

Panama Gold

I

The sun was slowly dying. Ella, a switch in her hand, rounded up her chicks. Cocks came proudly in, puffed by poise and conquest; hens, agitated, jealous of their young, clucked in—furious at the disappearance of a one-eyed one caught by the leg and dragged down the hole of a mongoose.

“Yo’ go up dere, an’ behave yo’self.”

Swish, swish, swish . . . “Ah know you had to be last, yo’ rascal yo’ . . . jump inside!” Guinea fowl, swifter than a hare, wild as any of the gap’s tabbies.

The wind subsided. Butter fish clung to the sky . . . fish in the sky . . . mullets, gar fish, butter fish. Fish—blue, gold, black, orange—tossing on a sea, floundering around in God’s sky. Fishermen at Low’rd set their nets by the twilight visions, mirrored in the sky, of the lore rolling drunk on the sea’s bottom. They were dark sea rats streaming out at twilight to embark on some intrepid quest.

She would be alone at dusk, cooking, mixing flour or tasting broth. . . . “Why taste it, why? If no fo’ me alone?” Yampies, eddoes, plantains . . .

“De Bajan man him say,” Ella smiled, “‘plantain an’ salt fish me don’t want ’um, an’ de Mud-head man him say, me

wish me had 'um, me wish me had 'um. . . ." And moisture came to Ella's laughing eyes.

From the plantains to the corn and the flour dumplings. . . . "One o' dem would knock a man in a cock hat," she observed . . . a man . . . a man. . . .

All of a sudden a problem arose, "Gahd, I ain't got a bit o' salt in de house. No, sah," she cried frantically, "me can't stand no fresh food—me muss get a pinch o' salt."

II

"Yo' mahmie inside, Capadosia?" Ella paused before the Dalrimple cabin. Even the mangy brindle pup with his ears sticking sickly up row-rowed hoarsely after the spunky downpour of rain.

"I is talkin' to you, girl!"

And Capadosia, still pricking the chigger fested in her thumb, hollowed, "Mahmie!"

"Don't tu'n yo' back 'pon me, girl, befo' I tell yo' mahmie!"
Unruly Capadosia!

"Capadosia, what is it?"

"Miss Heath, heah, mum, she want yo'. . . ."

Skimpy-legged Capadosia, the color of a warm chestnut, freckles dominant on her rude, glazed, hard little face.

"Hey, dese chilrun, Lizzie. . . ."

Ella stepped over to Capadosia's mother. "Hey, I ask de gal if she mahmie home an' Lizzie, yo' know what she tell ma, why de little rapscaillon tu'n me she back side an' didn't even say ax yo' pardin."

"Come in heah, miss, come in heah an' tu'n round. Ax

Miss Heath pardin! Ax she! yo' won't—yo' wretch! Vagabond! Take dat, an' dat, an' dat—shut up, I sez. Shut up, befo' I box ev'y one o' dem teets down yo' t'roat! Didn't I tell yo' not to be rude, shut up, yes—didn't I tell yo' not to be onmannerly to people, dat yo' must respect de neighbors? Like she ain't got no manners! Shut up, I sez, befo' I hamstring yo', yo' little whelp!"

"Dese gal picknees nowadays is 'nouf to send yo' to de madhouse! Hey, but Lizzie, what we gwine do wit' de chilrun, ni? Ev'y day dey is gettin' wussah an' wussah."

"Lord only knows, soulee gal, dat Miss Capadosia, yo' wait till she pappy come home. He gwine beat she fo' true."

Ella drew near the cabin door; near enough to be able to spy, through the blue smoke of Lizzie Dalrimple's cooking, Capadosia cutting her eyes at her and murmuring, "come complain' 'pon me—de old hag—why she don't go 'n get sheself a man?"

"An' how yo', ni," cried Ella, turning to Lizzie and coloring brightly, "how yo'?"

"Oh, so so, soulee gal, I still got de rheumaticks in me leg."

"Yo' ain't doin' not'ing far-rit, no? Hey, gal yo' ain't frighten, no? Yo' ain't afraid o' de horspital, no?"

"Come in an' sit down, Ella, an' res' yo'self."

"Don't put yo'self out o' de way, Lizzie, on account o' me. I wus jus' gwine ask yo' to len' me a pinch o' salt when dat gal chile o' yours skin up she behin' at me. A body can't even talk to chilrun nowadays."

"Tell yo' de troot, Ella," Lizzie answered, "I jus' use de las' drop meself to sweeten Christian's coffee. It make he coffee taste good."

"An' how's Christian, soulee?"

"Oh, so so, chile."

"He still at de quarry?"

"Yes, soul."

"Well, I gwine go back down de gap. I lef' de pot boilin'."

"Yes, soulee gal, I jus' shell de bonavis an' put dem in, an' in course de dumplings will tek long fo' swell up."

"Which kahl to mine dat las' ebenin' Christian bring home a bag o' soup-crabs from Miss Foulkes, de buckra. She are always givin' him soup meat, or pepper soup, or crab fo' soup, fo' tek' way. How-somevah, dem crabs is so nice, chile, I nevah taste nothin' like dem in all me bawn days."

"We usta catch dem in Low'rd, too—but I don't like dem. Giv' me de belly ache."

"Why yo' don't go up de road an' get a bag o' salt?"

"Up whey?"

"Up at Missah Poyah's shop."

"Missah who?"

"Missah Poyah, no."

"Who 'im are—whey he come from?"

"Palama, soul."

"Palama?"

"Yes."

"An' wha' he doin' heah?"

"He open a shop, soulee."

"Oh, I see."

"Yes, chile, he are a Palama man."

"Well, I must be goin' den," Ella drew the shawl around her shoulders. "I must go see disyah Poyah."

"An' oh, Ella, he got one leg—"

"Yo' don't say!"

"Deed he is! Got it cut off on de canal—"

"I gwine 'long now. Got to go back . . . leave me pot boilin'
. . . got to go back an' eat me fresh food."

III

Aftermath—green aftermath.

The gap gave up the scurvy ghost. In balloons of steaming froth, the fog of drought and heat, which had settled over the gap for the entire summer, bore its way over the craggy tips of Low'rd to the red, brewing sea beyond.

Splashes of rain—a swift transfusion. The earth murmured under it; lay tense, groaning, swollen, like a woman in toil, with the burden of its inheritance. Gold and green and yellow things, near-ripe, sent up tall, nodding fronds to trumpet the bursting of the dawn.

Dawn cast a greenish gold over the gap. Over the jagged stones donkey carts slipped, wheels stuck in mud. Men got down to coax their beasts out of the muddy gutter. Gone the dust. Red mud flowed over the land. Red mud—good for beans and potatoes—crawled up the legs of dusky West Indian peasant women, up the hoofs of townbound cattle.

Once more the peewits sang. Strange—the way they found their way back to the tip-top ends of guava or breadfruit or pine. Gobbling turkeys and fowls, fond of their new, egg-cruste'd young, proudly stepped out of coops, traversing the broad marl highway. Worms swarmed into their paths to be devoured; plenty to go round. Mixed with the rain the marl dust made a hard resilient road.

The wind tossed the lanky guava tree. Scudding popcorn—white, yellow, crimson pink guava buds blew upon the ground. Forwards and backwards the wind tossed the guava tree. It shook buds and blossoms on the ground—moist, unforked, ground—on Ella Heath's lap, in her black, plenteous hair, in the water she was drawing from the well. Guava buds fell in Ella's bucket, and she liked it. They gave flavor to the water. All of nature gave flavor to Ella, wrought a magic color in Ella's life. Green, wavy moss—rhubarb moss—at the bottom of the frog-harboring well, with fern and broad leaf sprawled along its ribs; brought color to the water, gave body flavor to it. Gave the water a tang.

Cast up on a bare half acre of land, Ella came to know the use of green, virgin things. Ore; green ore—spread over the land. Riotously nature peopled the earth about her. In front of her cabin door there was a water course. It was filled with sparrow grass. A wild, mad, hectic green—the green of young sugar canes. Up and down the gap, horses, donkeys, ring-horned goats, on the way to Bridgetown to be raced, tugged at their tethers, crazy to eat up Ella's sparrow grass. It tempted the oxen carting tremulous loads of salty sugar cane grown on the swampy seaside of Barbadoes—tempted sheep, oracular, voiceless, dog-shy sheep bewilderedly on the road to market—tempted hens frizzly with the pip, and leaping, lap-eared dogs.

Ella had come from Low'rd—the Lower Side—that dinky bar of salty black earth jutting out to sea on the easternmost tip of Barbadoes. From Low'rd Ella had brought a donkey cart load of sea crab shells, horns, conchs, rose and orange and crimson hued, and set them in rows between the blazing hibiscus and chrysanthemum along the walk.

Inexhaustible stems of green sprang up around Ella's domain. It'd take five years to mature, but she had planted a cocoanut tree on the northern-most wing of the cabin. Half an acre of land, but it was no trifling stake. Inch by inch green overspread it. Corn, okras, gunga peas, eddoes, *tannias*, tomatoes—in such a world Ella moved.

As if she were on an immemorial lark, Ella experimented with the green froth of the earth. One day she was grafting a pine and breadfruit. Standing, "jooking" a foreign stalk in—tamarind, star apple, almond—and strapping it into the gummy gash dug into the tree's side.

Similarly, with the pigeons and the ground doves. Pigeons at sunrise on a soapbox coop set on top the latrine cooing:

A rooka ta coo

A rooka ta coo

My wife is just as good as you

Good as you

Good as you

to sherbet-winged doves on the cabin roof—in spite of Ella's scissors. And rabbits; red-eyed ones white and shy, Ella'd set in the thick sparrow grass, guarded over by Jit, the dog, to play and frolic. Sometimes, unmoved by their genetic dissimilarity, Ella'd use drastic, aggressive methods. . . .

Sows fared prodigiously at the hands of Ella. She filled huge, fat-stinking troughs of slime for them. Ella's boars grew tusks of flint-like ivory. Vicious, stiff-haired boars who ate up the sow's young, frothed at the mouth at Jit's approach, tried to stick their snouts between Ella's legs whenever she ventured in the pen.

Under Ella's tutelage the one cow she owned streamed milk. From fat luscious udders filled skillet after skillet. . . .

Gay, lonely girl, her bare arms yellow in the blazing February sun, the words of a West Indian madrigal issued from her lips:

Do Mistah Bee don't chase me 'way
Fo' de gals nex' do' will laugh at me
Break me han' but let me stan'
Break me han' but let me stan'. . . .

Ella poured the water in a skillet. Guava buds in the water—honey in guava buds.

All around it was dark. Gravel assailed her feet. A moon worked its way through a welter of thick black clouds to soar untrammelled in the phosphorescent sky. Marl dust assailed Ella's unshod feet.

Under the evergreen big barnacled roots stood up like a mass of sleeping crocodiles—and Ella grew tired, and like blacks on a dark country road at night, began to sing

Do Mistah Bee don't chase me 'way

The broad road led to the world. Beyond Black Rock, beyond St. Michael's to Eagle Hall Corner, and Bridgetown. Along it traders from Low'rd, in landaux and victorias and oxcarts, sped to barter sea eggs

Sea egg, sea egg
Tittee Ann tan tan!

Evergreen leaves fell swirling through the dusk upon Ella's face. She brushed them away, and into her untutored mind came a legend. "Sh, carrion crow," she cried, "me no dead yet." The evergreen leaves, caressing her face, brought it vividly to her. . . . "Sh, carrion crow, me no dead yet." An old Dutch Guianese had uttered the ghastly words. Black Portuguese legend. . . . For sticking his hand in a pork barrel in a Portuguese grocer's shop, a Negro had been caught and whisked off to a dark spot in the woods. His hands had been cut off and he had been buried alive, with only his head sticking out of the ground. That had happened at night. In the morning the crows had come to gouge the eyes out of his head. "Sh, carrion crow, me no dead yet. . . ." Evergreen leaves on Ella's face . . . crows swirling around the head of a body buried on the Guiana mound. . . .

"Dis muss be it," Ella murmured.

Up a greasy embankment, one more leap, and Ella paused, breathing hard. Words—male words—vied with the wind for position in her alert consciousness.

Voices—

"... I mek dem pay me! Deed I dids! Says to dem, 'pay me, or be Christ you'll stan' de consequences!' 'Pay me,' I says, 'or I'll sick de British bulldog on all yo' Omericans!'"

"An' dey pay yo' fas' enough, didn' dey?"

"Pay me? Man, yo' should o' see how fas' dey pay me! Pay me fas' enough, indeed! Five hundred pounds! Ev'y blind cent! Man, I wuz ready to sick Nelson heself 'pon dem. At a moment's notice, me an' de council wuz gettin' ready fo' ram-sack de Isthmus and shoot up de whole blasted locks! Hell wit' de Canal! We wuz gwine blow up de dam, cut down de

wireless station an' breck up de gubment house! If dey didn't pay me fo' my foot!"

"Yo' handle dem fo' true, didn't yo'?"

"Man, don't tahlk! Shut yo' mout'! Handle dem? Dat am not all de troot. I swallow dem up! Swallow dem up like a salipentah! Sha'? Man, let me tell yo' something. I let dem understand quick enough dat I wuz a Englishman and not a bleddy American nigger! A' Englishman—big distinction in dat, Bruing! An' dat dey couldn't do as dey bleddy well please wit' a subject o' de King! Whuh? I carry on like a rattlesnake. Carry on like a true Bimshah! Heah I wuz losin' my foot fo' dem wit' dere bleddy canal an' dey come tellin' me dey wuzn't to blame, dat nobody wuz to blame, dat de engine wuz gwine slow an' dat I wuz musta been layin' down on de job. Hear dem Americans, ni? Layin' down on de job, hear dat, Bruing? And wuzzahmo' dey say dat why I didn't ketch holt o' de cow-katcher an' fling meself outa de way! Wha', man, dah t'ing knock me onconscience! I didn't even know I wuz hit! Dere I wuz oilin' de switch—oilin' de switch an' de nex' t'ing yo' know I wuz in de horspital at Ancong wit' one foot cut off."

Pipes were being smoked . . . stinking tobacco smote Ella. Green tobacco leaves burning in rotting corncob pipes.

Sugar, snuff, codfish, lard oil, sweet oil, corn, rum, kerosene—were the ingredients of one grand symphonic smell.

"Giv' me a bag o' salt an' a package o' senna."

"Are dat yo', Miss Ella?"

"Yes, it am me."

She turned. Perched on an old biscuit barrel was Petit Bruin, the village idiot, smoking a pipe which exuded an odor of burning cow dung.

"Howdy do, Mistah Bruing, how de worle a treat yo'?"

"Oh, so so, gal."

Ella's eyes deserted the old man to light upon the shopkeeper sticking his black veiny hand in the brine for the salt beef, his back to her. With a stab to the breast, she noted the protrudent tip of the cork leg. . . .

"Anything else, miss?" he asked, the brine dripping from his salt-crusted arm.

"Gahd, he are black in troot," Ella, mulatto Ella observed to herself; then aloud, "bettah giv' me a gill o' bakin' soda, I might wan' to make a cake."

"Look out dey, Poyah," mumbled Bruin, "gwine bring down dat salmon tin 'pon yo' head too."

"Oh dat can't hit me," Poyer replied, lowering the baking powder on the tip of the hook. "T's a man, man."

He faced Ella, piling up the goods on the counter. "T's a man, man," he said, meeting Ella's frosting eyes. "I wuz a brakesman in Palama, don' fomembah dat. I wuz de bes' train hooper on de Isthmus!"

"Count up de bill, quick!" Ella hastened, putting a sixpence on the counter. "It a get dark."

"Frighten fo' duppies?" Poyer said, a suggestion of teasing and mockery in his voice.

Island bugaboo. . . . "Who, me?" Ella's eye blazed, "I ain't frighten fo' de livin' much mo' de dead!"

"T'ink I is any cry-cry ooman, t'ink I is any cry-cry ooman—yo' lie!"

On the way back up the gap Ella felt unforgivingly warm in the temples at the very idea of Poyer's thinking she was afraid of ghosts. "Like I is any mamby-pamby ooman, like I ain't usta to takin' care o' meself."

Six days passed. Ella stuck a pig and corned the meat. The sapodillas ripened. Shaddocks—tropical grapefruits—filled donkey cart after donkey cart going through the gap to Eagle Hall Corner. Often as the sun rose showers fell. And then a visitor came—with a peg-step. . . .

It was dark when he came. He was perspiring furiously. He was one of those black men whose faces present an onion-like sheen, and upon whose brow and flabby jaws little fester-bright pimples stand out with a plaguing glitter.

He met Ella by the side of the well, binding up the spurs of a pugnacious game cock.

"I shut up de shop," he said abruptly, "why don't yo' come an' buy from me any mo'?"

"Hey, wha' yo' t'ink o' dat? Wha' wuz I doin' befo' yo' come along? Yo' t'ink I was starvin'? I look like I is starved out? Look at me good! We had plenty shops befo' yo' come along, bo."

"I taught—"

"Wha' yo' are taught? Yo' must be a funny man. Hey, yo' lock up yo' shop fi' come aftah one customah! Dat are a funny business."

"Bruing is dere—besides, it are good business."

"Tell me, how it are good business? Explain yo'self."

"Fo' me it are."

"Me can't see it, sah, furdah mo, I gwine ask yo' fo' excuse me, I got de chicken dem fo' feed."

"Wait—befo' yo' go, Ella—Miss Ella, yo' don't seem fo' hav' no feelings at all fo' de po' wooden foot man."

"Gahd! How yo' mean feelings? Wha' yo' want me fo' do? Hug yo' up?"

"Tek pity. . . ."

"Go 'way from heah I say. Don't come near me. Loose me befo' I go get de cutlass an' chop off yo' udder foot."

"Yo' know yo' won't do dat."

"Is dat so?"

"Yo' know yo' won't. . . ."

"Fo' true?"

"Yo' too kind. Yo' won't—yo' like me—"

"Oh, is dat de saht o' man yo' is, eh?"

"Wha' yo' mean? Tahlk, ooman, what saht o' man is dat?"

"T'ink dat ev'y ooman is de same. But yo' is a dam liar! Nutting can frighten me. All dem bag o' flour yo' 'a' got, an' dem silk shut, an' dem gold teets, an' dem Palama hats, yo' a spote round heah wid—dem don't frighten me. I is a woman what is usta t'ings. I got me hogs an' me fowls an' me pota-toes. No wooden foot neygah man can frighten me wit' he clothes or he barrels o' cologne. . . ."

Yellow kerchief mopping his brow, he walked off . . . peg step, peg step . . . leaving Ella by the well, gazing with defiance in her being.

"What he t'ink I is, anyhow?"

"Go back an' lahn, go back an' lahn, dat not de way fi cote."

The western sky of Barbadoes was ablaze. A mixture of fire and gold, it burned, and burned—into one vast sulphurous mass. It burned the houses, the trees, the windowpanes. The burnt glass did amazing color somersaults—turned brown and gold and lavender and red. It poured a burning liquid over the gap. It colored the water in the ponds a fierce dull yellowish gold. It flung on the corn and the peas and the star apples a lavender glow. It pitched its golden, flaming, iridescent shadow upon the lush of paw-paw and sunflower. It

withered the petals of rose or sweet pea or violet or morning glory. Its flame upon the earth was mighty. Sunset over the gap paralyzed. Sunset shot weird amber tints in the eyes of the black peons . . . sent strange poetic dreams through the crinkly heads of mule boys tiredly bowed over the reins of some starved-out buckra cart horse.

Sunset at Ella's—"Go in yo' pen, sah, go in. . . ." Hogs, fowls, pigeons, geese, bastard creations, straggled waywardly in.

Smoke. Smoke is easy to smell. Ella quickly smelt it. Then she began to look for it. . . . Smoke and the sunset. A smoky sunset. No. The setting sun kept her from seeing it. But slowly it grew dim, dark; slowly the gold burned into a deep rich bronze . . . slowly it burned and burned . . . black.

"Somebody grass burnin'," Ella sniffed and looked about. The dense night helped. The smoke persisted. "Ah, dere it are." Ella paused, a hen, sick with the yaws, clutched to her bosom.

"Gahd, a cane fire." Vaults of black smoke rose. A winding, spouting pyramid of it. Black, greasy, caneless.

"It must be de church steeple, dem ministers is so careless. . . ." Ella watched, lured by the curving, spouting ascent.

"Miss Heath!" From the gap a voice called. "Fiah, Miss Heath, fiah, Poyah shop on fiah!" One of the Dalrimple children . . . speeding down the gap, to the rest of the folks. . . .

"Lahd, 'a' massie!"

The hen suddenly took flight out of Ella's arm, spilling the molasses and corn she had been feeding it. Emptying the bucket containing the relishes of her evening meal, she ran to the well and jerked it down it. Swiftly the bucket was jerked

back up. Water splashed. It was a big bucket. With one grand sweep Ella swung it on her head. Ella was a mulatto, with plenty of soft black hair. She didn't need a cloth twisted and plaited to form a matting for her head. Her hair did that; it was thick enough. It could hold, balance a bucket.

The bucket sat on the crown of her head looking as if it had been created there. And Ella sailed on with it. She forgot to put out the fire under her food.

And down the gap she fled, the bucket of water on her head. Her strides were typical of the West Indian peasant woman—free, loose, firm. Zim zam, zim, zam. Her feet were made to traverse that stony gap. No stones defied her free, lithe approach. Left foot to right hand, right hand to left foot—and Ella swept down with amazing grace and ease. Her toes were broad; they encountered no obstacles. Her feet did not slip. The water did not splash. It was safe, firm, serene on top of her head.

Ella got in the broad road—easier. A sigh escaped her lips. The road was enlivened by one or two people coming up from town—

“Run, dahtah, the shop a bu'n.”

“Quick, dem a need it.”

It was dry; a little marl dust. Up the stony resilient incline she went, then swiftly down by the evergreen tree.

“Gahd, he is burnt out clean.” All around the evergreen tree there used to be shadows. The fire sent gleams of fire-light pelting through the dark. The shadows flew. You could have picked up a pin under the evergreen. . . .

Crowds of anxious hill dwellers gathered up the road. From Eagle Hall Corner a constable was coming with the

white cork hat, the creaking shoes, the regal swagger of the black constabulary. . . .

It was easy for Ella to strain through the tiny crowd of folk up the embankment.

Fire singed Ella. Smoke dazed her, choked and repelled her. . . . "Go back dere, go back. You—stand back!"

"Where is Missah Poyah, where is Missah Poyah?" Ella screamed. A straw valise, label spattered—deckers' luggage—an old shirt—one or two stray sacks of split peas—the money canister.

Faces; old Bruin, "Where is Missah Poyah?" Ella pursued madly, collaring the weed gourmand. "Where is Missah Poyah?"

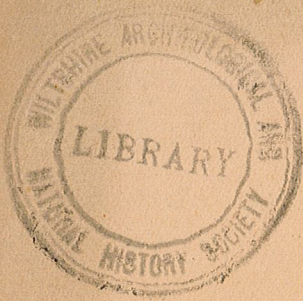
"Stand back!" the constable ordered, "stand back, and let 'em bring in de stretcher!"

Old Bruin gave way, talking loudly and excitedly. "He is in dey, yes, he is in dey . . . don't push me 'bout . . . I tell yo' he is in dey. Yo' must be drunk yo'self."

It was then that Ella realized how for nothing was her bucket of water.

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THREEPENCE.

0

"THE CATERING DEPARTMENT"

Next to the salaries and wages of the staff, the Catering Department absorbs the largest share of the Roundway Hospital budget. The Department is concerned mainly with the feeding arrangements for about 1350 patients and a fluctuating number of staff. It also 'lays on' the refreshments on special occasions in the Hospital: Committee meetings, Old Tyme and Modern staff dances, badminton, football, cricket, hockey and tennis games.

The Department spends £4,500 a month on provisions. Its weekly meat bill amounts to £150, exclusive of the cost of 4½ cwts of bacon. ("All meat was imported in the old days," according to Mr. R. W. Bishop, the butcher, who joined the Department in 1929, "Now we get English lamb, mutton, pork, beef, etc. There is more of a variety and the meat is 50% better than it was years ago".)

Mr. W. G. Keepence, the Catering Officer, came to Roundway in 1945 after 11½ years in what eventually became the Army Catering Service. He has a staff of 32 employees, in addition to a number of patients who help with the work of the Department.

Following considerable structural improvements in recent years, the walls of the main kitchen are now gleaming in white and the floor in red tiles. A Cold Room for the storage of meat, milk and fruit has been a valuable addition to the premises and the installation of electric fans for the expulsion of steam and vapours has done much to improve the conditions of service of the staff. Modern equipment has also been installed, including three Hobart mixers (equipped with adjustable parts for cutting vegetables and mincing meat) and a Berkerr machine for slicing cooked meats and bacon for the patients' breakfasts. The distribution of food to the wards has also been improved of late and insulated boxes are now used in place of open containers.

Back in October Mr. Keepence had told me:—"We hope to make another special effort regarding the patients' and staff cakes this coming Christmas. We do on an average about 300 cakes at Christmas, weighing about 6 lbs each". ("If you could buy one for a £1", one of Mr. Keepence's colleagues had added, "you would have a cheap cake"). I even had the privilege of seeing some of the ingredients for these cakes: 270 lbs of

sugar, 180 lbs of sultanas, 180 lbs of currants, 135 lbs of lard, 135 lbs of margarine, 32 lbs of dried egg powder (at a cost of 7/6 a lb), 14 lbs of marmalade and 22 lbs of mixed peel, nutmegs, spices and essences.

Early in November I had a glimpse of the finished product: rows upon rows of "dark rich fruit cakes" waiting to be iced. These are the cakes which, along with other seasonal fare, have done so much in the past to make the Hospital a 'home from home' for so many on Christmas Day.

The Bake House where they were made (and where bread is made not only for Roundway and Old Park House but for other hospitals in the Devizes area: St. James' Hospital, the Maternity Hospital, the Devizes and District Hospital) is one of the show pieces of the Catering Department.

It is equipped with a double-decker steam oven, each draw plate of which takes eighty 4-lb loaves of bread. Everything with yeast in it is tested in a "prover" before going into the oven. A Talbot Moulding Machine does away with the old-fashioned method of kneading dough. The Dumbrill Model "A" dough mixer is capable of dealing with a 280-lb sack of flour at a time. There is also a machine --- a dough and bun-divider --- which divides a pan of dough into 36 bun-sized portions of $\frac{1}{4}$ lb each.

To satisfy the needs of the Hospital four hundred and fifty 4-lb loaves of bread are baked every day. (One of Mr. Keepence's installations in the Bake House is a machine for slicing and buttering bread in one operation). For this purpose 20 sacks of flour are used, 90 loaves to a sack. In addition three thousand buns, forty eight 8-lb 'lardy' cakes and ninety five 4-lb patients' powder cakes are baked weekly.

Mr. W. L. Golding, the foreman, has been with the Hospital for 31 years and Mr. W. H. C. Avery, his 'first hand', 24 years. Jack Leech, a patient, has even a longer record of service. For forty years he has been helping with the work in the Bake House on a full-time basis.

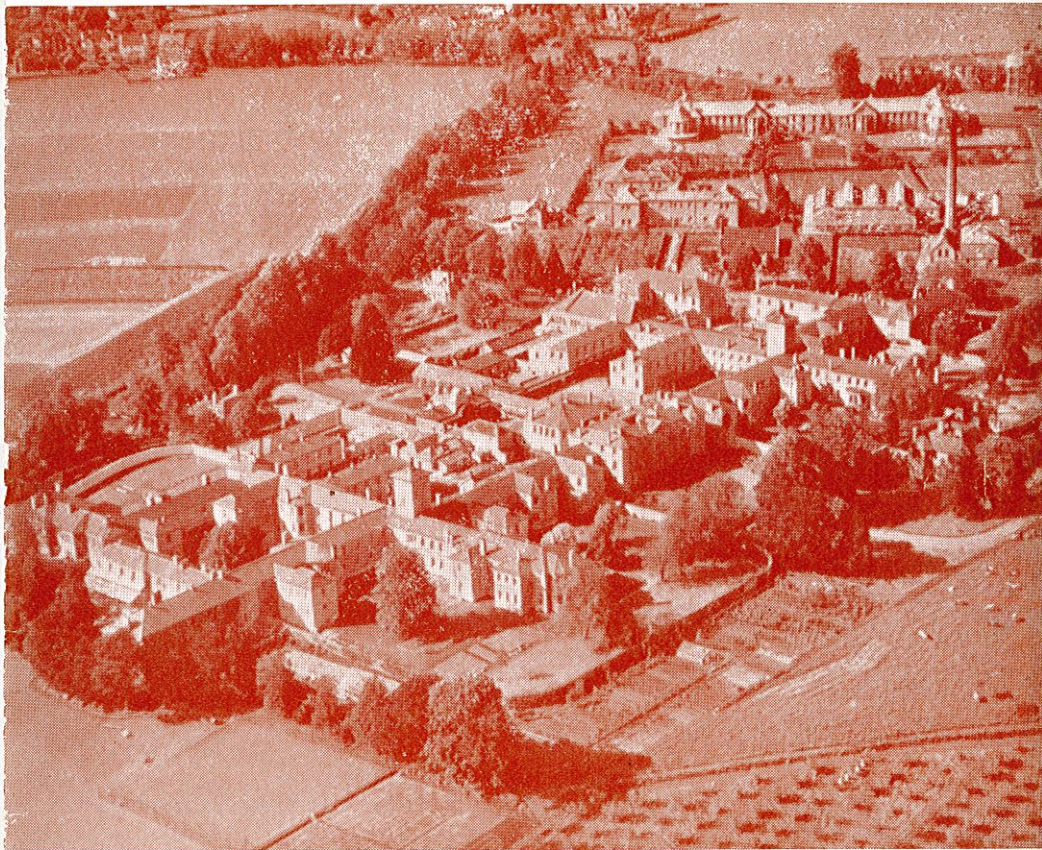
E. W.

TYPESET

Vol. 3

No. 6

ROUNDWAY REVIEW



News and Views from Roundway Hospital and Old Park House, Devizes, Wiltshire

MAY 1955

The Lieutenant's Dilemma

by ERIC WALROND

"Don't see many of the darkies about now, do us?"

"Ah, they da put 'em on a round the clock grind now, see. Unloading convoys at Avonmouth Docks."

"Is that what 'tis?"

"Aye."

Up on the landing I glanced at the clock. I was early. Five minutes to seven. A moment later the G.I. stamped into the hallway. He strode through the door as if the disposition to step warily and take nothing for granted had, less than a month after the "black Yank" invasion, given way in him to something sharp and vaguely hostile.

"Where do you want to sit?" I said.

The G.I., short and chubby, a jockey at a Long Island race track in the days before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, turned his head from side to side obviously not caring whether we joined the crowd down in the saloon bar, sought a refuge in the private bar or wandered out on the lawn where carp had been blown up during the Sunday evening raid on Bath when a huge, black, low-circling monster of a German bomber with a Spitfire on its tail had jettisoned one of its bombs in the canal flowing between the rear of the tavern and the wooded slopes of a hill.

"Oh, anywhere."

"Hang on a moment . . ."

I turned and went down to the bar. I got two foaming pints of beer, came back up the short flight of steps and rejoined the G.I. Across the hall from the landing the door of the private bar was half open. We walked in and sat down at a vacant table at the back of the small poky room. Two old women in black, a silver-haired old man and a middle-aged couple occupied three of the four tables standing at right angles from us.

"Cheers."

"Looking at you," said the G.I., raising his glass to his lips.

"Have a cigarette."

"No, you have one of mine."

"Okay."

The G.I. unbuttoned the flap on the left breast pocket of his tunic, produced a packet of cigarettes and shuffled out a couple on to the black gleaming tiles with which the table was inlaid.

"Haven't seen any of you boys lately," I said, lighting up. "I thought maybe you'd been confined to camp or something."

"We've been on strike."

"On what?" I cried.

"On strike. We boycotted the town."

Gently inclining himself towards me the G.I. lowered his voice. "You know how it is with the people in this town," he said, rolling his eyes *away* from me and over in the direction of the five other people in the room. "'Hello, darkey.' 'Good morning, darkey.' 'Oh, mummy, look at the darkie soldier!' 'Have you got any chewing gum, darkey?'" He paused, sat upright and stared ahead of him. "Well, we'd had enough of that 'darkey' stuff. We went to the company commander and told him we weren't going to have any more of it. We wanted to be sent back to the States."

The captain in command of the G.I.'s unit was a Regular Army officer from Georgia. One evening while firewatching I'd met him beside the waterless fountain in the Market Place. This, he'd told me with his eyes shining behind gold-rimmed spectacles in the black-out, was his first experience of Negro troops and he was thoroughly enjoying it. He'd even got so that he preferred Negro to white troops. Yes, sir, when it came to commanding troops give him Negroes every time.

"What did he say?"

"Oh," replied the G.I., "he hemmed and hawed and tried to soft soap us awhile till some of the boys sagged and now the whole thing is beginning to fizzle out."

"When did the strike begin?"

"About a week after we got here."

I reached for my glass . . .

"Another thing," said the G.I., "one of the boys in the outfit and I were standing on the river bridge one afternoon when a blonde passed by. A hayseed with a pitchfork on his shoulder strolling along on the other side of the bridge winked at us, jerked his head in our direction and sang out, 'All right, snow!'"

The G.I. paused, turned sideways and regarded me with a glitter in his black, low-slanted eyes. "What on earth did he mean? Was he trying to be funny? 'All right, snow!' We were so mad . . ."

I stubbed out my cigarette. "Drink up," I said. "The evening is young yet. You don't want to pay any attention to a remark like that. 'Snow' has nothing to do with colour. It's Wiltshire dialect. It means 'dost thee know!'"

"Dost thee what?"

"Know."

"Yes, yes, but what was he trying to say?"

"Something nice about the blonde. Something like 'righteous,' or . . ."

"Oh, I get it," cried the G.I., nodding his head.

I picked up the empty glasses.

"What will it be?"

"Same as before."

Outside the door the light was dim but not so dim that I could not see two of the officers from the G.I.'s unit standing in the hallway. I went down to the saloon bar and got two more pints of beer. When I came back up the steps the officers had not moved. They were still there.

Re-entering the room I saw that the G.I. was sitting with his legs stretched out under the table. He appeared to be taking things easily.

"Here's how," I said.

"How," murmured the G.I., taking a long drink of the beer.

Outside in the hall the two officers from the G.I.'s unit were slowly pacing back and forth. It was probably only a coincidence but every time they passed the door one of them

—a big, husky, bespectacled six-footer—would turn and look in our direction.

The G.I. suddenly drew up his legs. He sat perfectly still, almost rigid. "The lieutenant," he growled, "he keeps on walking up and down, up and down . . ."

"Was he the officer you were waiting to drive back to camp when I saw you in the jeep this morning outside the jeweller's shop?"

"No, that was another one."

"Oh."

The two officers passed by again.

"Any idea where our friend comes from?"

"Iowa," cried the G.I. "He played football at college, and owns some sort of a manufacturing business. He never had much to do with Negroes before he joined the outfit and he seems to be feeling his way along. He once told me that all the employees in his business have got to be educated, but since there were no educated Negroes in the small town in Iowa where he's located he has no Negroes on his pay-roll. I didn't know how to take that."

"Here he comes now."

Leaving his brother officer outside the lieutenant, pale as ivory, slowly entered the room and without a flickering glance at anyone else came straight towards us. He rested his hands on the edge of the table and leaned forward with his eyes fixed unsmilingly on the G.I.

"What are you drinking, fellah?"

"Do what, lieutenant?" asked the G.I.

"What are you going to have?"

"But I've got a drink, lieutenant!"

"Then have another. A short one. Do you good."

The G.I. cocked his head, elevated his brows and glanced down at the half-filled glass of beer in front of him. "Okay," he said with a succession of quick little shrugs, "make it a gin if you like."

The lieutenant slowly went out of the room, crossed the

hall and descended the steps to the saloon bar. Presently he came back up and again walking with slow, almost painful precision brought a sparkling glass of gin and set it down before the G.I.

"Thanks, lieutenant!" smiled the G.I.

"Don't mention it."

Silently gazing into space the lieutenant lingered for a moment beside our table, but when he turned to rejoin his companion I saw that he'd begun to perspire.

* * *

Tyre Burst

BELTING along, flat out—six miles to go and ten minutes to do it in. Push her up to 35 if possible and I might do it, then . . . Crack of Doom! and a hedge looming up where no self-respecting hedge should be.

"When in doubt, both feet out," a wrench at the wheel and a shuddering stop on the brink of the abyss—well, a five foot ditch, anyway.

(Masterly bit of handling, that! Might have been in the drink—or Eternity!

Phew! better smoke a cigarette and review the situation calmly.

I could change the wheel myself. I've seen it done . . . That is, if I can find the jack and if I can open the boot and if they put the spare back after the last puncture . . .

Still, all the best manuals say that if you stand looking helpless, every man in the neighbourhood will appear by magic and fight for the job. . . . Better give it a trial. . . .

Hmm! everything passing with averted eyes at top speed. Must be looking hopeless as well as helpless! (Note: change to Elizabeth Arden next payday.)

Well, no good languishing here getting frostbite. Better get on with the job.

The spare's here alright—that's something—and I suppose

this must be the jack, but what on earth to wind it up with? Ah well, shall have to use the pliers or something and hope for the best. Tedious.

Now for the nut-taker-off-er. That's easy. You just give a brisk turn. . . . You just give a turn. . . . You just give . . . Oh heck! it doesn't *want* to come off and it's no good adding a broken wrist to the frostbite (frostbite rapidly being counteracted by frustration-combustion). Better to add a little healthful locomotion—to the nearest telephone, if any.

Oh joyful sight! A cottage plus telephone, plus motor-bike! Here's someone who'll wield a pretty spanner and grovel lovingly in the dust. . . .

And he did—best sports jacket, and flannels and all. "It'll brush off," he said, and suited the action to the word inside ten minutes from the word "go", then nicely rounded off the job by waiting at the cottage door (complete with fiancé) to wave farewell at I slunk chastenedly by.

G. C. HELLIAR.

* * *

MAY QUIZ

1. What is is Howdah?
2. Where is Arthur's Seat?
3. Rebeccaites, Rechabites, Recusants: what were the aims of these groups of people?
4. How old are the oldest English hospitals?
5. The Seven Champions of Christendom: who were they?
6. What are the differences, if any, between (a) a *clock*, (b) a *timepiece*, and (c) a *watch*?
7. When was radium first discovered—in 1789, 1898, 1928 or 1936?

Answers on page 142.

* * *

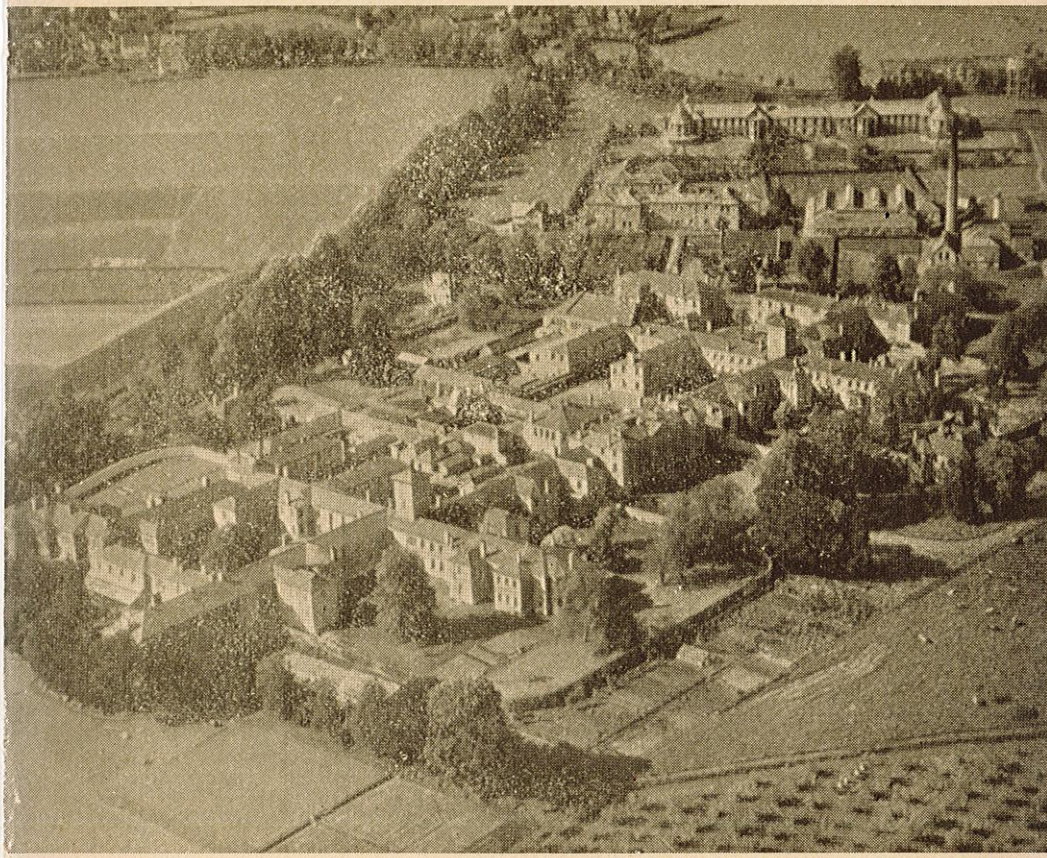
NOTHING strengthens a man's conscience so much as witnesses.

4

Vol. 3

No. 11

ROUNDWAY REVIEW



News and Views from Roundway Hospital and Old Park House, Devizes, Wiltshire

OCTOBER 1955

A Seat for Ned

By Eric Walrond

"This is it, driver!" cried Ned Bewley, his hand on the doorknob. The taxi swerved alongside the curb and Ned leaped out. He was long and slender in the legs and big in the shoulders and like a rah-rah boy at a Harvard-Yale football game in the 1920s he was attired in a raccoon coat. The yellow silk scarf fluttering gaily about his neck had polka dots on it. His apple-round cheeks shone like walnut in the light of the taxi-meter.

"What's the damage?"

"Three bob," said the driver in a hoarse Cockney voice.

"Keep the change," said Ned, giving him two half-crowns.

The oyster chop house, the chemist's shop and the all-night cafe were ablaze with light. The news vendor's kiosk was placarded with signs in Greek and all the Latin and Scandinavian tongues. Here and there in the darkness of a doorway lurked a female shape. Hanging in a shop window were strips of sun-dried meat, bottles of Chianti in their fibre coverings and bunches of black grapes with the bloom still on them. Not even the levity of someone tickling the ivories or the boop-a-doop doop of a crooner broke the silence.

He strode across the pavement and pushed open the door of a pool room. A classy piece of window dressing: large, high-ceiled and brightly lit up and with Ginger in a condition of dreamy lassitude, his legs crossed and his white folded arms grimy with machine oil, lounging against the wall.

"I'm looking for you," said Ned, breezing past him, "Come on!"

He flung open the raccoon coat and took out a roll of pound notes. He split the roll in two and put one back in his pocket. Then, with Ginger sleepily tailing him, he pushed open the door at the farther end of the room.

"Anybody downstairs?" asked Ned, stuffing the notes in Ginger's hand.

A half-smoked cigarette adhered to Ginger's grime-edged lower lip. Unsteady on his feet, swaying gently and with alcoholic fumes on his breath, Ginger took the notes and counted them. Then, with his hands trembling, he folded the notes length-wise and clasped them between his fingers.

“ What’s the matter ? ” cried Ned. “ Got the St. Vitus dance or something ? ”

Ginger slowly passed his arm up over his forehead. So far that evening he had had only one drink, enough with its rich taste of egg and brandy to make him tenacious and dogged—a glass of Russian stout at the pub on the corner.

“ Why don’t you lay off the stuff, fellah ? Don’t you know yet that it’s no good to you ? ” A music-hall artist who “ rated ” top-line billing, Ned had found that soft shoe dancing and tobacco and alcohol did not mix. They were as oil and water. He was in consequence both a non-smoker and a teetotaler and although just as a friendly accommodation he never went out without a well-stocked cigarette case and would even accompany a friend into a pub (without consuming anything more potent than lemonade) he could still on occasion be a little intolerant. “ Suppose I started burning myself up with liquor and yellowing my insides with nicotine,” he cried, scared by the thought of the light jellied rhythm no longer oozing out of his legs, “ where d’you think I would be ? ”

“ Still in Chicago, I expect.”

“ Running an elevator in the Loop at eighteen dollars a week ! ”

Ginger glanced down at the winding flight of stone steps. Then he turned and looked up at the stairs and round at the side door leading to a dark alley.

“ You mean a lift, don’t you, Ned ? ”

“ Let’s go,” growled Ned, beginning the descent.

He clattered down the steps and entered the room with a burgeoning sense of power at work within him. His cheeks were tinged with a reddish glow and his astrakhan cap was pushed far back on his head. And the expression in his light brown eyes was cool, diamond-hard, predatory. This is it, he told himself, slow and crisp and precise of step as he moved towards the poker room in a corner of the vast, ill-lit basement.

“ Got a seat for me, Senegal ? ”

The big ebony six-footer from the French Ivory Coast shook his head. “ I’m sorry, Ned, I’m full up.”

Ned proceeded to satisfy himself that the Senegalese with his antipathy to slummers was not trying to keep him from seeing how ‘ the other half ’, cast up like flotsam from the Seven Seas, lived or

rather contrived to get by. (The have-not powers had begun to turn the heat on what Benito Mussolini called the ' plutodemocracies ', but the ' plutodemocracies ' were themselves in the depths of the Great Depression.) He looked into the poky, smoke-laden room. Round the table in the centre sat seven men in their hats and overcoats. The long stringy neck, beneath a Velour hat, of someone sitting with his back to the door was familiar.

“ Come on, Sky, cash in.”

Sky turned and glanced upward:—“ Hi, Jelly Legs.”

“ Come on out before I turf you out.”

A wry smile gathered about Sky's thin lips. He yawned and stretched, flexing his arms. Then he proceeded to stack the poker chips in front of him in neat, easily counted piles. He was not sorry to be pulling out. He had had quite enough of the dizzy whirl. When at midnight Senegal had switched over to a big game he had not been doing too badly. He had decided to stay on after all the small fry had been weeded out, but exercising what Ned would have called a “ piker's caution ” he had begun to incur the taunt of being a stone waller. Now, while still fighting to hold his own, a big gust of wind had blown in. No, Sky had no fault to find with Ned's timing. None whatever.

“ See him go, will you, Ginger?” whispered Ned over his shoulder, occupying the seat Sky had vacated. “ How does everybody play?” He flicked the edge of the card which had been dealt face downward to him. Ginger, hovering behind him, watched the cards fall. He had one foot on the cross-bar under the side of Ned's chair, his elbow was resting on his knee and between the fingers of his hand Ned's money was on display.

“ I play call or pass,” said Coolie.

Ned gazed across the low-spreading circle of light that fell on the table's green baize cloth.

“ Why, I didn't see you, Coolie. Where have you been keeping yourself, fellah?”

“ Oh, I'm about.”

Coolie, a Negro of Hindu admixture, sat with his chair tipped back against the wall. “ ' Who you say you is? ' He wasn't hard of hearing. He was merely stunned. He was on the jetty cording up timber floated down the Essequibo River when the water-police

launch chugged up and the johnny jumped out. 'I'm the Mayor of Georgetown,' the johnny told him for the second time. Ocean Shark gave a snort. 'Well, if all-you is the mare of Georgetown, I'm a Buckston stallion'. And he went on tightening the rope round the logs."

Coolie flipped a chip in the pot.

"You could always tell," he droned on, "when he had a good fossicking season. He would go to the finest livery stable in town and hire a carriage with four black thoroughbreds and ride around in state. The top of the carriage would be thrown back whether the sun was shining or not and there he would sit with his bare muddy feet sticking up on the back of the driver's seat. Every time he lighted a cigar it was with a five dollar bill. He'd never pass a tray with fruits or preserves at some 'poor great' body's front gate without ordering the coachman to stop. He would get out and walk over to the tray and lift up the edge of the napkin. 'Anybody home?' he would shout over the paling. They would peep through the shutters of the jalousie windows but wouldn't stir or say a word. Then Ocean Shark would carefully tot up the price of the mangoes, the guava jellies and the custard apples or whatever 'twas they had on the tray and whatever it came to he'd put it down in silver and without touching a thing drive on again."

"What's the matter," cried Ned, rapping with his knuckles on the table, "Is everybody asleep or something? Come on men, let's play stud. I check. Two deuces check."

"Don't look at me," said the dapper little Cypriot sitting next to Coolie, "I'm hauling."

"See-sawing up and down," said Coolie, turning over his cards, "from a carriage with a liveried footman on the Parade Grounds to the water-logged bottom of a mine shaft and with everything kerosene oil, fat pork and corn meal on credit from the Portuguese. 'What all-you worrying about money for?' His sister was always on to him about his wild extravagance and it was only to please her that he finally gave up gold prospecting to work on a sugar estate. 'There's still plenty of gold in the bush'. Nobody would see him for months on end. Then, alone up there in the river bed with nothing but water fowl and coral snakes and marmosets to keep him company, Ocean Shark would develop quite a thirst. It would be nothing for him when he drifted back to town to walk into a Portuguese rum shop and buy up everything on the shelves,"

“ For consumption on the spot, I suppose? ” asked the Cypriot with a twinkle in his eyes.

“ You didn’t know Ocean Shark! ”

“ Whatever became of him? ”

“ Oh, he was killed in a cane field riot. Tried to break a strike.”

“ Two deuces check! ”

Ah Sung, almost as though he had a wife and ten children in Hong Kong to support, put a chip in the kitty. Ned at last had a ‘ caller’. He turned and as his eyes travelled from the frayed cuffs of Ah Sung’s overcoat on up to the dirty engine-room rag around his neck Ned’s mouth fell open. He had seen plenty of smallpox scars in his time, but none to beat the Chinese fireman’s. Ah Sung’s face looked as if a charge of buck-shot had been exploded in it.

“ How did you get in here? ”

Ned had never seen a Chinese seaman in Soho before. They usually congregated in the East End.

“ Got mo’ right in here than you,” said Ah Sung with a funny kind of laugh.

Ned moistened his lips. “ How much did you bet? ” he asked, gravely regarding the Chinaman.

“ Five shillings.”

“ Don’t you know that the worst thing you could possibly do is to bet at me when I’ve a pair showing? ”

“ What’s the matter,” spluttered the Chinaman, “ You talky, talky so——”

Ned plucked a pound note from between Ginger’s fingers. “ I raise you, I raise you a pound! ”

Ah Sung’s hat, a tall black one perched uncertainly on top of his head, danced gently from side to side. His long bony fingers moved like crabs’ legs as he gathered up the poker chips. “ I back raise you,” he said, piling more and more chips into the kitty—yellow ones, dark green ones, bluish pink ones. “ A pound more! ”

Attracted by the Chinaman’s agitation Senegal entered the room and stood with a scowl on his face behind Ned’s chair. Ned turned and, looking up at him, chuckled:—“ I believe the Chink is really trying to bluff me out of the pot. How does he play? ”

“ He is only playing what you see before him. Nothing more.”

Ned snatched the cluster of pound notes out of Ginger’s hand.
“ Set in! Set your yellow mangy hide in! Everything you’ve got! ”

Ah Sung complied without a moment’s hesitation, almost with alacrity. He pushed all the chips in front of him into the kitty. Then he ran his fingers round the inside of the box jutting out against his stomach like a drawer from under the table’s edge to make sure it was empty.

“ Show and take,” said Senegal.

“ Three deuces! ” cried Ned, eyeing the Oriental’s cards—ace, king, queen and ten of hearts. “ What you got? ”

Ah Sung turned up his hole card and slapped it down in triumph. Sure enough, it was the jack of hearts. “ Straight flush! ” cried Ah Sung, raking in the pot.

Ned relaxed. He had had fun——a little sobering but fun none the less. He pulled out a platinum cigarette case and opened it. Then he leaned forward and extending the case to Ah Sung, offered him a cigarette:—“ You smoke? ”

Ah Sung, richer by about twelve pounds and immensely pleased with himself, began to laugh—a laugh that was for a moment a little on the hysterical side, as if he was the repository of a secret clearly withheld from Ned and could even afford with impunity to crack a joke at Ned’s expense.

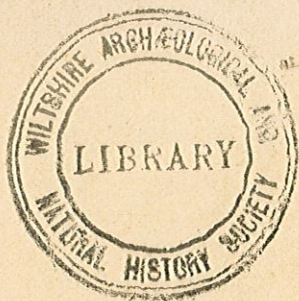
“ Opium, yes; tobacco, no.”

Ned snapped the case shut. Then he glared round at Ginger; but Ginger, supporting his chin on the palm of his hand, sleepy-eyed and imperturbable, was incapable of even a silent exchange of glances. He was too far gone.

* * *

ANSWERS TO FOOTBALL QUIZ

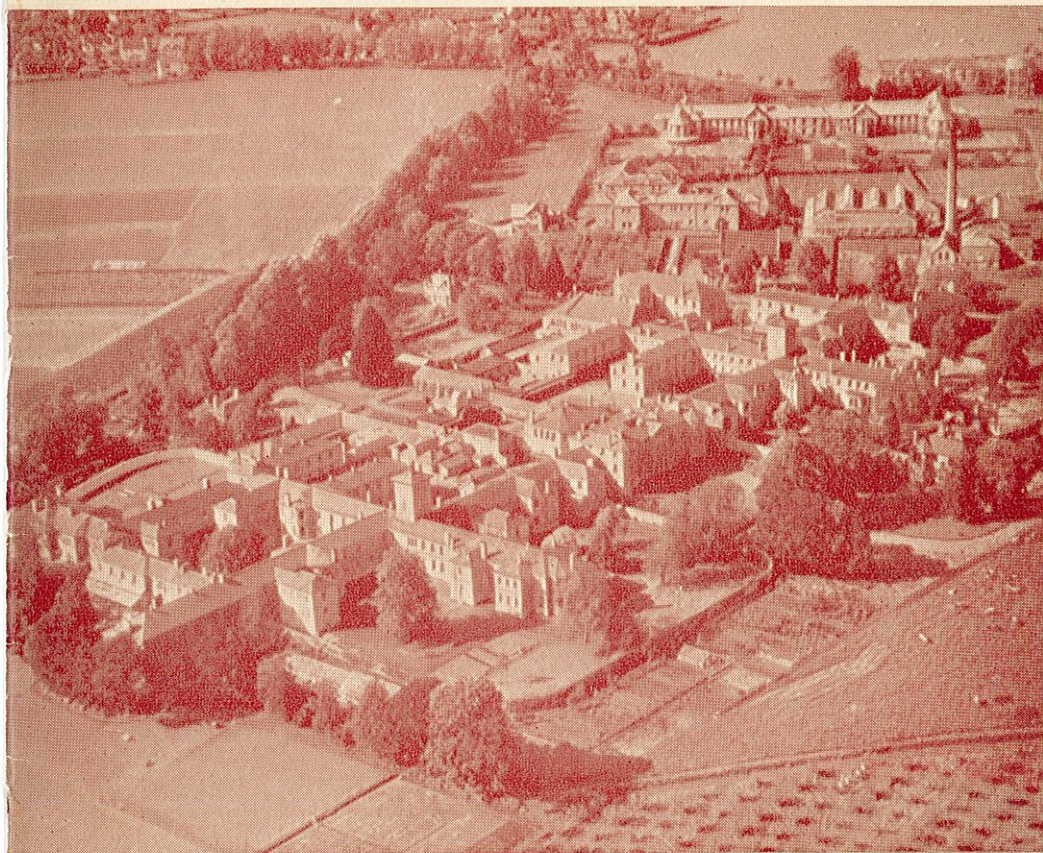
1. The striker should be cautioned or ordered off. If play has been stopped by the referee to deal with the offence it should be restarted by an indirect free kick to the opponents. If the ball was out of play when the offence occurred it should be restarted in the normal way.
2. He should award an indirect free kick for obstruction.
3. A player may join his team at any time during the game. Extra time is considered part of the original match.
4. No offence has been committed. The goalkeeper was not in possession of the ball.



Vol. 4

No. 2

ROUNDWAY REVIEW



News and Views from
Roundway Hospital and Old Park House, Devizes, Wiltshire

JANUARY, 1956

Roundway Review

News and Views from Roundway Hospital
and Old Park House, Devizes, Wiltshire

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VOL. 4 JANUARY 1956 NO. 2

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It is the aim of " Roundway Review " to encourage
free expression of ideas. Opinions put forward in
contributions do not necessarily represent the
official view of the Committee.



STRANGE INCIDENT

By ERIC WALROND.

THE town, presumably for reasons which might have been consistent with the pattern of race relations in America, was out of bounds to "black Yanks". It also lay somewhat off the beaten track, insofar as the generality of visitors from the "dependent territories" were concerned. Even as transients non-whites of whatever variety—colonial war workers, English mulatto evacuees or West Indians in the R.A.F.—were such a novelty I had a feeling that when they did put in an occasional appearance they possessed for the local folk all the interest of an exotic, war-time phenomenon.

I passed through the empty foyer. It was deep in the dusk of a late afternoon in November, 1943. I pushed open the big glass door and went in.

"Did you get our postcard, Mr. X?" asked one of the clerks. No, I hadn't. The card, mailed on the previous evening, did not reach me until the morning of the third day. "One of your books has arrived."

The clerk, a blonde with golden hair and an unvaryingly polite smile, emerged from behind the counter and walked down to the front of the shop. (It was she who had taken my order about a fortnight previously). When she got to the ladies' patterns on a stand just inside the door she proceeded along the wall behind them to the foyer. The girl out there was selling someone a newspaper. After a word with her the clerk returned and, taking no more notice of me, wandered off.

Standing there alone with the patterns, I didn't feel at all self-conscious. Not even a teeny weeny bit? I cannot be positive. The shop, in contrast with the gloom of the wintry dusk, was festooned with a beckoning array of lights. Nor was the lure of the lights abortive. There was a sprinkling of the local folk in the shop, but there was in addition a surprisingly large number of American military police conspicuous in their white helmets and white armbands. ("Snowdrops," I'd once heard a gum-chewing Negro G.I. from the camp outside the town where I was staying say, referring to the ones in his unit). There were about twelve of the M.Ps. and they were slowly moving about in groups of two or three . . . gazing up at the bookshelves . . . lingering beside a tray with Christmas and birthday greeting cards . . . gathering around the pyramids of new books on a row of tables in the centre of the room . . . coming in and going out through the big glass door behind me.

Presently the girl from the foyer appeared with a parcel for me. I handed her a ten-shilling note, pocketed the change and walked out.

Passing two M.Ps. in the foyer, I turned and strode up the street. Should I be able to accomplish all that I had planned? The doctor's surgery was open

from six to seven o'clock. (A return of an old bronchial complaint). I had a choice of two buses back: one at six o'clock and the other at six-twenty. But before I boarded the bus I wanted to stop somewhere for a cup of tea. Meanwhile I was hurrying along Church Walk to the County Reference Library! I made a rapid calculation. Even at the brisk pace at which I was going I could not get to the library under eight to ten minutes. Ahead of me and beyond the spiked railings of a high stone wall the clock on the church tower was barely visible in the dark. I peered up at it. 5.45 p.m. I decided to change my plans. Instead of going to the library (the things I wished to look up there in connexion with an historical work on which I was engaged could easily wait), I'd get a cup of tea and catch the six o'clock bus.

I started to retrace my steps. Nothing was farther from my thoughts than that I should forthwith find it necessary to step aside quickly in order to avoid a head-on collision with two ominously silent American M.Ps. I had not heard them coming up behind me. I continued on down Church Walk. When I got to the end of the passage I paused before crossing the road, took out a packet of cigarettes and lit one. The two M.Ps. emerging out of Church Walk, had stopped on the pavement of the High Street and while casting furtive glances in my direction, appeared to be trying to penetrate the blackness of a shop window.

The big store, lit up like a Christmas tree, absorbed a high proportion of the day's shoppers from the surrounding countryside. It was packed with a milling throng and trade at the buffet was brisk, incessant. The line of customers was two deep——.

"Do you live around these parts?"

A large, black-gleaming shape stood beside me.

"Yes," I answered.

"Whereabouts?"

I mentioned a town on the Wiltshire Avon to which I'd moved down from London on the evening of the day Hitler's ultimatum to Poland expired.

"Let's see your identity card."

The constable looked at the card and then handed it back to me.

"What's up, officer," I said, "What's all this about?"

"We've had a complaint," he said, "that you are wearing U.S. Army shoes. Are you?"

"I don't think so."

I glanced down at my shoes. They were an old pair of brown utilities I had purchased from a well-known firm of boot and shoe dealers in a West Country town.

"Who made the complaint?" I said.

“The U.S. military police.” “I see.”

“They said you sounded when you walked as though you were wearing U.S. Army shoes.”

For a moment I contemplated the shoes. What was it that I had done, or omitted to do to them that had made them sound on the wet, shining pavement in the darkness of an early November evening as though they did not belong to me? I looked up at the officer. It was plain from the expression on his face and in his eyes that he did not believe my story.

Half-jestingly, I said:—“Shall I take them off and show you?” The officer flushed. “Yes!” he hissed, leaning over towards me. He was daring me to take off the shoes then and there. Seeing that we were not getting anywhere like that, I turned my head aside in an agony of disgust. The whole thing was so ridiculous

“I think you had better come with me,” the officer then said.

I extended my foot. The M.P. bent down over it. I even pulled up the leg of my brown corduroy trousers.

“Are they U.S. Army shoes?” the constable asked.

“Yes, they are!” declared the M.P. without a moment’s hesitation. He straightened up and remained standing erect and motionless with his eyes set dead ahead of him. He never once looked in my direction. He was a boy of about 19 or 20, tall and lean with light hair that stood up stiffly on the top of his head. Until I had joined him and the constable outside the store I had never seen him before.

We stood in a corridor outside the door of a small room facing a larger one with a switch board and some unoccupied desks in it. The constable was telephoning. He was trying to get someone to replace him on his beat. When he got through telephoning he disappeared up the stairs. People kept passing and re-passing before us. Girl auxiliaries in dark blue uniforms eyed us. Finally a U.S. Army Officer with a tentative air about him, slightly built and bespectacled, appeared. The constable led us into the small room and I was motioned to a seat beside a desk.

“Let’s see one of your shoes.”

I took off the shoe and handed it to the lieutenant. He wasn’t long examining it. He turned it over, glanced at the marks inside . . . A 199 . . . MMI . . . 62M94 . . . Size 8 . . . Shape 6-77 . . . REF 1398 . . . and then casually handed it back to me. “No,” he said, “It’s not a U.S. Army shoe.”

When I got to the bus stop, just in time for the 6.20 p.m., an old woman crept up to me. “How did you get on?” she asked in a whisper.

“It was a case of mistaken identity,” I said.

“I thought so,” she said with a sigh. It was the same woman who, not for the first time, had served me the cup of tea at the buffet in the store.

