

VAGARY 18

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SUMMER (!)

1962

THIS AND THAT

Sorry, folks, but there has been no time to do illoing of any sort - there hasn't even been time to do Talking Point. I am sorry about this as there were a number of subjects I wanted to discuss. Also I haven't had time to have a discussion about architecture - its varying forms and the technicalities involved, but I am too ner the deadline. Much too near the deadline - I shall never get this to Ken in time. But in passing, having had a go at Coventry Cathedral, it is only fair to mention two older cathedrals that did not impress me at all. One was Peterborough Cathedral - outside there was a tremendous feeling of power, inside there was absolute flatness - a negativity of the spirit, and it looked awfully bare. It was like a body without a soul. The other place was Westminster Cathedral. I think it was built during the Victorian era and I will say that inside they are gradually covering up the brick work with the most beautiful marble. But it felt messy - there was no point of focus. There were some lovely side chapels, but they were much too open. What I did notice, though, was the chapel of St. Patrick and the Irish saints, the chapel of St. Andrew and the Scottish saints and the chapel of St. George and the English Martyrs. After all, there were English saints cononised by Rome. But what surprised me was that just inside the entrance to the door were two stalls, one for images and the other for books. I am aware that every cathedral does this, but surely another place could have been found. Also, considering the crisis going on in Rome, surely the girl on the books need not have had a radio blaring out jazz. A couple of yards from her was the church proper, where a priest accosted one with a plate. I have no objection whatsoever to contributing to collections, but I don't like having it thrust under my nose. I asked the priest for the latest news from Rome. He didn't know - nobody in the cathedral knew. To give the little Irish priest his due, he was quite dreadfully upset that no one had bothered to come from the clergy house to keep them informed. However, the ordinary Roman Catholics had been in and out all day, for candles were burning everywhere p and all for John. Afterwards we went to Westminster Abbey and in spite of the crowds there, the different atmosphere was noticeable immediately. In fairness, the Abbey has had nearly a thousand years to build up an atmosphere. But St. Faith's chapel was set aside for private prayer, and the atmosphere in there was tremendous. although the place itself was plain.

By the way, this may be the last Vagary for some time. For the next six months or so, I have some hard studying to do as I take an exam in February, so unless I can keep ahead of the curriculum, Vagary will have to go by the board.

Cont'd on P.28

COUNTDOWN

Being some rushed comments on the 35th, rushed because it's so damned near the deadline.

COMPACT. (Ella) Ah. captured at last! Welcome to the ring, Ella, and no horseshoes in the gloves! I hope that now you have finally moved we shall see more of you. I like your first issue, anyway, and especially did I like Arthur's crit of the so-called art folio inflicted on us a couple of mailings or so back. I think may be you are right about the underlying streak of malice in "That was the week that was." However, I must not pass judgment as I have seen so little of it, but I can recall two items which I thought in extreme bad taste and which I won't go into here. However, there were also some beautiful cracks and I especially like that one about Aldermaston being closed down not because of the bomb people but for lack of funds.

MORPH. (John) Where did you get the idea that John Wyndham was bigheaded? I have seen a number of times in the Globe and far from being bigheaded he is painfully shy. Perhaps this was, you mistook for bigheadedness./ as for giving an air of verisimilitude to the weird Somerset village, I can only suggest that you go and see for yourself. Yes, yes, yes, you are so right about the air of intenseness that has invaded Ompa and I see you too have used the pendulum theory. I know I have sounded intense in one or two of my reviews, but I had to get it out of my system as I object to loyalty being classed as old hat. Damn fine mess we would have been in today if most of us hadn't been loyal in 1939-45. Anyway, I think from now on I'm going to stick to the really offtrail stuff. Trying to make some of these intense types see someone else's point of view is only banging one's head against a brick wall and in any case, only bolsters their feelings of self importance. Also it is a waste of time and paper./ Reading your comments on Urdu, it occurred to me that very few of us who served in the forces bothered to learn the language of the country in which we were stationed. I swear that I knew less German when I left B.A.O.R. than I did when I joined it. They all spoke English so few of us bothered to learn German. But Bill was like yourself. He was in the regular army and spent five years in the Middle East, where he learned Arabic and French, the latter being the lingua franca of the Europeans. For a few days in France he was interpreter for Alexander, and would probably have been a great help all the war if he had not been invalided out after Dunkirk. This was the price he paid for being loyal.

OUTPOST (Fred) I am glad you like Ompa and quite without flattery I can tell you that you are one of the members who have given it a tremendous lift. When I look at your layout and see the lack of typos I think of my own zine and cringe. I was very interested in your story of the driving test, as it has been in my mind quite often lately to learn to drive, but having had my thirtyfirst (I think it is but I'm beginning to lose count) accident recently, maybe it isn't such a good idea. I am glad to see that you agree with me on some things, though when I get around to the subjects on which we agree I am always taken by surprise when someone has the same views. My God! Don't tell me you're suffering from the retired type of Cheltonian up there, too. I could have sworn that this town had all the selfish and nasty old bags from the rest of the country but it looks as though I might be wrong. The retired respectability I have seen since I came to live in Cheltenham has horrified me, but I think when the present lot die out we won't have many come here as Cheltenham is in the process of changing from snobbery to slobbery - in other words it is getting industrialised. Either way, I don't like it and if it weren't for Bill's business we'd both be out of the place at the drop of a fanzine. Alex Cambell's story was much appreciated, as was John Curtis's illos, especially the one heading Output.

AMBLE (Mercer) I did actually cut a stencil for the last mailing in which I reviewed Amble 12, but it was about De Gaulle and old hat now, so I won't bother to repeat it. Yes, I got as far as cutting one stencil of the last mailing and then we had the kitchen floor up and I never did get round to finishing a zine. Yes, your "equal Misery For All" was a good phrase and sadly, this seems to be the trend these days. You are not the first person to complain about how quietly I speak, though having to take the chair at the Con did prove I could raise my voice on occasions, I think.

SHADOWFAX (Eklund) H'm, you do have a point there about people being born all the time. I think we have got used to dividing the generations up by wars. Yes, I remember a cartoon somewhere of some medieval beats sitting down with a banner that said "Ban Ye Arrow." What amused me recently was the students who got into the Tower of London with a banner that looked just like the CND symbol, but a closer look proved it to be a clever drawing of a crossbow. Oh, yes, when the English first started using crossbows in strength the then Pope tried to get them banned, saying they would wipe out whole populations. Human nature doesn't really change a lot. What's with this Mrs. Gray idea? The name is Roberta, or Bobbie, whichever you prefer. Dammit, man, we're friends in this Apa.

ERG 15 (Jeeves) Good - I liked your illos very much, especially the one on page 2. Now if you decided to instruct the fans on how artwork should be done in fanzines I am sure more of us would agree than did with the last -er- instruction manual. Yes, I have noticed that Victor Borg ad and it has always puzzled me why a memory man should advertise via a book that one of his pupils has forgotten about. Yes, you have a good point about birth control. I would willingly support the needy who are that way through no fault of their own, but I see no reason why I should give what money I can spare to the reckless of any country, including this one.

SAVOYARD. (Pelz) Good zine, but I can't find much to comment on. Maybe your propaganda did say something about a northern blockade, but it doesn't alter the fact that Britain would not support the South. Despite the fact that the blockade had thrown thousands of cottoné workers in Lancashire out of work they still supported the North. I haven't time to go through my history books, but the most recent reference I came across was in a novel called "Proud New Flags", written by an American. Frank Yerby or Van Wyck Mason -- I've forgotten which one. Ah, yes, I wondered how many of you would spot the bow and arrow was also out of place.

WHATSIT 3. (Cheslin) Yes, you do have a very good point about newly independent countries, but one can always hope for what is called geometric progression. I see Haile Selassie is having an attempt to get things straightened out and I wish him luck - trying to get all those different African nationalities pulling together for their own good he's going to need it./As I said in the last Vagary, in the end everyone has to make up their own mind about reincarnation. You may have a very good point about souls originally coming from another planet and it's not as woolly minded - far from it - than some theories I have heard about these beings on Venus. Mars, maybe, because what happened to them when Mars could no longer support life as we know it. There is also the old Celtic idea of the transmigration of souls - that is, the animals progress until they are born as human and the humans progress until they become what we vaguely call angels. Perhaps there is something in it - Selina acts in a very human way at times, almost as though she is rehearsing. And she watches carefully every move we make. As she has learned to spell a few words, she must be rehearsing. I mean, whoever heard of a cat that wanted to read books? The Yugoslav army was in the film, not the horse./ Your point is taken about the fan artists, they should get more praise. As a matter of fact, this mailing was very good, apart from the deformed nude on the cover of Conversation.

BINARY (Patrizio) There is a bit about Coventry Cathedral in another part of the issue./Joe, the moment I find a modern book or play or painting that I like I shall not hesitate to say so. I am well aware that I can't have read and seen everything, but I have found it difficult to find a book that hasn't jumped on the bandwagon. I couldn't stand Beethoven at full blast, either. Any loud noise that keeps on and on gives me a blinding headache, but there seems so much discordancy in the commercial jazz. Yet, I remember a few years back I had a soft spot for skiffle. Since I became so abruptly shortsighted my ears seemed to have become extremely sensitive. Compensation, I suppose. I agree with you that sex itself isn't filthy but the exploitation of it. Treated as it should be treated there is nothing wrong with it all, which is why I have such a violent antipathy to words which make a mockery of it, I suppose. I also agree with you and Jimmy about these deformed babies. It is a terrible decision to make, I know, but think of the awful precedent that case has created. And justice was certainly not done - that child may have lived to be a genius. Although minus limbs, it still had a brain. The trial was an emotional mishmash. I read a quote recently which said "A miscarriage of mercy is as harmful as a miscarriage of justice" and I think that is what happened in Belgium. Though at the time I kept wondering just how much of a whipping boy has thalidomide been for radiation from tests.

CONVERSATION 21 (Hickman) Gods! And I thought this country was the most highly taxed in the world. Yes, I have already said I'd support people who are down through no fault of their own, but I object to supporting layabouts. But loyalty and an honest day's work seem to be dirty words these days. I see you have one of Rackham's deformed nudes on the cover. She's so top heavy she looks as though she's taken an overdose of stilbeostrol.

HEX (Wells) There wasn't much of a public outcry over the way the English government treated the Irish during the famine of the last century because for once they were not at fault. The Irish in Dublin could have done far more than they did. What was unforgivable were the things the English did to Ireland long before then, such as forbidding the native Irish to be educated and forbidding the training of priests. One could say that God is the Ultimate Good and the Devil the Ultimate Evil, but that's not a particularly good argument, either. I have said before that I believe in a power. A power that is neutral, but which can be tapped and used for good or evil. I have also heard it said that God allows evil to make us think, if there were no evil we would have still been primitive, but the evils forced to think and overcome then. The idea of what is evil varies from country to country and from generation to generation. So does the idea of good. One man's meat, etc.

SCOTTISHE (Ethel). I am glad you wrote that piece about the "quieter, more loyal times" and I hope that Bruce Burn has read it and digested it thoroughly and that it has made him realise that the times then were anything but quiet. After my father was invalided from the regular army - another one who paid for his loyalty - he went back to his profession of engineering. But he was a self employed man and when he died very suddenly at the age of 41 the money he did leave went on a court case, which my mother eventually won but as it dragged on for over a year you can guess how much money was left. Suddenly we were with the have nots instead of the haves and, incidentally, the have nots made our life pretty bloody for us at times because we had once been the haves. But eventually my mother was granted a widow's pension by the army of 28/- a week, and on this she managed to bring up five children. To this day I don't know how she managed it. What I do remember is how miserable we felt because she had to go out to work and somehow it didn't seem right that our mother should have to work. Our one ambition was to reach school leaving age so that we could go out to work and she wouldn't have to do so. This, I suppose, could be called loyalty to a parent who slaved her guts⁵⁰⁴ for us. Disgusting of us, wasn't it./ The open letter from Frances was a riot - you should chain her to the typer more often./Walt's memoirs as interesting as ever - I shall be sorry when he reaches the end of them./ I liked your ^{view} ~~re-~~ of John Prebble's book and I noticed that the Campbells did it again. They helped to sell Charles 1 to the English, it was their clan chieftain responsible for the execution of Montrose, it was a Campbell who gave the order for the Glencoe massacre, and it just had to be Campbells who turned on the Highlanders in the rising. Even the present chieftain seems to have got himself in an unsavoury mess. I bet the MacDonalds are having a quiet chuckle to themselves.

ENVOY 12(Cheslin) If you intend to do that when you have Power you can be dictator at any time you like as far as I am concerned. And have you noticed in the aftermath of the Vassal case how the blame was plonked onto a dead man who can't, of course, hit back.

CURIOSITY SHOPPE (Spencer) I was staggered to read that you were born in 1939 - I had the impression that you were somewhere round the thirty mark. However, it was a pleasant surprise as, contrary to many opinions, I am all for young people getting on, and I like the air of maturity in your magazines. Also you have proved that maturity doesn't mean being stuffy about things. Your very pleasant sense of humour proves that. As for good and evil, I don't know if I shall have time to to natter about it in Talking Point. The deadline is once again getting dangerously close.

BURP (Bennett) But, Ron, refusing to go to the movies because of some noisy youths making it hell. That's giving in to them. Why not just tell them to shut up or get them slung out. I can give you a personal assurance that it works./Elinor has summed up this so called realistic trend better than I have done. In fact, I find I am beginning to rely on Elinor to put down what I have been trying to say far more clearly and crisply than I do./Cor! Richard III was killed at the Battle of Bosworth. It was Edward II who was murdered with a red hot poker. I suppose the men who did it, knowing of his homosexual tendencies, decided to make the punishment fit the crime. Berkeley Castle isn't far from here and the legend still persists that on the anniversary of his death his screams can still be heard in the village. Incidentally, the Berkeley family still live in the castle./I agree with you on smoking. But note what an insidious thing this ban idea is. First it's ban the bomb, then it's ban smoking and loyalty, next it will be ban everyone who isn't spying for the CND and whatever crummy country is backing it. Funny, isn't it, how they want freedom for only the nits who think as they do. That's freedom?/ Your story of the Roses match reminded me of the Scottish football story. For the benefit of the fans who don't know Celtic and Rangers are two Scottish football teams, one Catholic and the other Presbyterian. Everytime they meet extra police are on duty in case a religious war breaks out. One year an Englishman was watching the two teams fighting it out and cheering both sides impartially. Suddenly a Scot turned and asked him: "Are you a Catholic?" "No," said the Englishman. "Then it's a Presbyterian you are." "I am not", said the Englishman. "Then hauld yer tongue, you bluidy atheist," said the Scot.

THE NEW ASHMOLEAN ETC (Johnstone) I cannot see any excuse for obscenities in literature. I am well aware of what a soldier may say in his barrack room concerning his equipment and his leaders. I also remember that during my time in the Forces no airman would dream of using that sort of language in front of the servicewomen, unless they were the sort of women whom nobody had any respect for, anyway, fortunately few. If he did accidentally used any of the obscenities he was most embarrassed and instantly apologised. As for a girl who used that sort of language - both sexes instantly placed her in one class - the common tart. But a book is not a barrack room, and most readers don't have to have the words spelt out for them. They accept what was said in barrack rooms and fit the words themselves if they wish. The only difference I can see between the immature mediocrities of my youth and the present ones is that in those days they knew they were being basically silly. When they had written "bum" on the wall they ran away. The present lot not only write worse on the wall, but they persuade

publishers to put it between covers and demand that the public treats it as great and significant literature and themselves as geniuses. It isn't even as though they have any real misery to wallow in - their so-called realism isn't even honest. But to get back to what I was saying - those men who of the war years who kept their curses to the barrack room can't be feeling too pleased. From all walks of life they did their best to be courteous in public and make their world better for their children. But I'm forgetting - they were the fools who were loyal - and no matter how afraid they were they didn't have the crawling whining gutless impudence to disguise their cowardice by saying that loyalty was for the birds. If people haven't the guts to be loyal I wish to God they'd go to the country they want to walk over us and see how far their damned stupidity will get them there. But they should keep one thing in mind. Nobody loves a traitor, not even the country which pays them. Those who can be disloyal once can be disloyal twice and any leader of a country with wits will have them put down quickly and forever. Don't construe this as an attack on anything you have said - it's that just that three words in the last mailing have damned near broken my heart. What years have so many hundreds of thousands of us wasted for the end result of dirt and disloyalty. Oh, we weren't all fine and clever - I can think of two nits already, but they were dealt with. And I can think of the virginal nit who sat behind us the other night when we saw Phaedra. I say virginal although her husband was sitting with her. She could not see that the film was not a chunk of dirt to titillate the jaded palates of of the wouldbe Lawrences and Weskers, but a tragedy that has occurred many times since the story of the first Phaedra three thousand years ago. "Look et 'er. Can see what she is, can't yer? Proper dissipated, aint she? Disgusting, I call it." Yet she was determinedly sitting there getting her money's worth. This was a film kept going by brilliant acting and brilliant photography. The seduction scene was an object lesson of how it could be done without a single kitchen sink or obscene word. She could have got up and left the cinema, of course, but with typical British fortitude she determinedly sat through the film, enjoying her disgust and misery. There was a lovely scene in the film of the British having a night out - we knew they were really enjoying themselves because there was not a smile to be seen.

And that seems to be the end of the mailing comments this time round. I would have liked to have done the previous mailing as well, but no time. However, I see, after all, that I still have one zine to review and then there is "BlastOff," of course.

SOUFFLE (Bickerstaffe) I nearly put this in the section I have called Blast Off, but in that I am discussing what I consider to be important and what you have said isn't all that important. All you need is cutting down to size before the fate of the frog overtakes you. Firstly, I am not dictating to you that you should not like jazz, but I have as much right to say I dislike it as you have to say you like it./ Just how observant, are you? For months on end I have been writing in Vagary on what I think of a lot of modern literature and art - so all of a sudden I sit down and scribble a few words without thinking what I am writing. I'd been thinking of it for months, boy. You are still a boy, aren't you? I mean, no mature chap would have sat down and spouted the arrogant rubbish that you did. I don't know if you've lived in Australia all your life, but if you have remember one thing. I have been all over the British Isles and I have seen its architecture, good, bad, and indifferent and I still say that Coventry Cathedral is a mess. However, to prove that this is not necessarily an opinion held by my age group alone, I'll quote you someone who is much nearer to you in age. He is twenty years old, the son of the director of our firm and is not a humourless do-gooder who wants to ban everything, but an intelligent, normal young man with a sense of values, a sense of humour, and sense of responsibility - and he is all this without being a beat, or a Ted or a pseudo-Bohemian intellectual. When we were discussing Coventry Cathedral he disagreed with me - very courteously, so it is a pity you weren't there to see how it can be done - and told me of the number of people who had visited it and felt a kind of awe. I pointed out that this was probably awe at the building, not awe of a religious kind and that so far nobody had mentioned a feeling of faith or loving kindness. The other day he went to see it, being firmly biassed towards it. He came back very disappointed. He said that the outside chapels looked like miniature gasometers, the three arches that connected the old and new cathedrals looked like the tops of nissen huts that the architects decided to use up. He said that the ripple effect of the front was quite impressive, but beneath the west window were plateglass doors that made him feel as though he were walking into a cinema. "And instead of nicely carved pews there were hundreds of wooden chairs all over the place." He looked at the statue of St. Michael holding the Devil in chains, which he considered out of place against the massive wall. As he said, the Devil is a powerful piece of sculpture, apart from the look of boredom, but above him was what he considered an evil ace topping a puny body. As he said, he would have called this "Persecution" - the arrogant weak persecuting the strong the moment they got

the chance. As for the tapestry - his description of it was that it looked as though a child had been asked to design the back of a playing card, had done so, then left it out in the rain. Another thing that saddened him was that he saw only one crucifix in the whole of the building. "If you could call it a crucifix," he said. "It was on the high altar and it looked like some twisted scrap iron on a pylon." He was so disappointed that he went to the ruins of the old cathedral and said that when he went into the tower he noticed as much craftsmanship and skill had gone into the building of it as had in the modern building. I nearly forgot - he mentioned that the lights over the choir stalls in the new building reminded him of "Sunday Night at the Palladium". By another observer the place has been called a collection of ecclesiastical curiosities. And the thing that impressed him most of all? The same thing that has impressed a vast number of visitors to Coventry. The make-shift cross, made by an airraid warden, of burnt rafters in the old cathedral with two words carved beneath it - "Father Forgive"/ You were a bit too eager to be snide when you leapt to the conclusion that I know nothing of engineering. Before you start sneering you should make sure that people either know or do not know any particular subject. I probably know as much about engineering as you do - apart from jet aircraft engineering. And I spent a good deal of my life in engineering, so I do have an eye for a good clean line and a graceful curve. For your information, my sight was ruined through the precision engineering I did in the Air Force. When you have only three thou of an inch to play around with and no visual aid it plays hob with the eyes. But what the hell, it saved a few lives so it was worth it. My father happened to be an engineer and a damned good one. My nursery was an engineer's workshop and I didn't bother to cut my teeth on a bone ring. They were cut on a micrometer - this displeased my father. So if I knew nothing of engineering how come I got the job of instructing a bunch of Waafs, all of whom passed their trade test ACW1, which is the equivalent of credits in an exam. And there was no fiddle about it - I only instructed them - they took their trade tests on another camp. Maybe it would surprise you to know that I have seen beauty in engineering work, but I have. Waterloo Bridge is a case in point. Also, during the war, the Air Transport Auxiliary asked for volunteers from the WAAF to transfer to it as flight engineers. I was one of those volunteers and had all the recommendations from the Technical section, but the medics stopped me cold. It was the medics who eventually forced me into an office. And the Air Force didn't waste time and money sending technical people on courses to engineering firms unless it thought they were worth it. And I went on two of those courses. I could go on for pages about my engineering days, but there is neither the time nor the

paper to do so. Besides, I haven't finished with you yet on some other points./ Sure Keats knew about the seamy side of life, but he didn't push it down everybody's throat and call it great literature, did he? I know Keats poetry pretty well so you were wasting your time quoting him. You say in one sentence that even Keats knew that one person couldn't know everything. In the next you announce that Keats said Truth is Beauty and Beauty Truth as though it were a statement of fact. You must be very young indeed if you think all truth is beautiful. Since when has all truth been beauty? Belsen and the other concentration camps were a most frightening truth. According to your argument, because it was truth it was beautiful. Death is a "moment of truth". I saw death, much of it, during the London blitz when I was a teenager - and there was nothing beautiful about it. War is a shocking truth. Is war beautiful? Two thousand years ago a man asked "What is truth?" and no one has yet given a satisfactory answer. Probably because there are so many facets of it. For instance, the truth of one religion may be the damnable lie of another. If you know what truth is precisely you're the only person in the whole wide world who does.

My God! If you think Dickens was writing about the real slums and dregs of society of the last century, you are naive. Dickens wrote a lot of sentimental slush - not because he wanted to, but because his publishers and his public wanted it that way. For the real sordid life and slummery of last century try reading Mayhew's London or "Gaslight and Daylight" by Sala. These are factual books that make Dickens read like a Sunday School text. But Dickens at least proved he could write by getting over his point without the use of a single obscene word or any pornography. But if you think that he had nothing but pity for the poor and downtrodden, I suggest you read "The Uncommercial Traveller". There is a chapter in there in which he actually takes an eighteen year old girl to court for using obscene language in the street. What is more, Dickens quoted the Profane Acts in court which, incidentally, has not yet been repealed. When you've read some factual books about the slums of the last century - and this - then you will have a peg on which to hang your argument. I shouldn't bother with Karl Marx, by the way. What he wrote about Manchester was hearsay and referred to conditions that existed thirty years before he wrote the book which is still doing its damndest to wreck the world./By the way, Shakespeare wrote with the sole purpose of entertaining people and his plays are still produced regularly. Ibsen and Shaw, especially the latter, used the stage as a platform, the former having more success as he was more sincere. But now their plays are produced as period pieces. And I am still

not interested in a book or a play unless it has a plot, a beginning, a middle and an end. I refuse to subscribe to this modern theory of negativity when mediocrities are so damned busy being functional, unemotional, and "precious" that they forget one must aim for the heart and soul and not minds as sterile as their own. That's it, I think, in the avant garde stuff. Soullessness! A great pity./ I leave you with a quote. "You exhibit all the signs of the mature reasoning fan, one of the most noticeable of which is a tendency to avoid contentious comments." You said that in your review of Bixel. Are you a mature reasoning fan? Or a not-think who is so eager to be snide that he trips up on all his own arguments. Until you have made up your mind, I suggest that you keep quiet.

I found yet another zine, so last, but not least is

DOLPHIN 4 (Elinor) You know, Elinor, I am beginning to rely on you to put into a few pithy sentences ideas that I have been trying to express in my usual excitable way. Mumble, mumble, I go and then you put it straight. I think in future I shall just refer members to page four of Dolphin 4./I really don't know if I seem the same in person as I do in print - I seem to have spent a great deal of my time in fandom being something official which is my own fault mainly, as I hate refusing anyone when they ask me to do something. But I shall have to put my foot down as it would be nice to relax and enjoy a con without having to worry about meetings and so on. Besides, since I've been in Cheltenham, my spare time has been cut down considerably. Probably I'm quieter than I seem on paper, though it has been known for me to go up like a rocket on occasions./ If you like pseudo-Gothic architecture, Elinor, when you come to London you must have a look at the Prudential Assurance building in Holborn, and Tower Bridge, of course. The Princes Theatre in Charing Cross Road, will probably make you want to cat, though./ Most people who knew Florence Nightingale found her a pest, but she did do much for the nursing profession and the Army hospitals. She also introduced a system of accountancy in the Army which was used until quite recently, perhaps it is still being used. But she must have been a most uncomfortable woman to have around one./ I don't know if you have read the biography of Richard III by Paul Murray Kendall, but it is worth reading. Since it first came out in this country there have been several reprints. I think Josephine Tey was largely responsible for the increased interest in Richard. Many people who only knew Richard from history books biased in favour of the Tudors, thought they were getting a modern detective story when they bought "The Daughter of Time," but it was so well and interestingly written that many of them became interested in finding out more about Richard. I hope you do manage the mailings regularly - I like Dolphin.

BLAST OFF

GRIST (Mills) You are in this section, Ellis, because of your cover. I don't understand it, because I knew you personally and you were kind and considerate of other people, therefore it defeats me how you could come out with a cover in such incredibly bad taste. If it were just irreverence I doubt if anyone would have cared much, but it's downright "sick." I have never professed to be overly concerned with religion and I don't how^{know} many members are Christians, but if any are that cover must have been horribly offensive. But putting aside any question of religion, crucifixion was a most cruel death and nothing will ever make agony funny. Whether Christ was Divine or not, many people are deep and sincere Christians and to mock at Christ's agony is to attack a deep fundamental belief they have in their Christianity. It is not in the least funny, but a most damnable discourtesy to a man who at least did as much as he could for humanity. As I have already said, I can't understand^{it}, because it seems so completely out of character for you.

SIZAR (Burn) I hadn't read all the mailing when I went to the Con, otherwise I would have had quite a lot to say to you on certain subjects. I am sorry that yours was one of zines I had not yet read because now it will be months before you read this and I would rather have let you know what I think sooner. So you don't want the older people to run things - and how much do you expect to get done by people who can think of nothing better than sitting down in the street? And I don't want what is mere "youth" in politics to run things, either. Hitler was somewhere round the forty mark when he took over Germany. Nasser is still a young man politically speaking. Stalin was in his forties when he came to power. And Kenneddy, who is more expert at Brinkmanship than Dulles ever was, is still in his forties. One has to have a hell of a lot of experience before running a country - there's such a lot to learn - and no-one has had enough experience at twenty, or even forty - it has to come with time. But God save us from the "youths" in politics. About the fifties is a good time to have had enough experience to become a Prime Minister or President. Who are the great leaders today? - and when I ask this it does not necessarily mean I'm in favour of many of the things they do. Adenauer - who pulled West Germany together and he's now 82. De Gaulle - who pulled France together - is 72. No matter how much the British and many of the French may dislike him he saved France from complete political collapse. The assassins who keep missing him have proved the inefficiency of the anti-De Gaullists. The Pope is 81, and he has done far more for

his religion than many of the previous popes put together. As I type this he is seriously ill and will probably have left us by the time the mailing reaches you. I think he will be as sincerely mourned by the non-Roman Catholics as he will be by his own flock. Churchill had turned sixty when he became the man for the need in Britain. Krushchev is turned 70. Now these men want a successor - maybe because they want to retire, maybe because by now they must be getting tired. And when one is tired - or too young to have had the necessary experience - odd decisions are liable to be made. But remember it was the younger men I have mentioned who plunged the world into war or near war. Churchill is nearly as old as Bertrand Russell, but when Churchill realised he was getting querulous he shut up and retired.

So you don't trust anybody born in more loyal times: Which remark only confirms my suspicions that there is a hell of a subversive element in the CMD who would sell us down the river at the drop of the hat. And don't tell me that we older ones yearn for the "quieter times". What quieter times? Any-one who would want the thirties back must be stark raving crackers. That was the time of the depression and there was no welfare state then to support those who deserved it or the layabouts who didn't. You worked or starved and as there was a lot of unemployment many people did starve. Oh, yes, there was the dole and the Relief Office, but you were only allowed on the dole for a certain number of weeks - after that it was the Means Test. As for the Relief Office, many people regarded this as begging and there was a queer idea then - it would be regarded as the height of stupidity today, of course - that money earned by an honest day's work was better than any begged off a jack-in-office in the Labour Exchange. Oh, yes, members of the unemployed man's own class often enjoyed his little bit of power and it was nothing for a man with a family who had been out of work a long time to be accused of being too idle to get work. But the majority of people did not expect the Government to keep them in comfort and would rather work at anything they could find than go begging on the dole, which many of them regarded it as. In many cases, when work was unobtainable and even the Relief Office could not - or would not - help, there was only one thing left. I saw it happen and it was heartbreaking. At our school there was a family of children who lived in a caravan - and if anyone lived in a caravan in those days then one was worse than a gipsy whose life it was anyway. There were no school dinners then, and if anyone had to stay to lunch they brought their own. These particular children brought lard sandwiches and not many of them, either, It was all their parents could afford. There came the day when there was not even the money to buy food. With the few coppers he had left the father came through

our village with his wife and children. He bought five wood-bines between himself and his wife - the first they had had since before the slump - and a few sweets for each of the children. It was the last of his money ^{and} to see that his family was fed he had been reduced to the last desperate expedient. They were on their way to Tichbourne Institute, which was a euphemism for the workhouse. Even at that, workhouses did not allow anyone to stay longer than six months. The last I heard of that family was that the children of school age were in a home and the rest of them were sleeping under hedges. And don't ask me why we didn't help. We couldn't - we had barely enough money for our own needs and the workhouse was the waking nightmare of countless people then. And don't you dare to say that those people should not have had the children. They were all born before the slump really hit this country - it had just started to pick up when the Wall Street crash came - and remember if couples hadn't had children then there would have been no cannon fodder to save this country for a pack of treacherous little crumbs who are ready to change sides to save their own miserable skins.

And did you know there was an act that stated young persons - from fourteen to sixteen - should not work more than fortyeight hours a week in a factory. There were many factories which turned a blind eye to this act and I knew a number of boys and girls of fourteen who worked 52 hours a week or more. And do you know what the basic rate was for fourteen year olds who worked in factories - and most factories kept to the minimum? It was 2¹/₄d an hour. Now work out how much a fourteen year old working 52 hours a week would earn at that rate. And when we reached our teens and the country was at last getting over the depression, it all went smash. Please don't forget that if it weren't for the teenagers and young men and women of 1939-45 (and what made you think that was a quiet time?), this present set of teenagers would not have had things so smooth. But now those of us who lost our youth so you could have one are regarded as criminals by your kind - because we were loyal. Well, thank you very much, but that is the sort of criminal I don't mind being. I don't want the so-called good old days back, but what I'd like to see is a better sense of values and less woollyminded idealism, which now seems to be a euphemism for disloyalty.

"Too soft to face the rigours of a hard and noisy broiling planet" indeed. You flaming nit! It's your own age group who are the ones who don't know what it is face rigours and would be too soft ^{for} them if they did. Too soft! There was nothing soft about spending your childhood in a depression - there was nothing soft about going through a war. I was in London all through its blitz and you - you who have never seen war - have the nerve to say we're soft. I'll tell you whose soft. After

the war, we had National Service and by the 1950s many of the National Servicemen were a spineless, whining lot. And this despite the fact they were on an easier discipline than the regulars. A regular airman of eighteen could get detention if he overstayed his leave. A National Serviceman would get seven, possibly fourteen, days confinement to barracks. By God! if you insisted to some of those little crumbs that they obeyed an order they'd be writing home to Mum, who would immediately write to her M.P., who was usually an interfering Socialist. To have heard some of the carry on you'd have thought that every National Serviceman spent his time in the Forces being persecuted. If anything, it was the regulars who suffered. For every good National Serviceman there were nine useless ones. In fact, the regulars were so depressed with most of them that many of the men and women who could have been of great service to the forces bought themselves out. And they weren't the ancient regulars, either, but the younger ones who had signed on after the war. And don't tell me I don't know what I'm talking about - I had to train some of the nits. I know from experience that for every George Locke there would be nine-sub-morons, with all the low cunning of the moronic tribe. And remember this - the previous generation to mine did not live soft (I can make an exception of Bertrand Russell, who saw a large part of World War 1 from the safety of the States). They were the young of the hell of the first World War and they did not have the dole or the old age pension before that. "The older ones!" Possibly to you I am a million years old, but I could still have a family. But now I'm glad I haven't got one. To go through a slump, a depression, and a war and then have my children - my Welfare State children - turn round and tell me that I've had it soft would have been more than I could have stood. I would have shot them and been glad to hang for it, for life wouldn't have been worth living with the knowledge that my children would cheerfully betray their country. If it weren't for the fact that I do know a few decent youngsters who do have some feelings of loyalty I would shoot myself. I suppose when you youngsters have finally let every would-be world dictator walk all over us I shall be slammed into a concentration camp for the crime of having been loyal to the country in which I was born. MacMillan turned round and said "You've never had it so good." He was wrong. The trouble is that 90% of the whole damned pack of you have never had it so soft." Apropos of which, is there any truth in the rather curious rumour I heard the other day that Burgess and McLean are the powers behind the throne of the CND Committee of 100?

Ah, yes, I read a book called "You have Lived Before", issued by the Scientologists in London and there was a case suspiciously like yours in it. One or two of the cases may have been genuine flashbacks, but the majority seemed to be a

mishmash of vaguely remembered sciencefiction stories. I don't think I shall have time for Talking Point, where I would have had something further to say on reincarnation.

You mistake me. I am not denying anyone their pleasure. All I ask is that no one should deny me mine, either. It was pointed out to me at the Con that because I am offended by some of the obscenities in novels that other people read without a qualm, why should there be censorship by people like myself. But this cuts both ways. Must I stop reading because I am so tired of all this? Freedom is freedom, but when freedom becomes license it is not official censorship that takes over, but weight of public opinion. It would be pointless putting the books back under the counter, but suppose the bookshops had various departments plainly labelled "Pornography", "Lavatory Literature," and "Obscenities"? so that the readers who wanted to read that sort of stuff could openly buy it. How many of the people who claim to be broadminded would do so? However, what I keep trying to point out is that eventually the pendulum will swing and, because of this obscene discourtesy that pretends even to itself that it is modern frankness it will swing too far. Extreme puritanism is as just as bad as this modern trend and what's more, when the pendulum swings that way it usually sticks. During the Elizabethan age, we had honest bawdiness (the scurrility did not survive except as *curiosa*), which slid into licentiousness during the reigns of the first two Stuarts. What happened? The Commonwealth - so puritanical that the pendulum swung again the moment the Stuarts got back. Then we had the Restoration period, after which we had our William and the pudding faced Georges. Until the Regency - a few years earlier, really - we had dourness and the death rather than dishonour period. After the Regency and the coming of the Prince Consort we had an age of false morality that took a world war to break it, though Edward VII and his contemporaries had started the ball rolling. But never mind, Bruce, in a few years time you will alter or modify your opinions - we all do. It's all part of the pattern of growing old gracefully, or disgracefully as the case may be.

I doubt if you'd ever convert me to modern or commercial jazz, as the only kind I do have a soft spot for is what is now called trad - I did rather like boogie, now I come to think of it. But I think the truth is that I have a liking for harmony, not only in music, but in architecture, literature, painting, etc., and though I know there always has to be an opposite, why is there so much of the opposite?

THE QUIET TIMES

(Extracts from a diary describing a trip to Dunkirk.)

Whitsunday. 1940. We passed the Belgian frontier about 5.30 a.m. Our first experience was the sharp explosions of ack-ack. We expected to be bombed or gunned at any minute and suddenly there was a tremendous explosion near us. Our lorry vibrated to the shock and we stopped. In a field beside the road there was a blazing German aircraft. The tail with a black cross on it is still intact and in the midst of the fire brighter patches of a white blaze that were incendiary bombs.

On once more. The most pathetic sight were the evacuees, of whom there is a never ceasing flow coming past us. Old, young, men, women, babies - they come by every known means of conveyance. Open lorries hold sometimes about 30 or 40 of them.- some dressed, some in blankets, or even their night-clothes. Two men pass us supporting an old woman by the arms. She has a handkerchief to her face. She removes it a moment and looks at us. Her expression is the most terrible thing I have ever seen. I have no words for the agony of suffering which showed through the blood. God help the poor devils! What have these unlucky people done that they should suffer? They show no sign of terror, but only bitter sorrow and helpless resignation.

Brussels at last! Most of those who greet us are women. These are who suffer most in a war. Loved men who die in battle can never be given back to them. The tragedy of it appalls me, and as I stand on the threshold of my own death, not knowing whether I shall cross it or not, I find what worries me most is the awful misery of these poor women, especially the older ones who have been through it all before, from 1914 to 1918.

May 14th, 1940. Still the evacuees come in weary processions. I cannot bear to look at them for long. One of their pathetic farm carts had a chair on it, in which was sitting an old, old woman. There were two tiny children huddling against her knees. The feeble motion of her shrivelled hands playing with the children's hair told their own story. I understand the civil population here are under orders to move. When I went to buy some bread the baker asked if it were true. I said I didn't know. "My God!" said the baker. "Do they call this civilisation?" "It's worse than---". "Savages?" I suggested. "Worse than those," he said helplessly.....

It is now 6.15 p.m. It is true about the evacuation. Oh, God! Poor devils, what will they do? There is a baby toddling round happily while its mother and aunt are cramming personal

effects together. They must leave before seven o'clock "Nous son sommes tout a fait perdu", the old woman weeps. Christ! The baby is picking up his little coat and hat - he thinks he is going for a walk! His pram is wheeled out. Blankets and suitcases bundled together, all at less than half an hour's notice. Who knows if they will ever see their home again? There they go, old lady, two girls, two prams, the baby in one, belongings in the other. All three women heavily dressed in black. They have no idea where they are going - they just go. There are heavy explosions in the distance.

16th May, 1940. The queerest sensation I have noticed so far is of living from moment to moment. It's very uncanny and will take some getting used to. About an hour ago I saw a Bren carrier which had been hit by an enemy armour piercing bullet. It wasn't pleasant. Too much blood where the driver had been.

21st May, 1940.I am alone in the huge room of a chateau still furnished with the possessions of its previous owner. There is a solitary candle on a marble table burning like a funeral taper. The silence is oppressive and the time is 10 pm. A mongrel dog has crept in silently, like a tiny frightened ghost. I tried to comfort him, but he only whined softly at me and our eyes reflected back each other's sadness. I cannot imagine I shall come through this alive. If this diary falls into the hands of an understanding person I hope they will send it to my mother whose name and address will be found at the back.

28th May, 1940 Moving again by daylight. Jerry dropped all sorts of bombs amongst us before we left. Will this ghastly war never stop? If I live through this I will try never to hate anyone again, for I have seen what hate brings. How one thinks of oneself! It seems so utterly selfish and mean of me. I am half ashamed to write this down, but it is interesting to know that when gets to grim fundamentals one finds a basic egotism at the root of all the showy creeds and philosophies masking the real self during easier times.... Today I saw on the road a horse killed by shrapnel - the wheels of our lorries slipped on its entrails. A little further was a newly made grave with a rough wooden cross made from two tree branches. There was a priest kneeling by it - his lips moving in prayer..

29th May 1940. The most ghastly day yet. About 8.30 a.m. about 20 dive bombers approached. We dived, too, in all directions. I had scarcely flung myself flat when the bombers opened up and the raid lasted for 40 minutes of unspeakable hell. I never thought to come through alive, especially when each aircraft that had dropped all its bombs flew low and systematically machinedgunned the fields and hedges. After the

raid I got up shaking from head to foot..... Off by lorry and eventually come to a field where there are many British Army lorries and trucks abandoned and some already on fire. We salvage what we can in the way of cigarettes, food and so forth. Somebody fires a bullet into our petrol tank and someone else strikes a match..... I regretted the loss of my portable typewriter, but when I see how others have lost everything I feel a selfish pig..... God knows where we are going, but I think we must be making for the coast. Havoc and ruin everywhere! Hundreds of lorries, kit and equipment of all kinds strewn over the roads. Indescribable quantities of army material lying everywhere. We covered mile after mile of destruction getting to the coast. On the way, I fell into a ditch full of water and got completely soaked, then it started to rain. We tramped for hours and eventually, about 6.30 in the evening came to a little coastal town. We reported our names, ranks and numbers to an individual collecting these details, and then stayed in the streets with the heavy rain pouring down on us, because there seemed no where else to go. Eventually I billeted myself with some others in a partly bombed house where someone had managed to scrounge tea, sugar and milk..... After dark went down to the beach. There seemed an endless queue of troops and after waiting for hours I lay down on the sand, waiting for dawn.

30th May, 1940 The beach by daylight was a sight I shall never forget. As far as the eye could see kit, equipment and arms lay all abandoned. Some humourist described it as Blackpool beach after an August Bank Holiday. There were thousands of troops lying in groups along the sands. They must have made a perfect target from the air. There was no excuse for this because behind the beach were sandhills and shrubs, which could be used as cover. There was no food and, worse still, no water, so I went scavenging. Others were doing the same thing, and ransacking kit after kit that lay on the shore..My bag was a slab of chocolate, a tin of jam, some Oxo cubes, and a tin of soup. Three or four destroyers and several odd boats were still taking on troops in desultory parties of 20 or so. 10 German bombers appeared suddenly out of the clouds and dived on the largest boat. In spite of ack-ack and pom-pom fire from the Navy, I saw one machine release 4 bombs and score a direct hit on a deck crammed from end to end with troops. A huge column of black smoke hid the ship temporarily from sight. A destroyer went towards ^{her} at full speed, regardless of her own danger. Another destroyer was hit amidships and a third had a narrow escape, being immediately straddled by bombs. The Germans disappeared momentarily. The troop carrying vessel was now visible again. She was blazing. God knows how many had been killed. Seeing a big flight of German aircraft approaching

I beat a strategic retreat to better cover and had the luck to find a disused gunpost, heavily timbered and sandbagged. Shortly afterwards I was joined by three others. Squadron after squadron of enemy planes flew overhead, gunning and bombing for about an hour. They finally showered us with anti-personnel bombs. They are light, but each aircraft carries a huge number of them, which they release in bundles. They sound like the drumming of hail on a window pane and their noise increases to an overwhelming roar as it approaches wherever one happens to be. Through the gun slit I watched these bombs bursting on the dunes where the troops were taking shelter. Actually, the damage these did was amazingly slight and there were few fatalities among all those thousands of men. Eventually, I drifted into a state of semi-coma - I could not call it sleep. After dark someone shook me awake and we went back to the beach in search of our unit. When it became light I saw a long column of troops stretching interminably ahead. Men were mostly lying down, utterly exhausted and too weary to care whether they offered a good bombing target or not.

31st May 1940 I went in search of drinking water, noticing on the way small groups of men at the water's edge, looking at something on the ground by their feet. I went to the nearest group. They, like the others, had gathered round the corpse of someone who had been drowned trying to make the boats during the darkness. I saw in this case the body of a British soldier about 30 years of age. It was lying on its back, hands clenched arms doubled across the breast. The face showed no particular signs of suffering, but the glazed eyes and lips drawn back, exposing a prominent set of teeth were not pleasant to look at. A gash on his forehead had bled rather badly, so I guessed he had knocked his head some way, fallen into the water partly stunned, and so been drowned..... After dark I walked for miles in search of a major who was supposed to be leading a party bound for a boat. I enquired everywhere, but no-one had ever heard of him. As I trudged back German shellfire was getting unpleasantly near and when some shrapnel whizzed past me I realised they were mortar shells. This meant the German advance troops were too close for my comfort. I left the vicinity hurriedly. As it was getting light weary men were digging holes for shelter in the wet sand and as far as I could make out boats were still waiting to be loaded within sight of shore.

1st June 1940. Utterly desperate and willing to risk anything. I found a few men I knew sitting by the water's edge with no idea of what to do or where to go. I made an appeal "Who wants to come with me. Get one of those drifting rowboats and see if we can make England, or get picked up on the way." There

was only one volunteer, so we trudged off together. There were several rowboats floating tantalisingly about in the water about two or three hundred yards out. I was not sure if I could swim this in my state of exhaustion. However, we found on the sands a cockleshell of a boat with a paddle. We dragged it to the water and put our kit on it. My plan was to row to a bigger boat and bring it ashore when we might rig up some kind of sail, get what supplies we could and make for the open sea. I had a compass and we were prepared to make a crosschannel trip if we had to. My cockleshell was only a few yards from the shore when she suddenly filled and sank under me like a brick. The damned thing had a hole I hadn't noticed. I dived and salvaged what I could, rifle, boots, tin hat, ammunition - the rest was lost forever. When I got ashore I saw a French soldier stripping naked and to my disgust he swam out to sea after the boat I had wanted. I could almost have wept. My partner made a suggestion. He said "Perhaps they might take us with them - it's worth a try." We reached the boat (a large open rowboat) just as about 10 French soldiers was scrambling in. I bluffed them into taking us along with a promise that I would try to get them taken on board the nearest British vessel. They agreed, so we rowed like mad toward the nearest tramp steamer flying the White Ensign. How long we took to reach it I don't know, but when we did I hadn't the strength to haul myself over the rails and can't remember who helped me on board. Somebody gave us water, bully beef and cigarettes, and I went to sleep on the steel deck below, wondering if we should be bombed or not before we got to England. We landed at Margate dirty, exhausted to the limits of endurance and so far as we knew, a temporarily defeated army. On disembarking, one civilian attracted my attention. He was such a gorgeous young man, crisp golden curls, immaculate white tennis shirt, spotless blue blazer with club badge, and perfectly creased white flannels. A tennis racquet dangled carelessly from one hand. He looked at us as though with vague amusement. Eventually he uttered his refined opinion of the returning British Expeditionary Force. "I say," drawled he, "you fellows look as if you've had a ra-ather tough time.!!!!". He was the only human being I really wanted to shoot during the war and have always regretted that I could not.

The foregoing were extract's from Bill's diary and are an authentic account of eyewitness on the retreat to Dunkirk. The account has been edited for Vagary and the bloodiest bits kept out in order not to upset the susceptibilities of the people who didn't know those quiet and soft times.

LIVING SOFT

17th September 1940. It was a Tuesday evening. We were all tired as we had been up night after night during the airraids, which had now started in earnest. Only the night before a stick of bombs had destroyed the next street. Walthamstow, after Poplar, was the most badly damaged borough in London. My brother had just come in from work and Mrs. Dewey, our landlady and afterwards his mother-in-law, had just given him his supper. Quite suddenly Patsy got up and started herding her two puppies towards the shelter. We had not heard the siren, but Patsy obviously had, and someone said "Shall we go to the shelter?" In spite of the raids I had not been down the shelter for several nights as I found I could not sleep there, though I did not sleep much better in bed. For days I had been on edge and it was only two days before that we had been machine gunned in broad daylight. My brother and I were just outside the house when we heard the stuttering and we both flattened ourselves against the wall. As chips of brick flew about us both my brother looked at me and said "Why don't you go inside?" "I'm too damned scared to move," I answered. "So am I," he remarked, "and I think you had better go back home." But I had no intention of going back to Hampshire, although I was in London against the family's wishes. I felt I ought to stick it out, because it would be like cowardice to run away. I was afraid, but I'll be damned if I were going to admit it. But this night, as Patsy disappeared into the airraid shelter with her two puppies I suggested to my brother that it might be an idea if he finished his supper in the shelter. He gave me a queer look, but already I had made a few prophetic remarks and he took my advice. We called to old Emil, the lodger in the downstairs front that we would help him to the shelter, but he flatly refused to come. Until that night I had been as obstinate as old Emil, but I picked up a pack of cards and followed everyone. This surprised them, as for once I did not argue about going to the shelter. Although the sun had set some time previously it was still quite bright, the light being provided by the fires from the London docks, several miles away. The ack-ack guns had already started as we got settled, and soon afterwards came the ominous thuds we had learned to recognise as falling bombs. The high pitched screams of the bombs came nearer. Then there came a really loud scream and as the bomb hit the shelter rocked. "I think that's the house," said my brother, as he finished off his supper. Then Fred Dewey suddenly said, "Hang on - here comes one for us." As I hunched myself up I thought "I hope I'm killed outright - I don't want live maimed for the rest of my life!" There was

a sort of loud whooshing that seemed to go on for ever and then there was a most tremendous concussion, the shelter seemed to spin round on itself and the lights we had rigged up went out. We knew that the bomb had dropped very near us and our first feeling was one of complete astonishment that we were still alive. Bits of the shelter had fallen on us and I remember saying "And I only washed my hair last night." Then old Mrs. Dewey, who had been sitting in a wicker armchair in the corner of the shelter, said "It's broken the bloody cider bottle and I hadn't drank it yet." At this point Fred and my brother discovered that we would have to dig our way out, and then Alice, old Emil's daughter started screaming hysterically. Dora, Mrs. Dewey's daughter, and I were helping the two boys to dig out and we were both getting rather irritated with Alice. We were both only in our teens and we considered that Alice, who was in her thirties, should have pulled herself together more. And what we all realised, except Alice, who was too busy enjoying her screaming, that her own father was still in the house, and probably dead, hence our anxiety to dig ourselves out as quickly as possible. Plus the fact that if we didn't manage it, we were liable to suffocate. Anyway, we did manage it and the two boys managed to persuade Dora to stay put and keep an eye on Alice and Ma Dewey. The house was badly damaged, most of the roof being down and much of the ceiling plasters. We tried to get in the back door, but although it was leaning crazily on its hinges there was too much rubble on the floor behind. We ran round to the front of the house and found we couldn't get in that way, either. In the road was a gaping crater right in the front of the house. The bomb had hit the gas and water mains and there was a tremendous smell of gas. We thought then that the blast had probably killed Emil, but it had gone the other way, for the next moment we heard him yelling to get him out as the ceiling beams were about to come down on him. We would have to help him as he was an arthritic cripple, but how could we do it? I suggested that as I was the smallest I could possibly wriggle through the back door, get through to the front door and kick the rubble away from it. We ran round the back again, unaware that we were running back and forth over an open manhole. With a bit of a push from the two boys I managed to get through the back door and raced through the kitchen into the front hall. Emil was still yelling his head off, but I knew I wasn't strong enough to pick him up, so I ignored his yells and frantically started moving the rubble from the front door. The lights had gone and yet I could see what I was doing. This puzzled me sub-consciously, but I was too busy getting the rubble away to think of it deeply. At last I managed to move enough of the rubble for the boys to get through. We rushed into Emil's room and the old boy was right. The ceiling was about to come down.

Most of the plaster had fallen but above his bed a large beam was creaking ominously. We grabbed him, blankets and all and hauled him out of the room. As we did so there was a rending crash - the beams had fallen. Then we came across another snag. Fred had discovered the open manhole cover so we couldn't get the old boy round the side of the house and as we were about to take him through the kitchen we discovered it was on fire. It was on fire when I had run through it before but I had hardly noticed it, but that was where the light had come from when I cleared away the rubble from the front door. We could just about get through it wrapped in blankets, but as I got the old man out through the back the boys remained behind to put the fire out. They could only use blankets as the water main had been hit, and they had to get it out quickly because of the escaping gas. The old man was hell to get to the shelter. He was a Swiss and he insisted on stopping to shake his sticks at the sky to bawl "Schweinhund!" As they were now machine gunning I was anxious for us both to get under cover. Quite suddenly there was the roar of an aircraft, an ominous rat-tat-tat and something went through my hair. I put my hand on my head and discovered that my scalp had just - only just been grazed. I showed my bloodied hand to Emil and said "Hurry up, you damned old fool. They've just shot me." I never saw the going of Emil - he was down the garden, sticks and all, like a two year old. I stayed long enough to shove him into the shelter and bawl to Alice "If you start screaming I shall slap you again." I had done that to shut her up when she had her first bout. Then I remembered the cat and her family. She had had kittens in the coal cellar a few days previously and if the boys did not succeed in getting the fire out she and her family would be burned to death. The shed was still standing and grabbing a box from there I made for the coal cellar. From the light of the torch I saw Pussy crouched over her kittens. Luckily, she didn't argue, but allowed me to put her and the kittens in the box, and I put them in the shed under a table. I now became consciously aware of screams from next door. At the same time I was appalled to see the shelter next to ours, only twelve feet away, had received a direct hit. Where the shelter had been was a large crater. And in that shelter had been Mr. and Mrs. Byrom and their two small children. It was only the day before that Mrs. Byrom had told us she had made arrangements to have the children sent to the country on Wednesday. The screams were coming from old Mrs. Byrom. She, too, had refused to go down the shelter, but a door had burst from its hinges and hit her, and she had two broken arms.

The boys managed to get the fire out and we went up to the Beasley shelter to see if they were all right. They were buried and we worked like mad to get the rubble away. They were working

on it from the inside and it wasn't long before they managed to crawl out. There occurred a curious thing. Joey, now seventeen, had fallen out of a tree when he was about ten and hurt his head badly. From then on he had become quite retarded and slow in speech. This night the blast had flung him across the shelter and he had sustained another crack on the head. When he crawled out of the shelter he spoke quite crisply and intelligently, without a sign of his previously slurred speech. But there was no time to contemplate this miracle for we had to begin the hopeless task of looking for the Byrom family. As we stumbled about over what had once been gardens, but was now a wilderness, Fred called out to me not to come near them. They had found Mrs. Byrom - with an arm and a leg blown off. She was still alive. But Joey and I had already found the little five year old girl, also with an arm and a leg off. She was conscious, but as we stood there she whispered "mummy, mummy" and mercifully died. Her mother died on the way to hospital - her little brother and her father were never found. At last, everything had been done that could be done and we went back to the shelter where, surprisingly I fell deeply asleep. It was, in fact, the best night's sleep I had had since the raids commenced, or perhaps it was sheer physical exhaustion.

But it was not the end, only the beginning. A week later our cousin arrived to tell us our Great uncle Harry and Aunt Rose had been killed in a raid in another part of London. And so it went on. Living in shelters until we found another house, replacing windows time after time, taking it in turns to go out and put out the incendiaries, always wondering if the damned ^{things} would explode just as you got to it. All through the winter and on into spring until the RAF finally gained the ascendancy - the ascendancy they would have had much earlier, but for the fact that Britain was daft enough to disarm in 1935, just when the RAF had demanded expansion. This, followed by continuous appeasement, did us no good at all. Soft answers may turn away wrath if the angry person is sane, but it does not work with a neurotic power-nut. The only answer there is to hit hard and swiftly, before the world went up in flames. But due to disarmament and appeasement, we did not have the necessary force.

I could go on, but it would take too many pages and I am too close the deadline, anyway.

Ah, yes, we lived softly when I was a teenager - after all, what's a bomb or two between friends?

On June 3rd, 1963, after ninety two hours of the most dreadful suffering, the greatest Christian for nearly two thousand years died-the world is the poorer for it. I am not a Roman Catholic - I am not even a practising Christian, but I felt - and I was only one of trillions - as though I had lost a most kind and loving father. Pope John was the head of the Roman Catholic Church officially - unofficially he was the greatest friend that "all men of goodwill" ever had. In a world of hate that kind old man had a tremendous power for love. He radiated it out to the whole world, Christian and non-Christian alike. Incredibly, astoundingly, the world recognised his love for them and returned it tenfold, as was proved during the last sad days. Catholic, Protestant and Jew, and other religions for the first time in history were united in one thing. A prayer for not just another pope, but a man who transcended race, creed and sect. To the end John was a parish priest - and the world was his parish. We shall never know if he had offered to take the sins of the world on his shoulders - one wonders when one thinks of the terrible agony toward the end. An agony which lasted so much longer than the Crucifixion and one can only hope that his work will not be wasted. John has worked steadily for peace in the world and tolerance to all men, not by futile gestures, such as marches and a demand that this or that should be banned, but by hard work. John never demanded - he always asked. Not for two thousand years has one man radiated so much loving kindness to mankind-and mankind had the wits to realise it. But will mankind have the wits to remember it? Will his successor have the wits to remember it? Was John the second man to sacrifice himself for us? If so, for the world to forget would be a betrayal of not a man, but a saint. A light has gone out of the world - it remains to be seen now whether the "men of goodwill" everywhere will keep the flame going that he kindled before he died.

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