? Still, as the animals said to themselves so frequently, there is absolutely no accounting for the oddity of human misbehaviour.

At long last night had fallen and the lights had been turned on while 'The Family' gathered around to assess the day's takings and to balance the day's profits against the day's losses in damage done, plants uprooted, and windows broken because it was a rare day indeed when some snotty-nosed little lout did not heave a brick through a greenhouse window. Eventually all the work was done, all the accounting was over. The night security man went around with his flashlight and his time clock booking in to various points in the building at pre-allotted times. The lights were extinguished and the night-watchman — one of several — moved down to the communal security office.

The black and white cat crept into the Great Hall through a partly opened window, and walked sedately up to grandfather clock. 'I have just had my supper, grandfather,' she said, licking her lips. 'I don't know how you keep going without having any food except a pull on your chains every so often. You must feel hungry! Why don't you come out with me and we'll chase a bird or two and I'll catch you a mouse.'

Grandfather clock chuckled deep within his throat, and said nothing. The time was not yet for everyone knows that no grandfather clock speaks before a quarter to midnight for that is leading up to the witching hour when all is magic, when the whole world seems different, and when those who are normally voiceless find the wherewithal with which to voice their thoughts. Grandfather clock for the time being could only think and say — as was his wont — 'Tick tock, tick tock, tick tock.'

Away in what had been a very important ladies' retiring room granddaughter clock mused upon the happenings of the day. She was extremely fortunate, she thought, that she

was not pushed off her base when two fighting hooligans had tripped over the rope barrier and fallen at her feet. Fortunately two wary attendants seized the men and bundled them unceremoniously out the door where they were grabbed by outside security people and bounced out of the grounds. Granddaughter clock thought of it with a shudder of horror which raised a metallic clatter in her throat. She thought, too, how pleasant it had been in the early morning when the young footman had come to her, attended to her attire, and fed her by raising her weights and then had very very carefully adjusted the time so that now she chimed and struck in exact synchronization with grandfather clock.

Everything was still, as still as things can be in an ancient house. The clocks went on with their monotonous tick tock, the travelling clock said ticketty, ticketty, ticketty, and longed for the quarter to midnight so that he could tell of some of his adventures. And the black and white cat looked at the hands of grandfather clock and sighed with resignation thinking the time is not yet, we'll never get the old clock to talk until a quarter to midnight. The black and white cat walked across the Hall and leaped lithely on to an old chest. There upon a drape she stretched out and went to sleep but not for long. Incidents outside the window kept awakening her and she had to crouch and make mewing noises as foolish birds came fluttering by the window. 'Oh! If I could only open this window' exclaimed the exasperated cat, 'I would teach you disturbing birds a lesson or two — not that you would live to profit by it.' The bird saw the black and white shadow inside the room and flew off with squawks of alarm.

At last grandfather clock chimed and chimed again, and struck the half hour of eleven at night. Granddaughter clock chimed and struck as well. The travelling clock seemed to go faster with its ticketty, ticketty, ticketty, and the black and white cat opened one eye — the right one this time — and looked up at the clock face to see if the hands were indeed at half past eleven.

Tick tock, tick tock, tick tock, went the clocks in unison,

and then at last there was the metallic rattle in grandfather clock's long case, a metallic rattle and then the rumble as a chain started to move and a weight descended. It was a quarter to midnight. Grandfather clock sang out the chime with gusto. A quarter to midnight, nearly the time when a day dies and a day is born, nearly the time when one cycle turns and becomes the reverse cycle. 'And now is the time,' thought grandfather clock, 'for TALK!'

'Grandfather clock! Grandfather clock!! I bags first talk.' said the black and white cat who had leapt to her feet, jumped to the ground, and raced to a position in front of the well polished long case.

Outside the moon was shining a little brighter than it had the night before because it was approaching its full and this was a quieter night. No storm clouds scudded across the sky, there was no wind to rattle the branches in the trees outside, all was quiet, all was still, and the moon shone brightly inwards.

'Well now, young cat,' said Grandfather clock, 'so you claim to talk first, eh? Well, it seems to me you have already talked first with what you said. But what do you want to talk about, young cat?'

The black and white cat interrupted her toilet and sat up straight and said, 'Grandfather clock, I have been thinking a lot of what you told us last night. I have been thinking of what you said about the Pendulum. Now, grandfather clock, if good and bad alternate with each swing of the Pendulum then they don't have much chance to do good and bad, do they, because they only get about a second for each swing, or so I understand. How do you account for that, grandfather clock?'

The black and white cat sat back on her haunches with tail spread straight out behind her. She was sitting squarely as though she expected a blast of wrath from grandfather clock to upset her balance. But no, grandfather clock had the wisdom of old age and the tolerance of old age too. He merely cleared his throat again with a metallic tinkle and said, 'But my dear little cat, you do not think that the Pendulum of the Universe beats at one second intervals, do you?'

It beats over a period of thousands and thousands of years. Time, you know, little cat, is entirely relative. Now here we are and it is fourteen minutes to twelve here in England, but in other countries it is a different time, and even if you went to Glasgow instantly you would find that it wasn't fourteen minutes to twelve but it might be fifteen minutes. It is all very mysterious, really, and of course my own figuring is limited to my own particular output of pendulum strokes.' Grandfather clock stopped speaking for a moment while he drew breath in the form of another link of the chain going over the tooth cog inside the case. Then when the weight had stopped its descent he spoke again.

'You must remember, little cat, that our unit — the unit of us clocks, that is — is twenty-four hours. Now in each hour there are sixty minutes, and in each minute there are sixty seconds, so that means three thousand six hundred seconds in an hour. So in twenty-four hours a one second pendulum beat will have moved eighty-six thousand four hundred times.'

'Whew!' said the cat, 'that IS a lot of strokes, isn't it? Oh my, I could never work out a thing like that!' And the black and white cat looked at the grandfather clock with renewed admiration.

'Yes,' said grandfather clock, warming to his subject and his pendulum beating even louder, 'but the Pendulum of the Universe has a completely different system because we are dealing with twenty-four hour periods in our assessment, but we must remember that in the real time beyond this Earth the world goes through a period of one million seven hundred and twenty-eight thousand years in each cycle, and all cycles go in groups of four as does my strike of the hour, the quarter, the half and the three-quarters. So, you see, we are following a good tradition. The Universe goes in fours and so do we striking clocks.'

The black and white cat nodded wisely as if she understood everything that was being said, as if all this profound knowledge was well within her capacity, and then she said, 'But, grandfather clock, how about when the Pendulum is at the end of its swing? You said it stops for a fraction of a

fraction of a second. What about in what you termed “the real time”?’

Grandfather clock chuckled to himself and said, ‘Ah! Yes, of course, but when we have one million seven hundred and twenty-eight thousand years to play with then we can afford to allow the Pendulum to stop at each end of the swing for many years, can't we? But it is all so profound that not many humans can comprehend it, and not many clocks can understand it either. We do not want to give you a burst brain, little cat, with all this knowledge so perhaps we should drop that particular subject.’

‘But, grandfather clock, there is one thing I particularly want to ask,’ said the little black and white cat, ‘if God is at one side of the swing and Satan at the other then how do they find time to do any good or any bad?’

The glass on the front of grandfather clock's face shone brightly in the moonlight, and then after an instant or two he answered, ‘When we have all these years for a swing then we can afford to have about two thousand years at the end of each swing, so that at one two thousand years interval we have good, at the next two thousand years we have bad, and then the next swing will bring good again, and the swing after that brings bad. But,’ said grandfather clock hastily, ‘I must stop, the time has come for granddaughter clock and I to strike together the hour of midnight when all Nature is free to make a change, when the day dies and a new day is born, and when the Pendulum swings it goes first from good and then to bad, and from bad to good — excuse me.’ And grandfather clock stopped abruptly in his speech while the wheels within him whirred and the descending weight rumbled, and from grandfather clock's long case came the chiming of the hour of midnight followed by the deep toned strike of the twelve. And then close by granddaughter clock echoed and faithfully repeated the chime and the strike.

On the little table to the side the travelling clock grumbled to itself and said, ‘What a windy garrulous pair they are. They hog all the speaking time for themselves. Bah!’

CHAPTER NINE

‘A VIRUS is too small to be seen through a microscope and there are more living organisms, viri, bacteria, etc., resident on the skin of a human being than there are humans alive on the Earth. About four thousand of these organisms are crowded into every square centimetre of the arms, and on the head, armpits and groin the figure may be in excess of two million.’

Vera Virus sat in her Pore Valley thinking of all the problems which beset the people of the world called human. Beside her Brunhilde, her closest virus friend, sat. They quivered pleasantly as only jelly-like viri could do. Then Vera said, ‘Oh, I am in such a state of confusion, I have been asked for my vital statistics and how can I get over to the people that I am a glorious 25nm? Oh, why don't we change to the metric system and have it done with, that would be so much simpler.’

Brunhilde wobbled violently and that was meant to be a laugh. Then she said, ‘Well, you just need to tell people the vital statistics of the nm. Just tell them that one nm is a billionth of a meter, and if they are still so stupid that they don't know what a meter is — we all know it is a thing the electricity man reads — just say that it is equal to one millimicron. Frankly, Vera, I think you are making a mountain out of a molehill.’

‘How can you be so asinine, Brunhilde?’ retorted Vera with very considerable acerbity, ‘you know there are no molehills here, and as for moles, well, they haven't been invented yet.’ She sniffed — if a virus can sniff — and relapsed into jelly-like silence.

The world called human was a very peculiar place. All the inhabitants of the world lived in the valleys or pores

because, for some remarkable reason which none could ever understand, the world was covered except for certain places with a very strange blanket or cloud or something. It seemed to be immense pillars criss-crossed with such space between it that any agile virus, given a few years, could climb straight up through that barrier and look at space from the surface of this strange material. But it was truly remarkable because every so often the whole world would endure a Flood. Millions of virus people would be instantly drowned and only people like Vera, Brunhilde, and certain friends of theirs who had seen the wisdom of living in pore valleys survived.

It used to be a devastating sight to raise one's antenna above the valley and look at all the bodies littering the plane between adjacent valleys. But no one could ever explain what it was. They knew that at certain intervals of time the great barrier covering most of the world would be removed and then would come the Flood, and then would come another barrier which was violently agitated. After that there would come yet another barrier, and for a time peace.

Vera Virus and her friends were sitting in their Valley of the Pore in a site which was never covered by this barrier, they could look up at the skies above, and Vera, looking up on this occasion, said, 'I often wonder, Brunhilde, if there are any other worlds besides ours?'

A new voice broke in, a gentleman virus called Bunyanwera who had been born from a Ugandan culture, or at least that had been in the racial memory of his ancestors, now he was just another inhabitant of the world called human. He said, 'Oh nonsense, Vera, nonsense, you know perfectly well there are thousands, millions, of worlds like ours. Haven't we glimpsed them in the distance at times? But then, we don't know if they have any life upon them, do we?'

A fourth voice called out, 'Well, I think this world was made especially for us. There is no other world in existence with life on like ours. I think the whole world was made by God just for us viruses, look at the advantages we have, there is no form of intelligence to be compared with ours, we have special valleys dotted about and if they are not

made especially for us how did they come about?' The speaker, Catu Guama, was an erudite sort of fellow, he had been around a bit, he had even moved as far as the next Valley of the Pore, so the others listened to his opinion with respect. But then suddenly Bunyanwera burst out, 'Oh nonsense, nonsense, there's no such thing as a God, of course there isn't a God. I've prayed time after time for little things to be done for me, and if there was a God do you think He would allow one of his children to suffer? Look at me, I've got part of my jelly crushed, it happened when I got too close to the top of the Valley and a piece of the barrier scraped my backside. No, of course there isn't a God, if so He would have healed me.'

There was an embarrassed silence for some time, and then Vera said, 'Well, I don't know about it, I've prayed too but I've never heard an answer to my prayers and I've never seen any angel-viruses floating about in the air. Have you?' The others sat in silence for a moment, and then a most dreadful catastrophe occurred; from out of space a great 'something' swooped down and scraped all the great pillars on which they relied for shade. 'Oh my goodness me, my goodness me,' said Brunhilde as the great 'something' swept by, 'that was a close shave, wasn't it? We were nearly wiped out that time!'

But having escaped one danger from outer space - it must have been a U.F.O., they thought — another matter happened. A sudden stinging flood fell upon them and they had a shockingly antiseptic smell pour over them, and all of a sudden Vera, Brunhilde, Bunyanwera and Catu Guama ceased to exist as the world called human dabbed astringent on his face.

Miss Ant sat placidly on a great stone. Carefully she brushed her antennae and made sure that all her legs were clean and tidy. She had to be sure she was looking absolutely as perfect as she could be because she was going out walking with a soldier ant who had been given unexpected leave. She turned to her friend, Bertha Blackbeetle, who was snoozing in the heat of the noonday sun. 'Bertha, you great oaf!' she

said, 'give me a good examination, will you? Make sure everything is as it should be.'

Bertha roused up and opened one eye, and looked with care at Miss Ant. 'My, oh my, you sure do look swell.' she said, 'our soldier boy will be knocked straight off his legs when he sees you. But it's too early, you know, sit down and enjoy the sunlight.'

Together they sat and looked out on the desolate world before them. There were great boulders, immense boulders which reared up twenty times the height of Miss Ant, and in between there was dry, dry earth, not a blade of grass was to be seen, not a bit of weed, nothing but desolation and vast peculiar marks in the soil.

Miss Ant looked up at the sky and said, 'Bertha, all my life I have wanted a soldier boy of my own, and I prayed that I should have such a friend. Do you think my prayer has been answered?'

Bertha wobbled one of her antennae, and then said slowly and carefully, 'Gee, I don't know, I don't believe in a God myself. If there is one He's never heard any of my prayers. When I was much younger, in fact when I was in the grub stage, I often used to pray to a God I had been told about but the prayers were never answered, and I came to the conclusion that I was — well, you know — wasting my time. What's the good of believing in a God if He is not godlike enough to give us a bit of proof? That's what I say.' Idly she turned a complete circle and sat down again.

Miss Ant carefully knitted with her front legs, and then said, 'It really is a problem, you know Bertha, it really is a problem. I wonder if all those points of light we see at night are other worlds, and if they are other worlds do you think anyone lives on them? Funny to think if this is the only world and we are the only people on it. What do you think, eh?'

Bertha heaved a sigh of exasperation, and then said, 'Well, I don't know that there are other worlds or not. I think it's something quite different. I met another insect some months ago and he said — he was a winged insect — that he had flown a long, long way and then he came to a tremendous pillar, oh such a vast pillar that I couldn't even believe what he was

telling me. And he said that at a certain time every night the top of the pillar went bright. Now I can't believe that there would be a world which only came bright when our world was getting dark. What do you think?'

Miss Ant was getting more and more confused. Well, I always was taught that this world was made for us insects. I was always taught that there is no form of life greater than us insects. That's you and me, Bertha. So if that is true, if our priests are right, then surely there can't be anything more clever than us, and they'd have to be a lot more clever than us if they could turn their world to existence only when this world went dark. I don't know what to believe, but I think there is a big Purpose behind it all, and, like you, I am getting a bit tired of praying to a God who never bothers to answer.'

Time went on and the shadows began to lengthen. From a short distance away an ant-voice called out, 'Hey, Miss Ant Miss Ant, where are you? I've got a message for you.' Miss Ant got to her legs and moved forward over to the edge of the big stone. 'Yes, yes, what is it?' she called down looking at another ant standing some distance away.

The other ant looked up and wiggled with her two antennae, and then she said, 'Your soldier boy has gone and left you. He said that after all he thought you weren't the right ant-girl for him, so he's gone off with that fast young hussy who lives way up there,' and she turned pointing. Miss Ant sat down with a thud, her whole world collapsed about her. She had been praying for a soldier boy to come and make love to her, and then they would make a nest together. But now — what did life have for her now?

Miss Ant and Bertha started suddenly as a tremendous thudding came along the ground, thudding like an approaching earthquake. They stood to the full extent of their legs trying to see what was happening, but before they could move dark shapes swooped out of the distance and Miss Ant and her friend and the messenger ant, too, were squashed into pulp as schoolboys just leaving afternoon classes swept across their playground on their way home.

Away in the country the grass was standing tall. It was

beautiful there, healthy grass as green as green could be, the suns had warmed it, the rains had nourished it, and now it was a field worthy of anyone's delight.

Deep in the depths of a field which seemed to be a veritable forest to its inhabitants two little field mice played about among the stalks of grass, played about on the earth, and then ran up the thicker stalks and jumped from one to the other. One jumped high and leapt right up above the top of the grass. As he came tumbling down with shrieks of merriment he fell at the feet of an old, old mouse. 'Be careful, youngster,' the old mouse said, 'you're being too gay, you know. There's no gaiety like that in this world. Soon a great Mystery will occur, all our forest will tumble down before the onslaught of such a vast Machine that none of us can even guess what it is. By the state of this grass I can see that we haven't much longer, so we'd better return to our burrows.' The old mouse, a wise old she-mouse, turned and toddled off. The two young mice looked at each other and then looked at her — looked at her retreating form. Then one said, 'Oh, isn't she a miserable old spoil sport.' The other said, 'Yes, I guess she doesn't like children, she wants to keep us as slaves bringing nuts and stuff like that, and getting nothing for it.'

For some time the young field mice played about together, and then a rustling chill in the air reminded them that evening was starting, so with one startled glance up at the darkened sky they hurried along together to their home.

They sat in the dusk at the mouth of their burrow communing in spirit, nibbling a piece of grass, looking up occasionally to be very sure that night owls did not see them. After a time the round orb of the silvery moon started its glide across the dark sky. One little mouse said to the other, 'Wonder what it's like up there? I wonder if there are any field mice on that big thing that we see so often?' 'Oh don't be stupid,' said the other field mouse, 'of course there is nothing except this world.' Then he added with a note of uncertainty in his voice, 'Oh yes, I often think the same as you, I often think, well, there must be worlds with field mice on besides this world. I know our priests tell us that this

world was made especially for field mice and there is no higher form of life than us field mice.'

'Ah yes,' said the other field mouse, 'but then the priests tell us we should pray. Well, goodness me, I prayed hard enough, I prayed for fresh cheese and things like that, but never, never have I had a prayer answered. I think if there had been a God then it would be such a simple matter to put down a bit of fresh cheese for a young field mouse every so often. What do you think?' He turned to his companion expectantly, but the other said, 'Well, I don't know, I'm sure. I prayed as well but I've never had any proof that there is a field mouse God nor have I ever seen any field mice angels flying about.'

'No,' said the other, 'only these night owls and people like that.' On that solemn thought they turned on the instant and dived down into their burrow.

The night wore on and various creatures of the darkness came out looking for food, but the little field mice were safely hidden in their burrow. In the morning the day dawned bright and there was warmth in the air. The little field mice set about their daily task. They left their burrow and off they went into the green forest of grass to see what food they could get for the day.

All of a sudden they crouched against the earth, their blood feeling as if it had turned to ice within them. A most hellish unearthly uproar was coming toward them, a noise such as they had never heard before. They were too frightened to move. One whispered hurriedly to the other, 'Quick, quick, let us pray for protection, let us pray for salvation.' And those were the last words the little field mouse said because the farmer with his reaping machine drove straight over them and their bodies were cut to shreds and flung among the cut grass.

From the great pyramid with its flat top and turreted sides came the blare of trumpets, their brazen voices echoing and re-echoing through the valley at the foot of the pyramid, which was indeed a holy temple.

People looked at each other in affright. Were they late?

What was happening? Such a blaring occurred only in times of crisis or when the fat slovenly priests had something to say to the people. With one accord they dropped what they were doing and hastened along the well-trodden path leading to the plinth of the pyramid. Here there were broad, broad steps leading perhaps a third the way up the pyramid, and all the way around there were extrusions, extensions, almost like balconies, or perhaps a better term would be walled walks, and along these walled walks or balconies the priests were wont to take their leisure. Two by two they would go along, hands clasped behind their backs or held within their ample sleeves. Two by two they went along thinking of the words of God, pondering upon the mysteries of the Universe. Here in the clear atmosphere so high up in the Andes it was so easy to see the stars at night, so easy to believe in other worlds, but the population of the valley was now coming in force up the great steps and surging into the main body of the Temple.

Within the dim interior so highly charged with incense smoke people coughed a little, and here and there a countryman used only to the freshest of fresh air rubbed his eyes as they started to water and smart as the acrid smoke of the incense attacked them.

The lights were dim, but at one end of the Temple stood a vast idol of polished bronze, a sitting human figure, and yet no — it was not quite a human, it was ‘different’ in subtle ways. It was super-human, but it towered many stories high, and the people at its base walking about could only reach up to half knee height.

The congregation entered, and then when the priest in charge saw that the great Hall was almost full there came the deep booming of a gong. Sharp eyes, unaffected by the incense smoke, could see the great gong quivering, quivering at the right hand of the godlike figure. The booming continued, but no one was hitting the gong, no one was doing anything within yards of it, but the booming continued. And then, without human hands, the great doors of the Temple closed. For a moment there was silence, and then upon the knee of the God there appeared the High Priest

clad in flowing robes. His hands and arms were raised above his head, he looked down at the people and said, 'God hath spoken to us, God is dissatisfied with the help you give your Temple. So many of you withhold your tithe, God will speak to you.' With that he turned and went on his knees facing the torso of the great figure. Then the mouth of the figure opened and from it came a booming. People dropped to their knees, people closed their eyes and clasped their hands together, and then the booming gave way to a strong, strong voice, 'I am your God,' said the figure. 'I am disappointed at the increasing lack of respect shown to my servants, your priests. Unless you are more obedient and more generous in your offerings you will be afflicted with plagues, with murrains, and with many sores and boils, and your crops shall wither before your eyes. Obey your priests. They are my servants, they are my children. Obey, obey, obey.' The voice faded out and the mouth closed. The High Priest got to his feet again and turned to face his congregation. Then he presented a fresh set of demands, more food, more money, more services, more young women for the Temple Virgins. Then he disappeared. He did not turn and walk away, he disappeared, and the Great Temple doors opened again. Outside there were lines of priests on each side, and each had a collecting bowl in his hands.

The Temple was empty. The idol lay silent. But no, no, not so silent because a visiting priest in the Temple was being shown around by a very, very close friend. From the idol came whisperings and rustlings, and the visiting priest commented upon it. His friend replied, 'Oh yes, they are just giving a check of the acoustics. You haven't seen inside our idol, have you? Come along and I'll show you.'

Together the two priests moved to the back of the idol and the resident priest pressed his hands in a certain pattern on an ornamentation. A hidden door opened and the two priests entered. The idol was not solid, it was a series of chambers. They went in and climbed a series of stairways until they got up to chest level. Here was a very strange room indeed; there was a bench and a seat before it, and in front of the seat there was a mouthpiece which led to a

series of tubings intricately convoluted which led upwards to the throat.

At one side there were two seats and a series of levers. The resident priest said, 'Those two levers are operated by two priests, they activate the jaws and we have had so much practice that we can move the jaws exactly in time with the speech.' He moved over and said, 'Look out here, the speaker can see the congregation at all times without being seen himself.'

The visitor moved over and looked out through narrow eye slits. He could see the Great Temple, he could see cleaners busy sweeping the floors. Then he turned to see what his friend was doing. His friend was sitting in front of the mouthpiece, he said, 'We have a special priest who has a very authoritative voice, he is never allowed out to mix with other people because he is the voice of our God. When required he sits here and he says his message through this mouthpiece. First of all he removes the slide here and then his voice goes out through the mouth and so long as this slide is in place nothing one says here can be heard outside.'

Together they moved down into the main body of the Temple again, talking all the time. The resident said, 'We have to do this, you know. I don't know if there is a God or not, I often wonder, but I am very sure that God does not answer our prayers. I have been here now for forty years and I have never yet known a prayer answered, but we have to keep our authority.'

The visitor replied and said, 'Yes, I stand upon our high peak at night and I look up at the sky, and I see all the little pinpoints of light, and I wonder if they are holes in the floor of heaven or if it's all imagination. Is there heaven? Or are those pinpoints of light other worlds? And if there are other worlds then how do they go on there?' The resident replied, 'Yes, I have many doubts myself, there must be some controlling entity but it does seem to me from my own experience that he never answers prayers. That is why a thousand years or more ago this metal figure was built, so that we priests could maintain our power, our hold, over people, and possibly help them where God ignored them.'

I BELIEVE that all life is made up of vibrations, and a vibration is just a cycle. We say a thing shakes. Well, we mean it goes up and it goes down, and it goes up and it goes down. If you draw a line on a piece of paper then you can draw another line curving up from your first line, curving over, and coming down again and going the same distance down before turning to go up. Here we have a cycle, a vibration, a pictorial diagram of a vibration similar to that used in biorhythm or in symbols for electric current of the alternating variety. But all life is like that. It is like the swinging of a pendulum. It goes from one side of a neutral point, through the neutral point, and up an equal distance to the other side. And then the pendulum swings again and goes through the procedure time after time after time.

I BELIEVE that all Nature goes through cycles. I believe that everything that exists is a vibration, alternating from up to down, from positive to negative, from good to bad, and, if you come to think about it, without having bad there would be no good because good is the opposite of bad as bad is the opposite of good.

I believe in a God. I believe very firmly in a God. But I also believe that the God may be too busy to deal with us on an individual basis. I believe that if we pray we pray to our Overself, to our superior soul, if you like, but that is not God.

I believe that there are two Gods, the God of Good - positive, and the God of Bad — negative. The latter we call Satan. I believe that at very definite intervals — at opposite swings of the pendulum — the good God rules the Earth and all things living and then we have a Golden Age. But the pendulum swings, the cycle moves on and then the power of the good God, the positive side, wanes and after it passes a neutral point where the powers of good and bad are equal then it goes up to favour the other side of the swing, the bad, Satan. And then we have what is so often called the Age of Kali, the age of disruption, the age when everything goes wrong, and looking about the Earth today at vandals, wars, politicians, can you deny that we are now in the Age of Kali? We are. We are coming up to the peak of the swing

and conditions will get worse and worse until at last the swing will be at its topmost point for bad and conditions will be very bad indeed. Wars, strikes, earthquakes, the powers of evil let loose unchecked. And then, as always, the pendulum will change direction, will fall, and the powers of evil will wane and there will be a resurgence of better feeling upon the Earth.

Once again the neutral point when good and bad are equal will be reached and passed, and the pendulum will climb up to good, and as it climbs up things will be better and better. Perhaps then when we have a Golden Age the God of this Universe will be able to listen to our prayers and will, maybe, afford us some proof that He does care about those lodged down here on this world.

I believe that at the present time the press, the media, television and all the rest of it contribute very largely to the increase of evil because we read even in the press itself how children of seven years of age are taught to commit murder, children of ten years of age set up murder gangs in Vancouver. I believe that the press should be suppressed, and television, radio, and films should be censored.

But about Gods. Yes, I believe there is a God, in fact I believe there are different grades of Gods. We call them Manus, and people who cannot understand the concept of Gods should look at conditions in a big departmental store. It doesn't matter what name you choose for the store, let us say a big chain of super-market stores. At the very top you have God, the President or General Manager — depending on which country you live in and the terminology employed. But the man at the top is the all-powerful one who dictates what shall be done. Yet this man, this Chairman of the Board of Directors or President or General Manager, is so busy with his immense power that he does not have time to deal with the smallest office boy or the smallest minor clerk who hands out food and puts it in bags. This particular man, the God of the supermarket, represents God Himself, the Head Manu of our Universe, the one who has control of many different worlds. He is so important, so powerful, so busy that he is not able to deal with individual worlds, not able to

deal with individual countries, and definitely not able to deal with individuals — individual humans, individual animals, for animals have as many rights as humans in the celestial scheme of things.

The supermarket President or Manager cannot see to everything himself so he appoints under managers and supervisors and overseers, and that corresponds in the spatial system to Manus. There is God the Almighty, and in our own scheme there is the Manu of Earth, the Manager who is responsible for the overall management of this Earth. Under him there are subordinate Manus, supervisors if you like, of each continent of the Earth. Supervisors or Manus of each country of the Earth. They guide the destiny of the countries, they influence what the politicians are doing although the politicians can make enough mess without any Manus to help them!

There is one creature who is known as 'the Eye of God'. The cat. The cat can go anywhere, do anything, see anything, for who takes much notice of a cat strolling around? People say, 'Oh it's only the cat, it's nothing.' And the cat goes on watching and reporting good and bad. Evil forces cannot control cats. Cats have a divine barrier which prevents evil thoughts, that is why in one century cats are venerated as Divinities, and in another century they are execrated as disciples of the devil because the devil people want to get rid of cats who report on evil deeds, and there is nothing the devils can do about it.

At the present time the Manu controlling the Earth is Satan. At the present time Satan is very well in control of the Earth, not much good can happen at the present time. Look for yourself at that evil Satan-like group, the Communists. Look at all the cults with their misleading 'religion' and how they try to gain dominance over those who are foolish enough to join their evil cults. But eventually Satan will be forced to abandon the Earth, forced to withdraw his minions just as a business which fails has to close down. Soon there will become a time when the pendulum will reverse its direction and with its reverse of direction evil will weaken, good will strengthen, but that time is not yet. We

face increasingly bad times until the pendulum really swings. Think of this; you look at the pendulum, you think it is always moving but it is not, you know, it is not even moving at the same speed because the pendulum is at its height on, let us say, the right side, and then it falls down with increasing speed until it is at its bottommost point. There it has its maximum speed. But then the weight of the pendulum climbing up to the other side slows the arm of the pendulum and at the end of the stroke the pendulum stops, quite definitely the pendulum stops for an appreciable time before falling again to climb up the other side.

Depending upon our time reference we are able to say that with the average clock the stoppage is for a fraction of a second only. But if we go to a different time where seconds are years or perhaps even thousands of years, then the time the pendulum is stopped may itself be two thousand years. And if the pendulum is stopped on the bad side a lot of bad can be done before the pendulum and its cycle goes down, down, down, and up again to the other side to provide good and equal opportunity.

The Golden Age will not be in the time of any who are living now. Conditions will worsen very definitely and will continue to worsen throughout the years left to those of us who are senior citizens. But children or grandchildren will indeed live to see the start of the Golden Age and they will partake of many of the benefits there from. But one of the great things which needs to be done is to overhaul the religious system. Now Christians fight against Christians, and the Christian religion indeed, since it was so distorted in the Year 60, has been the most warlike religion of all. In Northern Ireland Catholics are murdering Protestants and Protestants are murdering Catholics. Again, there is war between Jews and Moslems, and what does it matter what 'religion' one follows? All paths should lead the same way Home. We may have to diverge a bit here and there, but all religions should lead the same way Home. What does it matter that one person is a Christian and another person is a Jew? What does it matter that the Christian religion as it was in the time of Christ was formed from a combination of Far Eastern

religions? A religion should be tailored to the exact need of the people to whom it is going to be preached.

Religion should be very different indeed. It should be taught by dedicated men, not by those who want an easy living and a comfortable sure income as now seems to be the case. There should be no discrimination and definitely no missionaries. I know to my own bitter cost that missionaries are the enemies of the true believers. I know that in China, India, and many other places — especially in Africa — people pretended to be converted to Christianity just because of the free hand-outs which the missionaries gave. We must also remember that those missionaries with their prudish minds insisted on native peoples being clothed in unsuitable garments, and those missionaries indeed brought tuberculosis and other dread diseases to people who previously in their own natural state were quite immune to such illnesses.

We should also remember, perhaps, the Spanish Inquisition where people of different religions were tortured, burned alive, because they would not believe in the same imaginations as the Catholics believed in, or thought it was policy to pretend to believe in.

The Golden Age will come. Not in our time, but later. Perhaps when the God of our world has more leisure during the period of that good cycle He may consider investigating humans and animals a bit more. The Gardeners of the Earth are well intentioned, no doubt, but everyone will agree that at times it is necessary for the owner of the property to step in and see what his gardeners are doing and perhaps order a change or two here and there.

I believe in God. But I also believe that it is useless to pray and pray and pray for our own trivial wants to God. He is too busy, and, in any case, at this period of time our cycle or rhythm or pendulum is at its negative aspect, and during the negative aspect evil, negativeness, bad is in force. And so it is — well, if you want something pray to your Overself instead. And if your Overself thinks it is good for you — and good for the Overself! — you may get it. By that time you probably will not want it.

CHAPTER TEN

MARGARET THUGGLEWUNK cautiously opened one eye and peered apprehensively at the full light of day. 'Oh my God!' she groaned, 'what a girl has to do for a living!' Slowly she opened her other eye and then got the full impact of the full light of day. Pain shot through her head so that she thought it would split. Then she groaned as she put her hands on the small of her back. The ache was dreadful. For some moments she lay there trying to recall what had happened the night before. 'Oh yes,' she recalled, 'I was after that Beamish contract and the awful man said I'd have to stay the night with him if I wanted any more contracts from him. Oh my goodness, whatever happened to me? Straight sex I can take but I feel I've been in bed with a bad-tempered elephant.' She groaned and groaned and at last tottered off into the bathroom and flopped on to the seat. After much retching and vomiting she bathed her head in a wet towel oblivious of what was happening to her hairdo in the process. At last she felt somewhat recovered and looked about her. As she did so her face grew dark with rage, 'That no-good bum of a husband,' she said, 'I told him to get the place cleaned up before he left for work this morning.' At the thought of her husband she stirred again and tottered out of the bathroom into the kitchen.

Bemusedly she looked about, and then her eyes spotted a note propped up against a milk bottle. 'I am tired of living with a liberated woman,' the note said. 'Equal opportunities can go too far, and when you are sleeping around night after night that lets me out. You'll never see me again.'

She took the note in her hands and looked at it intently. Then she turned it over, held it up to the light, and at last turned it upside-down as if some inspiration would come to

her. But no, no inspiration, no joy, no sorrow either. She was just another of those females who call themselves liberated women, the worst curse of civilization.

I am one of those who have utter contempt and loathing for these women. They are not wives, they are just useless ullaage which are dragging down the race.

In 1914 or so a great tragedy occurred in Britain. Oh yes, the Great War started, the Great World War, but another war started as well; the so-called battle of the sexes. Women were designed to bear the children which continued the race of Man, but in 1914 women went to the factories and donned men's attire. Soon they were drinking and smoking and using such foul language that no man would ever use, no matter how depraved. Soon women were griping and bellyaching saying they had had a raw deal, but no woman has ever said what she wants. She wants, it seems, to be an unmitigated savage and have no thought at all for the continuance of the race.

Then there are those who put 'Ms' which doesn't mean a thing in the world science, but, actually, if they took an occult warning from it, it would show that women are becoming masculine and soon they will be becoming impotent.

It really is too dreadful for words how some young women go to bed with any man who takes their fancy. Sometimes it is almost a case of raping the man in the process. And then when a child is born in or out of wedlock the mother rushes back to the factory or the store or whatever it is almost before the child is born, and the child is farmed out or left to the tender mercies of a baby sitter. As the child grows up he or she is turned out on the streets to become dominated by stronger and older children. Soon there are gangs going around — listen to this which is from *The Alhertan* for July 15th 1976. This is just an extract, of course. It says, 'Hit-boys for Hire.' After the usual blurb etc., the article goes on to say, 'Somewhere in the Vancouver area is a ten year old boy who has made himself available to the underworld for contract killings.'

It appears that this young fellow, a ten year old, leads a

gang of a hundred boys who will kill to order for payment.

A few weeks ago there were reports in a paper that a boy even younger had committed murder, and now since that there is another case where a boy killed his alleged friend.

In the old days the mother used to stay at home and raise a family, and she made sure that they were decent citizens, made sure that they were children who would obey, and what greater task can there be than to have the mother who will stay at home and raise a suitable family and make sure that the family is looked after. It is clear that many of these women who will not stay at home are just being influenced by evil forces.

In the First World War women went to factories, offices, and even joined the Forces, and so advertising people found that there was now a doubled source of income for those for whom they advertised. And soon the economy was geared so that it was necessary for women to work - or so it appeared on the surface. All the advertising stressed that women could do so much by buying this, that, and something else, and, of course, they fell for it hook, line, and sinker.

The Governments, too, found that when women worked and earned high money then there was more income tax, more money from purchase tax, and all the rest of it. And women still go on being so utterly stupid that they miss their natural vocation and, instead, just go out to work to get into debt, to buy things which are no earthly use to them.

Some women nowadays have no taste at all, they haven't the vaguest idea of dress sense, they think that the height of fashion is to get out in a fresh blouse and skirt every day, stuff which has been bought on the never-never and usually is the cheapest material possible, material with gaudy patterns on it.

Have you looked at women lately, the younger women, that is? Have you seen their flat chests and their narrow hips? How are children going to be born? With the aid of forceps, no doubt, and then they will get their brains distorted and pinched.

Have you seen how marriage is deteriorating nowadays? Some women want to just shack up with a man and have as much sex as they want, and then if the man crosses them in any way at all they just pick up their traps and out they go to the nearest man who will have them.

In the esoteric world there is the male principle and the female principle, two opposite poles, and for the continuance of the world as an inhabited place it is necessary that men and women be unlike each other, otherwise women will become sterile and no matter how many times they try, no matter how hard they try, there still will be no offspring.

Perhaps we should go out and do violent things to the advertising people, the ones who lure women on to the path of racial destruction. Oh yes, it could be so. It is made clear in the Akashic Record of Probabilities that such a thing can happen. It happened millions of years ago.

Far, far beyond even a racial memory there was a civilization which reached quite a high standard. The people were purple and they were not necessarily human, not quite human, in fact, because the women had six breasts, not two as they do now, and there were other subtle differences.

There was a very high standard of civilization, and a very warm family life, but then women decided that they should not stay at home and raise the family, they should not bother about a husband or children, they were being persecuted — they never said how, nor did they ever say what they really wanted, but obviously something had gone wrong in their minds. And so they broke away from marriage, and as soon as the baby was born it was shoved off to any home that would take an unwanted child. Soon the quality of the race deteriorated, degenerated, and became moronic.

In time women became completely sterile - and the race died out.

Do you know anything about gardening? Have you ever seen a very choice apple tree which has been neglected? At one time that apple tree produced prize apples, prized for their firmness, their sweetness, their colour and everything.

But then if it is neglected for a time you get a thing like a crab apple, wizened, warped, shrivelled.

Have you ever seen thoroughbred horses which have been neglected and allowed to breed with wild moorland ponies? Well, I will tell you what the result is after a few generations the animal result is the lowest of the low because all these things seem to breed down, breed down to the worst parts of everything.

And so it is with humans. Children are neglected, they have no discipline, and so we get armed gangs, we get vandals - anything which is evil and ugly. We get rapists, and we get old people slashed and mutilated. Quite recently there was a case where two women found an old man who was disabled, he had artificial legs, so for the few cents which the man had in his pockets the women beat him up and broke his artificial legs and left him more than half naked in a deserted street.

Quite recently there was another case involving women; two women went to a house occupied by an old-age pensioner woman. They forced their way in and then they beat up the old lady, and she only escaped with her life by pretending to be dead. The women — if women they can be called — robbed the house and took all the money the old lady had, leaving her quite destitute. Old-age pensioners do not have much to live on!

Do you know what undisciplined children grow up to be? Do you know what happens when children are allowed to grow up into teenage state without any discipline, without any thought of trying to get a job?

Willy the Wolf loped along the midnight street. The garish gleam of the neon lights flickered and flared in the night wind as the lamp holders swayed, bowed, and swayed again. This had been payday and even at this late hour many people were still about. The shopping malls, ever ready to take advantage of payday, stayed open very late when the money was ready to flow.

Willy the Wolf was a shady character, one of those very undesirable people who seem to creep out of the woodwork on a Sunday morning, slouching and lurching like a drunken

moron along the early morning avenues. Even his parents had no time for him, and eventually had turned him from the shelter of the parental roof.

Father worked, mother worked. Willy stayed at home filching whatever he could. If his father's pocket book fell into his hands when the old man came back in a drunken stupor he took what he could. Willy was ever ready to purloin his mother's purse and sneak whatever currency he could — and blame it on his father when accused.

Willy had quite a reputation in the neighbourhood. He was always slouching around in dark streets, trying car doors to see which was locked, and those which were not locked — well, Willy was there to see what could be stolen from the glove compartments or even taking hub caps from the wheels.

His parents were sick of him. At last finding that Willy would not listen to them, finding that he would not do anything about getting a job after he was thrown out of school, they locked the doors against him and changed the locks, and made sure the windows were locked too. So Willy went away just a few streets. He went to the unemployment agency and was able to fake reasons for not taking work, and then with a different name obtained from a stolen pocket book he also got money from the Welfare people. But — Willy the Wolf loped down the street with predatory eyes aswivel for opportunity, his head turned this way and that way. He looked to the front and then he looked back. As he turned front ways again he suddenly stiffened and increased his pace. Just turning the corner ahead of him was a young woman carrying a heavy handbag, a late worker from one of the many busy offices.

Willy loped on, taking it easy. He saw she was waiting to cross the road, and just as she was about to cross the light against her turned red Willy loped on and drew level with her. He slid one leg in front of her and with his right hand he pushed on the nape of her neck. Like a log she fell, face down, hitting her forehead against the curb of the sidewalk. Willy grasped her handbag from her nerveless hand and without breaking his stride loped on. Turning a corner into a

dark lane going alongside an apartment building, he looked over his shoulder briefly to see if there was any pursuit. He saw the young woman on the ground with a spreading stain of red, red which looked black under the greenish neon lights. With a chuckle he just slid her handbag under his leather jacket, zipped up the front of the jacket, and sauntered along as if he had not a care in the world, as if he were the most innocent person in the world. Then he came to an even darker part of the back lane. Here there was a garage which had been deserted for some time. It was locked up quite securely, but the garage people had gone out of business and they were waiting to have the property sold. The garage was locked up but many weeks before it had closed down Willy had stolen a spare key, he had gone into the garage and demanded the key to 'the gents' and as the assistant turned to unhook the key Willy had snatched up the door key which was lying beside the cash register.

Now Willy went into the garage and crouched down inside the front door. There was plenty of light here because a street light just outside shone brightly through the garage window. Willy crouched on the floor and tipped the contents of the handbag on the ground. Chuckling to himself he put away all the money he could find, and then he rummaged through the other contents, gazing at the peculiar things which women keep in their handbags, reading with great difficulty the pile of letters which also were in that purse. At last, deciding that nothing more was worth having, he kicked the remaining items aside in a pile of rubbish.

On the uncaring sidewalk the young woman lay stunned and bleeding. Past her swirled the heavy night traffic, traffic coming from night clubs and cinemas, late workers returning home, and other workers going to their shift. Drivers gaped from passing cars and speeded up so that they should not become involved. The few pedestrians on the sidewalk hesitated, stopped to stare, and then walked away. From a store doorway a man stepped forward. He had seen it all, he could have apprehended Willy but, then again, he did not want to be involved, he had nothing to thank the Police for, why should he help them? Come to think of it, why should he help the young woman? He did not know her. So leisurely

he strolled forward, stopping by her he bent down and looked at her having a guess at her age, wondering who she was, and then he reached down and felt through her pockets to see if anything was there. Nothing was in the pockets, so he looked at her hands and saw that there was an engagement ring and a dress ring on two fingers. Roughly he pulled them off and slipped them in his pocket. Then, straightening up, he prodded her tentatively with a foot — wondering if she was alive or not — and then he moved back into the shadows.

In the slums of Calgary the turgid half life of the populace swirled uneasily on for day after day with a mounting crime rate, and with the newspapers shouting in great headlines that something should be done. There were articles about the increasing rapes, the increasing muggings, but the general population were unconcerned, they were concerned only if THEY became involved. Calgary night life went on as before, troubled, troubled, with seething crime below the surface ready to break out into the open at any time. There was talk of closing the parks by night, talk of increased patrols by night, talk, and nothing more. The city went on as before and day followed day, and night followed night.

Again the midnight hour. In the distance a clock was chiming. Nearby a car horn shrilled insistently. Some burglar breaking into a parked car had set off an alarm so the car shrilled away and the shrilling went unheeded, no one cared, no one wanted to become involved.

Again the midnight hour. Willy the Wolf loped along the midnight street. His once-white turtle-necked jersey stained with the remnants of many a meal swayed and stretched as he loped and, as before, gazed around for prey.

Sighting what he desired he tensed to alertness and increased his pace. A little way in front of him a small old lady carrying a heavy bag shuffled along into the night. Obviously she was disabled, handicapped, arthritic maybe, but she was shuffling along as if she could hardly put one foot before the other, shuffling along as though she were having difficulty in completing her journey. 'Well, she won't!' chortled Willy to himself.

Quickly he caught up with her. With practiced ease — a

skill developed with many a successful encounter - he slid a leg in front of the poor old lady and then a hand poised at her back to push her forward, to trip her on to her face and grab her bag. But — oh, surprise! — the little old lady ducked and swung her heavy brick-laden bag at Willy's head.

For a sick moment Willy saw it coming. Then with a smashing crash it caught him beside the head. He saw bright lights. He had an excruciating pain and he shrieked, and then the whole world went black before him, and like all his victims before he tumbled down to the ground and rolled over on his face.

The callous, careless onlookers on this busy night stared in torpid astonishment as the little old lady placed a foot on the small of Willy's back, crowed her pleasure like a rooster on a dung heap at break of dawn, then she did it again and walked away with a jaunty step.

The night wore on. A minute, an hour? It was of no moment to Willy. At last a police car patrolling around stopped at the untidy bundle on the sidewalk. The car door opened and an old policeman got out, hand on his gun. He moved over and with a careless foot just flopped the body over on to its back. The policeman gazed down and then — recognition. He called over to his companion still in the car, 'Oh, it's Willy, he's met it at last.'

Returning to the car, for he was the observer, he picked up the microphone and called for the ambulance to come and collect one badly injured person.

In the darkness of a nearby apartment facing that crossing the little old lady sat at her window peering through the curtain, and as she saw Willy thrown quite unceremoniously into the ambulance — the ambulance men knew him as well — she laughed and laughed and laughed before undressing and going to bed.

The Akashic Record which certain people can see when they go into the astral plane is a record of all that has ever happened upon the world to which it applies. It shows the origin of the world from the first gaseous ball on to the semi-molten state. It shows everything that has happened. It is just as though the world were a person, and that person had

parents who had a cine camera working from the moment of birth all through the person's life until the moment of death, so at any time a person with the necessary knowledge could turn to the reel of film and find out what happened, when, where, and how. That is how it is with all worlds.

In addition there is a Record of Probabilities, a Record showing what is HOPED will happen, but the behaviour of individual countries can modify what will happen. For instance, now there has been a big earthquake in the Far East and China has been cracked. Well, I personally believe that that is caused to a large extent by all the atom bomb tests underground, performed in America and in Siberia. It is like hitting a certain structure and finding that apparently no harm has been done, but then at some remote part of the structure cracks or fractures appear. Aircraft engineers know this when a bad landing of an aircraft can cause damage whereby cracks will appear in the tail!

Many years ago I was asked by a cultist to come in on a scheme that he had. He was going to sell people the idea that he would go into the astral - with his briefcase, presumably — consult the astral and come back with the information which he would then sell to the inquirer for a very large sum of money. He wrote to me about it and tried to get me in on the scheme saying that we would be millionaires in no time. I refused, and that is why I am still poor!

The Akashic of women shows that these things about Women's Lib should not have happened. There should not have been all the hate, all the bitterness which women have shown about it. Now, most women are decent people, as I am well aware, and if they go in for this liberation movement it is just for fun and they do not take it too seriously. But there are a certain number of crackpots, women who stuff 'Ms.' in front of their name meaning, I suppose, 'Mostly Stupid,' and that is very suitable because that is what they are — mostly stupid. But in putting that 'Ms.' in front of their name instead of 'Miss' or 'Mrs.', or putting nothing in front of the name, they are invoking wrong vibrations, and vibrations are the essence of all existence. They are invoking bad vibrations FOR THEMSELVES.

If things go on like this as these women seem to want soon other forces will make fresh arrangements, they will think that they will give people of Earth a real taste of their own foolishness, and then it will be a reversion to a state which happened in a far-gone civilization, a civilization which existed so long ago on Earth that there is no record of it except on the Akashic.

In that civilization when all the people wore purple skins instead of black, yellow, brown, or white, women betrayed mankind to a certain sect of the Gardeners of the Earth, the super-beings who look after this world, or who are supposed to. It seems they have fallen down on the job pretty badly of late. But, anyway, women led astray some of the male Gardeners and that made a lot of discord with the Gardeners wives. But a new race was formed by their union on the Earth, and it was dominated by women. Women took all the jobs, and there were few jobs available for men other than as menial servants — slaves almost — for men who were impotent. But in special luxury houses there were very virile ‘studs’. They were there for the sole purpose of providing the necessary babies.

Oh yes, all this is perfectly true, it is so absolutely true that I tell you most sincerely that if you read my books — all seventeen of them — and you practice the things I tell you, then if your intentions are pure you can go into the astral and you can see the Akashic Record of this world. You cannot see the Akashic Record of individuals because — well, that would give you an unfair advantage over ‘the competition’. You have to have special dispensation, as I believe they say in the Roman Catholic Church, before you can see the personal Akashic Record of any individual nearer than a thousand years. But in that long bygone Age when there was a matriarchy women were busy working much the same as Communist slaves have to work, and then the most beautifully formed, the most healthy of the women or those who were very well-in with the leaders, could go to the stud house for pleasure or, in the necessary cases, for procreation as well.

Can you imagine how it would be on Earth nowadays if there was such a thing? Can you imagine what the adver-

tising people would put out for gullible women? ‘Polly's House of Pleasure — the Most Powerful Men Available, take your choice, what colour you like, what shade you like, dimensions to suit your own choice. Reasonable fees, special terms for club membership.’

But, anyway, as is always the case, an unnatural society eventually ends. So it was that the matriarchy ended. It was so unbalanced that it eventually toppled and that whole civilization died out.

Do you know why it was unbalanced? Think of your car battery, think of a battery in your radio, or anything which has a positive and negative. Supposing in some peculiar unknown way you could make the negative more powerful than the positive, then the whole thing would be unbalanced, wouldn't it, and wouldn't work after a time? That is what happened with that particular purple race. Life demands that there shall be equal positive and there shall be equal negative, there shall be equal good and equal bad to balance. There shall be equal masculine and equal feminine without which there cannot be any balanced coherent life, and the liberationists are trying to upset the balance of Nature, they are trying to ruin human ecology, and it just will not work, it is just making a lot of very bad Karma for the instigators because look at the troubles they are causing; they are greedy, and greed is one of the big curses of this world. The Golden Rule is that we should do unto others as we would have others do unto us. It is also better to give than to receive. If you give you add to your good Karma, but if you are trying to stir up disharmony and strife then it makes a very bad Karma indeed.

I am always highly amused at women who get married but then will not take their husband's name so as to make a balanced unit. Here in Canada we have an aspirant to the holy office of Prime Minister of Canada and that fellow has a wife who will not use his name, she calls herself ‘Ms.’ I believe it's MacTear or something like that, and it's enough to make anyone shed a tear. But how can you have a balanced family at the head of a country when the two chief members of the family do not form a unit? You can't.

Then again, if women do not want to be wives, then why

get married? If they do not want to be wives and they still want children — well, set up breeding stations the same as there are for cattle, because if women are like that then indeed they are cattle. I believe that there is more in bringing up children than just ten minutes or so of dubious pleasure. I believe that women were ordained by Nature to be mothers who could raise children, and if they just have children and then dump them on the sidewalk almost as soon as they can talk then they are breeding a race of loveless creatures, which is what we have at present. Now we have gangs of children willing to murder, gangs of children who go about in the parks breaking down trees, uprooting plants, doing anything they can to raise hell. In days gone by wives were indeed wives, they would stay by their husbands, they would help their husbands. The husband went out to earn the living, the wife stayed at home to raise the family and to train the newest members of the race of humanity.

Of course capitalists must pay for a lot of all this because these money-hungry people think that if women work there will be twice as much money. Sure, it is just fine to have money — I have never had much of it myself, but I would rather be honest than be like these capitalists who ruin civilisation for the sake of grabbing a few bucks. Advertising men make such tempting offers with their credit cards and their instalment systems and all that, that weak-willed people are tempted, and tempted they fall and get head over heels in debt, debt which they can only keep up with by taking one job or two jobs, or even three jobs. When I lived in Windsor I knew a man who had four jobs and he worked himself into an early grave. His wife had two jobs so that between them they had six jobs, and they were so heavily in debt that when the man died everything they had was seized by creditors. So why will people not live more reasonably, more economically instead of grabbing at anything they see just as a spoilt child grabs and yowls like a mad thing if anything is withheld.

I feel very strongly opposed to Women's Lib, as I hope I have made clear, because I have seen the results of this

awful cult or whatever one calls it. I have seen it in the Akashic Record, and I have had thousands of letters telling me what misery some of these women have caused.

We now have arrived at a crossroads in the destiny of humanity, and if people do not take the right decision then there will not be a stable society. There will have to be a return of religion to life, it does not matter which sort of religion, I am not thinking of Christianity or the religion of the Jews, or the religion of Islam or Hinduism, or anything specific. It doesn't matter which religion it is, it doesn't matter what religion it is. We need a fresh religion because the old ones have failed so miserably. In Christianity, for example, what IS Christianity? Is it the Catholic faith? Is it the Protestant. And which one IS Christianity? If both are Christian then why are they fighting in Northern Ireland? Then, again, there is the fighting between Christians and Moslems in Beirut, and then there are the Russians, whose only form of God is Communism. And according to what we hear of conditions in China, well, I don't think I would like to go out and see what things were like either. But there will have to be a better religion, there will have to be priests who ARE priests instead of just people who want a soft living without having to do much to get their money. That is what they are nowadays.

We are, as I said before, at a crossroads. We have to choose whether we shall have a balanced society, one in which men and women work together equally as partners and in which women look after their children instead of tossing them out for older and, possibly, more depraved children to teach. That is going to topple society. In Russia it used to be that all children were taken and put in homes to be raised by the State while the fathers and mothers were working in factories or on farms and communes. Well, it has been proved that that is not so good, Russian mothers now want to be with their children, they want to stay at home, and they are raising an awful commotion in Russia to get control of their children. No one knows what the result will be.

Old Hitler, who really did have some crackpot ideas, had

special breeding stations. You probably have read all about it, but if some of you have not here is a brief idea of what it really was:

Party leaders were on the lookout at all times for very loyal, very healthy members of the Party who would make good parents. And then when a loyal, healthy young man and a loyal young woman were found they were sent off to great mansions in the country. There they were well-fed, well looked after, and after they had been built up a bit because German rations were pretty scruffy at that time, young men and young women were allowed to meet and pick their partners. When they had picked their partners and they had both undergone another medical examination they were allowed to stay together for a whole week. Well, you know what happens when a young man and a young woman stay together for a whole week with no holds barred, so to speak, and everything they did approved by the Government. Well, when the child was born of such a union it was taken away from the mother and put in a special Home to be brought up with all the skill and science and Nazi know-how available at the time. It was intended that they should form the nucleus of a super-race.

Twenty-five years after all this certain investigators went into the question of what had happened, and many of the children, now, of course, grown up, were traced, and almost without exception these children were found to be of lower mentality. Some, indeed, were morons which shows that not even Hitler could put a man and woman together, shake them up a bit and produce even a normal child!

By the time we reach the Year 2000 it will be known if the people of this Earth have to be wiped out like a lot of weeds and fresh stock planted. But if women will stay at home and be wives and mothers, as intended, then this particular race can continue into the Golden Age. It depends, ladies and Women's Libbers — who are not ladies — on you. What is your choice going to be? Classed as weeds? Or to carry on into the Golden Age with stability in the family?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

IT seems to me that we are dealing with metaphysics in this book, spirits, ghosts, etc., so perhaps it might be of interest to tell you — not too seriously — of the Tale of the Inn Keeper's Cat.

This inn keeper was quite a nice man and a real stickler for obeying the law. He had a good old tomcat who had been with him for many years, and this good old tomcat — I think it was a tortoiseshell cat or something like that — but, anyway, he used to sit on the bar near the cash register. One day the cat died and the inn keeper, who was very fond of him was absolutely desolated, and then he said to himself, 'I know what I'll do! I'll have old Tom's tail cut off and mounted in a glass case and we'll keep it on the bar in memory of him.'

So the inn keeper had a friend who was a taxidermist cut off old Tom's tail, and the rest of old Tom was buried.

Old Tom, the inn keeper's cat, had led a very good life. He had listened to all the people's talk as they came into the bar and he had sympathized with the men who said their wives did not understand them, and all that sort of thing. So old Tom, being such a very good cat, went to heaven: He got up to the Pearly Gates and knocked on the door and, of course, they were delighted to admit him. But then — oh misery, misery, oh what a shock! — the Guardian at the Door said, 'Oh my goodness me, Tom, you haven't got your tail on. We can't admit you here without your tail, now, can we?'

Old Tom looked around and was absolutely shocked to find that his tail was missing and his jaw dropped down so much that he nearly made a furrow in the heavenly pastures. But the Guardian of the Door said, 'Tell you what, Tom, you go back and get your tail and then we'll glue it on for you

and you can come into heaven. But be off with you now, I'll wait for you.'

So the inn keeper's cat looked at the watch on his left arm and he saw it was nearly midnight. He thought, 'Oh gee, I'd better be hurrying because the Boss closes at midnight, puts up the bar and all that, I must hurry.'

So he rushed off back to Earth and scurried along the path to the inn. Then he knocked hard at the door and, of course, the inn was closed. So old Tom knocked again in the way he had heard certain favoured customers knock. After a 'few moments the door was opened and there stood the inn keeper. The man looked shocked and said, 'Oh Tom, what are you doing here? We buried you today, you can't come back like this, you're dead, don't you know?'

Old Tom looked sadly at the inn keeper and said, 'Boss, I know it's nearly midnight and very late for you but I've been up to heaven and they wouldn't let me stay there because I haven't got my tail, so if you'll just give me my tail back — you can tie it on if you like — I'll get back to heaven and they'll let me in.'

The inn keeper put his hand to his chin, an attitude he often adopted when he was deep in thought. Then he cast one eye on the clock (but, of course, only metaphorically because he wouldn't have liked to cast his eye, he might have lost that and broken the clock as well), and then he said, 'Well, Tom, I'm ever so sorry lad and all that but you know how law abiding I am and you know it's well after hours; and the law will not allow me to retail spirits after hours.'

Well, after that, we should get back to the very serious business of writing this, which is the last chapter of this book. So—

The gentleman from one of those ancient little countries bordering upon the Mediterranean — it was Greece or Rome or somewhere like that, I don't know where it was for the moment - but this gentleman stood upon his soapbox. Plinius Secundus was his name and he was a very clever man indeed, he had to be, you know, he had to be very clever

because as his name implies — Secundus — he was not the first but the second. You have probably read of these car rental firms who advertise so glowingly in the papers, there is one in particular who advertises that they are second and so they have to work harder. Well, Plinius Secundus did the same. He had to work harder to be cleverer than Plinius Primo.

He stood upon his soapbox. I don't know what brand of soap it was because the advertising men hadn't got around to labelling everything so much in those days, but he stood there teetering somewhat uncertainly because the box was flimsy and Plinius Secundus was not. For a moment he looked about him at the uncaring throng, and then he said, 'Friends,' but there was no reply, no one looked. So he opened his mouth again and this time he absolutely roared, 'Friends, lend me your ears!'

He thought it was much wiser to ask people to lend him their ears because he knew them so well he knew they would not cut off their ears and walk on, if their ears stopped so would the owners and then they would have to stay and he wanted them to listen to what he had to say.

Still no response. He stopped for a moment again, looking at the scurrying crowds, all hell-bent on getting here, there, and everywhere else. Then he had a fresh approach; 'Friends Romans, Greeks, Americans,' but then he stopped in confusion, his mouth still open, he had suddenly remembered with a blush of shame that America would not be discovered for centuries yet. Then, as no one seemed to have caught the mistake he went on with his speech.

Now, I am a very kind person, really, some people think I am an old grouch, some people think I am a hard-faced old so-and-so. I know that because they write and tell me so. But, anyway, here following is a translation of what Plinius Secundus said. It is translated for you because, of course, you would not understand his language and nor would I!

'There is no law against the ignorance of doctors. Doctors learn upon their patients' shuddering bodies at the patients' risk. They kill and maim with impunity, and they blame the patient who succumbs, not their treatment. Let us do

something to keep in check those doctors who would not obey the dictum that they should do no ill, that they should console the patient while Nature effects the cure.'

Do you ever stop to think what a mess medicine is in? It is, you know, it really is a shocking mess. Nowadays the average doctor takes nine minutes to deal with the average patient from the time the patient comes before the doctor to the time the patient leaves the doctor, nine minutes. Not much time for personal contact, not much time to get to know the patient.

Yes, it is a very strange thing nowadays. It was meant that doctors should do so much for the sufferer, but now, after five thousand years of recorded medical history, no doctor can treat a head cold. If a doctor treats a head cold the cold can be considered to have ended two weeks after, but if the wise patient does not go to the doctor and just leaves the matter to Nature then the cold may be cured in fourteen days.

Have you ever thought how the average doctor weighs up his patient? He looks at a patient carefully for all of one minute, trying to work out how much the patient knows because years, and years, and still more years ago Aesculapius the Wise, came to the conclusion that the more a patient knows the less confidence he has in the doctor.

If things had gone right on this world and if the reign of Kali had not made such progress supported by the enthusiastic teenagers, Women's Libbers, etc., great developments in medicine would have taken place. For example there would have been aura photography which would enable any trained person to diagnose illness even before that illness attacked the body and then, by applying suitable vibrations or frequencies or cycles — call it what you will — the patient could have been cured before he was ill, so to speak.

But money did not come in enough to enable me to carry on adequately with research. It is a curious fact that any crummy lawyer can charge forty dollars an hour for his time, charge it and get it, and a typist can charge three dollars for typing a short one page letter, she can get that

too. And people will pay oodles of cash for drink, entertainment, etc., but when it comes to helping in research - no, they 'gave at the office', or something like that. So the science of aura reading has not been able to continue as I had hoped. I can see the aura at any time on any person, but that is not YOU seeing it, is it? It is not your doctor seeing it, is it. And I had worked with the idea that anyone with suitable equipment would have been able, to see the human aura.

When one can see the aura you can see schizophrenic people, how they are divided into two. It is like getting one of those long balloons inflated and then suddenly divide it in the middle so you have two balloons. Or one can see the approach of cancer to the body — through the aura, of course — and then by applying the correct antidote by way of vibration, colour, or sound then the cancer could be stopped before it attacks the body. There is so much that could have been done to help the patient.

One of the big troubles seems to be that everyone nowadays is suffering from money-hunger. You get young people at school or college, they compare notes so they can decide which profession — the law, the church, or medicine — will offer them the most money and the most leisure, and as things are nowadays with medicine the dentists seem to have the most money!

What was really intended in this part of the cycle of life was that doctors should be truly dedicated people, people who had no thought of money, in fact, it was intended that there should be 'medical monks,' men and women who had no thought other than to help their fellow men and women. They would be provided for by the State, given all they could reasonably want. They would be secure from income tax demands and things like that, and then they would be on call and they would do house calls, too.

Have you ever thought that a doctor who gets a patient to the office keeps him there perhaps four hours waiting and then sees him for a total of nine minutes — how can that doctor have an intimate knowledge of the patient's history? How can that doctor know of the patient's hereditary pat-

terns? And it is not a doctor-patient relationship, it is more like damaged goods being taken to the factory for repair. It is quite as impersonal as that, and if the doctor thinks the patient is going to be more than nine minutes of bother, well, he just slaps the patient in hospital which is much the same as being an article sent back for repairs and being stuck on the shelf for some time. The whole system of medicine is wrong, and in a Golden Age to come there will have to be something of what I have suggested, that is that all doctors shall be priests or at least attached to a religious Order. They will be dedicated people and they will be on call with regular shifts because no one would expect them to work twenty-six hours a day, but people do expect them to work more than six hours a day, as they do now.

One of the dreadful, dreadful things now is how doctors have several examination rooms. A doctor will sit in his office at one end of a corridor and stretched along the length of the corridor there may be four, five or six little cubicles each with a patient in. The doctor has a very hurried consultation with a patient and then directs him or her to a cubicle. While that patient is undressing or getting ready the doctor makes hurried visits to all the other cubicles, and it really is a mass production affair, just like battery hens where hens are confined in cages, tier after tier, row after row, and they are fed and fattened — food goes in one end and the egg drops out the other end. Well, it seems much the same with the patients. The doctor's words of wisdom go in at one end, that is the ears, and payment, either from Medicare or from the patient, flows in, in a continuous stream. Now this is not medicine.

The doctor does not always keep to his oath. Often he will go to the Club House and discuss the affairs of old Mrs. So-and-So, or laugh with his friends at how that old fellow wanted to and couldn't so what's going to happen to his marriage? You know how it is!

It seems to me that doctors get their license to practice and then they shut their text books forever and ever and any further learning comes only by way of the pharmaceutical representatives who go around from doctor to

doctor and try to drum up sales. The representative, of course, boosts all the favourable aspects of his firm's medications, but never, never does he tell about all the weird side-effects which might occur. Look at that affair in Germany when that dreadful drug was given to pregnant women and the resulting children were deformed, perhaps missing arms or legs or something else.

One gets the same thing with birth control pills. Women get themselves hocused and hypnotized by all the talk that they can have their fun and not have to pay the piper, by taking such-and-such birth control pills. Well, actual practical tests on the patients shows that there can be serious side-effects, cancer, nausea, and all that type of thing. So now the pharmaceutical firms have gone back to their metaphorical drawing boards and they are trying to devise other methods of baulking the nimble sperm, and preventing him from shaking hands with an eager ovum.

When the time comes there will be a quite infallible birth control method — no, I didn't say abstain! — the real method will be a form of ultrasonic emitter which will be tuned to the exact frequency of the man or the woman, and it will have the effect of knocking the sperm on the noggin so that it will not be virile, in fact, the sperm and the ovum can both be neutralized by ultrasonic's if one knows how, and that will not cause any trouble to either of the participants 'he' nor 'she', but that is something which will come in the Golden Age, if there is a Golden Age.

Pain is a terrible thing, isn't it? And really, the doctors or the pharmaceutical people have not come up with any real solution for the control of pain. A few aspirins doesn't do it. Demerol is only a very temporary thing with possible side-effects. And then you get into the morphine or morphia range and you may get addiction. But I believe that the researchers should first of all take into consideration the theory that pain can be felt only by creatures with a nerve system, so they have to do something to put a barrier between the site of the pain and the receptor nerves.

My own experiences in hospital as a patient have not made me admire the medical world because I was taken sud-

denly very ill with truly horrible pains, and we were in a state of confusion because at the nearest hospital there was a technicians' strike or a nurses' strike, or something of that nature and they were not taking patients, so Mama San Ra-ab got in touch with the ambulance people.

Now, as I have said before, the Calgary Ambulance Service is quite definitely unsurpassed. The ambulance men are highly trained and courteous, not only that, they also have great consideration for a patient. I cannot too highly praise our ambulance men. I am sure that Cleo and Taddy Rampa ought to kiss each one of them and then they could say they had been kissed by Siamese cats which would bring a blessing to them, wouldn't it?

Soon there came the screaming of sirens which stopped with a choke as the ambulance braked outside the door. Very speedily two ambulance men came in carrying big black bags. They were not the ordinary ambulance men, they were paramedics and the paramedics are the best of the whole bunch. They asked a few questions and then did not bother to open their bags, instead they wheeled in their stretcher and put it beside my bed. With every care I was moved on to the stretcher, and then we went down in the elevator and out into the street where almost as quick as it is to tell I was put in the ambulance. Mama San Rampa sat in the front with the driver and the other paramedic sat beside me. I was fortunate in having a brand new ambulance. It was the first time it had been used and it still smelled a bit of new paint and new disinfectant.

We drove along the streets of Calgary, and I am not going to tell you the name of the hospital because, in my opinion, it is the worst hospital in Alberta, so let us call it St. Dogsbodys. That is as good or as bad a name as any. I could think of a very suitable name but I am afraid that my Respected Publisher would blush (CAN a Publisher blush?) and would want alterations made.

Soon the ambulance drove into what appeared to be a dark, dismal cavern. From my viewpoint, flat on my back, it seemed that I was being taken into an unfinished factory with a loading bay just to the side. It was darn cold there,

too. But as soon as our eyes got used to the gloom the ambulance men took me out of the ambulance and wheeled me along a dismal corridor, and everyone I saw seemed to have a fit of the blues. I thought, 'Oh goodness! They must have brought me to a Funeral Home by mistake.'

Mama San Ra'ab disappeared somewhere into a crummy little office where she had to give all details about me, and then I was pushed into the Emergency Section which seemed to be a long hall with a few plated bars supporting curtains which were not always drawn, and then I was transferred to a sort of hospital cot thing in the Emergency Department.

One of the paramedics, knowing my difficulties, said, 'Nurse, he needs a monkey bar.' A monkey bar, by the way, is a thing that extends about three feet over the head of the bed and it has a triangular shaped piece of metal, plastic coated, depending from a short chain. It is to help paraplegics such as me raise themselves to a sitting position. I have had one for years, and I have always had one when I have been in hospitals, but this time when the paramedic said that I needed a monkey bar the nurse looked even more sour than normal and said, 'Oh, he needs a monkey bar, does he? Well, he won't get one HERE!' And with that she turned and walked out of the little cubicle. The two paramedics looked at me sympathetically and shook their heads saying, 'She's always like that!'

Now there came the period of waiting. I was stuck in this minute cubicle and each side of me there were other beds. I never got round to being able to count how many beds there were but I could hear a lot of voices, everyone was being made to discuss their problems and hear the answers in public. Some of the cloth screens were not drawn, and, in any case, they were open at the top and open at the bottom. There was no privacy at all.

There was one frightfully funny incident — funny to me. In the next bed to the right there was an old man, he had just been brought in off the street, and a doctor went in to him and said, 'Oh grandfather, God, not YOU again? I told you to stay off the drink, you'll be picked up dead soon if you don't stay off the drink.'

There came much rumbling and muttering and croaking, and then the old man burst out with a roar, 'I don't want to be cured of the drink, damn you! I just want to be cured of the shakes!' The doctor shrugged his shoulders in resignation — I could see it all quite clearly — and then he said, 'Well, I'll give you an injection, that will straighten you out for the time being and then you can go home, but DON'T COME BACK HERE AGAIN.'

Some minutes later, as I was lying on my hospital cot, a harassed nurse came skittering down the corridor. She dashed into my open cubicle and without a word to me — without even checking to see who I was or what I needed — she ripped back the sheet covering me, grabbed my pyjamas and pulled, and jabbed a hypodermic into my unsuspecting rump. Then, almost without breaking stride, she yanked out the hypodermic, turned on her heel and was gone. Now this is absolutely true; I have ever since been wondering if I got the shot meant for the old drunk in the bed next to me. No one told me what was going to be done, no one said a word to me, but all I know is I got a shot of SOMETHING straight into the — well, there may be ladies present, but you'll know where I was stuck.

Sometime later a porter came and without a word to me just grabbed the end of the cot and started pulling me out. 'Where am I going?' I asked, quite reasonably as I thought. But he just glowered at me and pulled me along a long, long corridor. 'You'll see when we get there,' he said. 'Mind you, I'm not an ordinary porter, I'm just helping out. Really I'm in—' and he mentioned another department.

I have always believed and always been taught that one of the duties of a doctor or nurse or anyone connected with treatment is to tell a patient why a thing is being done and what is being done, because, after all, it is quite a serious matter to stick needles into patients' posteriors and leave them wondering whatever it's all about.

We were going down the corridor and some sort of a clergyman was coming along. He saw me and he turned into a frozen-faced robot and averted his face. I was not one of his flock, you see, so he hurried off in one direction and I was

pulled away into another. The bed-stretcher-cot stopped and a squeaky voice said, 'That him?' The porter just nodded and walked away and I was left outside what proved to be the X-ray department.

Sometime later someone came along and just gave my bed a push — like a locomotive shunting trucks — and I rolled into an X-ray room. The bed was pushed against the table and I was told, 'Get on there.' Well, I managed to get the top half of me on to the table and then I turned to a little girl who was there — I looked at her and wondered what such a young creature would be doing in such a place. She had on white stockings and her mini-skirt was micro-mini-skirt and was right up to her — the place on which I had been poked, with a hypodermic. I said, 'Do you mind lifting my legs on for me, I can't do it myself.' She turned and looked at me in open-mouthed astonishment, then she said, very haughtily, 'Oh no!' her tone turned to awe and reverence and she said, 'I am a TECHNICIAN — I am not one to help you!' So it caused me extreme pain — pain amounting to agony even - but I managed to grasp my ankles with my right hand and pull them on to the table.

Without a word the TECHNICIAN just slammed about with her X-ray machine, setting buttons, etc., etc., and then she went behind a leaden-glass screen and said, 'Breathe in — HOLD IT! Breathe out.' I stayed there for about ten minutes while the film was developed, and then without a word someone came along and pushed the hospital bed back against a table. 'Get in,' she said. So again, with extreme effort, I managed to pull myself on to the hospital bed, after which this female pushed the bed out of the X-ray department and let it roll against a wall.

There was another wait and then eventually someone came along, looked at the card on the bed, and without a word pushed me back to the Emergency Department where I was slid into a cubicle just as one would push a cow into a stall.

Eventually after three or four hours I was seen by a doctor but it was decided they could not do anything for me, there was not a vacant bed in the hospital — except one

in the women's department. My suggestion that I would take that was not well received.

So I was told to go home again because there was nothing they could do for me and I would be 'better off at home'. 'You'll be looked after better there,' said another one and, believe me, I needed no convincing on that.

Mama San Ra'ab had been sitting in a cold, cold waiting room on a hard seat the whole of the time feeling, I suppose, like a castaway on a desert island, but at last she was able to come in to the Emergency Department and then the ambulance was sent for to take me home. From here to St. Dogsbodys is one and a half miles, and from St. Dogsbodys back to my home was another one and a half miles, three miles in all, if I can multiply correctly. But that little useless trip cost seventy dollars, not the ambulance men's fault, but that is what the city charges for an emergency call.

So I am now looking for another place outside of Calgary, preferably in some other Province because I am devastated by the crudity of medical treatment in Calgary. I am shocked by the cost of things in the medical world in Calgary.

That brings me to another point. I believe that medicine should be practiced only by dedicated people. I believe there should be a weeding out of scrimshankers and shirkers among the patients because too many patients like to go to hospital emergency and sit in the waiting room as if it were a country club except that no country club was ever so uncomfortable. I also believe that doctors and nurses — yes, and even porters — should have more consideration for patients, and if they took the Golden Rule and practiced 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you' then it wouldn't be such a bad world, after all, would it?

I would also have emergency departments where there was privacy because I heard the story of the old man to the right of me, and I also heard the story of the young woman to the left of me; she had what I can only delicately refer to as sex problems with her husband, and she had been a bit, let us say, torn. So the doctor examining her — who did not bother much about privacy either — was giving her advice in

a loud voice and asking her the most intimate questions in a loud voice, and I am sure the poor woman was as embarrassed as I was.

But home again with Mama San Ra'ab, Buttercup Rouse, Cleo and Taddy I had 'a call' to get busy and write another book, the seventeenth which has the title of 'I Believe'. Well, you know, I believe that this is a good point to finish the book, don't you?

THE END