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The Abinger Chronicle

Contents:

<i>In London Now (1)</i>	H. W.
<i>In London Now (2)</i>	S. S.
<i>Telegraph Wires</i>	Douglas Gibson
<i>Harvest Moon</i>	S. S.
<i>Song</i>	Geoffrey Eloy
<i>Spirit, Substance and Will</i>	R. C. Trevelyan

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NOTE :

All previous numbers, except a few copies of No. 8, are sold out. In order to increase the size of the Chronicle a few more subscribers are needed. If readers will tell their friends how to obtain it, this will be achieved. The Chronicle is self-supporting at present. If a profit should occur, it will be used to enlarge the paper, which exists for the delight of those who write in it and of those who read it. Contributors need not be, and often have not been, of the locality, but Abinger is represented in every number.

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IN LONDON NOW (I)

With other detached fragments of the stream she drifted from the stairs along the narrow edge of the platform left free from the swarm of misery, and with them, because there was no room to lie down, presently drifted through the open doors of a train.

"Can you tell me where this goes?" she asked at large, a weary childish voice.

An elderly man beside her, apparently like myself an ordinary passenger, as he carried no bag or bundle, told her; then looked at her more closely.

"Where do you want to go?" he added.

She glanced at a crumpled ticket in the hand that clasped a book.

"I can go anywhere as long as I don't go out," she said.

"Are you alone?"

"Oh, yes. My mother and sister—they're somewhere else; I shall go to Tottenham Court Road. I've some friends who sleep there. It's deeper down, they say. That's why I wanted to stay on the Inner Circle, because I suffer from . . . claustrophobia sometimes, but they won't let you because it's too shallow."

"How old are you?"

"Sixteen. Do you think it's quite safe down here? You don't think a bomb could get down to the Tube, do you?"

"But it's no place for you, among these—I mean, if you suffer from —"

In London Now (1)

"I'm quite all right if I can stay on the stairs, or if I can just see them."

At every station the bundle-carriers near the doors looked out and passed the word back, "No room here!" The elderly man had been craning his neck to read the title of the leather-bound volume.

"Shakespeare. A good choice!"

"I didn't choose it. It was just luck. I have a lot of other nice books, but they wouldn't salvage them. They were looking for important documents, they said. I found this on the pavement with some of my things."

We were slowing up for Tottenham Court Road before either of them spoke again.

"We already have refugees in the house," the elderly man began. "It is quite far out and ——"

"Oh, I don't want to be a refugee," she declared.

"But I'm sure my wife would be able to arrange something."

I heard her say she would be all right with her friends, as I passed them on my way to the lower level station, through more nightmare corridors of writhing humanity. I found the elderly man had followed me—it was difficult to avoid contact once made in those narrow lanes—and as we stood on the platform edge I presently saw that she perforce had followed him.

"No friends?" he asked.

"No friends. No room."

"Then you must really come with me and let my wife ——"

"This is too far down," she interrupted. "I want to get to the other stairs. Or I shall go on to Hampstead."

"But that's deeper still. Or do you mean the heath?"

"Oh, no. I mustn't go out."

"Then you *must* allow my wife ——. Now, come, here's the train!"

They were both packed in last, after me, just as the guard cried out to stand clear of the doors. "I can't stand this," she said. Then, as the doors started to slide

In London Now (2)

together, she darted out between them to the platform again, with a word apologetically flung back to him.

"Claustro——". The doors met on his foot between them; the guard shouted at him, then kicked his foot in and they closed on his protest: "But that girl—she mustn't go off like that—her mother and sister were killed ——" The train was moving.

K.W.

IN LONDON NOW (2)

There has been a bomb in my fine square since Monday night; a time bomb. Yesterday at 3 o'clock under a sunny blue sky the Royal Engineers sent it off. It has broken every window in the square and brought down many ceilings and floors, so that the houses into which the inhabitants still must not go, carry a white chalk cross, as though they had the plague.

The plague was, of course, worse. I have been reading Defoe's good journalism about it. It seemed to drop a great curtain on London behind which men and women and children in their thousands went down with the disease and died a most painful death. To isolate the infected houses was the Watchmen's chief concern in the days of the Plague. He would even lock the people in, rather than that they should spread the infection. We may reach such a pass if ever the sewers get badly damaged and disease begins to spread. We may yet live to see fires on so great a scale that we cannot cope with them. We may live to see a more deadly weapon than the high explosive or gas or incendiary bomb, some devilish mine that travels underground and ousts us all from our blessed basements. People in a bombed city think of these things sometimes, but on the whole, sufficient unto the day is the bombing thereof.

I thought Monday night my worst, with five bombs in and around the square, a fire round the corner with flames leaping higher than the great plane trees, two fine pillared houses opposite shattered into a great dust-heap and the discovery of the time bomb just as we were all

In London Now (2)

about to snatch a few hours precious sleep, and instead had to hurriedly pack a few useful things and move away. But then came last night in one of the safest shelters in London, silent and aery, yet all too near a great whistling affair that struck down one good half of a neighbouring hotel. The gigantic fall of masonry so close to one makes one feel very small indeed and helpless and rather afraid. I used to be ashamed of all this till an old soldier told me he felt like that too. But he added: "Women and children had no business to stand this sort of thing. It was meant for men." That is partly true. There are a lot of hysterical and very frightened women in London. They should be got away. The rest must run as many big kitchens and homes as possible to justify their continued stay.

Then there are beginning to be stray dogs and cats shivering with fright, a long way from home and mostly with a limp on account of the cuts made by certain glass-strewn streets. But worst of all are the homeless, mostly to be found in one or other of the thousands of shelters far away from their private disaster. They need help and guidance, and clothes and food, and somewhere to cook it. With shop and show windows full of these things the time must soon come when these goods, as well as every available billet, is requisitioned for them.

There is so much to go through yet. Each night brings a new load of grief and suffering, and each dawn a quiet question: What was your district like? One knows the "target" districts well by now and expects a bad answer, but taken all in all the damage is as yet very small indeed, the defence quite astounding, and the courage and belief in victory goes so deep that it seems rooted in the great city's life and history. Men may weave a whole tapestry of future commonwealths to cover this present disaster and this present suffering, but unless they build with a courage and independance equal to the fire-fighters and the bomb removers of London, the people will not be satisfied. There is high courage in the very air London breathes this autumn.

S.S.

TELEGRAPH WIRES

Here through this wild and lovely land
 The telegraph's slim wires expand;
 They cross cool rivers, climb the hills
 And line each high-hedged lane that spills
 The heady scent of flowering May
 On to the air. And here to-day
 The wind strums on the vibrant wires—
 Swift messengers of man's desires—
 And through this green and peaceful world
 Dark messages of death are hurled,
 And rushing through the burdened air
 News of destruction and despair.

DOUGLAS GIBSON

HARVEST MOON

This autumn night at sunset
 in quiet grey blue sky,
 among the thin and still clouds
 see harvest moon rise high !

The long and low and grey clouds
 carry an amber glow,
 shed by the rising moon
 till grey and golden grow.

And all the sky is wrought there,
 with these two colours rare—
 and all the earth is hazy
 with Autumn everywhere.

An old age and a deep pride,
 the grey and gold do lend
 to harvest moon slow rising,
 with list to journey's end.

S.S.

SONG

Under the bloom-spiked chestnut I
 Count the stiff-stalked leaves that lie
 Shuttering out the English sky,
 Piling their greenness thick on high.
 Leaves of grass against my cheek,
 Fingers feeling the shells so weak
 Of chestnuts pithed by the winter bleak,
 Light lie I, and limb-loosed seek
 After his hum, the path of the bee.

Who built the palaces under the sea?
 Can they be lovelier than this dark tree?
 Palaces! Centuries! Wings of the free!

GEOFFREY ELEY

SPIRIT, SUBSTANCE AND WILL

A Taoist Fable

Once on a time Spirit dreamt a dream; and in his dream he was vexed by a doubt as to whether it were possible for him to know anything at all. So he set forth in quest of knowledge, and travelled for a long while through the Great Void, until at last he stumbled upon Substance. "Pardon me, honourable Sir, for disturbing you," said Spirit; "but I pray you be so kind as to tell me whether it is possible for me to have any true knowledge of you." To this question Substance made no reply. The Spirit cried, "Ah, do I not now begin to see you?—something vague and vast, changing every moment from shape to shape, now slowly now swiftly! Surely *this* is knowledge. But speak. Let me hear too." Then, in his dream, Spirit seemed to hear a voice, but so indistinct that it was as though not words but unvoiced thoughts were passing through him. And this was their meaning:

Spirit, Substance and Will

Why seek for knowledge of what may never be known?
 Shall the bubble know the river, or the spray the sea?
 Yet hear what I am like. I am like waves
 Travelling a shoreless ocean of space and time,
 Ever as they go changing from form to form—
 A myriad mounds and furrows rising and falling,
 A myriad ripples gliding over their surface.
 Their crests break into bubbles of hissing surf
 That float for a brief moment and pass away.
 Thou fleck of sensitive foam, so, thou wouldst know me,
 Me who begat thee and gave thee form and freedom?
 Wait then, and sink back into me, and know me so.

When Spirit had received this answer from Substance, he was troubled, and turned away into the Great Void, through which he wandered disconsolately for a long time. At last he saw coming swiftly towards him a Being with stern looks and eager eyes, who stood in a chariot drawn by four strangely assorted creatures, a tiger, a bull, an eagle, and an ape. They would have swept by without heeding him; but Spirit flung himself in their path and cried, "Stay! I would speak with you. I am Spirit. Are not you the human Will?" "I am," said Will curtly. "Be brief, please. I am busy." "I seek knowledge," sighed Spirit. "Tell me, how may I find it?" "I know what I want," replied Will. "That is enough for me." "But *what* do you know? And in what sense do you know it?" "Miserable futile Spirit!" cried Will. "Of what use can knowledge be, except as a means to action and creation and the fulfilment of desire? Have you no hope, no ambitions?" "None, I think," replied Spirit, "except desire to know, and to enjoy the contemplation of what I know." "And how," cried Will, "can you enjoy without possessing? It is power you should desire, power to possess, to create, to destroy and rebuild, to dominate men and things." "Alas!" said Spirit, "I have no wish to dominate, or possess, to destroy or create; only to understand, to imagine, and to enjoy." "Then I can waste no more time upon you," said Will, angrily shaking his reins. "But, friend . . ." cried Spirit—in vain, for his friend

Spirit, Substance and Will

would wait no more, and was already hastening away into the Great Void with the speed of a thunderbolt.

And now, more disconsolate than ever, Spirit proceeded once more on his wanderings; until at last he found himself in his dream walking through a land which at first appeared strange to him; but little by little the landscape seemed to grow familiar. He felt an inexpressible happiness in contemplating all that he saw, and in welcoming the various sounds and scents that flowed in upon him. So he sat down to enjoy himself. Now this new world of his dream appeared to be compounded of sensations and memories and ideas of every kind, which were sometimes pleasant and beautiful, sometimes repulsive and terrible. Yet nothing of what he saw and felt aroused in him desire or fear, or the wish to possess, except as a spectacle.

But his contemplative blissfulness did not last for long. On a sudden he heard a roar as of a savage beast, and the bellowing of a bull; and the next moment the monster-drawn chariot of Will had swept furiously in upon the scene, which thereupon began to fade and vanish away, until he found himself now no longer in the Great Void of his dream, but awake, in the familiar world of reality. But the strange thing was that, when he began to recollect his dream, he discovered that the blissful country he had visited, had been all the time none other than the real world to which he was now returned: only, whereas the paradise of his dream had appeared to be marvellously composed of everything he had ever experienced or imagined, the world of existence seemed in comparison sadly limited and common-place. The rapturous happiness of his dream was gone; yet there were still moments when he could make his escape into contemplation, and for a while defy and forget the tyranny of Will and Desire.

R. C. TREVELYAN

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