

# THE GREAT ENGLISH NOVEL...

## CHAPTER ONE

The studio hung cavernous, empty, the dust flattened. From behind the shroud of white canvas he fought his way through to the darkening space. Everybody gone, the silence much like the days when he was late for school and he crawling like a small fly across the deserted playground.

The canvas was tacked to wooden uprights, which extended at intervals around the large room. The centre of the floor was occupied with the usual muddle of paint pots, surplus pieces of canvas, brushes and all the paraphernalia of the scene painter's trade.

Rubbing his eyes he surveyed the black chalk lines indicating the Venetian buildings.

Gradually his sleepy brain began to remember. Of course - the Woolwich Artillery Ball which meant an early start sometime toward the end of the week.

He shuddered.

He was not greatly enamoured of parting with his bed before he was ready. Of course staying up all night was one way. That was what happened last night- hence his sleeping on the pile of canvas between the scenery and the wall. The other boys were used to his fading out and took to leaving him in his cosy nest.

He made for the door. It was pretty well dark now and the steep stairs stretched down into the tunnel of the hall. At the sound of his footsteps on the stairs the door in the passageway opened throwing a lighted rectangle across the floor and against the opposite wall.

The proprietor of the Fancy Goods Shop on the ground floor loomed framed in the doorway.

“You are bloody late aren’t you” he growled, “How many times do I have to tell you I have to lock up?”

John remembered that there had been trouble about this before.

“Sorry”, he said. “I was –”

“I will see your employer about this - I am sick and tired of you lot traipsing up and down any time you think you will. Now get the hell out of it!”

John went.

If Hector heard that the man had complained again he might do some violence against both the man and his shop. Hector did not care about consequences, he lived at home and would have his parents’ support, and even if he did not he was the kind of lad who acted first and thought later. He was a fair draughtsman and liked the work but the wages the Studio paid did not dictate his style of living. His parents did not keep him short of money.

Money – John fished about him.

Christ, it was only Wednesday and he had to get something to fill his yawning belly. No use going to the digs. Nothing there except some mouldy cheese.

He started down Earls Court Road. The shops glowed with meat, vegetables and many goodies to which he could do justice.

He folded his raincoat around him. It was starting to get cold, but thank God that it was not raining. His shoes were pretty thin and soon let in wet.

He veered left away from his digs. His feet were taking him on a familiar route. He passed the Café where they sometimes congregated. He saw the white tables and near the window the stout form of Alan with a heaped plate surrounded by condiments laid out like toy soldiers. The beast was undoubtedly consuming steak, potatoes and green beans. He was a student with a good grant.

John had borrowed from him in the past but had received vibrations which signalled a certain reluctance.

On to the College of Art Common Room where he was tolerated and even on occasion welcomed. Most of the students thought of

him as studying in some section of the College and many a day he went there for a cheap lunch.

There was never any question of serving him.

False pretences.

Sailing under False Colours.

Nothing really criminal.

Ah, well, through the streets, sometimes in light sometimes in shadow.

Really, he must not take it for granted that Smith-White was there.

Bill was usually there, but he was completely impoverished. A dead loss from that point of view. Bill had many virtues, but affluence was not one of them.

He played piano with a natural rhythm and sang harmony to John's improvisations. Many a time had they been requested to leave a café because of their singing. He had commissions for copies at the National Gallery. But rarely did he work on them. He understood the process used by the Old Masters and his copies were not so much imitations as appreciations.

On the completion of one of the paintings he was most generous with the money received and shared the proceeds with John and any friend he could find. On those fortunate days he took John to the Mews. This being a Pub used by students, and due to the fact that they rarely had money for drink, they soon found that the liquor had a dizzying effect on their half-starved bodies.

It started to become dangerous after the second pint, because Bill then started looking around for someone to fight. He was reared in Newcastle and at an early age had served an apprenticeship in a Boxing Booth.

On many occasion John had had to pour oil on greatly troubled waters. He seemed to be some sort of peace maker, despite the boxing training he did at the Bethnal Green Working Man's Club.

John was a definite non-aggressive.

He enjoyed sparring, pitting his speed against muscle, of which he had little, not really being strong enough for a 'killer' fighter.

There was also the lack of regular food which did not help.

The red tin hut which stood back from the road housed the College Common Room. He entered.

The armchairs lined up against the walls leaving a space which on Fridays was used for the Dance to the gramophone which occupied the stage. There was a gigantic amplifying horn which protruded into the now empty hall.

He saw one figure slumped in one of the armchairs. It was not Smith-White. Hell!

He saw the light in the Secretary's Office. Knocking on the door and framing his inquiry he was delighted to see the form of the lad he sought.

Smith-White was built like a Hero.

Blond hair cascaded over his forehead and he wore a small moustache.

Many years later John wondered whether he had been attracted to him in some homosexual fashion, but then John had been of an age when some kind of hero worship had been at work with various lads who were more able in various ways than he was himself.

He thought of Smith-White as a resemblance to the Siegfried he had seen in a German film in the silent cinema days.

That was in Plymouth at the old Palladium where he had sat in the Orchestra beside the man who was teaching him the drums.

Smith-White grinned.

"Well", he said, "You want to carry on with the fight?"

John shook his head.

"Nope - I wondered-"

"Last time", said Smith-White, "I was not at my best." He scratched his blonde locks. "Tell you what - I'll give you five shillings for a fight."

"And if you win?" replied John.

"You get bugger all", said Smith-White showing his white teeth.

"You weigh more than I do", John said, "Lend me two shillings until Friday. You know I always pay you back."

"Sorry" and he strode toward the door.

John cursed and wandered into the room.

He slumped into the embrace of the nearest armchair. He lapsed into one of his dream states, thinking of nothing, but riding through time. He closed his eyes.

He was nearly asleep when something landed in his lap. He started up and clasped the hard leather.

"What the hell!" he shouted, "What bloody twat-."

Smith-White's handsome face beamed above him.

John stood up holding the boxing gloves.

"Come on", said Smith-White, "Five bob, eh?"

"Christ I was nearly asleep."

"Well, wake up", grinned the blonde lad.

The contest in the Gym went on without rounds and Smith-White found that he could still not catch his opponent. Finally, both gasping, they gave up.

"My Christ", said Smith-White, "You're fast."

"Have to be", blew John, thoroughly winded, "Keeps me out of hospital."

They parted with expressions of goodwill and Smith-White generously donated the disputed five shillings.

John purchased bacon, cheese and bread, together with ten Woodbines. These treasures he took to his small room.

This room was located at the very top of a large house just off Earls Court Road. It contained a gas ring, a single bed, a small table with a chair and he had drawings pinned to the window frame. Sons and Lovers lay on the table.

He hastily fixed some bacon and quickly consumed this whilst greedily delving into Lawrence's novel.

He lit one of the Woodbines and felt the dizziness come upon him which was always the result of not smoking for two days.

He had never felt better.

Then he heard the trilling whistle far down in the street. There was only one who whistled like that. Bill.

Looking down he could see the foreshortened forms of two figures standing in a pool of shadow.

He negotiated the stairs which were in practically total darkness. The hall was illuminated, but the landlady believed in economical lighting. Apart from this she rarely interfered with her lodger's comfortable seclusion, and preferred the application of the blind eye unless she was disturbed by loud noises. Any shouted welcome in the hall brought her out to stand mute and motionless. This was always enough. The disturbers of the peace just faded away.

Bill together with Percy stood on the outside steps. John pointed upwards. The three went up.

Bill made for the chair, crossing his legs, thoroughly at home.

Percy sat on the bed with John.

Percy was easily six-foot, dark hair and eyes - the sort that women turned around to look at in the street. He had been a bank clerk, leaving his home outside London to seek his freedom with an ambition to get on the stage. Not long ago his father had appeared and begged John to use any influence he had to persuade Percy to come home. John tried to convey to him that his son was in the process of searching for his own identity. But the Dad could not see it and told John of the good job at the bank and the security of the home he offered.

All this was in vain.

When told of this encounter, Percy tossed back his lock of dark hair, sniffed and made John promise that he would not tell of his whereabouts. The father turned up once more and finally gave it up, saying that his son must find out how foolish he was being. Emptying his cigarette case on John's bed he departed very sad and with heavy sighs in common with many parents whose children had flown the nest.

John thought of his mother in Plymouth.

She had the dog and enough to live on, and she even sent him a little money occasionally.

It had become so that he could not stand the sound of her voice, and yet he appreciated her kindness and love when he came home for a short period.

It was the same for them all.

Percy and Bill were floating, always hungry and now without shelter.

John had his painting job so that the tiny room provided a haven to which they very often gravitated.

"Any bread?" said Bill, sniffing the smell of the bacon which still pervaded the atmosphere.

John put the remaining rashers in the frying pan and lit the gas ring.

Bill started singing his favourite song – 'Frankie and Johnny'. By the time he had completed his singing the bacon was done. Slices of bread were produced and bacon sandwiches were rapidly consumed, followed by the inevitable cups of tea.

Percy handed around cigarettes.

"Where did you get these?" said John, "They're Players."

"Well", drawled Percy, "I am afraid that I conned them from a white haired gent I met in the Public Convenience in the King's Road."

Percy was often mistaken for a homosexual with his cultured voice and spectacular appearance. His rather exaggerated gestures invited attention from both sexes. All these things collected in the moving image were bound to cause comment.

Apparently he had been approached by this man who struck up a conversation. On mentioning his lack of cigarettes the man gave him the packet of Players and then smoothly suggested that they adjourn to one of the cubicles. Percy made a most hurried exit into the King's Road.

"There seems to be a distinct profit in Sin", he told them, "It's a wonder that I do not make it a career."

"Well", commented Bill, "You certainly attract 'em."

"We could use John's room and pay him rent. John could act as the Madam. We could advertise, re-decorate the room and should

there be any flagellation required I would be more than pleased to wield the whip."

"Sadist", said John, "You violent bugger."

"Violence", said Bill, "Is necessary and particularly for the timid."

"I've never known you as timid - far from it", said John.

"That is because you know me not - how do you manage to infiltrate my being? We all wear a disguise, some successfully and others in a transparent material. I am far from being naturally aggressive, perhaps my mask is made of stout stuff."

"But you are liable to take the bait at any sign of aggression in other people", said Percy. "This, surely, is playing their game on their own ground."

Thus the conversation took a usual turn.

This was liable to go on for most of the night until it had run its course, when it then degenerated into talk of an obscene nature. Bill's verbal gymnastics were often too much for John whose slow mind was left panting far back in the field.

Percy could cope with him and sometimes threw in some Latin phrases which irritated Bill and led to fierce arguments about Percy's Public School Education.

"Come on", said Bill, "Let's go to the Coffee Stall."

They pooled their resources.

Quietly down the stairs.

"Got your key?" said Percy who always said this about now.

Once the key had been left in John's room and they had to wander about in the chilly dark, not daring to knock up the landlady at such an hour. John remembered the long wait outside the front door until some other lodger emerged.

The coffee stall looked most inviting, being gaily lighted, an oasis in the dark blue night. There were two stalls nearly side by side, but they always patronised the one on the left kept by Harry.

"Coffee only I suppose", said Bill.

"It's bloody cold", said John, "What about soup?"

"Yup - it's about the same price", Bill pulled his raincoat up to the neck, "Do you have to work tomorrow?"

John nodded, "They dock my pay if I don't", he said. "I'll have to go to Woolwich on Friday - where will you guys doss down?"

"Hell", said Percy.

"What about Joyce?" said Bill.

"Nothing doing", replied John, "Her landlady is making trouble."

"She's a goddam lesbian", grunted Bill.

"I know - she's getting jealous."

John ordered three cups of soup.

"No dogs?" said Harry in his clean gleaming serving coat.

"Skint", laughed John putting the bare price on the high counter.

They looked at Harry so neat and clean, and were conscious of their ragged state, but by no means anxious to change places with him.

They drank their soups.

Louis came out of Earls Court Station and joined them.

"Nothing to eat?" he inquired.

They shrugged.

"O, I see", he grinned, "Four hot dogs please."

Like starving wolves they tore into the food. What with the bacon and now the hot dogs they felt a satisfying fullness which reached every part of their animal natures. Profuse 'thank yous' went the rounds.

"Forget it", said Louis, "After all the publisher says there is a likelihood that my novel may be passed."

"Wonderful", cried Percy. The others echoed their congratulations after their respective fashions.

"However", said Louis, "There's many a slip - so I do not yet spring into the air with delight."

Louis handed around his cigarettes.

"My firm is not greatly pleased with me at the moment", he said.

"I had rather too much to drink the other day and spent the night with the law."

"Arrested as drunk and incapable?" said Percy wistfully. "It's a long time since I myself was eligible for that particular offence."

"It was not only that", said Louis, "I was silly enough to hit a policeman."

"I thought it was only Bill who did that sort of thing", said Percy harking back to their previous conversation.

"O", replied Louis, "The constable was very good and said he did not want to press charges - but they fined me £10 for assault anyway. The copper and I had a drink together afterwards. Of course I apologised and he laughed and said he had had worse."

"You were damn lucky", said John, "I mean to be able to pay the fine. Had it been either of us we would have had to do time."

"Be sure that I have now sworn off punching policemen", said Louis.

They discussed Lawrence, Louis saying that he was only good when he was not crusading for sexual liberty, and that he was probably defending himself against charges of homosexuality.

"He shouts too loudly about his interest in women."

"Oh", says Percy. "But his poetry is a different matter. You will be saying that because of his he-man activities Hemingway is a Nancy boy. One can always make out anybody to be homosexual."

"It is known as the Masculine Protest", offered Bill, "We all have a feminine side."

Louis having made his statement felt in honour bound to continue to uphold it.

And so the night grew around them and John thought of his bed and the unfinished scenes of Venice waiting in the studio.

Eventually they parted; Louis swallowed up in the entrance to the station, the three friends to John's room.

In the room they distributed themselves in their accustomed places. John in bed with shoes and trousers off, Bill across the bottom of the bed with Percy on the floor wrapped in his overcoat. Percy's overcoat was a relic of palmier days. It had a high collar which was of great advantage in the chilly weather and was the envy of his friends.

It was soon quiet except for the breathing and Bill grinding his teeth. When John had first had them as guests Bill's sleeping habit

had kept them awake, but now it was absorbed into the accepted noises of the night.

Sometime towards dawn, John awoke thinking it was time to be off to Woolwich. Good God, he thought, I must be getting some sort of anxiety state. It was the knowledge of an early start on the Friday that must have set off his internal alarm clock. He pulled the sheet over his head and soon knew no more.

The sound of falling water was the next herald of the awakening day. This time he struggled out from the entwining sheets to find that it had been Bill at the open window.

"Well", said he, "It's too far down to the bathroom."

"Christ", said John, "You'll get me the sack."

"It's not the first time", said Bill. "You have been asleep - besides the landlady lives at the back."

"You'll hit a copper one of these nights, then there will be hell to pay."

"Me and Louis", said Bill adjusting himself.

John poured water into the bowl and they did their best to refresh themselves.

"We'll be off I suppose", said Bill.

"Where will you go?" John enquired. "The Common Room?"

"Or the V & A, or somewhere", said Bill getting into his coat.

The studio was there, just the same, with the outlines of Venice. John picked up a tin of green and started on the sky. Soon Hector and Lewis arrived.

"You been here all night?" said Hector.

"I bet he has", Lewis grinned, "Or with some woman."

"No such luck, come on let's bash hell out of this bloody thing."

They set to work.

"Conjure up Canaletto", said Lewis swiping some cream over part of the buildings. Hector painted pink on part of their task.

"When we have blocked it out", he said, "We'll go to that little pub and I'll buy you both a drink whilst it dries."

“Let’s hope the Old Man doesn’t pay a visit whilst we are gone”  
said Lewis, “He’s keen to get it covered before Friday.”

“Hush up”, cried John.

They listened.

Yes it was the Boss, he had just finished talking to the shopkeeper below and now he was talking to them even before he reached the room. Hector always said that if he stopped talking he would just drop dead.

“I reckon that he talks in his sleep”, said Hector.

“And when he’s on the job”, suggested Lewis.

“Get on”, said Hector, “He’s too old.”

The discussion stopped as the Old Man entered, his long grey overcoat nearly to his feet and his hair grown long at the back protruding from his trilby hat. He affected the bow tie of a previous style favoured by the artists of the day. He came in on a tide of words. They were all addressed as ‘Old Lad’ and he really was an easy taskmaster, although the work always was completed on time and never had any of them seen him angry. To them he seemed incredibly old - but he often said he was but fifty-three years of age.

“Perhaps you could sleep in the studio down the road”, said the Old Man. “Then we would be ready early tomorrow. Stan and the carpenters will be along soon with the lorry and by the time we get to Woolwich they will have fixed up the scenery in order for us to finish the painting.”

Together they tackled the Venetian buildings which, with the Old Man’s example, soon began to emerge from the preliminary patches of paint.

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John's earliest recollections were of setting out early in the morning to walk through the stillness of the streets of Plymouth to where the steamer lay at North Corner.

It always seemed impatient to start its journey, churning up the tide and vibrating throughout its length.

Together with Father and Mother the negotiating of the gang plank was much like crossing the Niagara Falls on a tight rope, or would have been had it not been for the parent's steady support. The journey was imbued with the smell of the fresh salty breeze and the feeling of superiority by sitting up on the upper deck - a concession to the fervent wishes of the small boy.

The deck shaking with the eager rhythm of the engine, the vast expanse of the rushing sea, and the cries of the gulls acted like an exciting antidote to the dull talk of the grownups.

If it were low tide they disembarked at South Down and walked around the edge of the lake until they came to Millbrook which was their destination.

But at a more normal tide they were landed at Anderton which was much nearer to the village.

West Street was much the same as most Cornish villages – two storey houses with occasional shops and a large hotel at the foot of the street.

Grandfather's shop was about half way up, the large window with shutters through which could be seen the old man working at his watchmaker's bench.

Many guns were displayed together with sundry small clocks and watches. They entered on the right, their presence heralded by the tinkle of a bell.

Grandfather was then greeted and welcomed, and John never forgot the ticking of innumerable clocks which formed the constant accompaniment to their conversation.

Then into the back living room where sat Grandmother with the table laid ready for midday dinner. The food was plain and plentiful and it appeared that Grandmother, although well enough to John's eyes, was not in the best of health.

Then the boy waited for one of the best parts of the trip, which was the present of a silver threepenny piece from Grandad. The return journey was much the same kind of experience, but of course, in reverse.

Home at last, part of the way carried on Father's back. His Mother's mother lived with them, a little old lady dressed in black (Widow's Weeds they called them) a gentle soul and very kind to John - who did not always appreciate it.

In the big front bedroom Granny occupied a double bed and the boy a single up against the window. He always waited to see the lamplighter who lit the gas lamp just outside the house.

In winter, Grandmother had a fire on her side of the room which projected some wavering orange and pink patterns on the ceiling. As he lay in bed, John could form these reflections into horses and various animals which accompanied him into sleep.

Some events become written indelibly upon the memory. One such was the crying of boys in the street which impelled his father to exclaim "Here, boy, take this and get me a paper."

John went out and found the street full of people surrounding the newsboys who were shouting "Special - War Declared."

John was only four years of age and found it very difficult to attract the attention of one of the paper boys. The presence of large men and women all struggling to obtain the news who elbowed him aside in their eagerness, made him despair of ever attaining his object.

Even old Mr Boundy and his dog were there.

This gentleman had a rather fierce animal which he kept within his porch, and when children passed his house the creature growled and sprang forward in a ferocious fashion.

After several complaints from parents he erected a small gate, but it took a visit from the local policeman to compel him to do it.

Eventually the boy did get a paper and heard his Father saying, "It will all be over by Christmas. When they see our fellows they will shout 'Kamerad' and throw up their arms in surrender."

As everybody knows Father was very wrong.

Father was, in common with all his family, a good shot, and he was very disappointed that he could not join the Army.

He had some idea that it would be like potting rabbits.

John thought in after years that his Father could never really believe that German soldiers were equal to British.

The war dragged on and instead of 'Cowboys and Indians' the boys played 'English and Germans'.

A Belgium family appeared in Bedford Park which was at right angles to Clifton Place where John lived. They were refugees from Ostend and soon picked up the English language, although the mother and father found it difficult.

The two girls and the boy were soon word perfect.

The impact of the war was strong upon every activity. Rations and Clothing Coupons became part of everyday life.

Even when John and his parents went to stay at his Aunt's seaside house at Newquay the War was ever present.

One day at lunch a siren sounded and they all ran to the Headland to see a ship sinking far out at sea.

A small boat came in to the jetty bearing some bedraggled souls who were the only survivors from the torpedoed craft.

Wounded in blue clothing were to be seen in the streets.

One cousin who was at the Hospital at the top of the street where John lived told them about the battle at Mons.

He and another had hidden in the corn and held their breath as the Germans prodded and poked with their bayonets. He had been wounded and used to visit the house in Clifton Place. However news soon came that he had died of his wounds.

The young lady teacher at the Sunday School lost her young man at the front, and she vanished to the sorrow of all the pupils, particularly as her replacement was a forbidding lady who appeared to have been immersed in vinegar. Her advent gave rise to the formation of a rival organisation called the Green Serpent.

The boys wore hoods made from old sacks with eyeholes and the sign of the Serpent painted on the front.

An altar was erected with a picture of the said snake upon it before which the members of the brotherhood bowed down and vowed allegiance.

All this took place on the other side of the courtyard of the Sunday School. Little did old Frosty Face know that devil worship was in progress not a hundred yards from her school.

Next door lived a small girl the same age as John. Much amusement was engendered among the adults as the pair paraded; she in becoming lace clothing with flowered hat to match and bearing a sunshade.

"A gentleman always walks on the outside next to the kerb", she said, "How many times do I have to tell you." Apparently she had to say it every time thus making John into a small gentleman.

But eventually nature and curiosity made mock of the conventions. One day they were drawing and Adam and Eve was suggested as a subject. This involved the depiction of figures 'with no clothes on'. The pair of them were immediately struck with a strong sense of guilt, and seeing that the girl's parents were in the next room they started talking in very loud voices.

She: "I am drawing Giants."

He: "I am drawing Dragons."

Neither of them had much idea as to the anatomy of the other. Eventually this was being put right in the outside lavatory where, of course, the girl's Mother, having seen the works of Art left on the table, and being suspicious of the loud explanations as to the subjects drawn, had suddenly made an appearance.

John was soundly berated and sent home and the poor girl to bed. This experience did not halt the boy in his quest for knowledge. He did not seek to molest the little girls but in his case it was just a spectator sport.

Archie White was about John's age but the product of narrowly religious parents. He understood that going to the 'Pictures', as we called the Cinema, was a room full of the most evil paintings it

was possible to imagine. His parents forbade any mention of those abodes of Sin and, of course, to permit Archie to enter one of these places was quite unthinkable.

The little Belgian girl was one of their striptease efforts. She was told not to tell her parents. This was the only occasion in which Archie participated, so, of course, he went straight to his parents and confessed. After a good thrashing he was sent to the Belgian Mother to apologise. The poor woman was completely dumbfounded as she knew nothing about it and could not make out what he was talking about.

This put John on his guard as to taking anyone else into his confidence and hereafter he became a lone wolf.

Armistice Day came with a deal of noise and waving of flags to celebrate the great slaughter.

There was talk of hanging the Kaiser from a lamppost. The Belgians returned to their own country.

Life continued together with school. John did not fulfil his early promise at the Infant School where he was thought to be exceptional at drawing. When faced with other subjects in the Juniors he fell very much behind. He had no idea of numbers, and unfortunately this blindness at Arithmetic persisted for the rest of his life. Father took him away from this school, as his reports were appalling and also he caught head lice and fleas from the boys who came from strange homes.

Hyde Park School was thought better and certainly cleaner. This place was a large stone built edifice rather like a government Prison. The progress at Arithmetic was no better, if anything it was worse. Father paid for private coaching. The money was wasted, and after trying several teachers the idea was abandoned in despair.

The Form Master was a man who seemed permanently sunburnt which helped to show off his grey hair. He could also make his eyes go up in his head so that the pupils vanished. Some of the boys tried to copy him and when John tried to do it at home his

Mother wanted to send for the Doctor. Apparently she thought he was having convulsions.

The boy was sent off early to School but dawdled on the way - imagining all sorts of adventures and gazing into the Shop Windows. The result being the empty Playground and the late entry into the silent classroom. The Master said that he would cure him of his lack of time keeping and every day he struck him on the hand with a cane. John became used to the sting and accepted it as the natural prelude to the day's work.

Around this time the teachers began gradually to recognise that the boy was very dim, but in some strange way produced vivid English compositions and excellent Drawings. He took an interest in Early English History, but naturally, the dates became confused. In the End of Term Exams he came top in Drawing and English Composition, but bottom in most other subjects, except for History in which he was a moderate performer.

Father grew mad at his son's idiocy and took some drawings to the local Art School in despair.

"He most certainly must come here", said the Principal. "He could start twice a week in the evening Junior Classes whilst he is still at School - then we will see."

So the die was cast for an uncertain Lifestyle.

The Art Classes were all boys, and held from seven to nine in the evening. The Master was a curious creature who spoke with a strange accent. The story went around that during the Great War he was arrested as a German Spy. It later transpired that he was born in the West Country and had never been to Germany in his life. He set up wooden models of cubes and cones and they were encouraged to draw them. Firstly to 'skim them in'. Then the next stage was to put a firm hard line around them once they had been approved by Sir. The last and final application was to model them in tone. Hands were raised in eagerness with the cry, "Please Sir, can I shade?" When the Master had viewed the effort and usually corrected the discrepancies, permission was given. This was the sugar on the pill, and they went at it like tigers at their prey.

Full of triumph, with the adrenalin pumping through their veins, they rushed headlong from the building. Two boys went up the hill with John. They both subjected him to what they called 'Chinese Torture'. This was twisting the flesh of his arms this way and that and banging his head on the ground. John knew that he must not shout out or cry - this was the accepted ritual in all cases of the torture. Having been used this way at School he knew that he must be a stoic. Eventually they ceased after a few applications, John having passed the test.

"He's a sport", they said. "We'll let you off now." So the boys became friends and made sure that any other lads who tried the same thing would have them to deal with.

Childhood, as everyone knows, is a jungle where survival is paramount. John's Mother said that the boys at School had him for a target. She referred to the condition of his School uniform.

Father being an Insurance Agent was away most of the day, but one day he took his son out in the backyard.

"Now", said he, "It is time you learnt to defend yourself. You are costing too much in school uniform and cap. You must stand up for yourself against these bully boys."

He then proceeded to give a lesson in the Noble Art of Self Defence.

"I'm no boxer", said he, "but that is more or less the way it is done."

Later he took John to the Cosmopolitan Gymnasium, where on Friday nights the prize-fighters performed. The language of the spectators was quite lurid in their advice to the contestants in the ring.

Father would not take his son to the 'Cosmo' again, saying it was no place for a boy.

Eventually the lad came home with the story of Mr Ballard's Club where all sorts of activities took place. No sooner had Father heard of this - where everything was provided free, due to the kindness and interest of Mr. Ballard, then he took John to the dusty Schoolroom where the Club met in the evenings.

He found the PE Instructor and told him the sad tale of the School bullies and the damage to the clothing of his son.

“I want the boy taught to defend himself”, he said, leaving John to the man in his white jersey who sported a large military moustache and an enormous spread of chest. The boy was set to various exercises to improve his physique. Then the Straight Left, dodging and weaving and many other moves, all done in slow motion and gradually speeded up.

The time came to match him with boys at the same stage. He became adept at defensive work, mainly on account of not liking being hurt. After the first fight at School he became used to employing his straight left to adequate effect as well as keeping out of harm’s way. Life became much easier, the bullying stopped but the Schoolwork did not improve.

“What a pity you are so daft at the other subjects”, said the Art Master, “I do think that Art School is the only place for you.” This opinion confirmed the verdict of the Art School Principal.

So he sat for the Scholarship for the Junior Art School. The examination was mainly Drawing, the Maths and English were very basic. However, he had a chance to write an English Composition. He passed, and afterwards he wondered if the Principal, who knew him through the Evening Art Classes, had not ignored his feeble attempts at Maths.

So at thirteen years of age he became a Junior at the Plymouth Art School. Blazers and Caps were worn as at the previous School. He found himself among a group of children not very different from the ones he had been with before, except that now there were girls. However the girls were herded on one side of the room and the boys on the other, much like East and West. The activities were mainly Art and Crafts with some Maths and English. There was a bald headed man who spoke on Citizenship, and wielded a cane on the boys. He was some sort of Head of the Junior School, the Principal confining himself to instruction in the upstairs Senior School.

Two years were spent in this way, and the majority of the pupils ultimately went into various occupations such as Painting and Decorating, selling apples from a barrow, or the Navy, whilst the girls favoured Hairdressing and behind the counter in shops. It was fairly obvious that they were there to keep them off the streets, and to give the Junior Staff a job. They left school without the slightest idea of the purpose of Art or Craft, always supposing that there was any purpose in it, but went out into the world as dim as when they entered the building. The brighter children went in the direction of various Grammar Schools, and presumably into different occupations, but John's fellow pupils did not even know that it was a Junior Art School, and called it going to the 'Tech'. This because the building was shared with the Technical School, which had a separate Staff and Principal. About the only benefit to John was that he made friends with Walter and Jack, two with rather rebellious views which accorded with his own.

As their time to leave the Junior department came looming up they decided that they would go 'upstairs' to continue in the Art School proper. At sixteen years of age they were encouraged to draw from casts of Greek and Roman statues. Beginning with Heads they then graduated to the Antique Room to copy full-length figures. A man who had been at the Slade with Augustus John was the instructor in the subject. He was also the Master in charge of Life Drawing. He was a grey-headed man who wore knickerbockers and stockings. Known as 'Granite Face', the friends swore that he had goats legs and was really a Satyr - hence the breeches in order to conceal this anatomical peculiarity.

The boys attended one of the local cinemas where German films were shown. The influence of 'Dr Mabuse', 'The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari' and 'Siegfried' soon showed their expressionistic flavour in their designs. Granite Face sniffed at these efforts as though they had a foul aroma. He said little - possibly hoping that they would grow out of it.

Woodcarving, Cabinet Making, Clay Modelling and Copper work were included in the curriculum. John not being of a practical turn of mind, and considerably awkward and fumbling, did not fair well at these pursuits with the exception of Clay Modelling. He enjoyed moulding the clay, and still more enjoyment was to be had when the Sir went with another member of staff to the Harvest Home which lay within reach.

Whilst they were sampling their pints all hell broke out in the Modelling Room. Pellets of Clay made good ammunition. The room was on the First Floor overlooking the main road. The inevitable happened. One hurled pellet went through the open window. A gentleman asked to see the Principal offering his hat for examination. Now this Principal was a replacement for the old one who had just retired. This man came from Harrogate and he was full of new ideas - a kind of troubleshooter.

The offender was soon traced, and no doubt the Sir in charge of Modelling had to suffer some North-country bluntness. We felt sorry for him, because it finished his mid morning trip to the pub. Soon after this he left for some other appointment and was replaced by a man called Lister.

Both these teachers were in charge of the Craft side of the school, and it became apparent that they could draw much better than old Granite Face, although he was on the Fine Art side. Whether it was something to do with the organisation and construction of their various crafts, or because they had an innate insight into structure, there was no doubt of the benefit the students derived from them.

Of course, Art Schools all had a Student Genius, and Plymouth was no exception. A tall youth, suitably pimped as most of the lads were, occupied this position. He did not have a beard, but was just unshaven and went by the name of Klondyke.

Once he became used to his surroundings he proclaimed his status. Setting himself up as the Messiah he christened John, Walter and Jack his Disciples. He was to be seen carrying an easel on his back through the corridors crying 'To Calvary'. Chalk

notices appeared on the walls of the School saying 'No Popery'. The Principal called an assembly in order to discover who was responsible. As he was talking he turned a nearby plant pot around for something for his hand to do. There to his fury was the hated inscription.

"Ee!" exclaimed he, "There's even 'No Popery' on the plant pots!" He suspected but could not prove who was the culprit. Yet another unsolved mystery lay on the file of crimes.

So the war between the interloper from the North and the students from the South grew in intensity.

At the top of the door of the Life Room there were some slats which acted as a ventilator. Inside the room some girl students had fixed a hosepipe to the tap and were squirting water through the slats onto some male students who were endeavouring to force the door. Suddenly a procession appeared on the stairs headed by the Principal. The lads made a hasty retreat to a turn in the corridor.

"And this, gentlemen," said the Principal, "is our Life Room." He tried the door. There was a cry from within and a jet of water drenched them all. The gentlemen were Inspectors from the Ministry of Education. The Principal from Harrogate must have thought that his sun had set, but he strove manfully on.

One evening a solemn Staff Meeting was in progress in the Architecture Room. There was an adventurous Architectural Student who wished to hear the discussion, he was interested to find out just what the old men had to say. No doubt he wondered if his name would be mentioned. He climbed into the roof space balancing on the rafters. In his eagerness to hear he slipped. A fall of plaster on the table made the earnest discussion come to an abrupt halt. Amazement was registered on all faces, as looking upwards they must have thought that the Almighty was making his opinion visible. A foot closely followed by a leg appeared from on high.

The Principal simply could not acclimatise himself. He became bewildered.

Jack wrote 'Harrogate Beans' on his drawing, "Ee," said the North country man, "There's no such thing." He asked Jack what he intended being.

"Train Driver, Sir," replied the lad.

"Then why come to my Art School," said the puzzled Principal. The West Country did not accord with his hard-headed philosophy, and various actions and sayings must have given him many sleepless nights.

Klondyke hid himself in the local Museum and Art Gallery after closing time. An attendant going below found the lad in the Cellar with paper and firewood preparing to apply matches with arson in mind. When challenged as to his presence and intentions replied, "Guy Fawkes Day!" The whole thing was hushed up, presumably because of adverse publicity which would have affected both Art School and Museum.

In the square at the back of the Market one George Ebury stood preaching a form of Socialism. Klondyke together with his disciples appeared one Saturday night where Ebury was wont to speak. The gaunt form of Klondyke raised both arms.

"Beware the Demon of Capitalism!" he shouted.

Ebury scowled, hesitated, then continued his speech. But the attention of the Saturday night crowd, there for anything out of the ordinary, was starting to wander. Although Ebury had long hair and beard, he appeared comparatively tidy beside the ramshackle vision which Klondyke presented

"Garn!" cried one rough fellow, "Look at 'e!"

This caused the gawping crowd to turn from Mr Ebury and surround the Baptist-like figure. His disciples grew closer in a protective group, although they would not be much use as bodyguards it gave Klondyke enough courage to continue what he started. There followed a long diatribe about the Rights of Man and Thomas Payne. Leaving the crowd gaping the lads quickly quitted the scene before trouble began.

Now came the time of preparation for the Examination for the Royal College of Art, known as the Drawing Group. Walter and Jack left to become Commercial Artists, whilst John, who did not know what to do, stayed on. They still met and went to Concerts and the Theatre together. The Gallery was cheap and many a play, opera and Musical Comedy was seen from a bird's eye view, perched high above the stalls and circle. One could see the musicians in the pit from this aerial eminence. The percussion soon caught John's eye, and he found that he was watching the drummer as much as the stage. He started talking about drums at home. His parents became sick of hearing about it.

One evening his Father talking of 'Two Strings to his Bow' took him to the Cinema where he used to go to see the German films. The Commissionaire was standing at the entrance looking as much like Lord Kitchener as he could. Father addressed him in regard to meeting the Cinema Percussionist. In due cause a little man made to enter, like some animal slinking into its blackened hole. With dark curly hair and a little moustache he spoke with a slight Cockney accent and he agreed to take John as pupil.

He came to tea and then repaired to the Front Room where he instructed John in the mysteries of the drummer's Art. No drum as yet, Practise Pad only.

Later he took the lad into the pit in order that he could watch and learn to read the music. Up above them was the great screen so that when the orchestra had their interval John could watch the film in exaggerated perspective.

Meanwhile at school study for the Drawing Group proceeded. John found the Measured Perspective practically incomprehensible owing to his difficulty in numbers. Architecture was moderate. Anatomy interesting. Antique and Life Drawing the kind of style he could do. However he became restless and became fired with enthusiasm over the drawings of Leon Underwood which he discovered in a magazine. Granite Face shook his grey head over the robot-like drawings which replaced the academic work John had been producing.

“You are off the rails,” he said. “You will never pass the exam with this kind of thing.”

At about this time John started playing drums with a dance band. Many events began to happen. The little grandmother died and his Father contracted heart disease. John was sent to Birmingham where grandmother was to be buried. Walter and Jack set up a fantasy in which John was sent on the journey with the hearse, seated up front with the driver. According to their account he was wearing a black flat cap with tissue paper protruding from back and front to help it to fit his head. In reality he went by train.

Back in Plymouth he sat for the Drawing Group. He felt compelled to make some rebellious gesture, so not only did he make some unacceptable drawings but walked out from the examination room very early. Klondyke passed easily with some splendid Renaissance inspired drawings, so he with most others headed for South Kensington. John was left with the idea of taking the Exam again. This was really because he did not know what to do, having set himself up as a rebel, he now did not find much to rebel against.

His Father lay ill upstairs and the thump of his stick was an everyday occurrence. He revived briefly and came downstairs. He had frequent heart attacks, even whilst eating his dinner, so that the food spurted from his mouth and onto everything in its path. He had to have his bed brought downstairs. The noise of his breathing was like a kettle boiling. The doctor could do nothing, so John and his Mother just waited. A Nurse came now and then to clean him up. Then one day in the summer heat the kettle stopped boiling. John ran for the Doctor - he signed the Death Certificate and the Nurse cleaned the body. John had to help turn him, which operation sickened him.

Walter had obtained a job drawing for the Publicity Department in a large store. Now he was offered a much better post as Artist in

an Advertising Agency. The position vacated by Walter was offered to John. He took the job, dressed in black jacket and striped trousers, he went around the store gathering the goods the buyers wanted to advertise. Then upstairs to the department to draw the objects for reproduction in the newspapers. The Head of the Department and John handled all the publicity for the store. He found that he was answering the telephone many times per day, the Departmental Head being out most of the time. John noticed that his boss started work at the end of the day and continued after the store had closed. He realised that the Managing Director also worked late and that he could see the Publicity light on, so marked the Departmental Head down as a keen and enthusiastic worker. John began to see that various tactics were employed to obtain desirable ends.

At about this time he began to be seized with an indefinable lassitude. His movements slowed and he found difficulty in mounting the stairs. His general apathy prompted the shop girls to christen him Death. They were very nearly right. The Hospital operated on him for Appendicitis. He received his notice of dismissal whilst in the Hospital Ward. His mother and himself were always bitterly amused when he brought home his weekly pay packet - five shillings less Insurance. No doubt he had upset the Managing Director when he had tried to explain that he was incapable of giving change when he was told to serve in the store at Sale Time. This, of course, on top of his Publicity drawing. He began to feel hard done by.

With Father gone poverty was very much their way of life. A few shillings earned at the drums became very welcome, but Mother kept on at her son to get a regular job. Her voice began to irritate him. He spent much time at Walter's house listening to the evening Dance Music on the radio. He was always too late returning - his mother having some idea that he was living sinfully. "Turning night into day" was one of her favourite sayings.

\* \* \* \* \*

He was nearly twenty years of age when the bonds burst and he announced his intention of seeking his fortune on the streets of London. Once his attitude finally convinced his parent that she could hold him no longer, she changed and wrote to some relatives in London to ask if John could stay with them. He turned up at Ridley Road in Harlesden where he was welcomed by Uncle George and Aunt Edie. They were not his real Aunts and Uncles but it was easier to call them so. There was also another so-called Aunt called Janie who had been a governess, but was now much retired.

George worked at an Art Gallery in the City, and was knowledgeable regarding the work of the painter John Singer Sargent whose products his firm handled. He had some reproductions of the Sargent pictures in the front room, which compartment was kept like a shrine - perhaps it was dedicated to the painter or just to Respectability itself. John was taken in to see the works, the silence was as thick as a pea soup fog and John felt he ought to say a prayer. It was obvious that the room was rarely used - if ever.

George was short and thick, and this was not only a physical description. In the fullest of time it turned out that he was not the sophisticated student of painting he pretended to be, but the man who did the manual work at the Gallery, in other words a porter. John was no admirer of Sargent's slick portrait pictures and so a difference of opinion soon arose between them.

In the mornings John took his Portfolio of drawings upon the bus and the Underground to the Strand. After several visits he had a cartoon accepted by the Tatler. Filled with joy and seeing that fame and fortune was really possible, he spent much time visiting the offices of various magazines. Alas, without success, until suddenly he sold another drawing, again hope rose and he obtained a commission for an illustration to a story in a literary magazine. He

had to wait for publication to receive the money for these few successes, so that his board and lodging came from his mother in Plymouth from her meagre resources.

The vast form of Aunt Janie sat constantly in judgement upon him. She produced photographs of the boy she had been governess to - now a young man in a Scottish regiment. He grew to loathe the said example in his uniform and kilt. He was told that this officer could no doubt use his influence to get him in the Army. "A fine life for a young man" she said. Uncle George lent his support to this proposition.

John had contacted his friends from Plymouth now studying at the Royal College of Art. This meant that he congregated with them and others in the student's Common Room, which being in Exhibition Road, was a long way from Harlesden. He found that very often he missed his transport to Ridley Road and so was late arriving there. At first there were hints which soon changed to complaints, Uncle George having to rise early to get to the City. John felt that he was being gradually restricted as he had been with his mother. Whilst he could acknowledge the justice of this, his youth rose up in rebellion and he sought some way of solving this difficulty. An advertisement for a brush hand at a Scenic Studio in Kensington appeared in a local newspaper.

He applied and received an interview with the man who controlled the firm. He was an old artist trained in Paris. He wanted £50 for an apprenticeship in Scenery Painting which would be paid back at the rate of £1 per week plus overtime. John wrote to his mother with no hope of ever getting this giant sum. The money arrived by the next post. It seemed that his mother cashed some bonds she had, and urged him to take this opportunity of a regular job. His gratitude knew no bounds and it was fortunate that he now had a legitimate excuse to move nearer Kensington.

He found, with the aid of a friend, a basement bed-sitting room in Fulham. Breakfast was included in the rent. The family consisted of husband and wife, two daughters and small son. One of the daughters was a good looking girl, but that was all she was. It was unfortunate that she would come to his room and parade herself. He thought of making a pass at her - but just in time came the thought of being accepted as suitor by the family who were already too familiar for his liking.

The father was manager of a grocery store in the same road, and Saturday nights he was heard to stumble down the steps past John's room in a drunken condition supported by a friend of his in a like state. This man was one Douglas Doe, a peculiar name for a peculiar fellow. He was the possessor of an aluminium foot having been in an accident with his motor car. He was addicted to violence and the time came when he asked John to make a drawing of his garage for his solicitor who was defending him on a charge of assault against a lady of doubtful virtue.

He now saw John as a contender for the hand of the fair daughter. This made for certain spiteful asides from him, together with some nasty looks. One evening when John inadvisably went into their kitchen for a cup of tea, Mr Doe was there scowling horrid. After some chat Mr Doe invited John to accompany him for a ride in his car.

"Of course" he sneered, "He wouldn't come - he's too scared."

"Don't you go", said the landlady, "He means you harm."

"I'll screw his bloody neck round," cried Mr Doe. "I know what he's been up to!"

"What ever do you mean?" went the landlady. There was question and no answer from Mr Doe who just looked privileged knowledge.

"I wouldn't mind a ride", said John amid protestations from the well-meaning landlady. Mr Doe and John set forth. They rode in silence until Doe stopped the car. John started grinning.

"Now what is all this about?" he asked. It turned into a 'damp squib'. When John assured him that nothing untoward had happened between him and the girl, the driver took his word for

it, which was very strange, because violence was undoubtedly intended. Of course it may have been partly due to the fact that the spanner which lay between them was nearer John - but who could say? When Mr Doe returned John undamaged it had the desirable effect of restricting the daughter's visits to his room.

John saw an advertisement in a newspaper, it was a competition for a set design for a forthcoming production of the Chelsea Follies at the Victoria Palace. He thought that, in view of starting a job as a scene painter, he would try his hand at this competition as he had had no experience of stage work in any shape or form. It was a design for a modern drawing room. He sent it off and straight away forgot all about it.

The Scenic Studio was in Kensington High Street, further up the road was the old man's wife, one Olga Baswitz with a photographic studio. He was making a good income from the money from his apprentices, and his wife from her business. The unemployment was massive in those days and many were the young people who would pay the price to have some regular activity. John was one of the poorer painters in the studio. At first he was conscious of his rather elementary education compared to the Public School boys, but this soon found an acceptable level.

The Old Man wished to secure the commission for a Christmas Show at the large store of Gamages. The lads were set to work to evolve an idea for this Show. John soon came up with a scheme including a menagerie, a castle complete with giant, and dancing girls. This, meeting the approval of the Old Man, was offered to Gamages. He returned with the news that other firms had submitted schemes.

"We have a lot of competition, old lad," he said, "but it seems favourable - so let us make a model and try our luck." Accordingly Stan the chinless Carpenter and his minions set to work. At about the time that the model was completed and painted, it coincided with a letter from the Victoria Palace to invite John to receive a prize for his Drawing Room Set.

This sent his stock up at the Studio, although one or two regarded him with suspicion. Most of the inmates, however, congratulated him. He accepted the Prize of £5 with alacrity, because together with some overtime pay from the Studio he was able to send his mother some welcome pounds. The sum she had had to pay for his apprenticeship was very much in his mind.

The £1 per week was further augmented by the work for Hiawatha at the Albert Hall. It was hard labour, where the space between and at the sides of the fingers bled through handling the paintbrush. They soon bound their fingers with rags, rather like puttees, which prevented chafing. Working all night and part of the next day made for a more affluent lifestyle. With the scenery for Hiawatha finished at last after much sweat, so that John began to feel that stamina and brawn were more important than any artistic aptitude, they stayed and watched the production with heavy sighs of relief.

A buxom Welsh wench, who worked as a retoucher at Olga Baswitz's Photographic Studio, was lent to help with the Albert Hall scenery. She had been a student at Chelsea School of Art. A relationship was soon formed with John who by now had a room in Earls Court away from the family with whom he had stayed in Fulham.

There was, however, Anne who worked in Domestic Science at a Hospital. When the front door bell sounded four times John bounded down the stairs and let in Anne complete with basket. In his room the receptacle was unveiled to disclose to his delight legs of chicken and other goodies. She was plump and dark and always welcome. She had the idea that he was semi-starved - and she was right. She read to him whilst he devoured the hospital food.

Chesterton's long poem The Ballard of the White Horse she read in instalments. Many another poem - always poetry. He was fond of her as young men are.

Then Bill and his girl Helen threw a party, just the four of them, John and Anne to make the quartet. Helen came from California with her mother and much money - hence the party. The Welsh

Joyce was then working with the Studio on the Christmas Show which had been accepted by Gamages. Wending their way home they stopped by the Chestnut cart and warmed themselves with the hot food.

"How do you feel about coming to a party?" said John.

"I have not been invited," said she.

"Yes you have", said he "I have just invited you."

"Who else?" asked Joyce.

"O, only Bill and Helen", John grinned, "They would be pleased to see you."

He quite thought they would - forgetting that Anne might view it from a different angle. Afterwards when Anne left abruptly, and he pursued her to the entrance to the Underground protesting far too much, her tight lipped stance still did not penetrate his thick head that to turn up with another girl was not exactly a compliment to her charms. When he returned to the scene of the party, Helen took him into the other room and produced another scene. "For crying out loud!" was one of her expressions which she now used to good effect. They returned to Joyce who had been put in a difficult position.

"Why for Christ's sake," she wailed "did you not tell me there was another girl here?" She and Helen joined forces and completed John's demolition.

His first real girlfriend Pat in Plymouth had written to say that she was to marry her cousin. This had seemed like the end of the world. He did not realise that this happened to practically everybody at some time. Anne had to some extent lifted his spirits, now she had gone and Joyce did not seem very keen to see him. The preparation for the Gamages Show was the usual hard work and it served as therapy for his wounded feelings.

The lead in to the Giant sitting on the battlements of the Castle was through the Menagerie in which was a Kangaroo. The keeper became friendly with the painters from the Studio. One day he said, "It looks as though you lads will be staying here for a while -

I engaged someone to box with the Kangaroo, but he's seen fit to be taken ill." He asked Lewis to take his place for a small fee.

"No bloody fear," said Lewis. "Not that creature."

"What about him?" said Hector indicating John. "He's a member of a Boxing Club." It was some time before John could be persuaded to enter the creature's cage.

"Look", said the keeper," hit him on the nose to keep him at bay - and watch out for his hind legs and tail."

The boxing gloves were donned and a practice bout performed. Providing he kept skipping backwards he found that he could easily avoid the animal, and when it came too close a swift jab halted it. So a small amount of money was forthcoming.

Unfortunately this did not last as the Old Man pulled them out to do a hurried job at Glares in Oxford Street. There was a seaside or scene involving a Diving Bell into which the visitors entered to emerge the other side to a representation of the bottom of the ocean. Whilst the customers were in the Bell the lads rocked the edifice to imitate the motion.

"It strikes me," grunted Hector, "That in all these shows we not only do the painting and construction but run the whole thing ourselves."

Lewis agreed, "The Old Man gets a pretty penny out of all our efforts," he said, "It is a wonder that he does not dress us and make us do the dancing."

When the visitors reached the Castle courtyard and the children fired the cannon to topple the Giant from the battlements, the door opened and, to the music of a hidden gramophone, some girls from Italia Conte's dancing school emerged to perform their ballet. This was at Gamages at their previous show. Alfred, a Jewish lad, was kept at Gamages to conduct the people through the Menagerie dressed as an Explorer.

The Glares and Gamages were running simultaneously so that from time to time the painters were halved to appear first at one place and then the other.

John felt the loss of the money from his exhibition with the Boxing Kangaroo.

“Go on”, said the lads, “Speak to the Old Man - after all it was your idea which got him the job at Gamages.”  
When John next saw Alfred he told him that mutiny was in the air. This raised the Jewish boy’s instincts.  
“I’ll see him,” said he emphatically.  
The eventual outcome was that John spent part time with the kangaroo, and an actor was engaged to take Alfred’s place as explorer. “He’s a real professional, old lad,” said the Old Man, “He’s doing nights in Cavalcade.”  
“In the bloody chorus,” muttered Alfred.  
However Alfred soon had to act as Explorer once more, as the actor suffered badly from piles - the bleeding kind, so he had to vanish in the direction of Cavalcade where being in the back row his complaint was not so readily noticed.

The painting staff were soon back in the Kensington Studio working on Alice in Wonderland which when completed would provide the backcloths for the production at a theatre in Acton.  
“You seem fairly good at drawing figures, old lad,” said the Old Man, “so perhaps you could do the Playing Card scene.”  
This was how he got his own way - through oblique flattery. They all worked for him, he knew that bullying would never get results, where low cunning would be the successful tactic to employ.  
So John was elected for that particular job. With Tenniel’s illustrations as guides it proved an interesting task.  
They never ceased to marvel at the Old Man. His appearance, much like an absent-minded professor of Art, disguised a shrewd business sense. He must often have given smart managing directors a shock with a sudden shaft of their own kind of shrewd observation, particularly in financial dealings.

Apart from the scenery for Alice, they had to paint the Proscenium. This meant using a tower to reach the top. John used to dance along the parapet at Glares, where they did the Diving Bell, in the manner of Bloudin crossing the Niagara Falls on a

tightrope. His confidence in this exercise suffered a more or less permanent setback when he performed some antics on the Scenic Tower at Acton. He fell some feet on to the hard floor. He was very fortunate to only sustain bruises to his body, but his head for heights was gone for good. It was the only time he saw the Old Man really angry.

"You are in my care," he said, "you might have been killed - then what would I have said to your mother in Plymouth?"

He was, of course, forbidden to use the tower ever again.

Now began a period when in nautical terms they became becalmed.

The various shows were finished and they just turned up at the Kensington Studio to hang about pretending to be busy. The overtime finished so back to £1 per week and, in John's case, semi-starvation. The other lads lived at home so their bellies were filled. Came the day of reckoning when the Old Man had them all in and scattered some money on the table.

"Sorry," said he, "- times are hard as you all well know - and this is all I have with which to pay you."

John spoke of his rent and of living in the street.

"Well," said the Boss, "John must have his rent - now this is all that is left."

They sorted it out amongst themselves and sadly bade farewell to John, the Studio and dreams of fortune.

John hung about and went on the Dole. This paid his rent, leaving little for essential food. Anne had disappeared to get married to an Irishman whose name John would not be likely to forget. It was Romeo Toogood.

Percy was living over a public house in a large room which he shared with a man and his mistress. John used to play Percy at Chess by the light of a candle, whilst the couple went to bed behind a curtain. They took little notice of the movements which indicated that the happy couple were still in love.

The Welsh girl had a brief reunion with John. He felt however that he was sharing her with Gary Cooper, who at that time was in the full flower of his screen beauty. She came bounding up the stairs one day, where John lay in bed saving food and energy.

"Get up!" she cried. "How much money do you have?"

"O," said John weakly, "What is the film?"

"It doesn't matter," panted she, "It's *Gary Cooper*."

The end of it was that she pawned her Wellington Boots and they went to the Cinema. Her eyes stood out like Organ Stops, poor Gary Cooper must have felt that he was being devoured piecemeal - even though he was so far away in Hollywood.

Bill and the American Helen entered the matrimonial state. She shortly produced a child. Her mother took charge and whisked mother and child away to California.

One day John returned from a fruitless quest to sell some drawings to find the landlady in the hall. She bore a very serious look and John immediately thought she was about to ask him to vacate his little room. Instead she told him that Bill had had an accident. The Doctor was with him.

"He drank something that he thought was gin - so do not forget that it was an accident," she said, "I cannot afford a scandal in this house."

Soon a stretcher appeared on which lay the pale form of Bill. He passed them on the way to the front door.

"Next time," he croaked, "I'll make sure and jump out of the window."

Apparently he was more upset by Helen's disappearance than John had realised.

He visited Bill in the Infirmary, where he lay pumped out. His sister Flora was there - she being on a roving commission to renovate the wax models in various stores. She would repair any breakages and repaint eyes and mouths and so forth so that again they could display the dresses for sale. She had been staying with the Welsh girl, but the landlady had objected so that Flora was looking for some refuge from the streets. Bill suggested that she

stay with John until she could find a lodging. John agreed and smuggled her into his small room.

"I have been talking to a man who is a poster writer but who is looking for an artist to do the pictorial work in order to extend his range," said she. John contacted the man who could not offer him work for a few weeks as he had some orders which were for lettering only and these had to be cleared first. Mr Stevens thought John would be just the man to get the more pictorial side going, and asked John if Flora was his "young lady."

John shuddered as he said "No!" Mr Stevens smiled in that sly fashion which meant that he did not believe him. Flora was a short girl with the kind of pallor one associates with a corpse. She appealed not to the lad and although she did some cooking for him and sewed buttons for him, he could not envisage her taking the place of the Welsh Joyce. They slept in the narrow bed head to tail with Flora tightly wrapped like a mummy so that contact was nullified between their bodies. This suited John for a time, but he soon grew restless, and although he could not turn her out into the street, he wished that she would find alternate accommodation. One night he begged shelter from Morton, a good friend from Plymouth. He told him of his plight.

"There is only one way to get rid of her," said he, "Pretend to rape her - she'll soon be off."

John put this into practice the next night. To his horror she encouraged him and did not seem averse to his advances. He flung out of the house back to Morton to report on the failure of the scheme. It did him no good to witness his friend's heartless laughter and his suggestion that perhaps he had not put his heart into the exercise.

The end of the matter was that Flora procured some money from somewhere and said that she was off to Newcastle - her hometown. John was overjoyed, but did not trust her intention. He helped her to prepare for her journey, and in order to make sure, went to the station and saw her off.

He wrote to his mother and said that he was returning to Plymouth.

The familiar surroundings, his mother and the drums, enclosed him with the feeling that he had never been away. Walter and various acquaintances made their appearances and he performed one or two gigs with small dance bands. But the knowledge that it was only temporary promoted the holiday atmosphere, and he prepared to go and resume what he thought of as his main journey through life.

His room was available and he started some drawings for Mr Stevens, thus thinking that a form of security would soon assume a regularity which he really needed, despite his partial inclination for a more 'Bohemian' way of living. Some weeks in London, going to the Studio, and receiving something other than the dole raised his spirits. He felt that he was again in the main stream and swimming happily with the tide. It could not last, and after one of his designs for a mural was turned down, Mr Stevens did not see his way to keeping him on. He was told that Stevens would send for him if any of John's kind of work turned up.

In his room he had the idea of looking up the Bethnal Green Club where he used to box. He turned out his treasury and found that with the money from Stevens plus some dole he was moderately safe from starvation for a time.

'Bat' Mullins was as pleased as ever to see him, having always taken a fatherly interest in someone slightly different from the other lads. He borrowed the club gear and sparred around with some of the members.

"You bin smokin' they fags again," said Bat. "You in out of shape." He asked what John was doing and taking him out for a good feed of steak and chips gave him a good talking to. John attended the club once more and under Bat's eagle eye began to get back to his former style.

However he received a beating from a club mate which made him regret coming back to Bethnal Green. This character had obviously

taken a dislike to John and took the opportunity whilst sparring to assault him in earnest. John quite thought that his ribs were broken by the unexpected pounding they received. He, in reflex action, hit the lad in what he thought was the solar plexus. This doubled him up. John bent over him, instantly sorry for what he had done. The lad straightened up and clouted John on the jaw and John knew what they meant by seeing stars. There was a post mortem in which John was accused of hitting below the belt. Some of the injured lad's friends joined in the accusations. It took Bat's diplomacy to the limit to smooth things over. Eventually it was judged an accident - but John never became in any way popular with the injured parties. The hostile atmosphere persisted during the whole of John's stay at the club.

It did not improve when John was chosen to box at the Albert Hall. This was a four round contest for which he would receive four Pounds - a Pound a round, which was the fee for unknowns who did preliminaries. The Doctor looked doubtfully at John's scar from his operation. However he passed him and recommended that he be careful regarding stomach punches. John was really selected because of his speed, and his opponent, whilst the same weight, was a short stocky lad whose style was aggression and more aggression coming forward all the time. This is known as the Hare and Hound contest, the idea being that the Hound catches the Hare. In other words the Chase format.

John vibrated with stage fright on the massage table.

"You'll be all right once it starts," counselled Bat. "Stay away from him and use your left to keep him away."

There were people in their seats, but many more still coming in - it did not seem worth starting before the hall was really occupied.

Bat was one of John's seconds the other was on the staff.

"Stop shaking, for Christ's sake," said he, "Where did you get this boy? He ain't fit for this job."

This little homily did nothing to increase John's confidence.

The contestants were summoned to the centre of the ring. The referee, with a sneer, said "Now none of these East End tricks. No

butting, Hitting below the belt - and do try and make a clean fight of it."

John thought "Now how the hell did I get myself into this - I wish I was home in Plymouth with Mother and the dog."

In due course the gong sounded and the lads approached one another.

The first round was dominated by his opponent crowding John, but the fear of getting hurt was greater than the fear of appearing in the professional ring. He retreated only vaguely conscious of some boos from the spectators.

The second round began in the same fashion, his opponent coming forward and John retreating. But this time he anticipated the other boy's punches, and, watching his eyes, he could see when he was about to lash out. John threw in counters and stabbed the lad's face much as he had done with the kangaroo. He soon found that he was able to beat his opponent to the punch.

This continued for the remaining rounds, until the face before him became highly decorated. John was not the possessor of a hard punch, but it was enough to pile up the points and gain him the verdict.

'Bat' congratulated him, ignoring the smirk on the face of the other second. However he later suggested that John could be not such a negative fighter, and that he must try and temper his retreating tactics with a little more fire. The suggestion of ' a little more fire' was unfortunately somewhat opposed to John's natural inclinations.

Apparently the promoter asked for John again, as he seemed to fill the preliminary bill, as against an aggressive fighter he appeared just the running 'hare' to provide an 'aperitif' to the more serious business of the evening's sport.

John participated in four contests, winning three in being able to run backwards faster than the other lad could come forward. The fourth contest remained a mystery to John who suffered total amnesia as a result of what he concluded was a severe beating.

Now his landlady was demanding an increase in his room rent, no doubt she required the room or she found that other landladies were charging more.

John soon found himself in the street, and meeting Percy completely by accident he joined him on a seat on the Embankment. Every now and then they were moved on by the police. It seemed frightfully cold towards dawn despite the newspapers which they used as extra clothes.

After two nights of this John decided that he must return to Plymouth as there was no likelihood of any kind of work in view, and his store of cash was sadly depleted.

Percy had obtained a position as pianist to a dancing class - this to begin shortly.

John took the night bus to Plymouth, this being considerably cheaper than the railway. After what had happened at his last attempt to become a lightweight boxer no other contest was offered him. He could not sell any drawings - in other words the well had dried up.

The dog greeted him and his Mother seemed partially sympathetic. She criticised his appearance, his jacket was buttonless, his shoes which had scarcely any soles and his jersey which let in daylight here and there.

"You will never get a job looking like that." So she fixed him up with money and encouraged the buying of clothes. Thus made comparatively elegant he issued forth into the streets of Plymouth to find work. The drums were practised until the man next door complained. However Mother stood firm and told the man that he had to work on the drums with the view to obtaining some engagements. He retreated shaking his head in a sad fashion not at all convinced. Mother was Birmingham bred and had some of the native Midlands toughness. The neighbour was heard from no more.

Now John found some dance work with a small band called the Stylists. The leader was a feeble violin player who would have

been better employed as a plumber or hewer of wood. In short anything but playing a difficult instrument like the fiddle. But the pianist was good and it was he who held the group together. They performed at dances which took place after Whist Drives and the like. Old sweating men and women slowly gyrated in front of them to tunes like the Veleta, Palais Glide and Old Time Waltzes. Gradually he became better known and gravitated from one group to another, playing in small dance halls in various surroundings. Sometimes in Masonic Halls, at Fetes and Tin Huts in rural settings.

Once he turned up at a country shack in pouring rain to negotiate an outside wooden ladder leading to a room filled with tea drinking ladies of middle years. He hugged a bass drum under his arm with the side drum slung by a string around his neck, and clasping a case filled with cymbals and various traps in his other hand. His dress trousers moulded to his legs by the rain so that the muscles were visible and it was a wonder that one could not see even the veins on his nether limbs standing out like ropes. He wore a stiff collar which the weather had by now made into a soft one.

From being trained by the Cinema percussionist as a 'straight' drummer he had been seduced through gramophone records by people like Red Nicholls and his Five Pennies into the wish to play Jazz. The sight of these ladies with only a piano made him wince. But now came more. A great ginger Fred appeared arrayed in white tie and tails. This overfed object, after greeting him, gave him to understand that this was the 'Band'. He, of course, had been on a blind date and had innocently thought that he was to play with the usual Dance Band with the usual instrumentation of Saxophones and Brass. After this apparition had made the obvious remark that John was wet and to please hurry and set up his drums, this character placed himself at the piano.

Then came pure horror as it threw back its head, and to the accompaniment of some doubtful chords, bawled "Let's all sing like the Birdies Sing." John joined in on the drums and the ladies

took up the tune with enthusiasm. So the evening passed with everyone enjoying themselves, except for John who sat at the drums with a sullen smile which was all he could summon in the circumstances.

At last it was over. John packed up his drums and making his way down the outside ladder caught the bus back to Plymouth. The next day he contacted the man who had engaged him and received eight shillings. This was for four hours purgatory.

The piano player with the Stylists had finally had enough of the violin playing of the leader of that particular outfit and had formed a combination to perform at the Great Western Hotel in Plymouth's Union Street. He now asked John to join as drummer. This was for every evening except Sundays. Unfortunately a cello player doubling saxophone forced his way in as leader. There was always at least one, and this one was really dire. He had been ejected from the Palace Theatre orchestra next to the pub, (which was really what it was at that time, having been a Hotel in past years) and he proceeded to take the reins to drive the other musicians to extreme despair. However the sax playing of Tyler and the violin and sax playing of Stan made the job worthwhile. The customers were mainly sailors, dockers, and seated along the wall the ladies who relied on them for their living. Sometimes Marines entered and there seemed a certain coolness emanating from the Royal Navy on these occasions.

The musicians played on a platform some feet above the level of the floor to which they ascended by means of a ladder, which object was to prove very useful later on. The bandstand extended through a gap in the wall so that part was over the front bar where the drink was dearer. This was called the Saloon, and uniform was not so prevalent in this area.

The music played was a mixture of drinking songs, selections from light operas, and real Jazz standards during which Tyler and Stan went to town in the style of the day. Tyler played improvisations on the theme with sax, clarinet and tin whistle, whilst Stan favoured the violin in the manner of Stéphane Grappelli, and

sometimes tying the bow around the instrument to produce four note cords. This suited John and the pianist. They left George, the leader, mystified at these outbursts. He endeavoured to argue them out of it in favour of something more 'tuneful'. He was largely ignored and very often sulked to such an extent that he went down the ladder and actually bought himself a drink. Saturday nights were Combat Nights. A struggling mass of Sailors and Marines filled the large floor of the Public Bar. The musicians pulled up the ladder, making the stage a safety island, and the pianist broke into Fight Music as played in the silent Cinema. Fortunately the fighting mob were too busy to hear this musical comment on their activities. It was not long before the Police appeared, closely followed by the Naval Patrol and some selected enthusiasts were carted off. This usually restored a measure of peace, and blood was exchanged for friendly drinks. The music started again and in their new found comradeship the now loving gladiators bought the band a drink. Generosity followed closely on the heels of hate and brutality. The pints were arranged on the front of the stand like footlights. John took the advice of the Bethnal Green trainer and never mentioned the fact that he had been in the Ring lest the landlord should invite him to be a part time Bouncer. "There is always someone bigger and stronger than you who will take you on and beat the living daylights out of you if you go boasting as your time as a boxer," said old Bat Mullins. "They don't understand that, whilst it ain't rigged, it is a branch of Show Business." He was right and John did right to observe his advice - after all he had not been anywhere near Championship class, and was far from strong.

It was not long before Tyler left for a more lucrative job in Torquay and Stan soon followed. They were far too good to play to drunken sailors. In their place came Ivor (violin and trumpet) and another George on the saxophone. Ivor was graced with a bald head like the dome of St Paul's. He said of himself, "I am a professional; Concert Party, Circus Band to Symphony Orchestra,

it's all the same to me." He wore a beautiful smile when performing, which served to increase his resemblance to a clown. The sailors soon spotted him and christened him 'Grock', who was a musical buffoon who appeared in the Theatres at that time. He believed in 'pulling it out', which meant that every note he played on the violin was accented, whether a slow romantic melody or a jazz classic. He put enormous physical effort into every application of the bow to the strings. The result was like a man struggling to get his breath or a labourer driving a stake into the ground with a sledgehammer. He seemed impervious to the comments of the drunks, and John found himself blushing on his behalf. Nothing said or done made any difference to Ivor's fixed smile.

George 2 blew into his saxophone in a retiring fashion as though he was afraid that someone might hear him. He was affiliated with a quivering lip and was an ardent believer in Spiritualism. At times a man called Jim came in when not engaged in band work, and liked to play his trumpet. He said to George 2, "Tell me if you sees anybody behind me." This prompted John to ask if he referred to a Homosexual Ghost. Jim also believed in the spirits and brought in specimens of Automatic Writing. They were scraps of poetry. "You knows me," he would say, "I can't write any fink like this - I ain't had no education anymore than wot you have." "Thanks very much," commented John who was always sensitive about his lack of learning. So the standard of music reached its lowest level, despite the hovering spirits of the departed. Jim did not appear very often, he fondly believed that he was Louis Armstrong's double, "You know Louis Armstrong? Well I kin play 8va above 'e," he was liable to say. Jim was fond of the ladies, and soon contracted a disease and was seen no more.

Now Alf came to play the piano, the other pianist having left for pastures new. Alf produced block chords, riding the instrument like a horse. He and John set up a powerhouse rhythm which overshadowed the miserable sounds emanating from Ivor and the

Georges. Unfortunately, this was not enough - they needed the front which had been supplied by Tyler and Stan.

John now set up a system of reliable deputies which he put in place of himself in the pub from time to time. He was then receiving offers from local dance bandleaders for odd gigs. George did not seem to mind and John's reputation grew among the bands who seemed to like his rhythmic drumming.

One day when he had been to camp with Walter and some friends he lay in the sun for a long time in his swimming shorts. When he arose the next morning and came downstairs he found himself on the floor looking up into the doctor's face. He had no idea what had happened. His limbs ached and blood filled his mouth. The doctor put it down to sunstroke and did not make very much of it. This experience was repeated at odd intervals and was soon recognised as epilepsy. Whether it was the result of the amnesia he had suffered after his last fight at the Albert Hall or whether he would have developed it anyway was always a mystery. It always seemed to occur in the mornings so that it did not interfere with his band work.

The fact of his being able to read the drum parts brought occasional deputy jobs in the Cafés. In those days most restaurants featured quintets. The music was Dance Music, Selections from Musical Comedies and Operas and Entr'acte Pieces. All were within John's range. Eventually he was offered the job in a well-known Café in the town with the understanding that he learnt the Double Bass. He had an instrument at home on which he had been practising - but it was time he had some lessons. So Tom from the local Marine Band was engaged and they worked in his Mother's front room. He was soon able to play simple pieces and one day took the Bass to the Café.

He had purchased a pair of Timpani from his old drum teacher who was now retired owing to the introduction of sound into the Movies. The previous drummer played the saxophone, sang and performed on the xylophone - in short a multi instrument man. John was encouraged by the leader to extend his range, but

eventually it was settled that he persevered with the double bass, as he could not sing and had never learnt the xylophone. The war seemed imminent and the regular bass player left for army service. So John now played bass for the 'straight' numbers and drums as required. The orchestra shrank to four players. Dance engagements were plentiful and John's money multiplied rapidly. The idea of the Café musicians as 'gentlemen' began to grate on him. When the band went upstairs to the upper Café they were not to be seen carrying their instruments. This was done by the porters. They were forbidden to speak to the waitresses and John was 'spoken to' by the fat Stanton who was in charge of the music.

This man was typical of many leaders of orchestras in as much as he had been in the Marine Band and his style of piano playing meant that to get constant work he had to form his own orchestra. His rather Military fashion of interpretation together with his attitude rather amused John, who started being 'obliging' in order to produce the reaction from him of Master and Man. John, of course, being the Man. He practically pulled his forelock and stood in front of him in an exaggerated stance. This became somewhat of a habit in later years - the feeling of power, much like a puppet master pulling the strings. The pompous types always reacted in the same fashion and John, whilst preserving a respectful posture, was really exploding with private laughter. So everything inevitably slid into the War and its accompanying Blitz on Plymouth.

Everyone knows about the bombing of the South West and Plymouth in particular. The Café orchestra was augmented to perform at the Royal Hotel Assembly Rooms and various players endeavoured to put some life into the proceedings. Their offerings of jazz versions of the melodies were ruined by the fat Stanton banging out the tune, instead of the chords which were essential for the solo musicians to build on.

"They dance to the tune," said he when it was suggested that he stuck to the harmonies. He paid the money so there was no

argument. When he took a piano chorus in what he fondly believed was a 'syncopated' fashion, he slowed down the tempo which drove John into a nervous breakdown. Presumably he did this in order to make it more important - in other words "Now listen to me!" During his life as a musician John had suffered from many inadequate leaders of bands, and on the rare occasion he went out with kindred spirits it was as good as an injection of some life-enhancing drug.

However the Luftwaffe saw fit to drop bombs on the Café and the Assembly Rooms and John's instruments were lost. In those war years it was possible to claim War Damage to tools of one's trade if lost through enemy action. But evidence of regular employment had to be provided. There was only one job John could find and that was at the Paramount Dance Hall in Union Street. Some excellent musicians were in residence and John was keen to start, having been accepted by the manager who was a retired drummer himself. Unfortunately this character turned out to be not entirely trustworthy. When John found that he was being paid less than the other members of the band he gave in his notice. The manager laughed when John told him he would be leaving at the end of the week. It was also becoming rather dangerous in the Dance Hall as the American Service men who had now appeared on the scene were taking all the girls away from the English. This resulted in many fights with fists and bottles flying - some landing on the stand thus putting the instruments in hazard. John had a taxi waiting on the Saturday night and was in the process of humping his drums down the stairs when the manager asked him why he was moving his instruments.

"I told you last week that I am going," said John.

"O that," said the man, an oily smile spreading over his features.

"That's all forgotten - come on, you're joking aren't you?"

Apparently he was unable to understand that it was not necessary to have a shouting match to part company.

Once he was free, the job at the Lockyer Hotel was offered him by Stanton who had employed him at the Café which had become a casualty of the bombing. This proved a congenial enough occupation. Again he played both drums and Double Bass as required.

When he had been with Stanton at the Café which had become a target for Mr Hitler's bombers he had been introduced to the Principal of the Local Art School. He had previously heard of this man from his students who had attended the Royal College of Art in Kensington. This Principal had been held in a certain amount of reverence by these young men. He had a reputation as a teacher of structural drawing. John's conversation with this man revealed that John had been familiar with some of the Principal's past students. At this time, John had been drawing Cartoons for some of the London magazines through an agent. He did 'roughs' in pencil in the intervals at the Café, supporting his pad on his side drum. He would then send them off and, if accepted, an order form would arrive for the finished work. Of course this had nothing to do with 'ART', being drawn in the accepted style for these puerile joke drawings.

The Principal offered classes in life drawing at the School.

"You will be invisible," he said, "Neither I or my staff will see you."

This, of course, meant that he would not have to pay any fees.

"Just learn to draw all over again," said the man.

This did not prove an easy task, but John persisted and eventually the work improved. He started oil painting from the Life Model and with some tuition in the craft soon produced some bold work in this direction. He attended the School in the mornings working through to half way through the afternoons. He then had to go to the Restaurant to play for tea followed by Dinner sessions. His days were filled in this fashion.