[illegible] 17.9.24

I Say

BY

JOHN BLUNT

OF THE

Daily Mail

A Selection from his Daily Articles

082
B 628

628

1/- net

PUBLISHERS
S. W. PARTRIDGE & CO., LTD.
LONDON

[illegible] K & CO., SIMLA

Abdul Majid Khan

29. V. '63.

"I SAY—"

"I SAY—"

By

JOHN BLUNT

OF THE

Daily Mail

A Selection from his Daily Articles

PUBLISHERS
S. W. PARTRIDGE & CO., LTD.
LONDON
1924

082
B62.8

MADE IN GREAT BRITAIN

PREFACE

THIS selection from the earlier "John Blunt" articles, which have been appearing in the *Daily Mail* during the last six months will, I trust, prove of interest to those readers who have written to ask me whether publication in book form could not be arranged.

I have made the selection as varied as possible, and I hope that people of many different tastes may find a certain amount of interest in these pages.

I think they represent, within their scope, a common sense view of things; and I can only believe, from the letters I have received, that this is the feeling of many of my correspondents.

JOHN BLUNT.

FOR REFERENCE ONLY

Library IIAS, Shimla
082 B 628
00012108

2711

INDIAN INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDY
Acc. No. 12108
Date 5 11 64
SIMLA

CONTENTS

PAGE

I. TACT 9

II. SNOBBISHNESS 13

III. ARGUING THE POINT . . . 17

IV. THE COLD BATH SUPERSTITION . . 21

V. AGE AND BEAUTY 25

VI. FILM BUTLERS . . 29

VII. CHARACTER 33

VIII. TREASURES OF THE PAST . . 37

IX. NO PLACE LIKE LONDON . . 41

X. UNCLES 44

XI. THE UNCONVENTIONAL . . 48

XII. LIFE'S LESSER WORRIES . . . 51

XIII. COLD PLATES AND BLUNT KNIVES . 55

XIV. WHAT'S HIS NAME ? . . . 58

XV. THE LAWS OF ORDER . . . 62

XVI. HOBBIES 66

XVII. THE MONUMENTS OF CIVILISATION . . 70

XVIII. ON BEING IN TIME 74

XIX. ROMANCE 78

XX. BAD FORM 82

XXI. NOUS 86

XXII. PREJUDICE 90

XXIII. WRONG JOBS OR LACK OF GRIT ? . . 93

I

TACT

OF all the qualities with which a man or woman may be gifted, tact is one of the most natural and one of the least possible to inculcate.

In other words, people are either born with tact or not born with it, and nothing they can do to acquire it will really give them that power of putting other people at their ease which is the real secret of tact.

We have all met the kind of hostess who thinks she is extremely tactful, who, indeed, almost flaunts her tact in our face, and we all know how exquisitely uncomfortable such a hostess can make us feel. To her, tact is a social asset to be emphasised as occasion demands, but in the really tactful person tact is a part of individuality, and there is never any feeling of strain about it.

True tact is a form of sympathy and is not confined to any one class or type. It is born in people who have a natural wish to understand the attitude of others and to make life pleasanter for others.

It is one of the most charming gifts with which anyone can be endowed because it does actually succeed without any conscious effort in making the world an easier place to live in.

The genuinely tactful person has an inborn sensitiveness which is afraid of causing pain. Such a person goes through existence without that egotistic self-absorption which is the curse of so many people to-day.

While relatively few of us have tact in this highest sense, most of us have enough tact not to lose our friends or cause our business acquaintances to fight shy of us. And if one considers how easily a single tactless remark can make an enemy and alienate a friend, it shows that most of us have a certain amount of intuitive tact.

Without this amount of tact, indeed, the wheels of social and business life would not be oiled at all. Everybody would be treading on everybody else's pet corns and existence would become unbearable.

There is nothing to equal the universal unpopularity of a tactless person, and though such persons may have considerable ability they frequently end up as dead failures. And nothing ever teaches them wisdom because, as I have said tact is a natural gift and cannot be taught.

I have known people without tact who realised that they lacked something and endeavoured by an ingratiating manner to make themselves agreeable. It was a dismal and embarrassing proceeding. Tact put on as a self-conscious garment is horribly unreal. I do not mean that a person with an ordinary amount of tact cannot make himself pleasant on purpose, I only mean that a person without any tact cannot simulate it successfully. His efforts to do so invariably emphasise his tactlessness.

There are some people who aways rub one up the wrong way with the best intentions in the world, and there are other people who by a single word can make one feel completely at home.

These are extreme instances of tactlessness and tact, and most of the people one knows fall somewhere between the two lines. It is the little things that count so abundantly in social intercourse.

In the humdrum lives most of us are compelled to lead, it is not enough only to be ready for big events and great deeds. No, the tiny amenities make life tolerable, and it is tact which guides one aright in carrying out these amenities.

Many a home would be happier if to the other domestic virtues was added a large share of that tact which would soften down the rough edges of petty annoyances and misunderstandings.

People should cultivate the tact they already possess—for relatively few are altogether without it—by realising that the usual round of life is enormously simplified by mutual give and take. It is the graciousness of tact which conquers opposition.

II

SNOBBISHNESS

It has been suggested to me by a correspondent that the subject of snobbishness is one that might well be dealt with. I agree with my correspondent, and more especially as I think that the word has a much wider implication than that usually given it.

The Victorian idea of a snob, about which Thackeray wrote so amusingly, was of a person passionately devoted to titled people, but nowadays we perceive that snobbishness may affect every class of society and that it is not merely a social thing at all.

A man may be just as great a snob from despising the class above him as from despising the class below him. The smug intolerance which is at the root of so much class hatred is in essence a form of snobbishness, because it is a form of unjustified superiority.

Few people are so crude as to boast about their social connections, but many people boast about their class as though it were the only one which held any virtue.

The reputation for snobbishness which is certainly current about Englishmen all over the world may be dying out in the narrower meaning of the word, but is applied now to the national character itself.

The Englishman is regarded as a man who thinks himself, not necessarily at all from a social point of view, but simply from the point of view of character, as someone better than anybody else.

Looked at from any angle, there is often a great deal of truth in this, though it cannot be but galling to other people. This inherent characteristic may help us to get on in the outside world, though it does not always add to our popularity, but when we are all living together in England, the kind of veiled snobbishness which is in our blood too often causes us to have quite unnecessary contempt for points of view other than our own.

And even regarded from its mere social aspect, who would deny that snobbishness is to be found deeply ingrained in every class? People who laugh at the ordinary conception of snobbishness, which they usually consider a prerogative of the middle classes, have their own class distinctions. The whole scale is so graduated that there is probably nobody who does not secretly despise somebody else.

Class pride, which is a very proper thing and which is found just as strongly among working men as among the aristocracy, becomes snobbishness when it is tinged with bitter contempt for other classes.

Thus the orator at the street corner may be just as pronounced a snob, and often, indeed, *is* just as pronounced a snob as the man who boasts of his friendship with a duke, or the grand lady who pretends that only her "set" counts in the least.

Class-consciousness carried to its logical extreme is the height of snobbishness, and the Communists in Russia who forbid votes to people because of their high birth are just as contemptible snobs as any foolish toady.

Good brains, no more than good breeding, are confined to one class, and as England has need of all its good brains, it is absurd for any one class to arrogate to itself all the talent and all the virtue.

But it must be admitted that this is a form of snobbishness very common in England. Our institutions are democratic, but our society is not democratic, and these two contradictions often result in the English in a snobbish contempt for one another that does not go well with our forms of equality.

Our social distinctions in every class are frequently so fine-drawn as to appear ludicrous and incomprehensible to an outsider, but nevertheless they enormously affect our lives and thoughts.

If, while legitimately admiring and standing up for our own class, we could rid ourselves of that snobbish instinct which makes us envy or despise other classes we should all be much happier. We are not naturally an embittered but an amiable race: let us resolve, therefore, that inverted snobbishness shall not cheat us of our proper heritage.

III

ARGUING THE POINT

During the recent general election campaign nearly every household in this country re-echoed to the sound of vehement argument and discussion. Freedom to air your opinions is an excellent thing, I agree, but I wonder whether anybody is ever really convinced about anything by a heated and acrimonious exchange of views.

Even a verbal victory does not make an opponent into an adherent; on the contrary, to be defeated in argument usually makes a man hold more stubbornly than ever to his former views.

Most of our opinions are more a matter of temperament or of interest than of calm, dispassionate thought, and consequently, though we may be silenced by logic, we are not convinced by it. Far otherwise. The man who is inarticulate is often the man who is really sure of himself.

Some people have an irritating capacity for tying one up in verbal knots and for demonstrating that one is quite wrong when one feels sure that one is quite right. But these triumphs of the ready talker are extremely barren. People distrust clever wordiness, and they are not to be blamed for doing so—the good arguer does not necessarily have a good argument.

Indeed, to be conquered in argument as often as not bears no relation to the merits of the case.

Why, then, do people delight so in arguing, especially about politics ? I imagine that most people argue not so much because they think they will change other people's views, but as a kind of declaration of their own faith and sometimes, I fear, as a kind of demonstration of their own cleverness.

And why arguments so readily tend to become acrimonious, although both sides know full well that acrimony invariably defeats its own ends, is just because the arguers realise, and get annoyed in realising, that they won't alter each other's opinions.

Politics, dealing as they do with the very basis of society, always have excited heated personal arguments, but though political views do change, I do not think that it is arguing that changes them. They are changed partly by the general movement of the times and partly by a realisation of special circumstances.

But the man who, in the privacy of his own home or circle, is out to make converts by his eloquence has probably very little effect. I should go so far, in fact, as to suggest that many people cling to convictions simply through opposition.

One does not alter a person's views by brilliantly exposing the fallacy of them—one only creates a kind of dogged determination not to be convinced. The unpleasant tone of so much argument, particularly political argument, is not the best way to make converts.

The best way is to understand your opponent's case from his point of view as well as from your own. One can test that for oneself by watching two people argue. The more violent and dogmatic they get, the more they drift apart and the less likely they are to convince one another.

But sometimes, when they are just reaching a hopeless climax of disagreement, they will suddenly both become calm and both begin to exchange views in an accommodating, friendly, and understanding spirit.

What is futile about argument is that, as a rule, it is not argument at all, but mere declamation. If arguments could be carried on with tolerance they might serve the purpose they are supposed to serve, but as most arguments are conducted with a view to gaining the victory rather than with the view of ascertaining the truth, they are really a waste of time.

That, probably, is why many wise people decline to be drawn into arguments. It is not that they have no convictions, it is that they are aware that words may be made to twist and belittle their convictions. Unfortunately, cleverness and shallowness often go hand in hand, and a sensible person may easily be overcome in argument by a fool.

I have seen it happen many a time. The nimble and sparkling talker is often no better than a windbag.

IV

THE COLD BATH SUPERSTITION

I HAVE always regarded with astonishment, not unmixed with admiration, those hardy individuals who, rather than miss their morning plunge, are even prepared to break the ice on the Serpentine.

It seems to me that this is really carrying the habit of the English cold bath to extremes. Indeed, I am not sure that the ice-cold bath, itself, it not rather a fetish on these winter mornings. As a race we pride ourselves on our cleanliness, and the cold bath is a kind of symbol of this national trait. But cold water closes the pores of the skin, and I imagine that one hot bath is much more cleansing than many cold ones.

Cold baths, certainly, are very invigorating for those who can stand them, but I cannot help thinking that many people continue to take them religiously every morning during the winter, as during the summer, simply in order not to spoil their record. A similar desire, I imagine, animates some of those stalwarts shivering in the chilly water of the Serpentine.

The very fact that people who never miss their cold tub always let you know about it makes me feel that a spirit of pride and bravado enters into their stoicism. The cold-bath habit breeds a special kind of self-righteousness, and the glow given by the water is reflected at breakfast in a glow of moral superiority.

Far be it from me to speak without respect of these devotees, but I cannot help thinking that they are not so strongly entrenched as they used to be. When I was a boy no man ever admitted not having had a cold bath that morning, but nowadays we seem to be moving away from that unarguable attitude. Is it that we are becoming less hardy or is it that we are becoming less insular?

Many people, of course, maintain that a cold bath, even on the most wintry of mornings, is an unalloyed joy, and they point to the fact that men who never dream of singing on other occasions will sing loudly in the bathroom as though it were evidence of uncontrollable happiness; but I sometimes wonder whether the singing is not more to keep up their courage than to show their delight.

In any case, it is a most deplorable habit in the opinion of everybody save the singer. I have been awakened before now out of dreamless slumbers by the dreadful sounds of a bathroom solo. I don't know why it is, but the worse voice a man has the louder and the more relentlessly does he sing in his bath. That law which forbade pianists to perform after a certain hour at night in private houses in Berlin should, in a revised form, be rigorously applied to bathroom vocalists.

Cleanliness, as we know, is next to godliness, but, apart from the fact that cold baths do not cleanse in any real meaning of the word, there is no reason why we should announce our ablutions to the whole household while they are in progress, and crow about them after they have been performed.

But the habit of taking cold baths appears to give one a feeling of virtue, whereas to have warm baths is regarded as slightly effeminate. I cannot imagine why this should be so, unless it be universally recognised that warm baths are really more pleasant—but, of course, this explanation would be scorned by the cold-bath enthusiast. The whole thing is a great mystery.

My own belief is that there are no legitimate grounds for self-satisfaction either in taking cold baths or in not taking them. Once that is admitted, many people, whose credibility on this point is open to doubt, will agree that it is at least possible to over-rate both the pleasure and the value of perpetual cold baths, and even—though I can hardly believe it—some of the bathroom songsters may be induced to curb their exuberance.

V

AGE AND BEAUTY

It is with some amusement I read that young men whose hair has become thin in spots are having it "patched." If some of the young men I know would have their hair cut instead of brushing their silken locks straight back like an oiled mop it would, I admit, be an improvement, but whether the "patches" of their more unfortunate brothers will add to their personal appearance I rather doubt.

People are always trying to conquer nature in regard to their looks, either to hide defects or to stave off advancing age, but they are seldom very successful. Indeed, they often defeat their own purpose, and, without in any way adding to their attractiveness, make themselves into laughing-stocks.

Each period of life has its own particular harmony, and it is ridiculous to see persons of forty or fifty trying to manipulate their features and their hair in order that they may pass as twenty. Nobody is ever taken in, and the only result is that the experimenters lose the dignified charm natural to the age they have reached without gaining any kind of compensation.

I do not mean, of course, that people ought not to take every care of their appearance, but simply that, in their own interests, they should think twice before they pretend to be other than what they are.

If, for instance, women of middle age would only realise how extremely attractive grey hair can be, we should see less of these mysterious and frenzied changes in its shade which startle their friends without in any way deceiving them.

The amount of futile trouble people take in pretending that they are a great many years younger than they are is almost incredible and shows a marvellous lack of any real philosophy of life.

The chief compensation about growing old is that all one's generation is growing old together. Why should we want to desert our camp to curry favour with a younger generation that does not want us ? They will soon be elderly in their turn ; nobody has any advantage in that respect over anybody else.

And, apart from this aspect of the matter, it strikes me that many of our facial adornments are not really adornments at all, but merely a conventional fashion, which actually spoils the appearance of a pretty face.

I have been in a part of the world where it was the fashion for ladies to dye their finger-nails bright red with henna. Such a habit would, no doubt, seem very odd in a London drawing-room, but perhaps the artificially reddened lips of many English girls would seem equally odd in the place where these Oriental beauties live.

I have been in another part of the world—rather a wild part, I agree—where a gentleman's idea of being well dressed consisted mainly in having two pins stuck through his lower lip, and though this would appear highly fantastic to a young man about town, yet possibly a wig or a "patch" would strike those far-off simple savages as a much more amazing outrage upon nature.

Primitive peoples, as we all know, have a passionate love of adorning and painting their faces, and I cannot help thinking that the modern girl, with her paraphernalia of cosmetics, is to a large extent but following an instinct derived from her ancestors. The beautifying process is as much a ritual in her blood as a self-conscious desire to look her best.

But there is, indeed, no hope more vain than the hope of defeating time, and nothing can be more tragic for a woman than the moment in which she realises that and, giving up the fight, suddenly becomes old. The only contented women are those who know that each age has its own particular charm and its own particular happiness. And, to be quite frank, the same is equally true of men.

The joy of life does not end when youth ends, as some people appear to imagine. Indeed, from what some other people have told me, I am not at all sure that the chief joys of existence do not only begin when the storms of youth are over.

Be that as it may, it is certain that a really balanced life finds in each decade a particular kind of happiness which no other decade could give.

VI

FILM BUTLERS

A BUTLER has been moved to write to the London *Evening News* offering his services because he has seen it stated by a film-producer that in America it is almost impossible to find a film-actor who is able to give a life-like representation of an English butler as he really is.

I sympathise with this butler, because it is quite true that the people who follow his calling in the kinema usually get themselves up and act the part in a spirit of the grossest caricature.

The idea that butlers are all immensely ponderous, immensely solemn, and immensely slow is quite a myth, but as far more people see butlers in the kinema than ever see them in real life, the kinema-butler is considered the type of all butlers by a great many people, with the result that butlers and butts have become interchangeable expressions.

Nor is this false exaggeration, which spoils so many kinema plays that are meant to be taken seriously, confined only to butlers. Almost every class of person, especially any class which has a definite social standing, is presented with a ridiculous over-emphasis which is neither true to type nor true to life.

In real life, after all, the personality of a peer is of more importance than his peerage, but not so on the screen. There, if he is old, he is side-whiskered, pompous, and absurd; if young, degenerate, immoral, and also absurd.

Do the producers really believe such nonsense or do they produce what they think their audience wants? This point may be difficult to decide, but from the plaint of the film-producer already mentioned it would appear as though reality were now sought after.

The sooner it is found the better; these unjust caricatures—and the tendency is constantly towards exaggeration—do a great deal of harm and act as a kind of insidious, even if unmeant, propaganda.

Let us see men as men and not merely as labels. I once witnessed a kinema play the main figures in which were an English nobleman and his numerous family.

I did not object to the nobleman wearing an eyeglass—some people, I believe, even wear an eyeglass because they require it—but when all his sons and sons-in-law without exception appeared wearing single eyeglasses, then it did occur to me that the serious purpose of the play had been subtly vitiated.

Such points may appear of small importance, but they help to give a wrong conception of the world and to fan the prejudices of ignorance. We are constantly being told about the educative value of the kinema, but education must be accurate and unbiased if it is to be of real value.

This would seem an obvious postulate, but apparently it has not always been obvious to those people who direct the productions of would-be life-like kinema dramas.

For it must not be thought for a moment that the exaggeration is only aimed at the Upper Ten and their dependents. The examples I have given are the merest fringe of the subject. How many English children, for instance, are now firmly convinced, simply from going to the kinema, that Western America is still peopled entirely by cowboys in the costume of 1880, living in a condition of society resembling that of 1850?

In all that I have said I am not referring to plays that are definitely "period" or humorous, but to plays that are supposed to represent things as they are. Such plays should dissipate, not deepen, ignorance. On the actual stage it is judged as bad acting to overdo a part, but on the kinema stage overdoing certain parts seems to be a regular convention.

Considering how enormous is the audience to which the kinema appeals and how great its influence must naturally be, it does seem a pity that it should allow caricature to creep into its presentation of actual life.

Baronets are not all indescribably wicked men wearing fur coats; women in Society are not all "vampires"; Chinamen do not all belong to diabolical secret societies; gamblers are not all completely reckless—in short, few (if any) people are merely the essence of the extremes of their rank, race, or profession.

It may, I grant, be harder to show the shades of life on the kinema than on the stage, but that is no reason why a totally erroneous view of life should be shown. It is not always thus shown, but it is very often. Even one real butler on the films would be a blessing, and that is why I hope that the offer of the London *Evening News* correspondent will be accepted.

VII

CHARACTER

In all the tributes to Mr. Bonar Law which I have read special stress is laid upon the unswerving uprightness of his character.

He was not a man of startling brilliance, he had none of the showy gifts which dazzle men's minds, but because he had absolute integrity of character he reached the highest position in the State without influence, and won universal respect without flattering the multitude.

The example of his life shows more convincingly than any abstract reasoning could that character is a far rarer and a far more impressive thing than cleverness. Nearly everybody seems to be clever nowadays and anxious that everybody else should realise it, but real character is, if anything, more uncommon than ever.

In this age of self-expression, when egotism is rife and many people think that they must get the best of life for themselves, the career of a man like Mr. Bonar Law, with his complete, unassuming simplicity, and his total sacrifice of self for the public good, is extraordinarily significant.

He was trusted because he had character, which is the least scintillating and the most finally valuable thing a man can possess. We all know that there are some people whose good or bad opinion means nothing to us, and we all know that there are some people whose good opinion can elate us and whose bad opinion can depress us.

If we were to analyse why this should be so, we should discover that the people whose opinions we fear are the people whose characters we admire.

We may not always think them right, but there is something about a man or woman of character that inspires a kind of respect which no cleverness can, of itself, inspire. Cleverness, in its very nature, is volatile and can cloak an inferior personality, but character *is* the man. In the long run, it comes to be recognised as clearly as is genius, and perhaps, too, it is in its highest manifestations as rare as is genius.

When we get the two things combined in one person, as, let us say, in Sir Walter Scott or Abraham Lincoln, we get truly national figures who are beloved by millions of people who never saw them and who gradually assume the gigantic stature of half-mythical characters.

Such a combination is, of course, extremely rare, and only a few men in a century can attain to that position. No one would claim for Mr. Bonar Law that he was a genius, but he was a man of the utmost integrity of character, and that alone is so unusual that it brought him to the Premiership.

Great character, naturally, assumes a good brain, and with these two assets any man may rise in his profession or employment to the foremost place. Brilliance is often a doubtful asset, because many people instinctively distrust it, but character always tells.

It surprises me more and more that while everybody intuitively recognises the value of character many persons fail to realise that their non-success is due to their lack of character. Some people, of course, have bad luck, and some people are actually not suited to the rough and tumble of competitive life; but certainly some people who complain of fate ought to complain of themselves.

The world will not indefinitely accept a man at his own valuation. Gradually it comes to its own silent conclusions, and he is docketed as a success or as a failure. This is regrettable, but people must learn that it is as important to strengthen their character as to develop their abilities.

The tendency of this age is, in its selfish preoccupations and in its conscious cleverness, to overlook the fundamental necessity of character. Thus a man with real character, such as Mr. Bonar Law, seems to shine with added lustre and is recognised at once as a leader of men. Because character does not sparkle it seems humdrum—but nevertheless it is far rarer and far more precious than many things that do sparkle.

In politics, indeed, it is the one thing that finally wins universal regard. It is strange to think that in a time of crisis the character of one outstanding man can bind a whole nation together.

History gives many instances of this no less in modern times than in ancient. Just as the Younger Pitt was symbolic of the resolve of England in the earlier part of the Napoleonic Wars, so was Clemenceau symbolic of the soul of France in the latter part of the European War.

Rightly or wrongly, the man in the street regards the average politician as a person without much character. When he finds, as in Mr. Bonar Law, a man of transparently genuine character, he gives him his trust in full measure. It is not a question of politics, it is a question of human nature.

VIII

TREASURES OF THE PAST

THE rumoured discovery by Egyptians of the tomb of yet another Pharaoh, rich in treasures, following upon the marvellous unveiling of Tut-ankh Amen's last resting place, makes one realise what inestimable secrets of this kind the world must still hold.

Bit by bit they are being yielded up. It is curious to think that each generation knows more about the far-off ages than the preceding generation, and that the mist which we believed had settled impenetrably upon so much of the past is being slowly lifted.

Little by little we are learning to reconstruct the life of ancient kingdoms from their own buried records. There is no saying how much remains to be unearthed, but it seems probable that our present knowledge is but slight to what it will be in years to come.

There is something strangely fascinating in the idea that underneath our feet, so to speak, there lie, preserved almost imperishably, memorials covering thousands of years. What artistic and historic "finds" the future holds for fortunate excavators!

People write exciting romances about searching for hidden treasure, concealed a few centuries back by pirates on the Spanish Main, but how can such excitement compare with the discovery of the priceless treasures of long-vanished epochs? Even the fabled wonders of Aladdin's Cave itself sound almost commonplace when contrasted with the exquisite works of art which have lain for thousands of years in Tut-ankh Amen's unknown sepulchre.

Such antiquarians as Schliemann in Greece, Sir Arthur Evans in Crete, Sir Aurel Stein in China, and Mr. Howard Carter in Egypt must have known thrills beside which the thrills of Monte Cristo were mere child's play. And any of us, with luck, may yet experience such thrills in less degree. The man digging in his back garden, the ploughman ploughing in a field, the workman excavating for a foundation—to all of them comes the chance of unearthing some memento of the buried past.

Europe and Asia are a vast depository of forgotten civilisations. The rumours of ancient history are being tested day by day in the light of modern research, and our knowledge is in a perpetual state of being readjusted.

Obviously much remains to be discovered. Indeed, we know for a moral certainty that beneath the buildings of such a city as the Rome of to-day there lie wonderful remains of ancient Rome. Man, from one generation to another, clings to his old cities and builds upon the crumbling stone of his ancestors' abodes.

Thus, if we would really know the past it would be necessary in many instances to destroy what now exists. Roughly speaking, it is only civilisations which have totally vanished from off the earth that offer great opportunities for accidental discovery.

Unwritten history, handed down verbally from father to son, is sometimes curiously accurate in regard to the hiding-places of buried treasure. In my boyhood I used to have pointed out to me a circular piece of ground on a hillside called the Roman Camp. Probably it had been called by that name for the better part of 2,000 years. When, a short time since, it was excavated, sure enough a rich haul of Roman remains was made. Thus history, which has no written memorials, had been vindicated once more.

One of the most moving and impressive things about these discoveries is the manner in which they succeed in humanising the past. When we read ancient Egyptian history it is as if we were reading of people with whom we had no point of contact and no touch of resemblance ; but when we hear what was discovered in Tut-ankh Amen's tomb and study the photographs of objects such as chairs and vases, which are familiar to us all, and fashioned very much as we should fashion them, then we suddenly perceive with astonishing vividness that the Egyptians of old must have been in some respects singularly like ourselves.

How true it is that changes of history affect mankind beneath the surface hardly at all. The truth of it is, indeed, becoming more and more clear every day as the dry bones of history are gradually being covered with the living tissue of visual evidence.

IX

NO PLACE LIKE LONDON

As a nation we are often inclined to depreciate ourselves unduly in certain directions, where it seems to me that a little just self-praise would do no harm at all. It is true that we are not always modest where we might be modest, but nations like individual people have a curious tendency to congratulate themselves over the wrong things and to ignore the things in which they really shine.

We talk about London being dowdy, but we forget that it is one of the cleanest and best-run cities in the world ; we talk about the beautiful cooking in Paris, but we forget that many of the most expert French chefs are in London ; we talk about the stylish way in which French women dress, but we forget both that there are French dressmakers here and that the English girls, being the prettiest of all, show off the dresses to the best advantage.

I cannot help thinking that there is often a kind of false modesty about such self-depreciation. The Frenchman who visits London still raves about Paris, but the Englishman who visits Paris is too prone to run down London.

But both cities have their individual and separate fascination. How frequently one may hear an Englishman declare that he loves London in spite of its drawbacks; how frequently one may hear a Frenchman declare that he loves Paris because it is perfect.

I confess that I prefer the attitude of the Frenchman—it is no doubt exaggerated, but it is healthy. As a nation we are too fond of excusing ourselves and of running down everything to do with us. And it is that kind of behaviour which sometimes makes our good faith distrusted and gains us the title of hypocrites.

The man in private life who is constantly explaining away his actions and laughing at what he possesses is usually looked at askance as having something up his sleeve. But, as a matter of fact, it is often a form of shyness, which conceals a strong ideal and a passionate devotion.

And in every respect the same is true of nations. Our patriotism and our pride in England and in English institutions, which may be rather blatant in some directions, is oddly shy in others. We like to pretend, even to ourselves, that we are inferior where we are certainly not inferior, and that our affection for our own home is held, not because of fine qualities, but in spite of grave defects.

All this is very well up to a point, but it misleads foreigners and it blinds ourselves. Why should we not sometimes consider what we have best in the world, instead of dwelling so dismally upon our—frequently imaginary—inferiorities?

I don't mean that we should boast; I only mean that we should see things clearly and without bias. In this age of swift transit and universal intercommunication, the material products of one country are quickly at the disposal of another, so that national arts, delicacies, and comforts have become the property of all alike. We cannot import the sun, but we can import what the sun brings forth; we cannot import the genius of a country, but we can import the products of that genius.

London, as has frequently been observed, is the hub of the universe, and for an Englishman to compare it, all in all, unfavourably with any foreign city, however beautiful, cultured, or strange, shows really a want of imagination. Let us be frank for once and admit that there is no place anywhere like London, and that, if other towns excel it in some respects, London excels them in more.

X

UNCLES

In the old fairy story the uncle was invariably a "wicked" uncle, but in the living fairy story of to-day, which is the life of a child at Christmas, the uncle is usually a "good" uncle.

Has there been a vital change in the attitude of uncles, or did the old fairy stories slander this excellent body of men? (I speak feelingly.) I imagine that uncles have always looked indulgently on their nephews and nieces, and that the nephews and nieces have always looked indulgently on their uncles. It is this mutual indulgence, this affection without any of the pains of responsibility, which puts the relationship on so easy a footing. Many an uncle at Christmas time surreptitiously urges on small but voracious nephews to over-indulgence in seasonable delicacies, and many a nephew wheedles another helping out of his uncle when he knows that it would have been useless to appeal to his anxious parents.

Most children have a certain awe of their parents as watchful guardians of their conduct and their health, but few children have any awe of their uncles. Uncles are delightful people who have a habit of turning up on festive occasion with half-crowns in their pockets and with no moral precepts on their lips.

Being a relation, the uncle is a person with whom one can feel completely at home ; but not being too near a relation, one need not feel that he is keeping too close an eye on one. He is amenable to reason, which parents have a shocking habit of not being, and at the same time he is full of thrilling surprises, from the afore-mentioned half-crowns to tickets for pantomimes. And, above all, he *likes* to see one enjoying oneself ; he has none of those stupid fears that one may be ill the next day.

As for the uncle's feelings, they are, I fear, unmoral to the last degree. The visible affection of his nephews and nieces fills a special place in his heart, and he is unscrupulous in winning and retaining it. There is often, as it were, a secret understanding between them and him which ignores the parents altogether—tiresome people who are always worrying—and in which he plays a part of the deepest duplicity. He wants to see his nephews and nieces have a good time—he hasn't to pay the doctor's bills, he hasn't to make himself unpopular by correction, he hasn't to attend to them when they are fretful and disobedient.

Christmas is the time when uncles come out strongest: their position then is almost impregnable. They appear upon the scene with a boisterous jolliness which highly commends itself to young people firmly convinced that Christmas is a season to be enjoyed. There are no half-and-half measures about an uncle bent on finding his own youth again. Parents are torn between anxieties, knowing from fatal experience that joy is followed by sorrow, but uncles are airily oblivious to anything but the fleeting moment.

They have their reward in the admiring, if transient, affection of their nephews and nieces, but it is quite probable that some of them would surrender their care-free state of mind for the more anxious but intimate affection which would come from having children of their own. This is as may be, but I sometimes wonder whether the outward gaiety of uncles and their hearty efforts to make themselves popular do not conceal a certain sense of emptiness.

But, after all, let us hope that uncles never will become scrupulous. That would be a terrible state of affairs. What would small nephews think of uncles who sternly forbade them to eat more plum pudding or who ordered them severely to cease blowing a trumpet? It would be the most disillusioning change of front imaginable and a disgraceful surrender to the grown-up ideas of old fogeys. The youthful cynics that would be made by such behaviour would be a future danger to the country, and I only hope that uncles will hold out manfully against such insidious suggestions. I think they will.

XI

THE UNCONVENTIONAL

It is an odd thing that some people seem to imagine that unconventionality is, in itself, a kind of virtue. But the wish to be unconventional for its own sake is simply a form of stupid conceit. It is stupid because it shows an amazingly narrow-minded lack of imagination, and it is conceited because at the back of it is the desire to draw attention to your own superior self. But how can a person get to know anything really about life who puts himself in a class apart?

It is only on the basis of a common humanity that a wise man can build up his own original conceptions of the universe. To despise other people and to resolve to shock them at every turn is a clear indication that you have no deep roots in life. That is why mere cleverness is such a dangerous gift: it makes second-rate people imagine themselves to be supermen.

There are people in the world who are naturally unconventional—that is to say, people whose convention it is to be unconventional. Such people are to be pitied, because they are shut off by a kind of inherent blindness from the interests of mankind as a whole.

It is from this class spring the fanatics and cranks, whose earnestness and lack of humour annoy some people and amuse others.

While one is sorry for the person who is, as it were, born a rebel, one can only have an irritated feeling for the person who is self-consciously unconventional. In what way is it necessarily meritorious to be eccentric?

Originality does not consist in jeering at other people any more than it consists in rushing down Piccadilly dressed up like a Red Indian. It is easy to be eccentric; it is difficult to keep normal.

Unconventionality *per se* is of no value and is simply the line of least resistance for certain natures. But there is a kind of unconventionality which is of great value, and that is the power of taking your own road—however unpopular it may be—which arises from deep inward conviction.

The capacity for not being carried away by public clamour is as important as the capacity for associating oneself with the hopes and interests of one's fellow men.

That kind of unconventionality does not go with lack of humanity; it goes with a just perception of values. The completely conventional person is often as petty as the completely unconventional one.

Unless convention has some sort of philosophic background it frequently degenerates into smug tyranny. And when that happens it naturally creates conscious rebels—who in their turn become equally smug and tyrannical.

The only sensible thing is to regard convention as a working basis for society. It changes with the social outlook and is not, in itself, sacrosanct and fixed. To make a fetish of convention is merely to arouse opposition. It ought to be a bond between men, but many people who forget its origin try to make it into a form of slavery.

XII

LIFE'S LESSER WORRIES

A CORRESPONDENT begs me to write about what he calls—quoting Mr. Kipling's Rectorial address at St. Andrews—the "minor damnabilities." No doubt he means all the inevitable small worries of life which, without being highly tragic, are nevertheless more of a real test of character and endurance than great calamities. It is, as Mr. Kipling said, "the little things, in microbe or morale, that make us; as it is the little things that break us." And, of course, this is true. An individual, like a nation, can brace himself to meet a crisis, but relatively few individuals are sufficiently self-poised to face the ordinary trials and disappointments of everyday life with continued cheerfulness.

Man is naturally romantic: he is always imagining for himself a future better than the present, and he grows impatient with the fact that the present is full of irritating hindrances. A sudden call to great endeavour appeals to this romantic sense, but the call to face year in and year out with equanimity and courage an existence which is neither histrionic nor ideal requires a different quality of resolution.

The truth is, I fancy, that most of us possess more of the poet than of the philosopher. We like to dream, but we do not like to think. There is a great deal of the child in all of us and a great deal of primitive man. Like the child, we love to imagine ourselves the centre of some wonderful drama, and, like primitive man, we still have a hankering belief in magic. We have a "feeling" that something good is going to happen to us. The mental complex from which so many people suffer nowadays is, to a considerable extent, due to a desire to escape from the surroundings and problems which are inevitable to their lives.

But if people would only perceive that it is existence itself which is the great adventure, and not the exciting special things which may, or may not, happen to them, there would be far less discontent. But people nowadays want to live pictorially and to feed upon sensation.

I was lately walking down a London street when a small dog was run over. In a moment a large crowd had gathered and stood round in a ring staring at it as though hypnotised. But what interest has a dead dog beside a living person? Yet people will pass each other in the streets without feeling a glimmer of interest in the unknown lives and mysterious problems of the people they brush against.

Life is certainly full of minor worries, from visits to the dentist to visits from the tax collector, but one cannot escape from them by wishing that life were different from what it is. One can only escape from them, in the sense of not letting them bother one unduly, by realising that life *is* like that. True optimism does not consist in hoping against hope for a change; it exists in admitting that life itself is worth while. If we know of people more fortunate than ourselves, we also know of people more unfortunate.

The extraordinary thing is that really unfortunate people are often singularly happy. Because they know for certain that there is nothing to hope for, they become philosophic and resolve to make the best of a bad business. That, probably, is why the blind are nearly always contented and plucky.

In the same way it is easier to bear bad news than uncertainty. The dissatisfaction with life of so many people arises from their refusal to give up their vague dreams. They will not make the best of the present because they always feel that fortune may suddenly change everything.

Such an attitude would be praiseworthy if their hopes were commensurate with their efforts. But the ambitions of many people often bear no relation to their efforts. It is as useless to suppose that Providence has something in store for one for which one has not worked, as it is vain to regret that one was not born into the purple.

Moreover, the happiness of other people is, as often as not, a mere myth of our imaginations. Happiness, as has frequently been stated but seldom believed, depends mainly on a frame of mind. It is just as well to remember that, after all, the people one envies most are just as much subject to petty annoyances and disappointments as one is oneself. They may be of a different kind, but they are equally disagreeable.

XIII

COLD PLATES AND BLUNT KNIVES

AMONG the letters I have received on various subjects is one which urges me into the fray against cold plates and blunt knives.

Having decided views of my own about everything that spoils the pleasure of a meal, I willingly accede to my correspondent's request, and herewith range myself unequivocally on the side of those who insist on having hot plates for hot dishes and knives with which you can cut your meat and not merely mangle it.

One would think that both hot plates and sharp knives, being so obviously desirable and so easy to achieve, would be the invariable rule, but everybody knows that this is not the case.

For some occult reason neither the one nor the other seems to be reckoned as essential in many homes. A lukewarm plate, whose very touch depresses one, is considered quite warm enough to receive the hottest of dishes, and a knife with which one has to perform sawing feats is considered an adequate instrument for the carving of a joint.

There are, of course, many houses in which such deficiencies are not permitted, but I am afraid there are many other houses in which they have come to be regarded with a resigned fatalism, as though they were an inevitable part of the worries of housekeeping. How often one hears such remarks as "Oh, the plates are cold again," or "I wonder whether this knife will *ever* cut?"—remarks made usually in a sort of hopeless key.

But, after all, the remedy is not far to seek, and if the housewife would only let it be known that plates must be hot and knives must be sharp with the same air of conviction as she lets it be known that breakfast and dinner must be served punctually, we should hear no more complaints.

The convention would be changed; and, as we are all the slaves of convention, it would soon be found just as natural to send up hot plates and sharpened knives as it is now found natural to overlook such details.

I am not ignorant of the fact that hot plates can be a great snare on occasions—probably because we are so unaccustomed to them—and have resulted in many burnt fingers and in much broken china (I, personally, always drop a hot plate at once through mingled surprise and pain), but I have noticed that when an English cook does send up hot plates she is presumably so filled with a sense of her own virtue that she is apt to overdo it altogether.

The golden mean applies to the warmth of plates just as much as to anything else.

In the same way it may be argued that sharpened knives might lead children into danger, but my experience is that the blunt knife, to use which requires considerable pressure, is a more lethal weapon than the sharp one. How frequently it slips and cuts, in consequence, not the cold beef but the warm finger.

But the real argument in favour of hot plates and sharp knives is, so to speak, an artistic one. Why spoil the ship for a ha'p'orth of tar? A good meal well served has a soothing, harmonious effect on one that is not simply gastronomic.

But if the details are bad that total effect is lost, however excellent the food itself may be, and I even go so far as to say that digestion probably suffers in consequence.

Every big result is constructed from a number of small details, and nothing is more annoying than a lack of finish to a fine piece of work. Eating plays such an important and complicated part in our lives that nothing, within our time and means, should be spared to make it as agreeable as possible. This is not greed, it is common sense.

XIV

WHAT'S HIS NAME ?

Anybody who receives a great many letters from strangers cannot help noticing that numbers of people seem to take an odd sort of pride in making their signatures as illegible as possible.

The body of the letter is often quite legible, but when it comes to the signature a kind of intentional collapse appears to occur, with the result that one is left guessing as to the writer's name.

I cannot imagine why this habit should be so universal, unless it is that people like to give a special touch of character to their signature. But, even so, it is rather like cutting off your nose to spite your face. I have frequently been prevented from answering letters simply because I could not decipher my correspondents' names.

Many people, I regret to say, have likened my own handwriting to the tracks left by a spider crawling over a sheet of paper after dipping itself in ink—a gross exaggeration, allow me to observe—but, at any rate, I have always made a desperate effort to make my signature plain.

The signature is the important thing, partly because it is the one set of words in a letter the deciphering of which is never helped by the context, and partly because, if your correspondent can't read the body of your letter, he is, at least, in a position to write and ask you what you did say. I never, I hope, set my unknown correspondents the particular kind of conundrum they set me.

It is nice to see individuality in handwriting, but, considering the fact that some of the most individual handwritings are also the most legible, nobody need indulge in illegibility in order to prove that he or she has character. Handwriting, like most other things, is subject to discipline, and, as one writes in order to be read, surely the first thing to aim at is legibility.

The English, in this respect, are by no means such bad offenders—though quite bad enough—as most foreigners, whose signatures drive one to positive despair. With them the convention of illegibility has evidently reached a point where an extraordinary kind of complicated flourish, which bears no faintest resemblance to decipherable letters, is supposed to represent a man's signature.

Such vagaries are all very well when one is corresponding with friends, but why try to impress your unknown personality on strangers? The contents of the letter will usually do that, for good or ill, in a much more satisfactory manner.

And if it is mere thoughtlessness, as I presume it generally is, why not try to remember that strangers cannot be expected to know one's name unless one tells them what it is?

I think that the illegibility of handwriting, which is so common nowadays, is, in essence, a revolt from the colourless copyhand that we are taught at school. I cannot help thinking that teachers of handwriting should allow more for the individuality of the pupils while keeping strongly before them the need for clearness. They would thus satisfy, at one and the same moment, the claims of personality and of legibility.

Some people profess to read character from handwriting, but personally I would much rather be able to read a stranger's letter, which is the thing that affects me, than to read his character, which does not affect me at all.

The impersonality of a typewritten communication—which, after all, may be in the real sense full of personality—pleases me much more than the most remarkable display of handwriting.

And on the point of whether character actually shows in handwriting, I am sceptical as to its being more than the surface character.

No doubt most of us have an innate tendency to write in a particular manner, which is a trait of character, but, on the other hand, people consciously develop their style for such obvious reasons that it does not look like a very deep trait.

What handwriting does prove in many instances is that numbers of people are inordinately pleased with the illegibility of their signatures, which seems to me a very perverse condition of affairs.

It may prevent their cheques from being forged, I agree, but it also prevents their letters from being answered. Many a bitter misunderstanding must be directly traceable to an undecipherable signature.

XV

THE LAWS OF ORDER

THE idea of order is at the root of civilised life. Without it existence, whether it be that of an individual, a business, or a State, is liable to go completely astray. If we think clearly about it we shall perceive that society is, in fact, built up on order and cannot exist in any proper condition without it.

It is true that many people are in their private affairs extremely vague and unreliable, but such people would be the first to resent similar defects in the folk around them or in the structure of the social system.

Indeed, people like that are only enabled to give play to their own temperamental inclinations because they know full well that other people will keep things going.

From the moment we get up in the morning till the moment we go to bed at night—and, in truth, all through the hours of darkness, when people like engineers and printers and bakers are working for us—order is essential not only to our well-being but to our very existence.

It is impossible to improvise the complex processes that go to make life bearable. When a nation suddenly forgets this, as happened in Russia, then at once appear the seeds of disintegration, chaos, and despair.

Revolutionaries, who are people of fixed ideas, despise the laws of order as usually understood, with the only result that they ruin the people they are out to save, discredit themselves, and make their doctrines odious to sensible people of whatever party. To destroy a nation may be the work of a few hectic weeks, to build it up again can only be the work of painful years.

And though in a normal state of society those persons who claim to have a contempt for order are to a large extent saved from themselves by the orderly behaviour of other people, yet many persons who end by making a thorough hash of their lives owe their misfortunes to their own untidy minds.

It is useless to try to float through life in a vague and slovenly fashion. The whole delicate mechanism of modern existence, in which individual is bound up with individual and nation with nation, is only held together by a balanced sense of order and by a close attention to detail.

For detail is order's most valuable handmaiden. Detail gives a precise value to the general idea of an orderly universe.

It works out the ways and means by which order shall be accomplished and is of no less importance to an individual than to a bank. There are people who have orderly minds without having any particular grasp of detail, but such people do not despise detail any more than a man with only one eye despises a man because he has two eyes. It is a misfortune which may be, and often is, compensated for by the finer natural development of other faculties.

No, the man to be despised is the man whose mind is too free to care for order and too glib to bother over detail. That is a very hopeless type of person, because he lives in a world of his own imagination, which is not at all like the real world, and because he relies on the efforts of others for whom he meanwhile expresses contempt. In my opinion there is no one so dismally inferior as the man who puts himself above his fellows.

To jeer at law and order is a very idiotic proceeding, for not only in a special social sense, but in a much broader natural sense everything is founded upon law and order.

The progression of the seasons, the life of the body, the very gravity which holds us to the earth, all are kept going by the orderly progression of laws.

We live in an age when many people have become so inflated with their own personalities that they have almost come to believe that they are above all order and all law. Such people should take a few lessons in physics, in astronomy, and in physiology. It might, at least, teach them a certain amount of humility, though I am afraid there are some people who would never be taught much sense.

It is very easy, and perhaps very enticing, to talk about smashing the things we disagree with, but if we begin to smash up the order and laws that bind us together as civilised people, another set of order and laws—the order and laws of nature—are likely to smash us up as human beings.

XVI

HOBBIES

THE other day, when I drew an ordinary penny box of matches out of my pocket, a man opposite said, "Excuse me, may I look at that box a moment?" He returned it to me with the remark, "Thanks very much; I've got it in my collection."

I have heard of people collecting queer things, but I don't know that I have ever heard of a person collecting a queerer thing than the different brands of penny matchboxes. But I daresay the discovery of a new make gives him a thrill of pleasure akin to that felt by those who collect the more recognised objects of art and vertu.

For the underlying idea of the true collector is to add interest to life through the cultivation of a hobby, and, that being so, there is no particular reason why he should not collect anything provided it comes within the bounds of his purse.

Most collectors follow the recognised channels —stamps, books, prints, and so on—partly because they like to exchange information with other collectors, partly because such objects have a definite financial value (and your true collector loves a bargain), and partly because, in collecting what has already been studied and written about, the collector knows just where he is.

People often smile at the foibles and enthusiasms of collectors, but a hobby of this kind is undoubtedly a great protection against the ills and boredom of existence. It keeps a man young in spirit when he is perhaps no longer young in years. For the real pleasure of collecting is not in possession but in pursuit. People who form a complete collection of one object will often begin to collect something else. And for that reason I think the rich man who can buy a whole picture gallery or library at a time can never taste the joys of collecting in their supremest sense. It is the man of moderate means, or even the poor man, who has to economise for his hobby, who slowly adds piece by piece, who routs in about musty second-hand shops, who really knows the collector's thrill.

Because some objects much collected are in themselves beautiful, people frequently try to associate the collecting instinct with a sense of beauty. But, strictly speaking, though they often run parallel, they are not the same. For instance, the ardent lover of pictures would not mind who painted any specific picture provided it was a great work of art; but the collector would be horrified if the authenticity were doubted, however noble the work might be. And this would apply equally to a very rich man to whom money was no object. The thought that his picture was not a Rembrandt, but only by a pupil of Rembrandt, would entirely spoil his pleasure in it.

No, collecting is not primarily an artistic instinct—if it were, collectors would be more content to spend their spare time in museums and picture galleries, where the finest examples are to be seen, rather than in hunting for themselves—though it often arises from a love of art or literature. (The wish to have beautiful things about you in your own home is a different instinct.)

Rarity and completeness are the collector's real aims; he may love prints, but he prefers the first impression of a print, though it was improved by the etcher himself in the second impression; he may love literature, but he prefers the faulty text and poor type of the first edition to the corrected and finely printed text of the latest.

It is all rather obscure unless we admit that mankind is not very much governed by logic. It was Charles Lamb who asked why people should collect first editions when tenth editions were much more unusual. They are, but they have not the sentiment which attaches to the first edition. And sentiment has much to do with collecting, as, indeed, it inevitably has with everything which obtains a powerful hold upon human nature.

I know people sufficiently strong-minded to pooh-pooh all hobbies. But have they, I wonder, in their strong-mindedness a corresponding compensation in life ? For we must remember that a hobby need not take the form of actual collecting ; it may take the form of gardening, or playing golf, or motoring, or, indeed, a hundred other things.

Its real definition is some outstanding interest which helps one to get the better of the misfortunes and the weariness of life. A man without any kind of interest is almost invariably discontented. For our own sakes we should cultivate some kind of hobby.

XVII

THE MONUMENTS OF CIVILISATION

THE other day I was standing and looking admiringly at a fine new building which has recently been put up in London, and as I stood there I began to notice that a number of other people, as they passed, also looked at it with an expression which I can only describe as a pleased and proud expression.

I have noticed this kind of thing before; I have even noticed that workmen putting the finishing touches to a great building seemed to do so with a kind of lingering fondness, as though they were glad to have been connected with something which would long and worthily outlast them and would carry down to future ages the civilisation of the present day.

Splendid architecture can, indeed, give to mankind one of the most genuine and unselfish pleasures he can experience, not only from an artistic point of view, but also from the point of view of civilisation.

That something of immortality which all of us would fain leave behind us is enshrined most visibly in architecture. The glorious buildings of old, which are now the wonder and veneration of the world, probably gave as much deep joy to their builders and to the people who watched them being built, and rejoiced in them when just completed, as they give to us in their mellow age.

It is a common fashion nowadays to despair of civilisation, but we should remember that when all the trials of the present are forgotten and that when all our squabbles and difficulties are mere dead history, the noble buildings of our generation will still survive to remind generations to come that our civilisation was after all not a mere figment.

The politics and the wars of past centuries cease in time to concern the future, but their architecture has its perennially new message. In it seem to be enshrined the obscure hopes and ideals of whole nations. The Pyramids of Egypt, the great cathedrals of Europe, the temples of Greece teach a dumb history which is far more eloquent and moving than the written word. There, patent to our eyes, is the triumphant struggle of civilisation and faith against their thousand enemies.

To encourage an exalted style of architecture which is not a mere echo of the past but typical, in some special way, of the time which produced it should be the aim of every enlightened age.

By doing so that age will obtain the recognition of future ages and give to all its generation a share in a common immortality.

We do not want to know who designed, let us say, Canterbury Cathedral, because we only have to look at it to feel that we already know something more important—namely, that it was created by the genius and the faith of a nation.

And great architecture is always like that: it gives one a universal feeling and resembles a whole people's history rather than the history of a few individuals. It is the least egotistic and the most national of the arts.

One could almost write an essay on the different psychology of the English, the French, the Italians, and the Spanish in the Middle Ages merely from a study of their cathedral architecture, and yet one could say scarcely anything about the architects themselves, and still less about the actual masons and builders.

Just as the first rude attempts at building of our early ancestors showed the glimmer of civilisation, so does building still lead the van of mankind's progress.

In this utilitarian epoch we should not forget that there is something more in architecture than the mere fulfilling of an immediate purpose. The builders of our cathedrals built to the permanent glory of God and have thus made us their debtors for ever; let us too make our fardistant descendants regard us as people to whom they owe a debt of gratitude. Our individual names will be forgotten, but our generation will have achieved a significance which will, if history is any criterion, long outlast the importance of historic events.

XVIII

ON BEING IN TIME

The virtue of punctuality has been proclaimed by many moralists, but it is open to doubt whether their arguments have not been, as it were, too moral.

There is something naturally repugnant to most people about the rather smug arguments in favour of such things as punctuality with which nineteenth-century moralists filled their pages.

Even the advice of American steel and oil kings, who began life with nothing and ended up with untold millions, has little effect on the young man of to-day.

No, the young man of to-day will not be made punctual, industrious, and so forth by being assured either that such conduct leads to a feeling of righteous satisfaction or, conversely, to the accumulation of a vast fortune.

He regards life from a more commonsense and from a more sceptical standpoint. Tell him, for instance, that punctuality will make life easier for him and he may listen to you; tell him that he will be a better or a richer man and he will smile.

The worst of moral truisms is that, being truisms, they are taken for granted and therefore frequently disregarded. Everybody knows that punctuality is a virtue—has it not, indeed, been called the virtue of kings ?—but a great many people make almost a virtue of disregarding it.

They think it rather stylish to be unpunctual in society and rather clever to be unpunctual in business.

This attitude of mind is, in my opinion, largely the result of the unctuous remarks of professional moralists and successful adventurers. If we want to appeal to the youth of this generation, which has a considerable independence of spirit and a marked tendency towards self-esteem, it is useless to talk down to it. Youth's idea of a prosperous life is not always bound up with a Sunday school conscience or an overflowing bank account.

It has frequently quite other standards. Generosity of spirit appeals to youth, which conceals many of its generous ideals under the rather vague term "playing the game." And, after all, to be punctual is to play the game, for it is a measure of one's capacity for putting oneself in the position of others.

Nothing is more unsatisfactory and irritating than an unpunctual person. Indeed, a person who is unreliable in keeping an appointment or in arriving at an office at a specified time is, just as likely as not, unreliable in other things. The capacity for invariable punctuality is a pretty good test of character.

And punctuality is not in the least difficult. It is just as much a habit as is unpunctuality. A man with a punctual mind—a thing not hard to acquire—orders his existence in such a way that he saves himself trouble. It is simply an automatic result of precision and tidiness of mind.

As for the trouble he saves the people with whom he comes in contact, that cannot be measured. The running of our complicated social machine must inevitably be based on a time-table, and it is the people who keep to that time-table who make life possible.

Unpunctuality is, indeed, a social crime which should not be tolerated. The slovenliness of mind which is really at the back of it, disguise itself how it may, is a menace to the whole fabric of organised life. If the young people of to-day would only realise this—which is not a " moral " point at all in the ordinary meaning of the word —they would better appreciate that unpunctuality, far from being a sign of cleverness or smartness, is a sign of stupidity and lack of perception.

I know that one often has great temptations to be unpunctual, but I am quite sure that one ought to resist them with a determination which may not always appear necessary. For unpunctuality is often the start of that "soft spot" in character which is the beginning of the end.

XIX

ROMANCE

One often hears the remark that romance is dead, but I should suppose that it is one of those remarks, like "The good old times," which is made afresh by every generation.

For some reason or other it seems natural to think that the special age in which we live is an age lacking in the colour of romance. But one has only to read the papers to perceive that we can find in these present days events just as romantic and improbable as those which we associate with the times of Queen Elizabeth or the Cavaliers.

What, for instance, could sound more wildly romantic than the episode of the beautiful Italian "countess," Anna Carolina Monici, who returned surreptitiously to England, almost penniless, landing at night from a fishing smack, just to see the man she loved and confront her supposed rival?

In the cold light of the police court where this story was finally disposed of it may possibly appear a rather tarnished romance, but no doubt many of the romantic happenings of olden days also seemed rather tarnished to the onlookers. It is obvious, for example, that Sir Walter Raleigh did not appear to King James I., or the Young Chevalier to King George II., the romantic figures they appear to us. Popular history loses sight of the details it wants to forget.

The point is that we always associate romance of this kind with a bygone chivalry, whereas it is really as much about us now as it has ever been. If we had read in some "costume" novel the story of Anna Carolina Monici, we would have said to ourselves, "Ah, if only such things happened nowadays!" But they do happen. Indeed, more romantic things are happening all the time than the most romantic novelist would dare to invent.

The trappings of romance, eighteenth century costumes, coaches-and-four, elegant and elaborate gallantry have changed; but what were they but the mere fashion of the moment? They are only romantic to us because we see them in retrospect.

A hundred years hence our most conventional clothes may seem infinitely strange and romantic to our descendants—just as, were we able to look ahead, their costumes would probably seem bizarre and wonderful to us.

The one thing that does not alter perceptibly is human nature. Whatever man or woman has felt or done, man or woman is capable of feeling or doing. If any age is romantic, then every age is romantic. All around us, unknown and unguessed at, the most unexpected things are happening.

Occasionally something will make a stir, and then we remark that truth is stranger than fiction. But truth is always stranger than fiction—if we only knew the whole truth. It is unnecessary to sigh for the days of romance, for we are living in the midst of them. Life, beneath the surface, is just as picturesque as ever it was.

The love of adventure and romance is deeply planted in the human breast, and the mechanical, mundane, and frenzied external existence of to-day has not altered it in the slightest. Politicians often lose sight of that fact. They try to arrange the world on lines of pure expediency, but they frequently come to grief because they fail to realise that man is not at all like the machines which do so much of his work.

Romance is our escape from the tedious worries and anxieties of modern life; but if only we could see that it is a living thing and not a dead thing, how much more complete would our escape be. It is not necessary to do something extravagant to taste the fine flavour of romance: it is only necessary to attune our minds to the conception that life is inherently romantic.

I imagine, indeed, that the people who come after us will regard this age as a quite fantastically romantic one. For what could be more romantic from one point of view than to be living in the very middle of world-convulsions? It may not be agreeable, but it is decidedly not humdrum.

Posterity may even envy us our experiences, just as many of us secretly envy the medieval days of knights and fair ladies—days which were, in reality, probably most unpleasant in almost every sense.

XX

BAD FORM

WHERE does convention end and bad form begin? In other words, why is it considered wrong to do certain things in certain ways and even to phrase certain sentiments in certain words, when they are, in intention, just as courteous as the methods and words which are accepted as right?

It is not a question of bad manners—bad manners may go hand in hand with the most exquisite social correctness; nor is it altogether a question of fashion—a man may be unfashionable in every conceivable way but always be perfectly good form.

Good form in this particular interpretation of the phrase is a kind of social cement which helps one to get through life easily. But why some things should be good form and others not I have no precise idea, though I think there is a kind of instinct for differentiating.

Of course one may assert if one likes that the good form of one class is not the good form of another; but as a matter of fact we use the words as though they were not relative and were applicable to no one class in particular. One speaks as if a thing either was or was not good form—and there is the end of it.

But there is another aspect of good form which is of much greater importance, and that is the aspect which deals with conduct in the real meaning of the word. In this significance it stands for "playing the game." When a man shrugs his shoulders in regard to another man's behaviour and observes coldly "Bad form," it is the most deadly way he has of expressing the opinion that the other is a cad.

The unwritten code which says that certain things are not done, with its penalties of social ostracism and contempt, is a kind of acknowledgment that the actual laws of the country are not sufficient to deal with all forms of social menace.

I do not mean to imply that good form, however rigorously interpreted, covers every question of conduct. Unfortunately it does not. Like all codes, it is bound by certain conventions of what is or is not permissible—and these conventions are not always entirely reasonable.

But what one can say is that it does cover many of the most serious questions of conduct. A boy who has once assimilated its spirit very rarely runs counter to its teaching.

Indeed, the inculcation of what is good form in regard to conduct is probably the most lasting asset a boy can carry away from school. He mostly derives it from his school tradition. And that is why such institutions as public schools, which have definite and strong traditions, are valuable even when their teaching is negligible; they develop an ideal of character if they don't always impart much knowledge.

Luckily, however, for the nation, a great many people who know nothing about good form in the drawing-room sense, and who have had, further, no opportunity of such an education as would teach them its broader implications, have nevertheless a natural instinct for it. Some of the finest gentlemen I have ever met were not polished in the accepted sense. But they would certainly never have done a mean thing or a thing that showed a want of innate delicacy. Their good form was not a conscious code, but it was there in the ultimate meaning of the word.

Like all those things which, generally speaking, have an artificial manner to cloak their real importance, good form is often regarded as a sort of snobbishness by those who don't know what it stands for. But as soon as it actually becomes that, it is no longer good form, but exceedingly bad form. It is, in its essence, a way of regarding life. It is wanting, perhaps, in generosity of outlook, because it is a rigid code from which there must be no falling off; but, on the other hand, cold though it be, it is to be relied on.

Many a man would rather die than do something which he knew his companions would consider bad form, just as many a man would rather pay his gambling debts than his creditors.

On the whole, therefore, good form does stand for an admirable ideal, though, of course, it is petty in some of its manifestations and stilted in others. It is a social code in one direction, it is a moral code in another.

XXI

NOUS

IT is surely rather strange that there should be no English word which is the exact counterpart of what is called " nous."

We have to borrow directly from the Greek to express that particular and most important shade of meaning. There are numerous other such gaps in our language, but perhaps " nous " is the word which is least replaceable by any one English equivalent. The colloquial word " gumption " comes nearest to explaining it briefly.

Nous, indeed, means something which it is not always easy to put into words. When we are told that a person has nous, a definite idea of that person is conveyed to us, but if we were asked, What, then, is nous ?, we might find it hard to think of a just definition. Nous may be called a natural aptitude for coming to sound conclusions added to a natural capacity for carrying things through sensibly. It includes intelligence, it includes tact, and it includes unbiased sanity.

The man with nous is the kind of man one trusts, because one knows that, apart from all his other qualities, he has the instinct for doing the right thing or for summing up a position correctly in an unexpected situation. In other words, nous is a sort of glorified commonsense—and commonsense, in spite of its name, is by no means as common as might be supposed. Indeed, just as few people have absolutely normal vision so are few people absolutely sensible. They are carried away by their predilections or their passions.

Needless to say, nous is an extraordinarily valuable quality. It is an almost intuitive capacity for making right judgments, and as such it probably cannot be taught.

We all know very clever people whose opinions we do not necessarily trust at all. That extreme individuality which often goes with great cleverness is, of itself, a biasing factor. But the *flair* for being right, which is the mark of the man with nous, is in its highest manifestations a form of genius almost as unusual as any other form of genius.

Men like Martin Tupper and Samuel Smiles and Dr. Crane may write books full of good advice as to how to succeed in life, but no one can really succeed triumphantly unless he has something more in him than can ever be taught to him. Nous is part of a man or woman's personality—and personality is, in the long run, unanalysable.

I do not mean for a moment to imply that instinct cannot be trained and developed. Of course it can be. I only mean that the germ of the instinct must be there—and, as far as nous is concerned, the germ of that instinct is not present in everybody.

Indeed, one of the most recurrently astonishing things in the world is the frequent wrong-headedness of even able people. A really just sense of values and of proportion appears to be singularly rare.

Many people muddle through existence, many people throw wonderful chances away, simply because they are lacking in that ordinary commonsense which no brilliance can take the place of.

Success to a large extent depends on making other people believe in one. And there is perhaps nothing that other people more quickly perceive and appreciate than nous.

Of all the silent judgments we make throughout life about the people we are brought in contact with, judgments as to their relative amount of nous take a foremost place. It is one of the few qualities in a man which induces people to give him their confidence. Nous is applied sanity in relation to things as they are, and nowadays especially, when the world seems to become more complex and disordered every day, sanity is what we all ought to pray for.

The man who possesses it in full measure is the man people admire and in the end follow.

XXII

PREJUDICE

A CORRESPONDENT asks me to write an article on " Prejudice," because it plays so great a part in the lives of us all. The only thing against this request is that practically nobody will think that the article applies to himself.

The truth is that, while most of us are keenly alive to the prejudices of others, we are usually blind to our own prejudices, which, indeed, we generally regard as the dictates of common sense.

This frame of mind no doubt gives us a feeling of superiority over our neighbours, but it hardly helps us to appreciate the fact that prejudice often usurps the place of justice and common sense in the minds of us all without exception.

Man likes to delude himself into believing that his actions are based upon logic, but he forgets that the logic often only comes into action upon the false basis raised by prejudice.

If, for instance, a man instinctively dislikes another, he will usually find strong reasons for his dislike, though the real reason may be an inherent but trivial prejudice against the colour of his hair, or the tone of his voice, or the way he coughs.

Indeed, prejudice is not subject to that kind of reason which can be adequately explained in words. But most people want to explain things in words, if only to themselves, and therefore they often invent, without even knowing that they are inventing, logical reasons to account for their prejudices.

The world would be a very dull place if it were as logical as people try to make out, and I cannot say I am altogether sorry that prejudice plays such a large part in our lives.

I am only sorry that people will not admit more freely that they, themselves, are prejudiced. Why should we be ashamed of our prejudices? After all, marriage and friendship are only extreme forms of prejudice in favour of certain people.

How often we hear people say in a pitying or irritated tone that they cannot understand what So-and-so could have seen in So-and-so, when, as a matter of fact, other people are probably saying similar things about them. The attraction of one person for another is frequently most incomprehensible. I rather suppose that our prejudices are often just as near the mark as our attempts at logical argument.

There are no absolute standards of right and wrong, and the only safe working standard is the general opinion of the majority. And taken all in all prejudice usually follows more or less the standards at which society as a whole aims.

Of course there are plenty of minor prejudices which are mere idiosyncrasies. Some people cannot bear the presence of a cat, other people have an uncanny affection for snakes. Every one of us is probably full of small reasonless prejudices of this type: they are simply part of our individualities.

I suppose that, if one were to go into it deeply, one would find that every prejudice, however singular, had a cause, but probably many of the causes would now be impossible to trace and, even if traceable, would only lead back to other causes.

Intuition, which many women especially rely on to lead them aright, is a form of prejudice and, like other prejudices, is sometimes sound and sometimes unsound. For it must be confessed that prejudice, though perfectly natural to mankind, is often very unjust. But then so is logic, and it is well known that there is nothing more hopeless than a wrong-headed logical person.

A prejudiced person will sometimes admit that his judgment may be at fault; a logical person is always sure that he is right.

XXIII

WRONG JOBS OR LACK OF GRIT?

THE restless discontent which affects so many people nowadays is largely due to an excess of morbid self-consciousness. Everything would have been perfect if only everything had been different! If they fail it is not their fault, it is the fault of circumstance.

This state of mind is a modern disease which arises from the fact that, as some philosopher has said, people now spend so much time thinking about their rights that they have forgotten all about their duties. Their chief desire is to explain that as things have turned out they have never had a fair chance of "expressing" themselves.

"I wish I were a surgeon," a physician once said to me.

"Why?"

"Oh, some surgeons do awfully well."

"So do some physicians," I answered, looking at him coldly.

The truth is, a great many people think they would have made a success of life if only they had gone in for something else. And in this connection I am interested to read that Dr. G. H. Miles, assistant-director and secretary of the National Institute of Industrial Psychology, has been stating that numbers of people fail to be successful in their professional or trade careers owing to their temperaments clashing with their natural powers of mind. But my belief goes farther than that; my belief is that nearly everybody's temperament is against doing any work at all that he has to do, and that if we are going to give way to our temperaments we shall all end up in the workhouse.

The world, says Dr. Miles, is full of people in the wrong jobs—but I contend that all jobs are wrong jobs, and that the only way to get the better of existence is to realise that, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, it is not one's temperament that stands in the way of success but merely one's lack of grit or of capacity.

In the long run most of us, in this democratic community, get pretty well what we deserve. No doubt there are exceptions, but there is no conceivable arrangement by which society could be made watertight against unfortunate exceptions. When people pity themselves for being in the wrong jobs they should draw some satisfaction from the knowledge that nearly everybody thinks he is in the wrong job. Indeed, the only right job, theoretically, is to have no job.

It does seem to me that the parentalism of our laws, with their mixture of foolish prohibitions and foolish laxities, only encourages us to weep over ourselves. People whose every step is guided naturally lose self-reliance and naturally begin to think that life (and the Government) should do still more for them.

Talk about the blind leading the blind! I recently read a paragraph in a paper which stated that a naval warrant officer had actually been summoned—the magistrates sensibly dismissed the case—on a charge of loitering for the purpose of making a bet, because at a Portsmouth "unemployed" meeting he challenged a speaker to prove that he had seen war service and produced £3 to back it up with.

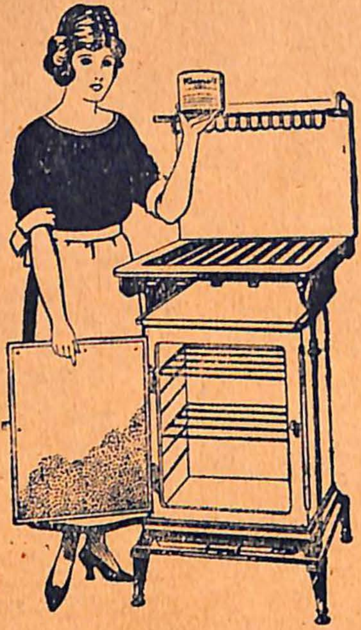
Sheer opera-bouffe! But then, at the other end of the scale, we have a law which enables women, who are so urgently needed in domestic service, to draw money from the State for doing nothing. If so many of our views are maudlin and unsound, surely it is largely because such views are fostered by the laws, which appear to love cranks and idlers, but to put all sorts of irritating and meaningless restrictions on the ordinary man.

Why is it that years ago people weren't troubled by their "temperaments" as they are to-day? Simply because they were not encouraged to be unwholesome. Pride in one's work is a great anodyne against discontent—and it is a frame of mind just as easy to cultivate as crying for the moon, which is the present fashion. But so long as any Government subsidises idleness, so long will people think poorly of work. Man is very much a creature of habit; he listens to his master's voice and he takes his tone accordingly.

The modern trait of being dissatisfied with everything is based upon a profound delusion. There is no such thing as absolute happiness or absolute perfectibility. The only thing we can all do is to make the best of a relatively bad job.

INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED STUDY
No. ....
Date ....
SIMLA

THE LONDON AND NORWICH PRESS, LIMITED, LONDON AND NORWICH



KLEENOFF

Cooker Cleaning Jelly

10d. PER LARGE TIN

A thin coating
remove with ease
Cooker. It is re
principal Gas Con
Stores. Ask y
Grocer or Gas C
they do not stock, send 6d. for **Trial**
Sample post free, from

THE KLEENOFF CO.,
(*Dept. B*) **33, ST. MARY-AT-HILL,**
LONDON, E.C. 3

Library IIAS, Shimla
082 B 628
00012108