

the last few turnips. But we have marched so far, not unassisted in the past by Lancashire's money and muck, and we have a long long way to go yet, perhaps carrying Lancashire on our backs for a spell; and the hour for complacency, if it ever arrives at all, will strike long after most of us are dead. No man can walk about these towns, the Cinderellas in the baronial household of Victorian England, towns meant to work in and not to live in and now even robbed of their work, without feeling that there is a terrible lack of direction and leadership in our affairs. It does not matter now whether Manchester does the thinking today and the rest of England thinks it tomorrow, or whether we turn the tables on them and think today for Manchester tomorrow. But somebody somewhere will have to do some hard thinking soon.

And on this most unsatisfactory conclusion, asking myself, over and over again, what must be done with these good workless folk, I took leave of my kindly host and his family, of watercolours and toxopholy and *dhooties* and black puddings and pretty stunted children in clogs, and made for the bleak and streaming Pennines, on my way to the Tyne; with the weather, like my journey, going from bad to worse.

HARRY TRAVELLING BRITAIN  
WEEK 8 (NE)  
BLANT J. B. PRIESTLEY

## TO THE TYNE

## I

THE morning was a fury of rain. Cutting through the Pennines and across the West Riding, we made for the Great North Road and reached it finally by way of Ripon. I have most unhappy memories of Ripon, and I am not the only one, by several thousands – for it was here, in the late autumn of 1916, that I found myself in what was called, by some ironic jester at the War Office, a 'convalescent camp'. Actually it was not a camp fit for troops bursting with health; and for genuine convalescents it was a nightmare of mud, bad food, and petty tyrannies. I do not know what beribboned ass was responsible for the miseries of that camp – and I think my spirits sank as low there as they did anywhere during the whole war – but even after all these years I am not ready to forgive either him or his ghost. As we crawled through the market place, and the water streaming down the car windows grotesquely distorted Ripon's most fashionable shops, I said to myself: 'Well, it's pouring with rain and you're a long way from home and you're going still further away from it and you've a cold coming on and a worrying, nagging, quite impossible sort of book on your hands, just when you had decided you needed a rest from books, but – by heck! – you're a prince, my lad, compared with what you were, seventeen years ago, when you were herded into the camp here like a diseased sheep.' And that will do for Ripon.

Something more must be said, however, about that cold which was coming on, for it plays a part in the narrative that follows. I suffer at times from damp snivelling colds in the head, which descend upon me quite suddenly, turning me into a helpless and disgusting red-nosed and red-eyed animal feebly

crying for still more handkerchiefs. Now my doctor had found some stuff for me that immediately dried up these colds. It did not cure them but it drove them, so to speak, from the surface. After a dose or two of it, I am no longer helpless and sodden, but am able to carry out – perhaps rather drearily – an average programme of work or play. In the car travelling north, I realized that a particularly nasty cold was threatening and that unless I grappled with it at once I should be unable to see anything for days and my journey would be wasted. So I began dosing myself with this mixture. (It contains belladonna; you take it before food; and for a few seconds, as a result of its drying-up properties, it makes you feel rather sick.) As the cold seemed to be of gigantic size and strength, I had to keep on dosing myself all the week. I was able to do all that I had arranged to do. Nobody knew that I had a cold. But my inside was the arena for a grand seven-day contest, Giant Cold v. Belladonna Mixture. This meant that throughout these days I was not quite my usual self. (I have been told since, by a competent medical authority, that I probably had a temperature all the time.) The result was that I moved in a world that was not quite the ordinary real world: it wobbled and bulged at times, like the world we know in dreams. A more marked subjective element, I suspect, was present in my field of observation. Hence this paragraph, which is not an attempt to force upon you a more than usually disgusting bit of autobiography, but a possible explanation of why things looked very queer indeed and were a little larger and wilder than life during these next few days. I ask the reader to remember the swarming bacteria, the drenchings with belladonna, the rising temperature.

We reached the Great North Road. Along its deserted length, the raindrops were bouncing merrily. There was no more colour in the day itself than there is in a bundle of steel rods, but up to Darlington the red ruins of autumn were still about us. At the great divide of the North Road, Scotch Corner, which ought to be the most romantic spot in the country but

somehow is not, we turned right for Darlington; and while the rain still spouted into the main street there, I sat upstairs in a café and ate roast mutton and treacle pudding behind the *Yorkshire Post* folded against the water jug. The waitress who attended me was tall, frail and looked tubercular. (Probably my own temperature was beginning to rise then. Still, it is surprising how many waitresses in these cafés are tall, frail and look tubercular.) We ran through County Durham, which offered us nothing but distant glimpses of coal-pits and mining villages. There was a nightmare place that seemed to have been constructed out of small army huts and unwanted dog kennels, all sprawling in the muck outside some gigantic works. What they made inside those works I did not discover, but even a Kaffir would not have envied the employees if it was they who lived in these forlorn shanties. A dingy huddle of cottage houses, bethels in corrugated iron, picture palaces with hardly a flake of paint left on them, butchers' windows decorated with offal, all announced that we were arriving at some great industrial centre, that soon we should be in civilization again. First, a mile or two of Gateshead (to which we shall return later), then a great bridge across steaming space, and we were in Newcastle. I had been in these parts only once before, and that was during the war, not long after I had left Ripon. Then I lived for some weeks in a pier pavilion or something of the kind at Tynemouth, doing odd and mostly unpleasant jobs. One of the oddest, I remember, was going out in a boat on the Tyne in charge of a party of four men, all of us monstrously encumbered with rifles, bayonets and equipment to a ship that had just arrived from Scandinavia. It was a gusty wet winter day, I remember, and we had to climb from this bobbing boat up a slippery rope-ladder, each of us so heavily loaded that we weighed a ton and could hardly move, to the main deck of this ship, which was being searched for spies. We did not find any spies but we had a few cups of coffee from the cook. During this brief stay at Tynemouth, I roamed about a good deal when off

duty and so made the acquaintance of most of the Tyneside towns, North Shields, South Shields, Jarrow, Gateshead, and the metropolis, Newcastle, which promised us, after a dash by electric train, a good tea and a show at the Hippodrome or the Empire. I have a very distinct recollection of taking a great dislike to the whole district, which seemed to me so ugly that it made the West Riding towns look like inland resorts. The people were not bad once you got to know them, though even to a Yorkshire lad they appeared uncouth. And I disliked – as I still do – their accent. As a rule I like local accents, and have kept one myself. They make for variety in speech and they give men's talk a flavour of the particular countryside to which at heart they belong. Standard English is like standard anything else – poor tasteless stuff. Probably if I had spent most of my impressionable years near the Tyne and had known the ecstasies of first love in Newcastle's *Jesmond Dene*, I might have discovered treasures of cadence in the local accent; but as it is, I can find nothing pleasant to say about it. To my ears, it still sounds a most barbarous, monotonous and irritating twang. Every short phrase rises in exactly the same way, almost to a scream: *taw taw ta ta tee tee ti ti*. The constant 'Ay-ee, mon,' or 'Ay-ee, yer b –' of the men's talk and the never-ending 'hinny-ing' of the women seem to me equally objectionable. It is probably difficult for a visitor to make all necessary allowances for the effect of the local accent upon his opinion of a place, if that accent produces a slight but perpetual irritation. One ought to allow a liberal discount for its bad influence.

The centre of Newcastle, into which we had now landed, has a certain sombre dignity. The streets are fairly wide; the shops are good; and there are more impressive buildings than one would expect. It is chiefly built of a stone that has turned almost a dead black. Newcastle is even blacker than Manchester, and might almost have been carved out of coal. The sad trade depression into which most of the district has fallen is not immediately noticeable here in its capital. The city looked

busy and quite prosperous. After casting about a bit, I found an hotel that looked as if it might be reasonably quiet at night and in the early morning. (It was, but only because I took a gloomy little back-bedroom.) I unpacked my bag, sniffed a bit, took another dose of the mixture, then said to myself: Well, here I am in Newcastle. I had then to consider the next move. The afternoon was nearly done. It was still raining, though not hard; and the whole city seemed a black steaming mass. I had not a friend in the place. At that moment, I was not even sure that I had a friend in the world. I sent out for one of the local papers, and then wasted an hour staring gloomily at it rather than reading it, and smoking a pipe that appeared to be rapidly losing its flavour. I ought, I know, to have been busy and elated, for this was the most northerly point of my journey and soon, very soon, I would be turning round again and making for home. But I sat there in my little bedroom, like a man marooned in Lapland. I said bitter things about those two publishers who, far away in London, after having lunched well, were now brisk and cheerful and in their respective private offices, probably arranging for some other poor fool of an author to leave home for months. And I was enormously sorry for myself. Then, remembering that I had a job to do, I climbed out of this morass of silliness and set about exploring the Tyneside. I did explore the Tyneside, and have not been genuinely sorry for myself since; though at times I have caught myself at the old drooping tricks and have been ashamed. There is, you see, something bracing about the Tyne. After you have seen it, you realize that it is not for the likes of us to be sorry for ourselves.

I made a start by remembering that I had had some humorously aggressive correspondence with a bookseller in this city. I would look him up. It proved to be an excellent move. I found

him in and not too busy; he gave me a cup of tea; and we settled down before the fire in his office for a good talk. He is in the rare-book-and-first-edition branch of the trade, which has suffered a great deal from the depression in America. Nearly all booksellers of this type have been most unlucky in the number of bad debts they have had in America, where bibliophiles seem to be rather casual in money matters. I care very little about rare books and first editions. I write books and I read plenty of them, but I am no 'bookman' or 'book-lover', no collector. I have never even understood the first-edition man at all: he seems to me the most foolish of collectors. And when I find the prices of these early editions being raised a pound or two because of a dropped letter on the title-page or a misprint in the first chapter, I feel I am spying upon lunatics. In spite of these opinions, which I openly acknowledged, I got on very well with my Newcastle bookseller, though he was no mere tradesman, but, like most of his kind, himself an enthusiast, whose mouth watered at the thought of a dropped letter. He was a man of my own age; and no dreamy bookman but one who lived vividly in the present. This was fortunate for me. When he asked me what I was doing in Newcastle, I replied that I did not know but that I should like to look round the district. This pleased him, and he said he would like to show me what there was to be seen. Meanwhile, that evening he had one or two calls to make - he did some work with the *People's Theatre* - but otherwise was at my service. Let him do whatever he had to do, I suggested, and I would go with him, if I was not in the way; and so in this easy fashion I might contrive to see something of Newcastle life on a black wet November night.

It worked very well. First, we had some food (not bad) in a very hot grill-room that he recommended. After that we ran and dodged and ran through the pouring rain to a tram, which took us to the bottom of a narrow hilly road. At the top were some bedraggled women trying to sell peanuts; a square building; some men and lads hanging about, as if it were June; and a

pay-box. This was the *St James's Hall*, where boxing shows are held nightly. I asked for two ringside seats. The man said, 'Sevenpence each.' For the next half-minute we were at cross-purposes; I wanted better seats than sevenpenny ones; and he thought I was trying to get to the ringside for less than sevenpence. It appeared that on ordinary nights, there were only two classes of seats: the threepenny balconies and the sevenpenny ringside. I think sevenpence was a fair price for what we saw. The square hall, with its rows of seats climbing steeply all round the ring, looked almost empty when we first went inside, but I soon discovered that it was deceptively large in its seating capacity and that actually there were already several hundred people there, mostly in the threepenny balconies. The bouts we saw were either between rather stringy lads, who arrived in the ring wearing overcoats, or between ugly lumpy pitmen with the blue coal-marks on their hairy bodies. Those ignorant persons who imagine that boxing contests reek of blood would here have been confirmed for once in their opinion. There was a lot of blood about, partly because most of the boxers were novices who hit out wildly and also bled easily. The flat-faced seconds seemed to be for ever sponging away the crimson stains. The crowd did not seem to mind this: they were a bloodthirsty lot. 'Go on, yer b—,' they seemed to be muttering all the time. This was not an evening when they were willing to concentrate on the finer points of the craft, which indeed were obviously absent. They wanted the rough stuff. 'Oo, yer b—!' they cried in delight when one of the stained gloves got home with a nasty thud. Some boxing matches are enchanting spectacles: the powerful lights above the ring cutting through the haze of smoke; the torsos of the pugilists; the quick ripple of muscles; the satiny bloom on their skins; the race and speed and strength of those two figures in the brilliant little arena; the dim mounds of faces that can suddenly let out such a huge roar. This was not one of those boxing matches. It was uncompromisingly ugly. The naked arc lights,

the empty rows of seats, the awkward blood-stained fighters, the jeering spectators, all helped to make the scene an unpleasant one. I looked about me and thought I had never seen a crowd of men whose looks pleased me less. There was not one intelligent sensitive face in sight. Or so it seemed, in that harsh setting. For a moment, I had a vision of a dark sub-humanity, like those underground creatures in Wells' *Time Machine*. 'Had enough?' asked my companion. I had. 'So have I,' he said. 'This stuff's no good. You ought to be here on one of the big nights, when Seaman Watson's fighting. He's a local lad, you know. Ay, he's a local lad. Let's go. I have to leave that message at the rehearsal.' We went out. It was still raining. The lads who could not afford the threepence for admission were still hanging about the entrance outside. The women were still trying to sell their peanuts. We rode in trams again, among a smell of wet clothes. In the shadow of an enormous ebony bridge, which looked as if it stretched into the outer spaces of the universe, we found a large but almost deserted pub. But vague noises came from upstairs, and I was steered in their direction. That was the rehearsal. It was being directed by a middle-aged man in a blue suit, who peered at his players through the smoke of his cigarette. When we crept in, a spectacled young man in a raincoat was declaiming with passion some lines about Greek gods and Trojan heroes. 'Now then,' said the producer, when the spectacled youth had retired, gasping, 'now then, chorus.' Then, to my surprise, about a dozen women, mostly rather short women in coloured mackintoshes, who had been standing about in a slightly shame-faced fashion, like the mothers of children at a dancing class, suddenly grouped themselves, slowly moved forward, as if sowing imaginary seed or strewing invisible flowers, and in far-away voices began chanting verses that prophesied woe. A very tall girl, as if maddened by the sight of so many coloured mackintoshes, rushed out of a corner, flung up an arm, made her eyes flash away as if she were a human lighthouse, and angrily ad-

dressed the chorus, giving them three woes to their one. This roused another young man in a raincoat who appeared to be in a towering rage and apparently did not care if he gave himself a sore throat. But the raincoats were not to have it all their own way. The mackintoshes grouped themselves again and returned to their chanting, conducted enthusiastically by the producer, who encouraged me to hope that he was about to throw away his cigarette and dance for us. Perhaps he might have done, but just then a rather shy and pretty tweed winter coat swam forward and told us softly that she was Argive Helen, and then delivered quite a long speech about herself, with coloured mackintoshes rustling all round her. Those who know the *Trojan Women* may search in vain for a scene in it resembling this, and possibly my memory may have failed me; but it was certainly the *Trojan Women* they were rehearsing. If you had been standing in the saloon bar downstairs and had heard them moving about on the floor above, how many guesses would you have had to make before you reached the right conclusion? You would have said they were playing snooker, or dancing, or having a whist drive, and might have gone on guessing for days before you had suggested that they might be rehearsing the *Trojan Women*. If you were writing a story about a large pub in Newcastle, you would never have the impudence to fill its first-floor front with people rehearsing Greek drama. But there is no end to the impudent surprises and odd twists of reality. My companion had now quietly delivered his message, and at the conclusion of Helen's speech and before the mackintoshes could get going again, we sneaked out, and down the stairs I muttered: 'What's Hecuba to them, or they to Hecuba?'

Another tram and then a long walk in the rain - it never stopped raining all night - brought us into a basement where some people with painted faces and false whiskers were drinking coffee and eating buns. We were now, I was told, underneath the stage of the Peoples' Theatre. This did not surprise me: I could not be surprised any more. But the theatre deserves

## ENGLISH JOURNEY

a word. Its prices range from sixpence to a half-crown, and if you buy a serial ticket for five shillings you are admitted throughout the season for half-price. The productions that season included *Peer Gynt*, *Widowers' Houses*, *The Insect Play*, *Loyalties*, and *The Trojan Women*: good fare, solid tack, value for money. The players are all amateurs. I met one of the theatre's most enthusiastic helpers, whom I will call Bob. We did not stay long, and Bob left with us. Once more we walked through the rain; we went to the Central Station and missed the train we wanted, went to a bus stop and found that we had missed the bus we wanted; walked through more rain, climbed on to a bus, got out and did more walking. We were now outside the city, high up somewhere, and in the comfortable little home of my friend, the bookseller. At least, that is where I think we were, for by this time the evening was becoming very unreal, a mad mixture of rain, grill-rooms, trams, rain, peanuts, boxers, trams, rain, Trojan women in coloured mackintoshes, buns in basements, theatricals, rain, buses, remote suburbs, and a never-ending stream of talk about books, plays, railways, ship-building, coal, the Means Test, Russia, Germany, politics, sport, life and death. But I remember walking with Bob to catch the last electric train back to Newcastle. We waited about quarter of an hour in one of the wettest and most melancholy little stations I have ever seen. We might have been waiting for a ghost train. The metal rails went straight from one mysterious darkness to another. We were alone on that tiny platform. We sat in a dim shed of a waiting-room, with the rain dully drumming on the wooden roof. You could not have had a better opening scene for a sinister film. It was a grand little station for a murder. But though Bob and I did not always agree, we were far removed from thoughts of murder. Bob was busy, talking, and I was equally busy, listening. That murder was not even mentioned will surprise some people when they learn that Bob was a militant communist.

Bob deserves some space to himself, not simply because I

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spent part of this evening and nearly all of the next evening in his company, but because he seems to me a figure of some significance. Though he is very much of an individual, he is also a distinct type too. There are a good many Bobs about – especially in the north – and before long there will probably be a great many more. Wipe out at once any mental sketch of a sullen, greasy, long-haired, blue-chinned 'comrade'. Bob is a strongly-built, alert working man in his thirties; with a good forceful face – eyes slightly aslant and wide apart, blunt nose, short moustache, square chin; and a clean neat appearance. He is married and has a fine little boy, of whom he is immensely proud. I do not think it would be fair to him to say here what his occupation is; but he is employed by a very large concern, works hard and for long hours, and his wages are just over two pounds a week. He has to be up before six in the morning, and as he lives some distance from his work, he is not back again until the early evening. He spends nearly all his leisure either helping at the Settlement for the unemployed or lending a hand with such activities as the Peoples' Theatre. He admitted that this was hard on his wife, she saw so little of him, but told me that she understood and sympathized with him and made the best of it. In his amateur theatricals, he is a promising comedian. When a bit of holiday comes his way, he likes to do a little careful water-colour sketching, and what he does is very creditable to an untrained man with not much time to spare. He is a kindly, lively but forceful sort of chap, who, if he were living in a pioneer society, where labour was in demand and ability soon rewarded, would quickly win promotion, be a foreman, a manager, and so forth; he is something of a natural leader. Having grown up in a very different kind of life, he has turned communist. He is not at all sentimental about his own class – except in its theoretical existence as 'the proletariat' – but quite sternly realistic in his attitude towards it. (As we shall see, later.) He is not equally realistic, however, about other classes, with whom he hardly comes into contact. The world he

lives in is not the sad muddle that most of us have begun to recognize, but is a mysterious and melodramatic place of vast sinister conspiracies, in which capitalists and bosses and officials plot together to trick him and his mates. Thus, he grumbled and sneered because the concern that employs him has lately been spending money on a certain extension of its premises. They could not spare money, he complained, to give their workpeople some decent wages, but they could throw it away – just to please a few officials – on these building operations. Now even I, who knew very little about the concern, did know this, that it was spending this money in a last desperate attempt to get more business, and that the process of finding the money for this extension must have been like wringing blood out of a stone. But this is typical of his attitude of mind. He did not make this an excuse to attack a muddled wasteful competitive system; which would have been legitimate enough. He saw it as one more example of the conspiracy of bosses and officials. He thinks that most people are poor because a few are rich. Any man receiving more than a few pounds per week automatically becomes one of the sinister conspiring class. The modern world is to him simply a wicked place, and not, as it seems to many of us, a stupid place. When he talks of his neighbours or the men he works with, he is a realist, quick to notice their many weaknesses; but when he argues, unconsciously he becomes an idealist and talks about ‘the workers’ as if they were a race of bright beautiful beings incapable of selfishness, indolence, corruption. On the other hand, men of the employing or managing classes are never to him men very much like himself who, though they may be the servants of a faulty and even cruel system, are honestly trying to do their duty and to be decent and kind and unselfish; they are always sneering cunning tyrants, to whom the very poverty and helplessness of the people are a source of deep satisfaction. And he is, I suspect, permanently trapped into this attitude, like thousands of other working men who have managed to raise them-

selves above the beer and betting mindlessness of their mates. I am not, of course, presenting my friend Bob as an example of a Marxian thinker. He is not really a thinker at all, except when he is shrewdly realistic about the life in his immediate neighbourhood. He made one great effort – an effort that not all of us would have been capable of making in his circumstances – to jump clear of this beer and betting jungle, this brutish fatalistic acceptance of the miserable muddle of our present society, and to arrive at the level of his own brand of communistic thought; and since then I suspect he has done no independent thinking at all but has simply applied a woefully rough-and-ready standard to everything. His communism is not a reasoned alternative to a social machine that is wobbling and running down, is not a transition from an obviously incompetent and unjust system to an order of society that embodies our ideas of competence and justice: it is the entrance into a Human Paradise and a new Golden Age, from which, by some mysterious means, all the selfish wickedness of the present world will be banished. Nobody could be more cynical than he is about elected persons and men in authority here and now, but he has no difficulty in persuading himself that in a communist England all elected persons and men in authority would acquire a new mystical virtue. This is Bob, and I have met scores like him. There must indeed be thousands like him in the making. And no picture of contemporary industrial England would be complete without a little portrait of him.

Nevertheless, in spite of much disagreement, I thought Bob himself a grand chap, and when he told me, on that deserted last train to Newcastle, that he would be spending the next night conducting a rehearsal of some unemployed young men, for a forthcoming pierrot show at the Unemployed Men's Settlement, I was only too glad to accept his invitation to call for him at his home. Then we parted outside the dark and dripping entrance to Newcastle's Central Station, where the newsboys, despairing of selling another paper, were begging for

coppers. These lads looked the most miserable sodden bundles of old clothes. Bob told me, however, that they are great hands at betting. We are a nation of sportsmen.

## 3

It was a raw gloomy evening when I set out to find Bob's home. I think I shivered all the time from that internal cold, which was now beginning to make me feel miserable. In order to find Bob's little flat, I had to explore a large part of Gateshead, and there was nothing in this exploration to raise my spirits. Once off the long dreary main road, there was nothing but their names, not always easily seen, to distinguish one street from another. There seemed a great deal of Gateshead and the whole town appeared to have been carefully planned by an enemy of the human race in its more exuberant aspects. Insects can do better than this: their habitations are equally monotonous but far more efficiently constructed. As the various industries of Gateshead are in a state of rapid decline, it is possible that very soon it will be in the position of the decayed medieval towns, those ports that the sea has left, but unlike those medieval towns it will not, I think, be often visited by tourists in search of the quaint and the picturesque. Ye Olde Gateshead Tea Rooms, I feel, will not do a brisk trade. The town was built to work in and to sleep in. You can still sleep in it, I suppose. When at last I found Bob, in a neat little sitting-room with a neat smiling little wife, I told him that I did not think much of his native town.

'Do you know what's the biggest town either on the railway or on the direct road between Newcastle and London? I'll bet you'll never guess. Well, this is it - Gateshead. You can catch a lot of people out with that. Gateshead's the biggest town between Newcastle and London. It's got more than a hundred and twenty-five thousand people in it, Gateshead has.'

And that, as he went on to admit, is about all Gateshead has

in it. One hundred and twenty-five thousand people, but no real town. It has fewer public buildings of any importance than any town of its size in the country. If there is any town of like size on the continent of Europe that can show a similar lack of civic dignity and all the evidences of an urban civilization, I should like to know its name and quality. No true civilization could have produced such a town, which is nothing better than a huge dingy dormitory. I admit that it is only just across the river from Newcastle, which has some amenities. But Gateshead is an entirely separate borough. It has a member of Parliament, a mayor, nine aldermen, and twenty-seven councillors; and I hope they are all delighted with themselves. They used to build locomotives in Gateshead, very fine complicated powerful locomotives, but they never seem to have had time to build a town. A place like this belongs to the pioneer age of industrialism, and unfortunately the industry appears to be vanishing before the pioneers themselves have time to make themselves comfortable. It is a frontier camp of bricks and mortar, but no Golden West has been opened up by its activities. If anybody ever made money in Gateshead, they must have taken great care not to spend any of it in the town. And if nobody ever did make money in the town, what is it there for? It cannot be there for fun. Gateshead is not Somebody's Folly. How is it that a town can contain one hundred and twenty-five thousand persons and yet look like a sprawling swollen industrial village? The answer is that this is a dormitory for the working class. Perhaps at first they wanted nothing better, and now, by the time that some of them want something a great deal better, there is no money. Yet the town owes its existence, on this scale, to Britain's famous industrial prosperity, to which the town itself in turn contributed. The prosperity itself is now behind us, like the Victorian age with which it is so closely associated, and now we may ask what are the signs and marks of it left in Gateshead? To what must we point, in admiration, when we stand here in Gateshead and think of that vanished era? We can of course point to the hū-



dred and twenty-five thousand people, but there is nothing in their appearance or in their present situation in life to suggest that they themselves are the finest legacies of that era. True, some of them, like Bob, are fine sturdy fellows; but it is just those fellows who condemn most thoroughly the whole dingy bag of tricks. Every future historian of modern England should be compelled to take a good long slow walk round Gateshead. After that he can at his leisure fit it into his interpretation of our national growth and development.

Bob had another visitor. He was a lad with a rather fixed smile, a gentle face and voice, who sat up stiffly. He and I began arguing about Russia, and though he did not convince me, I thought he made some good points and talked well. During this argument I made one or two cheerfully outrageous remarks, and as I brought them out I grinned across at him in a friendly fashion to indicate that I did not expect to be taken too seriously. I thought at the time that he did not appear to be responding too well to these grins, and put this down to his earnest youthful enthusiasm, which forbade such trifling with the sacred subject of communism. It was only afterwards that I learned, to my horror, that the boy was blind. He was also semi-paralysed. Bob told me that the boy is now able to take first-year classes in adult education. Up to a year or two ago he learned nearly everything from his mother, a working-class woman, who read to him hour after hour. Now, of course, he can read Braille, and finds his way about, and is an active and very useful member of that community. I still think he is wrong about Russia, but I wish so remarkable a lad could find it possible to be even half so enthusiastic and inspired about England.

Bob took me to the Bensham Grove Settlement. It is established – and has been for a good many years – in a detached house, the only one of that size I noticed in the neighbourhood. A little theatre has been built in the garden, and there are one or two other small annexes. Conditions are prob-

ably worse on the Tyne than anywhere else in this country, but it is only fair to say that in no other districts are more determined efforts being made, by means of these settlements and their various activities, to help the unemployed. (See the annual report of the *Tyneside Council of Social Service*.) Bob showed me round this settlement, which appeared to be very busy indeed. There was a play on in the theatre; there were classes being held in various parts of the house; the notice boards were covered with lists and programmes. Bob's embryo concert party was ready for him, and we all moved into a little hut where there was a piano and a tiny stage. The young men were a very mixed lot. Some looked very clean, neat and healthy; others were very grimy and seedy specimens. They were so mixed that it would be impossible to generalize about them. I spent so long in that hut that I can easily recall their faces, which ranged from a handsome ruddy youthfulness to dirty, young-old, toothless masks, and their voices, which included everything from a piercing tenor to a varied assortment of Tyneside grunts. One fellow – who afterwards laboriously went through a comic song, and appeared to be a most successful comic man except when it was his turn to be one – was specially noticeable, if only for his odd look and a hand that was nothing but a stump. I learned afterwards that he had been an epileptic, and that a few years ago, having been left alone (I believe in the place where he worked), he had fallen down in a fit and this hand had gone into the fire. When he was discovered the hand had been nearly burned off; and since then he has had no more fits. Of such stuff were the comedians made in this grim concert party. They were not good musical or dramatic material – but my friend Bob, who was an old hand as a producer, wrestled stubbornly with them, taking them through choruses, harmonized quartets, and concerted numbers in which unshaven Tyneside lads turned themselves into an agonizing burlesque of coy fluttering maidens. Their best number – and I hope it went well on the night – was their opening chorus, in which, harried

by the stamping, time-beating Bob, they thundered their conviction that happy times were here again. I can still hear them singing that chorus about the happy times, can still see their fixed anxious gaze, can feel the little hut shaking beneath the tramp of their heavy boots, and can recall the ironic sting of that roaring mock welcome. Most of them may have been poor creatures (and Bob had no illusions about them), but I should like to be there when they could sing that chorus in good earnest.

When the rehearsal was over Bob collected a friend or two from other parts of the Settlement, and we went back to his home, where his wife had coffee and sandwiches ready for us. We began talking about these young men who had grown up in a workless world. Bob explained that he had had great difficulty in persuading them to join his concert party, which was for their benefit and not his own, as he had plenty of opportunities for this kind of work elsewhere; and that even when they had consented to join it was not easy to get them to turn up punctually to rehearsals, to learn their songs and patter, and to make them submit even to the easiest discipline. Sympathy, he declared, was wasted on most of them, because, unlike older men, who had known what steady employment and regular wages were, these youngsters did not 'fret' because they had no work. There was no loss of self-respect, no anxiety, with them. The others present agreed with him. Most of these young men, they assured me, were undisciplined and carefree, the dingy butterflies of the back streets. They had no sense whatever of waste and tragedy in themselves. They were not at odds with their peculiar environment, which by this time had moulded their characters and shaped their way of living. They had little or no money, but never having had any, they did not miss it. They cadged cheerfully from relatives, and so managed to find a few coppers for cigarettes and the pictures and a bit of betting. (Somebody recently had got up a free film show for them, but hardly any of them had attended it, and they had been seen,

that very night, coming back from the ordinary cinema.) They lived below the level of worry. They were not citizens, though some of them soon would be husbands and fathers. If the time ever came when they had to work hard and to obey orders, it would find them resentful and untrustworthy. Having grown up in one kind of world they would be puzzled and probably annoyed by any other kind of world. They knew nothing about responsibility. They are the new playboys of the western world. But of course they have to play in Gateshead, which has obviously been designed only to work in. They live, in short, in a workshop that has no work for them. They are the children of an industrialism that has lost its industry, of a money-making machine that has ceased to make money. If they live mean foolish little lives, whose fault is that? Citizens must have a city. Seen at such close quarters, as idle irresponsible corner boys, they do not vanish as tragic figures. They are tragic to their parents, and we can only hope that they may seem tragic, some day, to their children.

There was a railwayman present, and he told us that only that very day he had been called upon to give an exact account of his duties. 'They thought they might be able to give me the sack, man,' he explained, 'but when I told them all I did, they thought better of it. There used to be three different men - ay, man, three of 'em - doing what I have to do by myself now.' He went on to tell us, no doubt with some humorous exaggeration, that the company's policy of keeping on old employees as long as it could and of not taking on any young men had resulted in a droll state of affairs, in which you had to go round looking for a man strong enough to undertake anything that required a bit of muscle. If a heavy package arrived, the place had to be combed for a man still young enough to handle it without danger to himself. 'We've all got one foot in the grave, man,' he cried. His father and grandfather had been railwaymen before him, he said, but railways were railways in those days. Gateshead, of course, was a great railway town. We are all proud of

our splendid railway systems, but I have never caught the wildest enthusiast among us beaming with pride at the thought of our railway towns. I left this specimen of them without regret, though I was sorry to see the last of Bob. When I got back home I sent him a copy of a book of mine, and at once he sent me the water-colour sketch of his, of one of the Tyne bridges, that I liked best, though I am sure it was his own favourite too. Of such stuff, it seems, are dangerous red agitators made, the fellows who ought to be locked up. I shall not join Bob's party yet; but I wish I had a party fit for him to join.

## 4

As an interlude - 'a tedious brief scene' - I will now present the episode of the Newcastle hotel register. Throughout this journey I was always anxious to avoid the attentions of the local newspapers, not because I dislike the provincial Press (I believe in it, and always buy and read local newspapers wherever I go), but because I wanted to be able to prowls about a little without being attended by photographers and interviewers. But I am no Montagu Norman or film star, so I did not travel under a fictitious name or wear blue spectacles. As a rule I did not entirely escape the local newspapers, but they found me only when most of my work in their town had been done. In Newcastle I was unlucky, for the Press was on my track almost at once. The first thing they did was to embroider the simple, really meaningless tale of the hotel register; in fact, they did not embroider, they invented the tale. On the day of my arrival in this hotel I was asked to sign the register. I was in a hurry and I did what most of the other guests on that page had done, and indeed what one nearly always does, that is, instead of putting down my full address I simply put the name of my city, London; thus following the Birmingham and Wakefields and Stockports of the other guests. 'Full address, please,' the clerk murmured mechanically. 'Doesn't matter,' I muttered, moving

off, 'that'll find me.' Like the gentlemen from Birmingham, Wakefield and Stockport I was merely saving myself trouble; and it never occurred to me that any peculiar significance would be attached to this idle remark. Nor was it, I think, by the clerk. It was the Press, the artful promptings of reporters, that turned this into 'an amusing incident'. Before I had left Newcastle I had read five different versions, in local and London papers, of this 'amusing incident'. The only likeness between these five versions was that they all introduced me and the hotel register and they were all untrue. In three of them I was made to behave like a pompous ass, in two of them like a conceited buffoon. There was nothing to be done about it. The fables had been sent on their travels and I could not arrest them. I do not believe there was the tiniest spark of ill-nature in the fellows who concocted these little yarns; they probably wished me well, and did not realize that they might be doing me a mischief. The matter itself is of course a triviality, and would not be worth mentioning if it were not a good example, on a small scale, of a very mischievous tendency in the modern Press, which must have its 'amusing incidents'. These spicy little dishes are only served up to the public because it is believed that the public is interested in the person in question; but it never seems to occur to reporters and their sub-editors that the effect of a slightly heightened or distorted anecdote may be a very bad one, helping to prejudice thousands of readers against the innocent victim of it. The little episode is worth mentioning too because it is also an example on a small scale of how current history is made. To read five different and untruthful versions of a tiny incident in which you yourself were concerned not two days before, this is to become even more sceptical than ever. Such is news, and news soon hardens into history. Fortunately I shall never be an historical personage, otherwise the very schoolchildren might one day be compelled to learn how I ran screaming up and down this hotel lounge, flourishing the register.

It was my bookseller friend who took me down the Tyne. The rain had gone but the morning was cold and rather misty. I had nothing to do most of the time but stare through the window of a saloon car, and I doubt if I was fit to do that, heavily dosed as I was with that belladonna mixture. I have no doubt that the subjective element, against which I warned you at the beginning of this chapter, now comes into play, blurring the scene; but I will at least make an honest attempt to put down what I thought I saw that day. We began by running along the old Quay Side as far as we could go. There I noticed nothing but a lot of miserable fellows hanging about, probably looking for the chance of a job. When we turned away from the water's edge, on our way to Wallsend, I found that the ebony dignity of central Newcastle had been left behind. These were all mean streets. Slatternly women stood at the doors of wretched little houses, gossiping with other slatterns or screeching for their small children, who were playing among the filth of the roadside. You would have thought that New Bridge Street was miles away, in another city altogether. Between Wallsend and North Shields the road was confusing, and the landscape more confusing still. It was strewn with broken-down pitmen's cottages and the ruins of higgledy-piggledy allotments. I never saw a bit of country that was in more urgent need of tidying up. If any decent woman had been shown a room half as bad as this, she would have itched to be at it. If T. S. Eliot ever wants to write a poem about a real wasteland instead of a metaphysical one, he should come here. We are all fond of saying that people 'get used to' things, but I do not believe that anybody can look complacently at a dirty mess of this kind. It must have been depressing folk for years. All round this hideous muddle, where industry had had a dirty black meal and had done no washing up, there must have been schools in which children were learning about Simon de Montfort and Keats and the properties of

potassium. The fathers of many of these children were wondering how to get through another idle useless day. And here was this great mess waiting to be tidied up, and determined in the meantime to take the heart out of anybody who looked at it. I do not say that the scene as a whole was lacking in certain elements of the grim picturesque. On the right, there were sudden strange glimpses of the river far below; rather like a deep gulf in which a thicker mist moved sluggishly. The sight of it lifted the heart at once, probably because one accepted it as a symbol of escape. There was the estuary, water and air and light, and somewhere not far away was the wide sea itself, a window upon the world. There were glimpses too of the great cranes and the other paraphernalia of the yards, reminding you that these Geordies, stocky toothless fellows in caps and mufflers, cursing in their uncouth accent, could do a grand job of work whenever they were given a chance. I could not lend a hand with that work, but let nobody assume for a moment that I cannot appreciate its grim strength and mastery, its Promethean and Vulcanic grandeur, or that I moved through this setting for it like a finching minor poet dreaming of roses. Labour of this kind, bending iron and riveting steel to steel, is the real thing, man's work. Grim and ugly as it might be, nevertheless if this riverside had been black and shattering with the smoke and din of tens of thousands of men hard at it, for the commonwealth and for their own decent comfort and self-respect, I think I would have found it wildly inspiring, a scene to overtop any poor praise of mine. There was, of course, some good work going on, but what chiefly caught the eye there were evidences of past greed, now satiated here and ravening elsewhere, and present indifference and neglect. Silent rusting shipyards are not an inspiring spectacle; neither are rows of broken-down cottages and forlorn allotments. If all these things are now as useless to the industrial and social body as nail-parings and hair-combings, they might at least be decently tidied away. They are, I gather, partly the result of severe

surgical operations in our post-war economy. Neither the patient nor the operating theatre seems to have been cleaned up; and the resulting mess is not a pretty sight.

We crossed from North Shields to South Shields in a fat little ferry-boat, and on our way over my companion, whose father had been a marine engineer and who had been apprenticed to the trade himself, pointed this way and that up the raw gulf of the river, and told me what a pitifully small tonnage of shipping there seemed to be about now. We ran up a sharp street into the main square of South Shields, which, I am delighted to add, seemed to me a pleasanter town now than I remembered it as being, from the war. But it has, I believe, a far larger middle-class population than most of the other neighbouring towns. We had lunch in a deserted and very warm hotel dining-room. The sunlight was struggling through to the square when we went back to the waiting car, and we were now ready to explore the towns on this south bank, between here and Gateshead. My companion was anxious that I should have a talk with one or two men of his acquaintance in Jarrow and Hebburn, and I might as well confess here that we never succeeded in finding any of those men, though we spent most of the afternoon asking our way in a labyrinth of little streets trying to find them. But if we did not see the men, we certainly saw the towns, though we did not find our way into them without difficulty. They are plainly there, along the river bank, and I was with a Tyneside man who knew them, but nevertheless we had to ask our way several times and twist about and turn back before we contrived to reach Jarrow from South Shields. I suspect that devilish agencies were at work trying to prevent us from ever seeing Jarrow and Hebburn. They did not succeed. We managed at last to thread our way through a maze of monotonous streets, complicated by a spider's web of railway lines, and then went round and round Jarrow chasing two elusive officials. I will not add that these two officials had vanished

into thin air because there is no thin air in Jarrow. It is thick air, heavy with enforced idleness, poverty and misery.

The most remarkable giant liner in the world is probably the *Mauretania*, for she is nearly thirty years old and is still one of the fastest vessels afloat. Her record, both for speed and safety, is superb. We are proud of her. Now the *Mauretania* was launched at Wallsend, just across the river from Jarrow; and she has lasted longer than Jarrow. She is still alive and throbbing, but Jarrow is dead. As a real town, a piece of urban civilization, Jarrow can never have been alive. There is easily more comfort and luxury on one deck of the *Mauretania* than there can ever have been at any time in Jarrow, which even at its best, when everybody was working in it, must obviously have been a mean little conglomeration of narrow monotonous streets of stunted and ugly houses, a barracks cynically put together so that shipbuilding workers could get some food and sleep between shifts. Anything – strange as it may seem – appears to have been good enough for the men who could build ships like the *Mauretania*. But in those days, at least they were working. Now Jarrow is a derelict town. I had seen nothing like it since the war. I put a derelict shipbuilding town into *Wonder Hero* and called it Slakeby. Some people thought I overdid it a little in my Slakeby chapter. I assure those people that the reality of Jarrow is far worse than anything I imagined for Slakeby. It far outran any grim expectations of mine. My guide-book devotes one short sentence to Jarrow: 'A busy town (35,590), has large ironworks and shipbuilding yards.' It is time this was amended into 'an idle and ruined town (35,590 inhabitants, wondering what is to become of them), had large ironworks and can still show what is left of shipbuilding yards.' The Venerable Bede spent part of his life in this neighbourhood. He would be astonished at the progress it has made since his time, when the river ran, a clear stream, through a green valley. There is no escape anywhere in Jarrow from its prevailing

misery, for it is entirely a working-class town. One little street may be rather more wretched than another, but to the outsider they all look alike. One out of every two shops appeared to be permanently closed. Wherever we went there were men hanging about, not scores of them but hundreds and thousands of them. The whole town looked as if it had entered a perpetual penniless bleak Sabbath. The men wore the drawn masks of prisoners of war. A stranger from a distant civilization, observing the condition of the place and its people, would have arrived at once at the conclusion that Jarrow had deeply offended some celestial emperor of the island and was now being punished. He would never believe us if we told him that in theory this town was as good as any other and that its inhabitants were not criminals but citizens with votes. The only cheerful sight I saw there was a game of Follow-my-leader that was being played by seven small children. But what leader can the rest of them follow?

After a glimpse of the river-front, that is, of tumble-down sheds, rotting piles, coal dust and mud, we landed in Hebburn, where we pursued, in vain, another man we wanted. Hebburn is another completely working-class town. It is built on the same mean proletarian scale as Jarrow. It appeared to be even poorer than its neighbour. You felt that there was nothing in the whole place worth a five-pound note. It looked as much like an ordinary town of that size as a dust-bin looks like a drawing-room. Here again, idle men – and not unemployable casual labourers but skilled men – hung about the streets, waiting for Doomsday. Nothing, it seemed, would ever happen here again. Yet oddly enough a great deal is happening here; more, in some directions, than has ever happened before. Its Council of Social Service possesses a particularly energetic secretary, and in this stranded hulk of a town there are courses on history and economics (an ironic course, this) and literature, an orchestra and ladies' and children's choirs, two girls' clubs for handicrafts, gymnasium classes, a camping and rambling club, and play

centres for children. It is possible that Hebburn is coming nearer to civilization in its poverty than it ever did in its prosperity. Probably these cultural activities are breeding a generation that would not tolerate the old Hebburn, even though it offered them work and wages again. If this should be true, then at least in one direction there has been a gain. But consider the gigantic loss. It is not merely that two-thirds of the town is living on the edge of destitution, tightening its belt another hole every month or two, but that its self-respect is vanishing – for these are *working* towns and nothing else – and that it sees the sky for ever darkening over it. We went down to the social centre, which after some difficulty we found in a couple of huts by the side of a derelict shipyard. A little gnome-like man, grandly proud of everything, showed us round. There were places for carpentering and cobbling, a tattered library, and a newly-finished hut for their twopenny whist drives and dances. (I had an odd feeling all the time that I was looking at a camp just behind the front line in some strange new war.) This centre possesses a boat of its own that has already achieved some fame, and our gnome-like friend offered to go down to the water's edge, where it was moored, to show it to us. To get there we had to cross the derelict shipyard, which was a fantastic wilderness of decaying sheds, strange mounds and pits, rusted iron, old concrete and new grass. Both my companions knew about this yard, which had been a spectacular failure in which over a million of money had been lost. They had queer stories to tell of corruption in this and other yards, of lorry-loads of valuable material that were driven in at one gate and signed for, and then quietly driven out at another gate, of jobs so blatantly rushed, for show purposes, that in the last weeks wooden pegs were being used in place of steel rivets. As we came to the sullen water-front, we could hear the noise of the electric riveting from the few yards working across the river; but both of them agreed that it seemed quiet now compared with the deafening din of the riveters in the old days. There

was one ship in the yards now where there used to be twenty. Down the Tyne we could see the idle ships lying up, a melancholy and familiar sight now in every estuary round the coast. There is hardly anything that brings you more sharply into line with the idiotic muddle of our times than the spectacle of these fine big steamers rusting away in rows. We have these vessels doing nothing; we have coal for their bunkers; our ports are filled with ships' officers and men out of work; we have goods that other people need, and across every stretch of ocean are goods that we need; and still the ships are there, chained and empty, rusting in the rain, groaning in idleness night and day. But one boat is not idle on that river. That is the one we looked at now, as she creaked at her moorings. She was an old ship's boat and as she was in a poor shape, she was bought for the social centre for four pounds. The men themselves patched her up. She carries a sail and ten men usually go out in her, working three lines. The fish they bring back – and they had had some good catches, though the Tyne estuary is no Dogger Bank – is not sold but distributed among the unemployed men's families. She is called the *Venture*, and a better name could not be found for her. I do not know that anywhere on this journey I saw anything more moving and more significant than that old patched boat, which hung for years from the davits of a liner but is now the workless men's *Venture*, creeping out with the tide to find a few fish. The effort she represents is something more than a brave gesture, though it is that all right. It means that these men, who were once part of our elaborate industrial machinery but have now been cast out by it, are starting all over again, far away from the great machine, at the very beginning, out at sea with a line and a hook. And it will not do. These are not simple fishermen any more than this island of ours is one of the South Sea islands. They are the skilled children of our industrial system, artisans and men with trades in their fingers, and every time they go out and fumble frozenly with their lines and hooks, they declare once again the miserable bankruptcy of

that system. This *Venture* may be their pride, but it is our shame.

Chilled and aching, I stood by the side of the river and looked at the mud and coal dust below, at the slimy and decaying wood piles on either side, at the tumble-down sheds above, and across at the motionless cranes and idle ships now fading in the mist; and as I looked about me, I remembered the miserable huddles of mean streets and dirty little houses behind me, and the grimy wilderness we had passed through during the morning; and I asked myself, with failing courage and hope, whether the whole Tyneside had not taken a wrong turning. There was a time when this must have been one of the prettiest of our green estuaries. With a clear sky above him and clear water below, a man could have been happy here in the old days, content to live in peace without cinemas and newspapers and racing dogs and betting slips or even without rambling clubs and musical societies and gymnastics and lectures on the Economic History of England. (He would not have known – the lucky fellow – that it had an Economic History.) I am not given to sentimentalizing the distant past, and have argued often and ferociously with those who do and have seemed to me to gloss over its ignorance and brutality and the narrow limits of its life. But I could see men reasonably content, if not happy, in this clean verdant river-sea country, with its fresh salt winds. Well, there is no more green estuary now. The whole riverside wears a black scarred face. It is not casually but ruthlessly ugly, as if every charm had been deliberately banished. But there was the new grimy fairy-tale of industry; there was work; there were rising wages. England would not be the England we know if the Tyneside were not the Tyneside we know. Coal, millions of tons of it, had been poured out down this channel; great ships had been built and repaired; engines had been constructed and sent away by the thousand; there had been enormous fortunes spent in wages and material, in profits and dividends. But still I wondered, as I stood there, shivering a little, whether it had all

been worth while. Here was the pleasant green estuary, blackened and ruined, it seemed, for ever. Here was a warren of people living in wretched conditions, in a parody of either rural or urban life, many of them now without work or wages or hope, not half the men their peasant ancestors were. They seemed to have gained as little as the befouled river itself. And the fortunes, the piles of gold that the alchemy of industry had conjured from this steam and filth and din, where were they? What great work, I asked myself, owes its existence to those vast profits, those mounting dividends? What sciences and arts had they nourished? What new graces had they added to English life in return for what they had taken away from here? The ramshackle telephone exchange, at the back of my mind, put the call through, and I heard the bell ring and ring: but there was no reply.

On our way back from Hebburn to Gateshead, which was a journey among the very scrag-ends of industrial life, we passed no less than three funerals, each of them with a long black tail to it. Here, though you can no longer live well, you can still die and be buried in style. I had already noticed that although so many shops were closed in Jarrow and Hebburn, the shops that sold funeral wreaths were still open. True, the specimens they exhibited in their windows had a white waxiness that was now somewhat fly-blown, as if dissolution had anticipated their ultimate arrival at the grave or was becoming impatient and so setting its mark upon them. But there they were, and costing good money. It seemed as if Death provided the only possible spree left here. Once you had escaped from this narrow life your cold body was treated like an honoured guest and made a royal escape. There were flowers for the dead, if none for the living. All the neighbours turned out to witness this triumphant emigration. Here was something that asked for what was left of one's best clothes. Here was the remaining bit of pageantry. If you could no longer work and found it hard to play, you could still turn out and march to the cemetery. My companion told

me that the district had always had a weakness for lavish funerals; its folk growing reckless and opulent in the presence of death. Years ago, he told me, his father, weary of seeing poor widows flinging their money away in this fashion, had had a few short sharp words with some of the local undertakers, who were not above encouraging the bewildered creatures to be lavish and outdo their recently bereaved neighbours. As we passed these long dragging funerals, I thought how hideously we have bedizened the face and figure of Death. The major events of our lives are unfortunate for our dignity: we come into this world to the accompaniment of shrieks of pain and the reek of disinfectant; we are married among idiotic ceremonies, and silly whispers, giggles, nudges, stares and stale jokes; we leave this world in the company of wired flowers and dyed horses, commercial gentlemen with professionally long faces, and greeny-black suits that do not fit; and we can only say good-bye to the bodies we have loved in a monstrous atmosphere of black boggy-men on parade. 'Thou thy worldly task hast done,' I muttered to the last and grimmest coach. 'Home art gone and ta'en thy wages.' But there were probably no wages: home he had gone and taken his dole. And where was this home? Where was the fellow whose cold carcase had been screwed down inside that yellow tapering box? Was he in deep sleep for ever, or was he watching in amazement this procession, or was he already struggling into another life, perhaps not lacking so many elements of justice as this one, somewhere beyond Sirius?

In Gateshead, on our way back, we passed some little streets named after the poets, Chaucer and Spenser and Tennyson Streets; and I wondered if any poets were growing up in those streets. We could do with one from such streets; not one of our frigid complicated sniggering rhymers, but a lad with such a flame in his heart and mouth that at last he could set the Tyne on fire. Who would rush to put it out? Not I, for one.