

MY BROTHER EVELYN & OTHER PROFILES

by
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BLOOMSBURY READER

Contents

PART ONE

Chapter 1 COUSIN EDMUND—*Sir Edmund Gosse*

2 AUTHORS AT UNDERHILL—*E. Temple Thurston, Desmond Coke, Ernest Rhys*

3 MY FIRST PUBLISHER—*Grant Richards*

4 FRANK SWINNERTON'S *Nocturne*

5 THE SOLDIER POETS—*Robert Nichols, Robert Graves, Siegfried Sassoon, Richard Aldington*

6 THE UNIVERSITY OF MAINZ—*Hugh Kingsmill, Gerard Hopkins, Milton Hayes, J. L. Holms*

7 RALPH STRAUS

8 W. L. GEORGE

9 THE BAD BOY IN THE GEORGIAN NURSERY—*Gilbert Cannan, W. W. Jacobs*

10 THE NAIL IN THE COFFIN—*Hugh Walpole*

11 TWO POET CRICKETERS—*Clifford Bax, J. C. Squire*

12 MY BROTHER EVELYN

PART TWO

Chapter 13 ARTHUR WAUGH'S LAST YEARS

14 MY SECOND WAR

15 THE LAWYER—*E. S. P. Haynes*

16 SON OF OSCAR WILDE—*Vyvyan Holland*

17 MICHAEL ARLEN IN RETIREMENT

18 W.S.M.: R.I.P.

19 THE MACDOWELL COLONY

20 SELF-PORTRAIT—NEARING SIXTY

21 ISLAND IN THE SUN

Foreword

In 1962 I published a partial autobiography, under the title *The Early Tears of Alec Waugh*. I was born in July 1898 and the book took me up to the summer of 1930. It told how I had become the kind of person that I am, restless, rootless, eager for change, avid of the sun, finding his plots between Capricorn and cancer. The year 1930 was a watershed for me. It marked the end of a major love affair and the success in America of a travel book *Hot Countries*—which was a Literary Guild selection—introduced me to the United States. From that point on, my professional base began to shift from London to New York.

One or two of the reviewers of *The Early Years* were kind enough to express the hope that I should write a sequel. Perhaps I shall, one day. But this is not that book, although it is reminiscent and told in the first person. Its 'I' is the observer and the commentator, the *raisonneur*. The book is an attempt to present a picture of the English literary world as I have known it, through a series of portraits of some of the men and women who comprised it. Where I have been autobiographical, it is only because certain of my experiences as a writer illustrate my general thesis.

It is in no sense comprehensive. A number of prominent writers have been omitted, even though I may have known them; but I think that each of the portraits will be found to illustrate and interpret one aspect or another of the writer's life. It takes all sorts to make a world, and the literary world with its excitement and its monotony, its sudden changes of fortune; its rich rewards, its bitter disappointments; its salutations in the market-place, its essential loneliness; its precariousness, its penury; its deep personal satisfaction from doing in one's own time, in one's own way, what one enjoys doing most—presents an infinite scope for drama. I hope that these pages will give the reader some concept of that scope.

Most of these portraits were sketched separately at different times; some of them have appeared in magazines, some were originally intended for inclusion in *The Early Years*, but in the end did not seem to fit satisfactorily into its pattern. For the convenience of the reader one or two of the chapters have been dated.

Part One

My first novel was published in July 1917, so that I have been part of the literary scene for half a century, but I have been an observer of it for a good deal longer, through my father, Arthur Waugh, who for forty years directed the fortunes of Chapman & Hall, Dickens's original publishers. My father has told his own story in *One Man's Road*; my brother Evelyn has told it in *A Little Learning*; I told it in my *Early Years*.

My paternal grandfather was a west country doctor, who hoped that his son would inherit his practice, but from early days it was obvious that by taste and temperament my father was unfitted for a life of medicine. He had a passion for books, for the library not the laboratory. At the age of twenty-three, having won the Newdigate Prize Poem at Oxford, he went up to London to earn his living with his pen.

He started his adventure without financial backing, but he had what was more valuable than capital, a blood relationship with Edmund Gosse. Gosse is far from forgotten, even now. Critical articles constantly refer to his writings and to his personality. His autobiography *Father and Son* is 'required reading'. For over forty years he was influential in the world of letters. Nobody could have been better fitted to give a young man like my father his first chances.

The actual degree of cousinship between the Waughs and Gosses is a little distant—my great-grandmother was the first cousin of Edmund's father—but the links between the families have long been affectionate and close and they go back many years. My father's mother spent part of her childhood in the same melancholy religious atmosphere which Edmund Gosse described in *Father and Son*. 'The Plymouth Brethren of this circle were,' my father wrote, 'a desperately sincere but terribly depressing company whose principal interest was a lively and immediate expectation of the second coming.' My grandmother recalled how Philip Henry Gosse would stand in the doorway, austere, solemn, confident, unwinding an interminable worsted scarf from about his neck and saying to her mother, 'Well, Cousin Anne, still looking daily for the coming of the dear Lord Jesus. Are not all the prophecies indeed fulfilled?' The ominous decision would then go forth that the Lord would accomplish the number of his elect on Saturday afternoon at about three o'clock. When Saturday afternoon came and waned to evening, without the expected event occurring, a new text was found next morning to justify the delay.

The young Edmund was brought at the age of seven, after his mother's death, for a visit to my grandmother's home. He seemed a precocious infant but she, several years his senior, was touched by the eagerness which was one of his greatest charms and used to tell how he knelt excitedly before a case of stuffed birds exclaiming with high pitched enthusiasm, 'Cousin, you have here a remarkable specimen of the Golden Oriole.'

Max Beerbohm, in his series of cartoons, 'The young self meets the old self', drew Gosse in his last decade, surrounded by important friends, being startled by the unannounced invasion of the august assembly by a small earnest infant waving a flag and shouting 'Are you saved?'

To the reader of today, Gosse is remembered in terms of those two selves: the young evangelist of whom he himself has drawn an unforgettable picture in *Father and Son*, and the doyen of letters whose legend has been enshrined in Osbert Sitwell's *Eminent Presences*, Max Beerbohm's *Christmas Garland* and the imaginary conversations in *Avowals* with George Moore.

Gosse was the first important writer whom I met, yet it is with hesitation that I write of him. As

schoolboy I asked my father if he had ever met Oscar Wilde. He shook his head. 'No, and I only saw him twice. Once in London, when he put his head round the door at a party and said, "I have come to tell you I can't come," secondly in Paris, after the scandal.'

My father was in a café, so he told me, with Sidney Pawling, Heinemann's partner, and Peter Chalmers Mitchell who directed the London Zoo and was subsequently knighted. Wilde came in, looked round him, then went out. Mitchell said, 'That's Wilde. I'll go and speak to him.' He was away ten minutes. On his return, he said, 'I don't see why you should cut a man because he's had a scandal. I've no use for fairweather friends who drink a man's wine when he's in favour and look the other way when he's in trouble.' He was so persistent and generally self-righteous that finally Pawling said, 'What are you making all this fuss about? Waugh doesn't know him. I've scarcely met him. Don't be such an ass, Mitchell, finish up your beer.'

That was the story as my father told it me. Many years later, in his autobiography *My Fill of Days* Mitchell described how he found himself in Paris with 'two quite nice people, one a stockbroker, the other a partner in a publishing house, both what may be called "men of the world"'. On Wilde's appearance, so Mitchell said, 'my friends got up to go. "You can stay if you like," they said. "He is probably here under a false name. The hotel should be warned."' Mitchell said that he and Wilde talked for two hours.

Mitchell had the warmest affection for my father. He wrote a few pages later, 'Arthur Waugh is another of my lifelong friends for whom the years have done nothing worse than to silver his hair. By nature a poet, he is the rare combination of a man of letters and a man of business and has been one of the steady and beneficent forces in the English literature of our time.' He had clearly forgotten that my father was in his company that evening.

My father's account of the incident is far likelier to be correct. He recounted it twenty years before Mitchell wrote his book, his memory was very sound, moreover he was not the kind of man to make a scene in public, and very far from being the man to turn against anyone who was in trouble. It is clear to me that Mitchell confused what might have happened or rather what he would like to have happened with what did happen.

I recall the anecdote here because it exemplifies the danger of accepting even what is known as first-hand evidence. When we look back at our childhood it is impossible to distinguish between what we actually remember and what has been remembered for us; in later life we are often in the same predicament. However clear may be our mental picture of this episode or that personality, we can never be certain that it has been wholly painted by what we have ourselves seen and heard and not in part by what we have heard repeated, and in the case of Edmund Gosse, I am very conscious that my knowledge of him is largely based on what I have heard my father say of him. Yet even so he is as distinct to me as many men whom I have been meeting regularly over years.

As a schoolboy I saw him intermittently, when he and his wife came to lunch on Sunday. Those visits are vivid memories. My father was an excellent host, but on the eve of any occasion he was invariably nervous lest 'everything should not go off all right', and he was particularly anxious when the Gosses came. I was myself very conscious that we were receiving a visitor from a larger world who knew personally men and women with whose faces I was familiar in the Press, Balfour and Asquith and Lord Salisbury, men whom I could not quite believe to be real people with headaches and indigestion like the rest of us.

I remember Gosse describing Queen Alexandra's lengthy visit to his library (would she never leave?) and how at length he had been driven to exclaim, 'I fear, Ma'am, that I have nothing else to show you that would be worthy of your attention.' I was very proud to have so distinguished a relative.

He had too an imposing presence with his head carried erect above a high collar, whose pointed ends were turned but not folded back. His drooping moustache was tidy; he had retained in full the hair to which Sargent in an early portrait gave a tint of lilac. Maugham described him as the most brilliant talker to whom he had ever listened. Gosse dominated but did not monopolize the talk. With memory's eye I can see him very clearly, sitting bolt upright in a hard-backed chair, clasping firmly against his waistcoat the spine of our grey-blue Persian cat while he stroked its underbelly with both hands. He professed great love of cats, but I was never convinced that our particular cat appreciated his attentions. When I attempted similar endearments, I was scratched. But perhaps his long fingers possessed a mesmeric quality that mine lacked.

In the 'twenties as a member of his own club—the Savile—I saw him oftener. He was then in full enjoyment of a mellow St Martin's summer. At the age of sixty-six he had had to retire from the Librarianship of the House of Lords. He was irritated at the time, but his release from official duties was in fact a benefit. He had more time for writing and for social activities. His links with European writers had been always close and during the war he acted as a literary ambassador between France and England, taking the chair for Frenchmen visiting London and himself addressing French audiences in Paris.

After the war honours came thick upon him. On his seventieth birthday he was presented with the bust of which a reproduction stands in the London Library. He was knighted, and as chief literary critic to the *Sunday Times* he could write within two columns' length exactly as he liked about any book he chose. Some of his best writing appeared there.

I have read recently one or two denigrating references to his qualities and capacities as a critic, and it cannot be denied that he was no more infallible in his judgement of contemporary writing than his predecessors were and his successors have proved to be. He was susceptible to personal influence. He liked to be courted, to be approached with deference. My father once asked him if he was interested in a certain young poet. 'I have not been invited to take an interest in him,' was the reply.

But the qualities that make a man a good judge of contemporary writing make him as often as not a pedestrian writer. The best poets and novelists are usually erratic judges of each other's work. Wilde's definition of criticism as 'the adventure of a soul among masterpieces' asks of the critic flashes of illuminating interpretation, and such flashes Gosse provided in full measure. He was fervent in his love of letters; widely read, he was human in his approach and he saw life itself on a broad scale. Much had he seen of men, climes, peoples, governments. He had wit and a large vocabulary. The English language, in his hands, was a highly flexible and polished instrument. Books such as *Gossip in a Library* are very well worth re-reading. I doubt if anyone has written more readably about books and writers.

During the 1920s his many qualities had full scope. The *Sunday Times* gave him a forum. He had outlived his enemies. The young were gathered round him. He had glamour for them as the friend of Stevenson and Swinburne, of Tennyson and Hardy. They brought their books to him for his approval. Every Saturday he lunched at the same table at the Savile with old cronies, like Ray Lancaster. Against the background of his library and his pictures, in his charming house in Hanover Terrace looking over Regent's Park, he held court like royalty.

That is the Gosse whom Osbert Sitwell knew, and that is the Gosse who has found a niche in literary history. But it is a different Gosse that I remember. Through following the same profession as one's father, one acquires a panoramic outlook; one sees contemporary events and the rise and fall of reputations in the lengthened perspective of an added generation. When I think of Gosse I see him in terms of an episode largely forgotten now, which did in fact colour his later life and explains the eccentricities that marked his behaviour in his middle period. It took place in 1886 and it is worth

recalling in a book which is primarily concerned with the rise and fall of literary reputations.

In the careers of most ambitious men there is a point when the formula of Greek tragedy fulfilled and a man, through arrogance, through 'hubris', incurs the irritation of the gods. Gosse was then, in his middle forties and his career of unbroken success was at its peak. As a poet, as an essayist as a lecturer, he was the object of an adulation that passed in places the boundaries of idolatry. No one sets much store by his poetry nowadays, but each new volume was highly praised. He had a genius for friendship, and he was on close and affectionate terms with the best writers of his day.

Applicants for the post of Clark lecturer at Cambridge were required to support their claims with letters of recommendation from distinguished figures. There was competition to obtain as many signatures as possible. Forty or fifty was considered a modest quota. Gosse presented himself with three, Tennyson, Browning, and Matthew Arnold. He obtained the post.*

That post was the origin of his reverse. He was a great success at Cambridge. Under the aegis of his appointment, he was invited to lecture in America. It is very easy for an English visitor to have his head turned by American hospitality and American readiness to applaud success and welcome 'the new thing',* and Gosse lost momentarily his sense of focus, accepting the public's evaluation of his powers. 'He was credited,' Charteris wrote, 'with the authority of a learned scholar, a position which his knowledge, various and discriminating though it was, never really justified and at this time was far from supporting. It was assumed that anyone who wrote so well and ranged so widely must be erudite in the most specialized sense of the term. Scholarship was in fact being thrust upon him; he was driven to living beyond his intellectual capital.'

'To adjust the minute events of literary history is tedious and troublesome,' Dr Johnson wrote. 'It requires indeed no great force of understanding but often depends upon enquiries which there is no opportunity of making

Gosse was too creative, too original a writer to possess the meticulous painstaking caution of the scholar. He needed an editor who would closely check his manuscript for inaccuracies. But he was now so self-confident that he appears to have trusted his own memory in the very kind of book where accuracy is essential. Under the imprint of the Cambridge University Press, signing himself Clark Lecturer, he published *From Shakespeare to Pope: an enquiry into the causes and phenomena of the rise of Classical Poetry in England*. A book with such a title requires to be above suspicion, but Gosse in his self-assurance allowed slip after slip to go uncorrected.

It was the opportunity for which the many who envied him had been waiting and, in October 1888 there appeared in the *Quarterly Review* one of the most virulent and sustained attacks that has been delivered against a man of letters. Forty pages long, entitled 'English Literature in the Universities' it purported to be a review of *From Shakespeare to Pope* and its opening paragraph contains the sentence: 'That such a book as this should have been permitted to go forth into the world with the Imprimatur of the University of Cambridge affords matter for very grave reflection. But it is a confirmation of what we have long suspected.'

Churton Collins, the author of the article, was everything that Gosse was not. He was a great and meticulous scholar, but he was little else. When he died in 1908, Arnold Bennett wrote that 'he was quite bereft of original taste. The root of the matter was not in him. The frowning structure of his vast knowledge overawed many people but it never overawed an artist unless the artist was excessively young and naïve... his essays were arid and tedious.'

Collins had been an unsuccessful applicant for the Merton Professorship of English at Oxford and his article was manifestly inspired by malice and ill will. At its close he wrote, 'And now we bring to a conclusion one of the most disagreeable tasks that it has ever been our lot to undertake', but it is clear that he had relished every spiteful phrase. There were many of them. 'Will our readers credit...

‘This is a University lecturer...’ ‘But this is nothing to what follows...’ ‘Our readers will probably believe us to be jesting when we inform them...’ ‘Not the least mischievous characteristic of the work is the skill with which its worthlessness is disguised...’ He compares Gosse with Mr Pecksniff. ‘About the propriety of his epithets, so long as they sound well, he never troubles himself.’

In tone the article is pompous and self-righteous, but there Churton Collins was in tune with the temper of his time, and when he refers to his victim’s ‘habitual inaccuracy with respect to dates’, he was well armed for the attack. ‘Of all offences of which a writer can be guilty,’ Collins was able to write, ‘the most detestable is that of simulating familiarity with works which he knows only second-hand or of which he knows nothing more than the title. That a lecturer on English Literature should not know whether the *Arcadia* of Sidney and the *Oceana* of Harrington are in prose or verse or not knowing, should not have taken the trouble to ascertain, is discreditable enough, but that he should under the impression that they are poems, have had the effrontery to sit in judgement on them might well in Macaulay’s favourite phrase, make us ashamed of our species.’

‘Unless the Universities give care to the teaching of English,’ the article concluded, ‘so long will our presses continue to pour forth such books as the books on which we have been animadverting and so long will our leading literary journals pronounce them “volumes not to be glanced over and thrown aside but to be read twice and consulted often”.’

The article caused a great sensation. Letters were written to the Press. No man knows who his friends are till he is in trouble. Gosse had always recognized the hostility of the Henley group, by many whom he had thought his friends had been secretly envious of his success and now joined the chorus of contumely. Gosse in his dismay and indignation may have exaggerated the extent of the calamity, as when a few weeks later he was bewailing to Thomas Hardy that, ‘my little influence for good is almost gone’, but there is small doubt that his prestige at that moment stood perilously low. His income dropped. Editors were no longer so anxious to employ his pen. At Oxford it became stock saying for anyone who had made ‘a howler’ that he had made ‘a Gosse of himself’. And a ludicrous sidelight on the situation is provided by his cook’s giving notice because she did not like seeing ‘the master’s name so often in the papers’.

Gosse never got over the attack. It affected his entire conduct. He became hypersensitive to criticism. Warm-hearted and affectionate by nature he was on his guard against betrayal, considering it disloyal of a friend to praise in print someone whom he held to be an enemy. With most of his friends, during the 1890s there were periods of estrangement when something written or repeated had been misunderstood.

My father shared an experience that was nearly universal. He had written an article that rather pleased him, and in the course of casual talk mentioned it to Gosse, saying he would like him to look at it. Two days later he received a biting letter from Gosse saying that while he recognized that a working journalist had to accept whatever commissions he was offered, he did not see why his attention should be called ‘to such lucubrations’. My father had presumably written a kindly word about someone who, unknown to him, had forfeited Gosse’s regard. My father hit back, and there was a two years’ schism.

Gosse never overcame the sensitiveness to criticism which Collins’s article created, yet he gauged correctly not only the limited extent of the damage that it could do him but the nature of his own fallibility; and later he found a parallel for his own position in Ralph Brook’s attack on Camden in *Britannia*. In an essay in *Gossip in a Library* Gosse referred to the ‘very hasty pamphlet which created a fine storm in an antiquarian teapot’. This attack was the work of a man who would otherwise be forgotten, who was jealous when Camden was promoted over his head to be Clarenceux King-of-Arms. Camden, like Gosse, was guilty of a number of small inaccuracies, and how accurately Gosse

diagnosed his own weakness when he wrote that 'Camden had sailed too long in fair weather' and 'needed a squall to recall him to the duties of the helm'. How completely has Gosse's prophecy been fulfilled. Is Churton Collins remembered today for anything except his attack on Gosse?

The incident has its significance in literary history. It shows that attacks are soon forgotten provided the object of them continues to produce works of quality. There is only one answer to attacks: to write a better book next time.

E. TEMPLE THURSTON, DESMOND COKE, ERNEST RHYS

My brother Evelyn and myself—Evelyn was born in October 1903—were brought up in an atmosphere not only of books but of professional writing. We lived in Hampstead on the edge of the Heath in a house called Underhill and our father invariably returned at the end of the day with a new book under his arm—one that he had for review or one that Chapman & Hall had published. His conversation with my mother turned on office problems, on difficulties with a bookseller or an agent or an author's reluctance to 'tone down' a manuscript.

My father was convivial and hospitable. But he was asthmatic and in consequence reluctant to go out at night in winter. In later years his deafness made him avoid large gatherings, but he loved having his friends round him. Most Sundays there would be visitors. Occasionally one or two would stay on to supper. Most of these friends would in my father's house avail themselves of their chance of learning about this and the other authoress and author. Writers provide material for gossip. The reader forms a mental picture of his favourite author. He wants to know what So-and-so is 'really like'. He is also inquisitive about an author's earnings. 'How much did So-and-so make out of that?'

I was continually listening to literary 'shop'. I was brought up to think of literature as a profession almost as a trade. I used to hear how this writer's stock was going up, while that other's was going down. I was clothed and fed, housed and educated by my father's pen. There did not seem to me to be anything peculiar about a man being a writer. On the contrary, it seemed to me to be a most natural occupation.

As a schoolboy I was read poetry by my father almost every evening; I have seldom heard poetry read as well, and never better; I heard much talk of publishing and the auction-room of letters, but I am surprised, in retrospect, that so few authors should have come out to Under-hill. During the ten years before the war, Chapman & Hall published a number of prominent writers, H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett—*The Old Wives' Tale* was on their list—Somerset Maugham, Sheila Kaye-Smith, but none of them ever sat in his oak-panelled book-room with its warm red lamps. This was in part because of his resolve to forget his office in his home at night, and partly in order to keep business and friendship separate. He had a great distaste for calculated hospitality. 'I know,' he would say, 'when Johnson's asking me to lunch. He wants me to send a MS. to the Ipswich Press.' Johnson was a shareholder in Chapman & Hall. The Ipswich Press, which he managed, was every bit as good and no more expensive than any other firm. There was no reason why Johnson should not have had his share of the firm's printing and several very good reasons why he should, but my father hated the idea of a lunch party having a commercial aspect; business, he felt, should be transacted in an office. He did not until his very last years have an entertainment expense account. To him the home was sacrosanct. The only two of his authors whom I remember meeting as a schoolboy were E. Temple Thurston and Desmond Coke.

Both of these had special and different reasons for making an appeal to me. Temple Thurston because he was the favourite author of a contemporary at Sherborne, two years senior to myself, and whose eyes I managed to acquire prestige as the son of his favourite's publisher, and I was at pains to return from the holidays each term with gossip-column information about Thurston's plans and movements.

This boy, whose name is Noël Whiting, and who has become one of my closer friends, though I see, alas, little of him nowadays—we rarely find ourselves at the same time in the same place—was one of the most remarkable of my contemporaries; and in retrospect I am surprised that I did not

include him among the characters in my school novel; I suppose the reason is that I did not recognize then that he was remarkable. In my eyes he was no more than an agreeable and elegant eccentric. It was not till later that I came to recognize him as an insistent individualist, who got his way by passive resistance, a rebel who did not rebel, a nonconformist who did not challenge the conformity of others.

Graceful and good looking, with a gracious voice, he had the air of an Etonian; but his family had entered him for Winchester, where he failed to pass the College entrance examination, a thing that was not difficult to do. The educational standard at Winchester has always been exceptionally high and he had come to Sherborne because our headmaster Nowell Charles Smith was a Wykehamist. He was what was described in those days as well connected. His background was a wealthy one, but he never displayed his ampler means. He never 'dropped' important names.

He had a contented nature, because he had interior resources. He could be perfectly happy provided that no one interfered with him. He was resolved to enjoy his five years at Sherborne, in his own way. He was physically strong and became one of the best swimmers in the school, but he did not want to play cricket or Rugby football. Games were compulsory at Sherborne until a boy had reached the top form, the sixth, but Noël always arranged to do something in the afternoon for which it was permissible to get 'leave off games'—a music or a drawing lesson, an archaeological expedition or a game of fives. In the end, house captains ceased to post him on cricket and football sides, and he was able to spend a couple of afternoons every week reading in the library.

The O.T.C. (Officers' Training Corps) was technically voluntary, but 95 per cent of the school joined. Noël availed himself of his technical liberty and did not join it; not on pacifist, non-combatant grounds—when the war broke out, he applied immediately for a commission—but because he wanted to use his spare time in other ways. He was not a classical scholar; he never reached the sixth, but he spoke excellent French. The wife of the drawing master was a Frenchwoman, and he used to give weekly tea parties in his study where only French was spoken.

He interfered with no one and no one interfered with him. He wore his hair a little longer than was officially approved, but no one told him he must get it cut. You would have expected that such a boy would have been ragged and bullied in his early days, that there would have been an equivalent for the 'Shelley Hunts' at Eton; that tough Philistines would have insisted that his duty to the house forced him to the football field: 'get into the scrum and shove, you little scum'; but they never did. From the start his independence was respected. Many years later, as a result possibly of his experiences in India and Burma during the war, he became a Buddhist. Without knowing it, he had been a Buddhist from the start, adopting a policy of non-aggression.

He had at that time four main objects of enthusiasm—music, painting, Napoleon—the walls of his study were covered with portraits of the Emperor—and the novels of E. Temple Thurston. I still cannot understand why those particular novels should have held such a strong appeal for him. I can think of so many other novelists with whom he might have been expected to find himself in tune.

Temple Thurston died suddenly, when he was apparently in good health, early in 1933. I do not suppose that any of his books are still in print, but for twenty-five years he was a prominent and successful author. He was one of my father's discoveries. His first novel *The Apple of Eden* recounted a priest's fall from grace; 'religion and sex is an infallible mixture', my father said. Thurston wrote two kinds of novel: the one powerful and realistic like *The Apple of Eden*, the other sentimental and romantic like *The City of Beautiful Nonsense*—which was a considerable best-seller. He was extremely anxious to succeed on the stage and wrote a number of plays that had little success, but at last, soon after the war, he had a genuine 'run' for *The Wandering Jew*—a lavish full-scale production at His Majesty's Theatre. He wrote scenarios for the films. He made a reasonable amount of money and he was able to finance his share of matrimonial confusion without excessive strain. He could have

looked forward to at least another fifteen years of steady profitable production. Yet he was very far from being a happy man.

It is possible that he was not a very pleasant one, though, personally, I found him companionable, agreeable and encouraging. He was a great egotist, utterly self-centred; never satisfied that his work was receiving the attention that it deserved from publishers and critics. He was not easy to do business with. He published for ten years with Chapman & Hall and dedicated one of his novels to my father, but he was never satisfied with his books' sales. 'Hodders have offered me an advance of £700,' he would say. 'You say that my last novel only earned £500. Perhaps Hodders with their bigger organization could push up my sales to seven hundred.' When eventually he left Chapman & Hall, he changed his publisher several times.

He made considerable demands upon his publisher. He would bring my father the first four chapters of his new novel, then eight weeks later he would arrive with the next four. My father and Underhill that night would press the back of his hand against his forehead. 'How can I be expected to remember the precise impression that was made on me by four chapters of a novel two months ago? Think of all I've read in between.' I have taken that lesson to heart and been very careful not to submit my work in short instalments. One of Thurston's agents said to me: 'I know that authors ask me out to lunch because they want to talk about their work, but I wish Thurston would wait till I have finished my first cocktail before he starts telling me the plot of his new novel.'

He was a lone wolf. I do not think that he had many men friends, though he was the kind of man whom you would have expected to have them. He was athletic and played lawn tennis well enough to compete in the opening rounds at Wimbledon. He played cricket at Lord's for the Authors against the Publishers and took three wickets. His last victim jumped out to drive him, missed the ball and was bowled. By a mistake of the scorer, the batsman appeared next morning in *The Times* as stumped. This distressed Thurston. He thought that it would look as though the batsman had held his bowling in such contempt that he had run out of his ground to swipe it.

Tall, dark, lean, photogenic, he looked both as the author of *The Apple of Eden* and *The City of Beautiful Nonsense* could have been expected to look; tough with a tender side. But he had a charm upon his shoulder.

He had not been to a university, nor to one of the recognized public schools. *Who's Who* contains no autobiographical details and that mattered quite a bit in England before World War I. His first wife came from a superior social caste. She wrote a novel, *John Chilcote M.P.*, which was a 'best-seller' and of which he was so jealous that he persuaded my father to issue one of his novels in miniature editions of 250 copies so that he could claim to have sold more editions than she had. Many years later when I was myself published by Chapman & Hall, I followed his example, though for different reasons, and arranged to have one of my novels issued in small editions so that it could be advertised as 'seventh large printing exhausted before publication'. In 1957 when my brother brought a libel suit against Nancy Spain and I was one of the witnesses, the question arose of how many copies there were in an edition; the judge was highly amused when I told him of this device. 'Mr Waugh, Mr Waugh,' he admonished me, 'you are giving the whole show away.'

Thurston evaded military service on the curious medical grounds that he suffered from agoraphobia—the fear of open spaces. His nerves, he claimed, would disintegrate on Salisbury Plain or on any battlefield; although, as my father remarked, he could with impunity take a cross-channel steamer to Ireland and France. Perhaps it was a pity that he did not have the opportunity that war provides of mixing in a community. It might have taken him out of himself. Instead he became more ingrown.

Though a member of the Garrick he never seemed to belong anywhere. In a sense that is an advantage for a writer. It is unhealthy for him, in the long run, to belong to a coterie. A cliquish

becomes a *claque*. And when fashions change, a writer goes out of favour with his fellow members. But Thurston was never quite strong enough, quite good enough to stand alone. He was never given more than respectful attention in the weekly reviews. He was never included in general articles on 'trends in the modern novel', although even though he was not a major novelist, he had many of the minor qualities of a major novelist. He could construct a story; he had a sense of character and caricature. He was ambitious and hard working. His trilogy *The Achievement of Richard Furlong*, which was issued in a single volume at no great profit to Chapman & Hall, only just did not 'come off'. He wrote with feeling. He was a better writer than many of those who were reviewed at length in highbrow columns. His lack of critical acclaim did not, probably, cost him a penny in royalties, although never having been fashionable, he was spared the chilling experience of finding himself out of fashion. But he himself was perpetually plagued by this lack of recognition. He was so desperately anxious to write 'a book that mattered'.

It is a common, a familiar plight. An agent was saying to me the other day of a mutual friend 'Poor Jackson tortures himself because he can't produce a masterpiece. If only he would be content with the kind of work he does so well and that is in fact very profitable.' Thurston's predicament was precisely that. But the solution is not as easy as the agent thought. It was only because Thurston was so desperately anxious to write supremely well, that he was able to write as effectively as he did.

Though I heard more talk about Thurston than any other of Chapman & Hall's authors—how well I remember my father's dismay when Thurston wanted to call one of his novels 'The Love Story of an Ugly Man'; it was an impossible title for Thurston in 1912, but possibly it would be an enticing one in our day of the anti-hero—I did not read one of his novels until I had left school. Much of Desmond Coke's work, on the other hand, I knew by heart. He wrote school stories that could be appreciated both by a schoolboy and an adult; some of his books indeed were published simultaneously in two separate editions, one after being serialized in *The Captain*, the chief schoolboys' magazine, in a popular boys' series with lurid coloured illustrations, the other by Chapman & Hall in sober hard covers for the parents.

The Bending of a Twig was published in 1906. It was in part a satire on the conventional school story. A poet suddenly decides to send his son, who has never been away from home, to Shrewsbury, the public school to which Coke went himself. The father in order to equip his son for this new experience provides him with a collection of school stories, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, *Eric, or Little by Little*, *Stalky & Co.*, *The Hill*, and one or two of the cheaper imitations of those classics. The poet's son derives an entirely false impression of school life; and the opening chapters describing his mistakes and his ridiculous search for the school bully are extremely funny.

The first part is satire; the last two-thirds describe with sympathetic realism how the poet's son gradually becomes the conventional school prefect, how the twig is bent in fact. At no point was the system itself criticized; it was a popular conception that was satirized. Yet in retrospect it can be seen that Coke's book was the first step in that debunking of the public school mystique, in which ten years later I was to play my part.

In 1922, in an anonymous article for *The Times* on the public school in fiction I wrote that *The Bending of a Twig* had struck the first note of rebellion. Coke thanked me for the article 'in which I recognise your Roman hand. I am having my cards changed from "the last of the Victorians" to "the first of the Georgians".' But in fact, Coke was anything but a rebel. To him the standards of public school life were sacrosanct. Indeed he was one of those Englishmen who remain all their lives exactly what they are at nineteen, the school prefect believing that the issues that lie outside his cloistered world will be basically the same, on a larger scale. That is no doubt why I at fifteen felt so much in tune with him. He confirmed the standards to which I was being trained; he did not raise

uncomfortable doubts. He was tall, handsome, neat; unobtrusively well dressed; the man who never let down the side. The mildly disapproving letter that he wrote to my father when *The Loom of Youth* was published, is now in the Sherborne school library.

Coke wrote in addition a few unspecialized novels about adult life. One of them occupies a footnote in literary history. In 1910 he published a novel called *Beauty from Ashes*. It made little stir and Somerset Maugham had never heard of it when he planned to call his long autobiographical novel 'Beauty from Ashes'. When he found that the title had already been used, he switched to *Of Human Bondage*. He was possibly irritated at the time; there was a view then that a positive was preferable to a negative title. When Geoffrey Moss's *Defeat* appeared, W. L. George said, 'What a pity he couldn't have called it "Victory".' In terms of his sequence of comedy successes on the stage, Maugham may have thought *Of Human Bondage* too drab, too depressing a title for a popular success; but how well it fitted that majestic, sombre epic. How finicky in comparison is 'Beauty from Ashes'. Perhaps under that title, the novel would not have been the abiding success it has.

Inevitably Coke in 1914 was one of the first to hurry into khaki, and within a few months was with the B.E.F. in France. He was mentioned in dispatches, but trench fever combined with a heart-attack invalidated him from the service, and in the lieu of war work, he enrolled on the teaching staff of Clayesmore School. He must at times have looked forward with some anxiety to peace conditions. He had only moderate private means, his books had never earned large sums, and he could scarcely anticipate, in that direction, a sudden change of fortune; but fate 'turned its wheel'. An uncle who lived in Australia whom he had scarcely seen, who was childless and had taken great pride in having a nephew who wrote books, made him his sole heir. Coke, a rich man now, returned to the staff at Clayesmore and became one of the school's chief benefactors. He showed, unobtrusively, great generosity to many friends. He indulged his hobby as a collector of eighteenth-century silhouettes and Rowlandson drawings. He wrote a few books, which received kindly reviews, without having to worry whether they sold more than moderately well. His last years (he died in 1931) were apart from his bad health among his happiest.

I have used the general outline of Coke's career in lectures that I have given on the problems of the modern novelist, altering the facts to suit my purpose. This is the story as I have told it to many audiences. An adaptation that provides a pertinent example of the way in which novelists make cop-outs of their friends.

In the anecdote as I have recounted it, I have turned Coke into an elegant young man of fashion, a Londoner who wrote round about 1910 rather precious novels that were well reviewed in the exclusive weeklies. He averaged a novel a year, and usually a few months before he was due to deliver his manuscript, he paid my father a Sunday afternoon visit to discuss it. He had, he would say, a problem. It was invariably the same problem. He was two-thirds of the way through his book, and had got his characters involved into a confusion from which he could not extricate them. The situation in which they were involved never seemed particularly original or obscure. Those were the days, morally, of the double standard, and a young woman with a past had become engaged to be married and was wondering whether or not she should confess her misdemeanour. Could she act a lie; would she imperil her marriage if she told the truth?

My father who had encountered many similar situations in the novels that he had published and reviewed, suggested a conventional solution. 'Why not,' he said, 'have the girl confess, and then have the man say, "Well my dear, I'm very glad you've told me this, but in point of fact I've known it all along."'

The novelist shook his head sadly. Those were the days when plots were out of fashion, when the traffic of humanity was compared to the Heraclitan river, that changed from second to second, but

continued to appear the same. All things were in a state of flux. Novels in those days did not finish. They stopped. 'No, no,' said the novelist, 'you can't have things being "known all along". That's cliché; the kind of thing that only happens in third-rate novels.' The novel, he explained, should end in a compromise, showing how one incident flowed into another; with nothing beginning and nothing ending; a continuing process of effect and cause.

And that was how he ended his own novels, in a compromise that was a kind of fog, with nothing clearly resolved and the reader in some doubt as to what had actually happened to the various characters in whose fortunes he had been invited to be concerned; and as that is really the one thing that the reader does need to know—how it eventually works out for Jack and Jill—his novels were far from being 'best-sellers', yet equally they were very far from being failures. He had genuine merit. He had a knack of narrative; he could make a reader want to turn the page and see what was on the next; he led a brisk social life; he had interesting settings to describe; his work had a literary quality. He deserved the critical recognition that he received. His books lay on the table of the drawing-room he frequented. And as he drew a reasonable private income from Russian oil fields, he could accept with equanimity the small royalties from his books. He reminded himself that Henry James had never attracted a large public. His day would come. In the meantime, the present was extremely pleasant. In that last high rich summer of 1914, he was as happy as any mortal can expect to be in this imperfect world.

Then the war came, changing everything. He was one of the first into khaki, and he was gassed in the first attack at Ypres; his health was permanently ruined. The Russian Revolution followed and with it the confiscation of private property and the end of his private income. His future had suddenly become shadowed. He came out to Underhill one Sunday, early in 1918, when I was home on leave, in a despondent mood. 'I don't know how it's all going to work out,' he said. He began to talk about his private life in the same way that five years earlier he had talked about his novels. He could see no solution to a confused situation.

My father did his best to be encouraging. My father had a Pickwickian manner. 'It'll turn out better than you expect,' he prophesied. 'Those White Russian generals have a trick or two up their sleeves. Your oil shares will be paying dividends before very long. And after the squalor of the trenches, the public will be wanting to read books like yours, dignified, restrained, classical: your second innings is going to begin.'

But he did not believe it would. He had no faith in the White Russian generals, nor did he expect that a war-weary, but ruthless generation would have much use for remote, austere stories about idle worldlings. A new lean day would create its own idiom of self-expression. Yet at the same time he did not think the future was too dark. Our friend would have a disability pension; probably the Bolsheviks, once the Revolution was established, would pay some token recompense to former shareholders, so as to earn the goodwill of other governments. He would live economically on the Riviera, cherishing his health, which was in itself an occupation. His pen would still earn him something. Every so often he would address to one of the highbrow weeklies a captious complaint on the shortcomings of the latest school of novelists. 'In fact,' said my father, 'it'll end like one of his own novels, in a compromise.' But fate had a last trump in its hand.

Early in 1921 he again invited himself to tea. My father had not seen him for three years and was curious and a little apprehensive. It might be an embarrassing situation. Far from it. Punctually at half past four a long, low, shining car drew up outside my father's modest residence. The door of the car was opened by a trim chauffeur. The novelist had always been unobtrusively well dressed: dark well-cut suits and stiff starched linen. But today there was a definite gloss about him. There was also a conspiratorial twinkle in his eye.

‘Now what does all this mean?’ my father asked. The author laughed. This, he explained, was how it had all come about. He had had in Australia a widowed and childless cousin whom he had never seen and of whom he had scarcely heard. His novels were this cousin’s sole family link with England. He bought each novel as it appeared. He had them bound in leather and arranged under glass. When one of his friends came down from one of the stations for a week-end, he would lend him one of these novels to take up to bed with him. He was delighted next morning when his friend said that he could not make head or tail of it. He was proud to have a cousin who wrote novels; he was even prouder that they were novels his friends could not understand, so that when he died, he left his entire fortune to his cousin.

The novelist paused. His smile became a grin. He had a sense of humour. ‘It’s the kind of thing,’ he said, ‘that only happens in third-rate novels and real life.’

One other writer was a constant visitor at Underhill, though he was not a Chapman & Hall author. His name is well remembered and he is held in respect today, as a poet and as the original editor of the Everyman Library.

I think that my father had first met Ernest Rhys at Gosse’s; or it may have been through Richard Le Gallienne. But our two families as far back as I can remember lived on terms of close and affectionate cordiality. Rhys was married to a minor Irish essayist, and the name Grace Rhys during the ‘nineties and before the First War, appeared on several charming volumes of belles-lettres. The Rhyses lived near to us, in Hampstead, we were ‘in-and-out of each other’s houses’ and they always came to our tree on Christmas Eve. They had three children, a boy and a girl several years older than myself and a daughter Stella who was Evelyn’s age, who did nursery lessons with him, and of whom he has written in *A Little Learning*. I, in terms of age, fell between the two groups. Brian, the eldest when I was a preparatory schoolboy was an undergraduate at Oxford, and Megan was an art student at the Slade. She was handsome and dynamic, and wore loose Liberty silk blouses. For those days she was considered wild and it was whispered that she had anticipated the marriage ceremony with the man who eventually became her husband. She inspired in me an awed and breathless curiosity.

Rhys himself, in those early days, seemed to me colourless and ineffective. I judged him by the narrow standards of a public schoolboy. He was tall, moustached, deliberate in walk and speech. He was not untidily but loosely dressed; the equivalent in tweeds for his daughter’s Liberty silk draperies. He was clearly not particularly well off. Old Dent, the publisher of Everyman, was a difficult man to work with: parsimonious and dilatory in his payments; and I often heard Rhys describe, amusingly, without self-pity, the devices to which he was driven to extract his periodic pittance. Schoolboys set high store by success and they gauge it by a very narrow standard. Ostensibly, on the surface the Waughs were doing better than the Rhyses. At the same time I thought of Rhys a sport. My father told me of how at a children’s party at their house, Rhys had come up to him in agitation. ‘This party isn’t going well,’ he said, ‘I’d better black my face.’ I admired a grown man who was prepared to make himself ridiculous for the benefit of kids.

It was not till I began to read the minor poets of the ‘nineties that I came to appreciate what he stood for. He had been a member of the Rhymers’ Club of which Arthur Symonds had written in his preface to Ernest Dowson’s poems. He had sat in the Cheshire Cheese, with Yeats, Davidson, Le Gallienne, Lionel Johnson, listening to their poems, privileged to read his own. The Rhymers published two collections of their poems; as the sum earned in royalties was too small to be divided among the contributors, it was devoted to a dinner in a Soho restaurant. Each contributor was allowed to bring one guest. My father went as Rhys’s. I could not ask Rhys too many questions about the men who had become my heroes. He had some excellent stories to tell, many of which he has included in his reminiscences.

Nor were his anecdotes confined to the poets of the 'nineties. He had kept in touch with the young in a way that my father had been prevented from doing by his asthma. He knew many of the young Georgians. He was particularly amusing about Ezra Pound. Whenever I came home on army leave during 1915—17 I managed to see the Rhyses. It was Grace Rhys who first took me to the Poetry Bookshop in the late autumn of 1915 to hear a reading of Gordon Bottomley's *King Lear's Wife*.

At that time I was interested in Rhys because he had known writers in whom I was interested. It was not till a good deal later that I came to realize what he was himself. The creation of 'Everyman' was a definite achievement, but he was much more than the founder of a library. He was a genuine man of letters. As a critic and a poet he had earned the respect of his contemporaries; of his elders when he was young, and of his juniors when he was old. He had held his pen in trust. His gift for writing poetry was a slender one, but he had worked on it steadily, had developed it so that when a powerful idea struck him, he was on two or three occasions able to write a memorable poem. He often read his poems at Underhill. I remember him on a summer evening in 1916, reading a poem which he had just written called 'The Leaf Burners'. It was rhythmical, without a marked metre. It was alliterative. 'The rhymes,' he explained, 'come at the beginning of the words instead of at the end.' I was moved. Later I said to my father, 'Surely that was very good.' My father nodded. 'It is hard to tell when you hear a poem for the first time. But I think it was.' 'The Leaf Burners' was the title poem of his next book of poems, and it has been included in a number of anthologies.

At his memorial service in June 1946, two of his poems were read by Richard Church, 'The Old Men' and 'Autobiography'.

Wales England wed; so I was bred,
'twas merry London gave me breath.
I dreamt of love—and fame: I strove:
But Ireland taught me love was best.
And Irish eyes and London cries,
And streams of Wales may tell the rest;
What more than these I asked of life,
I am content to have from Death.

Three or four poems may not seem a very substantial harvest from a lifetime's sowing, but it was only by careful assiduous husbandry that his small plot of land was able to yield those few faultless flowers. If he had not written three hundred negligible poems, he would not have been able to write those three.

A luncheon was given for him in London on his seventy-fifth birthday. Not many of his contemporaries were still alive. Yeats and Ernest Radford were the only Rhymers left, but his juniors were there to pay him honour. He had never made very much money. He had never been 'in the news'. He had never been able to entertain on a large scale, but many of us remember gratefully the small Sunday tea-parties where friends who had much in common met to exchange opinions and to read their poems. He had led a full and happy life. And he is remembered today, whereas so many who seemed so much more important during their brief, bright hour of prominence, are forgotten.

My First Publisher

GRANT RICHARDS

My first novel was accepted by Grant Richards in January 1917. I was then a cadet at Sandhurst. On my next leave, I called on him in his offices near Leicester Square, across the way from Ciro's. I knew more or less what to expect. 'Grant Richards', my father told me, 'is the best-dressed publisher in London and he wears an eyeglass.'

He was then in his middle forties and certainly an impressive person. He was the first 'man of the world' that I had met, and today, fifty years later, I have not met anyone who fits that role more effectively. He looked and behaved as the young Arnold Bennett from the Potteries dreamed of looking and behaving. He was supremely knowledgeable about food and wine and clothes and travel about the practical ordering of existence. He had in a high degree what the Edwardians called 'style'.

Five years earlier he had escorted Theodore Dreiser across the Atlantic, to London and the English countryside, to Paris and the South of France. He described the trip in his autobiography *Authentic Hunting*. Dreiser also described it in *A Traveller at Forty*. The rough-grained Bohemian, hardened by the reverse, embittered by opposition and neglect, had met no equivalent for the polished, assured cosmopolitan. Barfleur is Dreiser's *nom de plume* for Richards, and the first chapter is called 'Barfleur Takes Me in Hand'.

Richards was at that time, to employ a current American phrase, 'between wives'. He was free to concentrate his entire energies upon his guest. He stage-managed everything. He told Dreiser what to wear and what not to wear. It was, Dreiser learnt, 'not quite good form to wear a heavy striped tunic with a frock coat', and 'We never tie them in that fashion, always a simple knot'.

Dreiser spent at Dover the eve of their trip to Paris and went on board before the train from London got in. Richards arrived by it, 'as usual very brisk, a porter carrying four or five pieces of luggage and his fur coat over his arm, his monocle gleaming as though it had been freshly polished, a cane and an umbrella in hand, and enquiring crisply whether everything was in order. If it were raining, according to a strip of paper on which he had written instructions days before I left London, I was to enter the cabin on the vessel which crossed the Channel; pre-empt a section of seat along the side by putting my baggage there and bribe a porter to place two chairs in a comfortable windless position on deck, which we could repair in case it should clear up on the way over.'

A Traveller at Forty has long been out of print. It is unlikely to be reissued; it is very long. Dreiser was diffuse; it is not easy to cut his work; its bulk can only be reduced by a process of compression. Much of this particular book is dated and a great deal of its interest is lost by its author's habit of giving his characters pseudonyms or of referring to them as Miss E and Mr G. But anyone who finds a copy on a library shelf can be recommended to give up a couple of hours to it. It has many passages on the differences between Europe and the United States that make nostalgic reading now and presents a full-length and sympathetic portrait of Grant Richards.

The preceding paragraphs may have given the impression that Grant was managing and 'bossy' but that was not the case. It was a sense of assurance, of self-confidence, that he diffused. He was never in a hurry, he was never flustered, his voice was warm, his manner suave. His bearing suggested that the present was agreeable and, that no matter what the past had been, the future would be better still. His monocle heightened this atmosphere of well-being. It was not attached to a cord; it had no frame; it stayed in place. Only a very composed man can wear a monocle.

This air of prosperity was one of his great assets as a publisher. He restored and sustained an author's confidence. If your books were issued under his aegis, everything must, you felt, come right.

in the long run. He was always buoyant, always encouraging. He never interfered with a writer, never tried to edit his manuscript. He assumed that the author knew best what he wanted to say and how to say it. I published seven books with him; he only twice asked me to make an alteration. He suggested that one or two Greek phrases in *The Loom of Youth* might put off potential readers, making them suspect something over-scholarly. He was quite right. On the title page of *The Loom of Youth* I had included my middle initial, 'R'—Alec R. Waugh. He asked me to drop the 'R'. What sound advice that was.

The Loom of Youth, published in July 1917, was a considerable success. It was not for eight years that another book of mine sold well. My second and third novels, published in 1922 and 1924, sold barely two thousand copies each and created no stir of critical interest. A book of reminiscences sold seven hundred copies. I imagine that by the end of 1924 most people had dismissed me as a 'one-book man'. Perhaps Grant himself had his doubts, but he never let me suspect he had. I was welcomed with the same warmth when I called at St Martin's Street. He would enquire about my new novel, wonder whether it would be ready for the autumn season, discuss who should design the wrapper. Then he would take out his pocket diary. 'Now, which Sunday are you coming down to lunch?'

He had a charming house at Cookham Dean; it was an easy excursion and a pleasant one. One winter I met at Maidenhead and driven, very likely in a pony trap, through a country-side that was still unspoilt. There would be other guests gathered on the lawn. It was unlikely that any of them would be writers. He liked to make his authors feel separate, distinct, apart. Grant was never the kind of man who wore open-necked shirts or high-necked sweaters. He would look countrified in tweeds or flannels. His wife, a Hungarian, beautiful and very many years younger than himself, was a gracious hostess. The food and the wine were good, but there was no excess. 'Sybarite is a mild expression for your character,' Dreiser said to Richards. But Grant was a gourmet, not a gourmand. He never overate or overdrank. I have the warmest memories of that dining-room, designed by Heal in terms of the fashion of the hour, with its bright blue walls, orange curtains and chair covers, its black carpet and cushions and black line below the ceiling. And always at some time during the meal he would find the right occasion to say something encouraging about the work of the author who was his guest. I would return to London resolved to make my new book better. I have been very lucky in my publishers, in London with Cassell's, in New York with John Farrar, Doubleday, the Rineharts and Roger Straus, but I know their feelings will not be hurt if I say that there was something special, something very special about the attention that Grant Richards gave his authors.

What a flair he had for publishing, how much of himself he gave, how much of himself he threw into it. *Author Hunting* was published in 1934. It was reissued in 1960, and it seemed to me when I reread it that it had, like certain wines, improved with age. A few of the authors about whom he wrote are half-forgotten now, but many have increased their stature, have become more interesting because we can see them and their work in focus. They are established figures now, but Richards knew them before they were established. He recognized their qualities before the world did. He was the first publisher of G. K. Chesterton, Alfred Noyes, John Masefield. Laurence Binyon was on his list, so were Katherine Tynan, John Davidson, William Watson, Frank Norris, George Bernard Shaw, Sir Hugh Clifford, Richard Le Gallienne, Alice Meynell, E. V. Lucas, Thomas Burke, Ronald Firbank, the Sitwells, Neville Cardus, Ernest Bramah—what a list of authors!

How Grant loved books and the whole world of books. He knew that each book was personal, and in consequence, just as each man evolves for himself a certain style of dress, so each book needs a certain format, a certain arrangement of type and binding. He was concerned with the machinery through which books are issued. He visited the big bookshops personally and made friends with the booksellers, not only in London but the provinces. He was never an extravagant advertiser, he had no

the means to be, but he was a skilful one.

In the summer of 1917 he invented a new style of advertising, and I was lucky in having the innovation coincide with the publication of *The Loom of Youth*. He took every week a half-column in the *Times Literary Supplement* which he filled with gossip about his books and their authors. It was set in heavy small black type. He was a good writer and it was very readable. He was the first publisher to quote the unfavourable comments on a book. He stimulated controversy. He was unique. That was the thing about him.

After the title-page of *Author Hunting* he printed a quotation from a letter to him by Shaw: 'You should call your book,' Shaw said, "The Tragedy of a Publisher who Allowed Himself to Fall in Love with Literature...." A certain connoisseurship in the public taste is indispensable; but the slightest uncommercial bias in choosing between, say, Bridges' "Testament of Beauty" and a telephone directory, is fatal.'

This may puzzle the modern reader of *Author Hunting*. 'Tragedy? Where is the tragedy?' he may well ask. Here is the story of a man who loved books, who spent his life among books and bookmen, who published many of the best authors of his day over a period of thirty years. What a full, successful, happy life! Where does the tragedy come in? *Author Hunting* gives no answer to the question.

In an earlier book, *Memoirs of a Misspent Youth*, he covered the first twenty-four years of his life. He wrote of his boyhood as the son of an Oxford don of frugal tastes who did not provide the mental and social stimulus that an imaginative boy needed. Grant was sent as a dayboy to the City of London School, staying in lodgings with a schoolmaster near the Crystal Palace. It was a dreary boyhood from which he broke loose at the age of sixteen to work as a junior clerk with a firm of wholesale booksellers in Paternoster Row, at a wage of twenty pounds a year. Within a few months, however, he was congenially employed under W. T. Stead on the staff of the *Review of Reviews*. He gives a lively account of his experiences and of the men and women whom he met there and of his times in Paris with Phil May and William Rothenstein. His association with painters was always close, and his publication of C. R. W. Nevinson's war pictures was as important an event in 1916 as that in the following year of Siegfried Sassoon's poems.

Author Hunting is not, however, autobiographical. He has little to say in it about himself, except in relation to the books he published and the authors who were his friends. He only once refers indirectly, to the financial difficulties in which he found himself, and no memoir of him would be complete, would give a true picture of him, that did not refer to his two bankruptcies and to the financial reorganization of his business in 1927 that left him with so little control over the fortunes of the Richards Press that he resigned his chairmanship.

His two bankruptcies came early in his career. The bibliophile will note that some of his publications appear under the imprint E. Grant Richards; that is because for a time he was unable to conduct a business under his own name and used that of his first wife. Those two bankruptcies were considerable reverses. Most of his authors went to other houses, he damaged his credit with the trade and he lost his 'list'. By 'list' a publisher designates those books five, ten, twenty years old which sell without advertising their fifty, two hundred or a thousand copies every year, that are his 'bread and butter', and which pay his overhead expenses. Richards had in the beginning a number of such books, the World's Classics for example, and several excellent anthologies. He lost them all. Each time he had to start again from scratch.

It was an immense handicap, too big a handicap. Shaw attributes his difficulties to his having fallen in love with literature, but that was a bad diagnosis. I heard a member of his family assert that his readiness to publish poetry at his own expense in the end proved fatal, but I should doubt if on the

whole he lost money upon poetry. He made a great deal out of A. E. Housman. He was a good judge of poetry and good poetry eventually finds a public. He was always prepared to run a risk, but it was not because he ran risks with unestablished authors that he ran into difficulties. It was something much simpler than that. He wanted more out of life than publishing could give him; a trait that Shaw, temperamentally, could not understand, because he had not the clue to it inside himself; but Dreiser understood it, very well. To him Richards was a character out of Balzac, a middle-aged Rubempré. 'Towards gambling, show, romance, a delicious scene, he carries a special mood. Life is only significant because of these things. His great struggle is to avoid the dingy and the dull and to escape, if possible the penalties of encroaching age.... Just one hour of beauty is his private cry. One more day of delight, let the future take care of itself.... He had a delicious vivacity which acted on me like wine.' With that kind of nature he inevitably took more out of the business than it could afford.

When I first met him in the spring of 1917, he was probably as happy as he had ever been, happier than he was to be again. He was healthy, handsome, he was just too old for military service; his sons were just too young. He had remarried a year and a half before. He was in love. Books were booming. He had had the previous autumn a spectacular success with Bruce Bairnsfather's *Bullets and Billets*. Thomas Burke's *Limehouse Nights* was on its way to best-sellerdom. There was a glow about him.

In a certain sense that glow never left him. He enjoyed the adventure of living to the end, but the particular high-summer radiance was short-lived. By the spring of 1922 the chill wind of a depression had begun to blow. I was working then in publishing in a part-time capacity for my father with Chapman & Hall and I was astonished at the pace with which the depression struck. In 1919 we were paying bonuses to the staff, in 1924 we were facing angry shareholders. It was hard to see how it had happened: the annual turnover was as high, our list seemed as good, books were selling well, but increased costs and high taxation cut profits to a minimum. And if Chapman & Hall, a ninety-year-old house with a long back list, its Dickens plates and a highly profitable technical department, was threatened, how desperate was the state of an orphan firm like Richards's.

It was an awkward time for Richards's authors. He had never been a prompt settler of his royalties, accounts and the delays now became exceedingly inconvenient to a race that lives upon a shoestring. I learnt from another of his authors that he preferred to settle his accounts with acceptances at six months. That seemed in keeping with his optimistic, improvident temperament, and I accepted that as a solution. 'Grant,' I would say, 'it looks as though my next royalty account which is due in November will total about eighty pounds. I'm short of money. Do you think you could let me have a bill at six months that I can discount?' He would stand against the light, benign and bland. He would nod his head. Yes, he thought he could manage that. He was generous, always anxious to help a friend. He might not be in a position to cash a cheque for twenty pounds but he would always sign a bill for fifty. And he looked so sleek, so prosperous; his manner was so assured, so reassuring that it was impossible not to believe that the situation was sound at base. For a year, two years, it went on like that. Then the day came when a bill was not honoured.

It was a major shock to me. I was young and selfish, ambitious and self-absorbed. I thought of my own temporary embarrassment, not of the permanent predicament in which the man who had launched and befriended me now found himself. A sheltering presence had dissolved. I shivered. 'You now go out into the wind,' I told myself. During those months I was one of many, very many.

Richards was then in his middle fifties. It was too late to make a third come-back.

Author Hunting seemed to me in 1960 a better book than it had in 1934. It was also a different book. It had had on its first appearance a melancholy quality. Everyone knew about his difficulties, of his attempt to come back with insufficient backing and the public's faith in him diminished. It was hard not to think, reading it, 'Poor Grant, why couldn't he have pulled it off?' He was not, let it be

understood, in a desperate position. He returned to authorship. He was far from being negligible as a novelist and a reprint company might well do worse than reissue *Bittersweet*. *The Coast of Pleasure* about the Riviera, is far more than a guide-book. Max Beerbohm in his preface to *Memoirs of Misspent Youth*, wrote of him as an author who 'knows just what he wants to say and can say it—always lightly, firmly, vividly, amusingly, endearingly'.

I often saw Grant during the 1930s. His wife had a flat in Monte Carlo. He never forfeited his devotion. His zest for life was unabated. He still added to the enjoyment of any party he attended. He was still, moreover, operating as a publisher, in a restricted way. I remember a party in 1930 which Betty Askwith and Theodora Benson gave to celebrate their *Lobster Quadrille* of which Richards was the publisher, and how we lingered long into the morning at Cadogan Gardens with Grant not seeming by any means the eldest. But the big days were over. A curtain fell in 1927.

Reading *Author Hunting* in 1934 one felt one was following the story of a failure. But in 1960, ten years after Grant's own death, I felt that I was reading the story of a success. Events have fallen into focus. We can see the literary history of an era in perspective. We can see how much Grant achieved.

The small magazines and the small publishing houses—how would authorship fare without them? The big firms—the Heinemanns, the Cassells, the Macmillans—are on the look-out for budding talent. But they cannot devote to apprentice work the attention which the young writer needs. A writer is self-taught. He teaches himself by writing. He needs to see himself in print. Until he does, he cannot judge himself, cannot assess himself. He needs to talk his work over with his contemporaries. The young must have something in print to show each other. That is how they become writers. And how can they do that without the small magazines, without the small publishers? Literature stands in the debt of those who give the young that opportunity. They do not, the men who fulfil that function, finish rich, with titles and large houses in the country. But they have their reward, in the history of their country's literature.

We make and pass and our place knows us no more. Nothing is more dead, nine times in ten, than the last decade's best-seller. But there are those who do not 'all glut the devouring grave'. There are those who set their names as publishers on books which are part of our eternal heritage; men who enrich the world by the work they do in it. Who can think of the eighteen-nineties without remembering Elkin Mathews, John Lane and Leonard Smithers? Who could write of the years 1910 to 1925 without paying tribute to Martin Secker? And the name Grant Richards will be always honoured on account of the authors that he sponsored.

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