

## ENGLISH JOURNEY

sake, some great popular festivals, some days of universal high jinks, as an escape from the growing pressure or monotony of our ordinary lives. But they must be better than any Goose Fair. I do not want to hear any more laughter from machines.

TRAVELLING BRITAIN WEEK 9  
(YORKSHIRE)

J. B. PRIESTLEY

## CHAPTER SIX

### TO THE WEST RIDING

1

ONCE again I had to abandon the route I had originally planned. I had promised to attend the first re-union dinner of my old Kitchener's Army battalion, which was to take place in my native city, Bradford. So there was nothing for it but to visit the West Riding next, leaving the still unvisited Potteries behind. This time I travelled from Nottingham to Yorkshire in my own car, being carried there like a precious parcel in a glass case. I used to drive myself, but have given it up these last few years, not because I think myself too important to change my own gears but simply because I am a very bad driver. People who are downright bad drivers should not handle a motor these days, when the roads are so crowded and dangerous. They are a menace to other persons as well as to themselves. I think - as you are probably thinking - that it is disgraceful that a large adult male should not be able to drive a car decently. (My own trouble is that I become absent-minded at the wheel and am not able to act quickly. The result is that I run into things. Indeed, there are few things commonly met with on the road that I have not bumped in my time.) But it is still more disgraceful not to admit your incompetence, to go on driving when you know in your heart of hearts that at any minute you may turn into a dangerous nuisance. Spend an hour on any road and you will see that there are any number of shockingly bad drivers about; but how often do you meet a man who can drive, and has driven for some time, but who admits that he is a bungler and a menace? I have met men who have never tried at all, and do not intend to try. But if a man has ever handled a car for a year or two, he will not admit that he is anything but supremely

efficient. So they go on – as the statistics of killed and injured show us – dealing death in their vanity. There are of course various ways of making the roads safer; but not the least important of them is a wholesale dismissal of bad drivers; probably about one in every three motorists who now career up and down the country.

The early afternoon, sunny but not warm, found us well outside Nottingham and making for Chesterfield. Somewhere about half-way we passed through the main street of a very small town, and each side of this street was lined with folk, old and young, who were all looking in one direction. Possibly there was a big funeral or perhaps a wedding among the notables, but there was no sign of either, and the staring crowd gave us no clue. It was very odd and rather disquietening to see all those faces and not to know what was the matter. It was as if we were not really there or alternatively as if we had gone rushing on into some mad England, not on the map. To travel swiftly in a closed car, as so many of us do nowadays, is of course to cut oneself off from the same reality of the regions one passes through, perhaps from any sane reality at all. Whole leagues of countryside are only a roar and muddle outside the windows, and villages are only like brick-coloured bubbles that we burst as we pass. Their life is temporarily as remote as the moon. For all I know, those staring people in the little town may have been expecting the signal for the world's end or the Second Coming. Their lives may have been so curiously transformed that my chauffeur and I and our machine were not present to their minds. Perhaps if we had stopped and got out, we might not have been able to hold any communication with them. All this is not mere fancifulness, a literary gent having his fun. Our new, rapid, closed-in sort of travel has its sinister aspects, and here is one of them. When people moved slowly in their travel, there was time to establish proper communications with what was strange, to absorb, to adjust oneself. Now that we are whizzed about the world, there is no time for absorbing and

adjusting. Perhaps it is for this reason that the world that the traveller knows is beginning to show less and less variety. By the time we can travel at four hundred miles an hour we shall probably move over a dead uniformity, so that the bit of reality we left at one end of a journey is twin to the bit of reality we step into at the other end. Indeed, by that time there will be movement, but, strictly speaking, no more travel.

The fancy that we might be rushing on into some strange mad England, inspired by the sight of those staring people, returned to me a little later when we reached Chesterfield. I have often noticed its famous crooked spire from the train, but had never been so close to it before. It was startling. To begin with, it was much bigger than I had imagined it to be; actually it is 230 feet high. Then again it is most grotesquely warped, twisted, crooked; the oddest, drollest tower in the country. It dominated the town and its narrow streets, but only in its own queer fashion, like an enormous antique jest set for ever in the skies. The people who live in its shadow ought to be folks out of the common. They ought to go careering about like the elvish burghers and peasants in old Breughel's enchanting pictures. They ought to be humorists. Every time the morning papers arrive in Chesterfield roars of laughter ought to ascend to that black barley-sugar stick of a spire. For a moment I thought there was an air of cheerful madness about the whole place, welcomed it, and said to myself that England ought to be filled with such fantastic pieces of architecture, to match its fantastic characters and books. Just as there is a grimly sane England that is really lunatic, so too there ought to be, on a big scale, an apparently mad England, with towers all awry, that is really sane and sweet, like some of Shakespeare's comedies. Probably the old citizens of Chesterfield were annoyed when they saw what happened when you build a lofty spire of wood and lead and do not use properly seasoned timber. But if they are not proud and fond of their spire now, they are poor creatures. Warped minds and hearts, these are our trouble, not warped

spires. It does not matter into what twisted folly the architecture breaks so long as we can live merrily and affectionately beneath it. And the more I see of this country the more firmly am I convinced that it is not its cheerful fools but its grimly practical hard-headed men who have always been its chief source of danger. With that mad spire to live under, Chesterfield ought never to have been allowed to enter industry; it should never have passed a dividend, never come within sight of double-entry book-keeping; but ought to have been kept as a Derbyshire stronghold of cheerful English eccentricity, a fortress of pleasant folly, a last refuge for Cousin Silence, My Uncle Toby and Mr Micawber.

Between Chesterfield and Sheffield, where the fields are preserved in the place-names and hardly anywhere else, the countryside looked very queer. Industrial man and Nature sing a rum sort of duet in those parts. I saw a row of sharply conical little hills that looked like a topographical freak until I came close to them and then realized that they were old slag-heaps now almost entirely covered with grass. Further on we passed a hill that might have been brought from some other planet. It was black where the low rays of the sun were not faintly gilding it, and was everywhere deeply scarred and seamed. Not even passing through mountainous Nevada, where the landscape is only so much geology, have I seen so strange and desolate a hill as this; only of course Nature had not been at work here, for this was really a colossal slag-heap, the biggest I have ever seen. We were now drawing near to Sheffield. There was some fine high country on the left, good Pennine stuff. The sun was low but still shining strongly and, with the increasing smokiness of the air, it made a strange chiaroscuro, as Northern as high tea and the proper short 'a' sound. For one minute Sheffield, far below, looked like the interior of an active volcano. The road ran along a ridge. Down below, on the left, were rows and rows of little houses, acres of slanting and gleaming slates. We ran under the murky canopy and were in Sheffield.

The smoke was so thick that it made a foggy twilight in the descending streets, which appeared as if they would end in the steaming bowels of the earth. In the centre of the city was a large new white building that threw into darker relief its older neighbours. We were now in the true North country. One glance at the people, with their stocky figures and broad faces, humorous or pugnacious, told you that. On the road to Barnsley the stone walls began, settling any possible doubts. The North of England is the region of stone walls. They run from the edges of the towns to the highest and wildest places on the moors, firmly binding the landscape. You never see anybody building them or even repairing them, but there they are, unbroken and continuous from every tram terminus to the last wilderness of bog and cloud. No slope is too steep for them. No place is too remote. They will accurately define pieces of ground that do not even know a rabbit and only hear the cry of the curlews. Who built these walls, why they were ever thought worth building, these are mysteries to me. But when I see them, I know that I am home again; and no landscape looks quite right to me without them. If there are not a few thousand leagues of them framing the bright fields of asphodel, it will be no Elysium for me.

Along this road to Barnsley the sun flared hugely before finally setting. All the western edges of the slag-heaps were glittering. I saw in one place a great cloud of steam that had plumes of gold. In another, we passed under a vast aerial flight of coal trucks, slowly moving, in deep black silhouette, against the sunset. It would not have made a bad symbolical picture of the end of one phase of industrial England. When we looked down upon Barnsley, we saw it for a moment dimly ranged about an ebony pyramid of slag. When we stopped in the town for tea, the sun had gone and the air was nippingly cold. In the café where I ate my toasted tea-cake, a young man was being funny to his girl about somebody's bad elocution. (I suspect that the somebody was a local big-wig.) 'He said "lor" for

"law"; said the young man, 'and "dror" for "draw". Honestly he did. "We will now dror to a conclusion," he said. Yes, really.' And as they were in that stage of courtship in which each finds the other's least remark a miracle of apt speech, they were very happy, two refined but humorous souls in a wilderness of clods. It was almost dark when we left Barnsley for Huddersfield. The hills were now solidly black; their edges very sharp against the last faint silver of the day. They were beginning to take on, for me, that Wordsworthian quality which belongs to the North. The factories might be roaring and steaming in the valleys, their lighted windows glaring at us as we passed, but behind were those high remote skylines, stern enough and yet still suggesting to me a brooding tenderness:

The silence that is in the starry sky,  
The sleep that is among the lonely hills.

A road well lighted and of immense width led us into Huddersfield, which is not a handsome town but yet is famous in these parts for the intelligence and independence of its citizens. Whether they really deserve this reputation, I have never been able to discover, though I know the place fairly well. We climbed from Huddersfield, on our way to Bradford, to the heights of Shelf. The familiar nocturnal pageant of the West Riding was all round us. This is the region of mountaineering trams; you see them far away at night, climbing the hills, like luminous beetles. You will go through mile after mile of streets, climbing all the time, and then suddenly arrive at a stretch of open country that seems nearly as wild and cold as Greenland. From such heights you look across at hills that are constellated and twinkling with street lamps. If the towns in the West Riding were as brilliantly illuminated as Los Angeles, they would run excursions from London so that people could see these patterned hills at night. Even as it is, the spectacle has a never-failing charm. We ran down from Shelf, which is a place as mysterious to me as it probably is to you, into the centre of

Bradford, then climbed another hill and reached our destination. I was back in my old home, and, journey or no journey, there I intended to stay for the next six or seven days.

Perhaps I should never have included Bradford in this itinerary. Obviously I cannot visit it in the same spirit in which I visit the other places. I am not merely returning to a city I know well, but to my childhood and youth. I left Bradford in September 1914, and have never lived in it, only stayed in it, since then. I have probably got just the wrong amount of knowledge of it now, being neither a citizen nor a complete stranger. I had better apologize now for everything that follows in this chapter. Nevertheless, I am determined to write it. This record would not be complete if there was not some such visit as this set down in it. I am not a citizen of this city, the Bradford of 1933. My Bradford ended in 1914. This must necessarily be a tale of two cities. They have much in common, and youthful memory may seize too eagerly upon what has been brought from that earlier Bradford; but I could not ignore the differences even if I wanted to do. I have changed, of course; but I think the place itself has changed even more than I have. And I am not thinking now of those inevitable alterations in the appearance of a large town; the new streets where once there were old pubs and shops; the miles of semi-detached villas where once I rolled among the gigantic buttercups and daisies. These changes are more significant. A sight of them here may give us a glimpse of two Englands, two worlds.

Bradford is one of those cities and towns that are products of nineteenth-century Industrialism. In 1801 it had a population of about 13,000. In 1901 its population had risen to nearly 280,000. (The only town in the country that grew faster was Middlesbrough.) It was very fortunately placed for its own staple trade of worsted and woollen manufacturing. It was near

some large coal-fields, and what was even more important, it had an excellent supply of soft water free from lime, good for both washing wool and dyeing it. All the processes of worsted manufacture – combining, spinning, weaving, dyeing and finishing – are carried on in Bradford. It also deals in alpaca, mohair and silk. Indeed, there is nothing that can be spun and woven that does not come to Bradford. I remember myself, as a boy, seeing there some samples of human hair that had been sent from China: they were pigtailed that had been cut off by Imperial command. And there used to be one factory in Bradford that specialized in dolls' hair, those crisp curls you find in the nursery cupboard. When I was a rebellious lad, I used to think that a wool office – and I was sent to one for a season – was the very symbol of the prosaic; but now I see I was wrong. Revisiting them again, I saw that these offices, with their bins of samples, blue-wrapped cylinders of hair, are really romantic. Take down some of those greasy or dusty samples and you bring the ends of the earth together. This wool was lately wandering about on our own South Downs. This comes from the Argentine, this from Australia. The dust and dried dung that falls out of this packet comes from the desert. Here, in this blue paper, is hair clipped from the belly of a camel. The wools and hairs will be sorted, scoured, combed, the long strands forming Tops, the short Noils, and these Tops and Noils, if they are not used locally, may be exported all over the place, from Finland to Spain. What they will end as, God only knows. Their adventures are terrific. Do the Bradford wool men, with their broad faces and loud voices, ever think about these things? I fancy they do, but they never mention them in public. Their talk is all of prices. You might think, to hear them, that they cared for nothing but 't'brass'. Don't you believe them.

It was after 1830 that Bradford began growing rapidly and piling up wealth. Apart from its natural advantages and the general state of trade, there was another reason for this, and that is that during the early and mid-Victorian periods, a

number of German and German-Jewish merchants, with German banks behind them, came to settle in the town. Many of these merchants were men of liberal opinions, who knew they could be happier outside Germany. The results of this friendly invasion were very curious. Bradford became – as it still remained when I was a boy there – at once one of the most provincial and yet one of the most cosmopolitan of English provincial cities. Its provincialism was largely due to its geographical situation. It is really in a back-water. The railway main lines went to Leeds, ten miles away, and not to Bradford, with the result that Leeds, though it has never had the worldwide reputation of Bradford, is a larger city and of much greater local importance. It was Leeds, and not Bradford, that became the great marketing centre of West and Mid-Yorkshire. Leeds has a university and law courts; Bradford has not. I have always thought that there must be proportionately fewer university graduates in Bradford than in any other large town in England. Then again, the wool business was so much a local trade that a man might spend all his life in it, unless he happened to be sent out buying or selling, and never meet anybody but his neighbours. A city that has mixed trades will probably have some of its corners rubbed off; it must work with other places; but Bradford, with its one trade, was all corners, hard provincial angles. There was no mistaking a Bradford man. Moreover, Bradford was, and still is, on the edge of the moors, hardly more than a tram-ride from wild Pennine country. A man might spend his mornings in the Wool Exchange and then spend his evenings among moorland folk, who would not do badly as characters in the medieval Wakefield Nativity Play. Wuthering Heights are only just round the corner. The town did not gently fade away into regions decorated by landed proprietors and gentleman farmers. John Ball's old gibe, 'When Adam delved and Eve span, Who was then the gentleman?' had no application to Bradford, where everybody was busy spinning. A few were rich, and a great many were very poor, work-

ing from morning until night for miserable wages; but they were all one lot of folk, and Jack not only thought himself as good as his master but very often told him so. Bradford was not only provincial but also fiercely democratic. (The Independent Labour Party was born there.) If, having made some big lucky gambles in wool, you made a fortune there and determined to retire and set up as an English gentleman, you never stayed in Bradford, where everybody was liable to be very sardonic at your expense; but bought an estate a long way off, preferably in the South.

Yet at the same time – and this is what gives the place its odd quality – Bradford was always a city of travellers. Some of its citizens went regularly to the other side of the globe to buy wool. Others went abroad, from Belgium to China, selling yarn and pieces. They returned to Market Street, the same sturdy Bradfordians, from the ends of the earth. You used to meet men who did not look as if they had ever been further than York or Morecambe, but who actually knew every continental express. They would go away for months, keeping to the most complicated time-tables. When they returned they did not give themselves cosmopolitan airs; it was very dangerous in Bradford to give yourself any airs, except those by tradition associated with solid wool men. And then there was this curious leaven of intelligent aliens, chiefly German-Jews and mostly affluent. They were so much a part of the place when I was a boy that it never occurred to me to ask why they were there. I saw their outlandish names on office doors, knew that they lived in certain pleasant suburbs, and obscurely felt that they had always been with us and would always remain. That small colony of foreign or mixed Bradfordians produced some men of great distinction, including a famous composer, two renowned painters, and a well-known poet. (In Humbert Wolfe's *Now a Stranger* you get a glimpse of what life was like in that colony for at least one small boy.) I can remember when one of the best-known clubs in Bradford was the *Schillerverein*. And in

those days a Londoner was a stranger sight than a German. There was, then, this odd mixture in pre-war Bradford. A dash of the Rhine and the Oder found its way into our grim runnel – 't'mucky beck'. Bradford was determinedly Yorkshire and provincial, yet some of its suburbs reached as far as Frankfurt and Leipzig. It was odd enough. But it worked.

The war changed all that. There is hardly a trace now in the city of that German-Jewish invasion. Some of the merchanting houses changed their names and personnel; others went out of business. I liked the city better as it was before, and most of my fellow-Bradfordians agree with me. It seems smaller and duller now. I am not suggesting that these German-Jews were better men than we are. The point is that they were different, and brought more to the city than bank drafts and lists of customers. They acted as a leaven, just as a colony of typical West Riding folk would act as a leaven in Munich or Moscow. These exchanges are good for everybody. Just lately, when we offered hospitality to some distinguished German-Jews who had been exiled by the Nazis, the leader-writers in the cheap Press began yelping again about Keeping the Foreigner Out. Apart from the miserable meanness of the attitude itself – for the great England, the England admired throughout the world, is the England that keeps open house, the refuge of Mazzini, Marx, Lenin – history shows us that the countries that have opened their doors have gained, just as the countries that have driven out large numbers of its citizens, for racial, religious or political reasons, have always paid dearly for their intolerance. It is one of the innumerable disadvantages of this present age of idiotic nationalism, political and economic, this age of passports and visas and quotas, when every country is as difficult to enter or leave as were the Czar's Russia or the Sultan's Turkey before the war, that it is no longer possible for this admirable leavening process to continue. Bradford is really more provincial now than it was twenty years ago. But so, I suspect, is the whole world. It must be when there is less and less tolerance in it, less

free speech, less liberalism. Behind all the new movements of this age, nationalistic, fascistic, communistic, has been more than a suspicion of the mental attitude of a gang of small town louts ready to throw a brick at the nearest stranger.

But our theme is Bradford. Not only have nearly all the big merchanting houses disappeared but a great many of the English firms too. Wool merchants, whose names seemed to us like the Bank of England, have vanished. Not one or two of them, but dozens of them. The great slump swept them away. Some of them, of course, had made fortunes before then. There were fortunes to be made in the West Riding during and just after the war. The money rolled in. I think this short period of artificial prosperity confused many people's ideas of trade. They thought, and still think, it represented some form of trading. When the slump came, many of them sat about, not bothering much and telling one another that there had been bad times before. I am no economist, but it is obvious even to me that this notion of there being a normal standard of trade is fallacious and dangerous. The situation is not merely changing temporarily all the time; it is also changing for ever. A set of conditions cannot exactly repeat themselves. The export trade of such places as Bradford was declining long before the war. We used to sell textile machinery to other countries and send out managers and mechanics with those machines. You cannot expect to teach other people to make goods and then expect them to go on still buying those goods from you. The war was a sharp break in this process of decline, a brief golden age of profits. Then reality broke in again in the early nineteen-twenties. The export trade, dependent on countries that had not the money to spend, rapidly dwindled. The very tide of fashion turned against the West Riding, which was still making solid fabrics for a world that wanted flimsy ones. Prices sank lower and lower. One firm after another staggered and then crashed. The raw wool business had always been a bit of gamble, but now it was a gamble at which you could not win. The wool

trade suffered a great purge. The first to be swept away were the crowds of middle-men, who had been earning a living – and a very easy living – for years. Even when I was a boy, it had struck me that these gentry, with their one little room somewhere, their solitary clerk or typist, their hours of lounging in the cafés, playing dominoes or chess, had a remarkably easy time of it, that they had escaped very conveniently from the curse of Adam. I used to know dozens of them, and a very nice life they led, with the maximum of freedom and the minimum of responsibility. The air was fragrant with the latakia and old Virginia in their pipes. But not now. That fairy tale of trade has been rudely concluded. Those swarms of genial smoky parasites have gone. At the time of writing the wool trade is better than it has been for several years, but now it is a different wool trade, with none of that easy gambling and genial acceptance of good times and bad times. They snatch at every crumb of business. Every man has to do not only a day's work but a very canny day's work, using his wits all the time.

Everybody in the business I talked to confirmed this change. It was no longer the wool trade that I had known. 'And mind you, lad,' said one old merchant, 'they're beginning to say Bradford's makking money again. It's doing nowt o' t'sort. What bit o' money is being made's going to t'banks. It's banks 'at's makking money.' They are not enthusiastic about the banking system in these parts, for in a world demanding long credits, they say that the banks will give them no rope at all except the rope with which to hang themselves. The men who are managing to hold their own in this new and keenly competitive age are different from the old wool men. They are not such tremendous 'characters', but, on the other hand, they are something more than lucky gamblers. They have to have a good many solid qualifications. I am thinking now of several men in their forties who have decent positions in the trade, chiefly on the export side. Let me make a tiny composite sketch of them. He is managing a firm, and therefore has under him various buyers,

travellers, clerks, warehousemen. He has to have a good knowledge of raw wool, tops and noils, and there is a great deal to know about these commodities. Probably his knowledge was acquired in the first place from a course or two at the Technical College and then improved, and vastly improved, by practical experience. He probably knows German, French and some Spanish or Italian. He has to know something about the relative cheapness and efficiency of various methods of transport, shipping and railway lines, road and canal. He has to know something about finance, about drafts and bills from Gothenburg, Warsaw or Barcelona. And all the time he must watch the market, which is never still and never reliable. In my opinion he earns his money. And you can safely bet that his wife, unless he is unlucky, earns hers too. For she probably has only one maid or a daily woman, to help with the rough work, and yet not only keeps the house clean and comfortable and looks after the children, but carries on the Yorkshire housewife's tradition of cooking and baking everything (including the bread) herself. Unlike her mother, who probably did all this but tended to let the house and its work and worries crush and age her, she will probably keep herself smart and pretty and reasonably well-informed and be ready to join her husband at cards or golf or whatever pastime he favours. These two seem to me good citizens; and there are plenty of them, known to me by name, in the West Riding.

The re-union battalion dinner, which had brought me here when I ought to have been continuing my journey elsewhere, was held at a tavern on Saturday night. The battalion was the 10th Duke of Wellington's, of the 23rd Division, which did good work in France and then in the later stage of the war did equally good work on the Italian Front. It was not specifically a Bradford battalion. Most of the fellows I had known as a boy

had not belonged to it, but had joined a Bradford 'Pals' battalion that had been formed rather later. There were a number of these 'Pals' battalions, and as a rule the young men in them were well above the average in intelligence, physique and enthusiasm. They were all sent to the attack on the Somme on 1 July 1916, when they were butchered with remarkable efficiency. I spent my boyhood in a rapidly growing suburb of Bradford, and there was a gang of us there, lads who played football together, went 'chumping' (i.e. collecting - frequently stealing - wood for the bonfires) just before the Fifth of November, played 'tin-can squat' and 'rally-ho' round the half-built houses, climbed and larked about on the builders' timber stacks, exchanged penny dreadfuls, and sometimes made plans for an adventurous future. If those plans had been more sensible, they would still have been futile; for out of this group there are, I think, only two of us left alive. There are great gaps in my acquaintance now; and I find it difficult to swop reminiscences of boyhood. 'The men who were boys when I was a boy,' the poet chants; but the men who were boys when I was a boy are dead. Indeed, they never even grew to be men. They were slaughtered in youth; and the parents of them have gone lonely, the girls they would have married have grown grey in spinsterhood, and the work they would have done has remained undone. It is an old worn topic: the choicer spirits begin to yawn at the sight of it; those of us who are left of that generation are, it seems, rapidly becoming mumbling old bores. It is, however, a subject that has strange ramifications; probably I should not be writing this book now if thousands of better men had not been killed; and if they had been alive still, it is certain that I should have been writing, if at all, about another and better England. I have had playmates, I have had companions, but all, all are gone; and they were killed by greed and muddle and monstrous cross-purposes, by old men gobbling and roaring in clubs, by diplomats working underground like monocled moles, by journalists wanting a good story, by hysterical women



waving flags, by grumbling debenture-holders, by strong silent be-ribboned asses, by fear or apathy or downright lack of imagination. I saw a certain War Memorial not long ago; and it was a fine obelisk, carefully flood-lit after dark. On one side it said *Their Name Liveth For Evermore*; and on the other side it said *Lest We Forget*. The same old muddle, you see: reaching down to the very grave, the mouldering bones.

I was with this battalion when it was first formed, when I was a private just turned twenty; but I left it, as a casualty, in the summer of 1916 and never saw it again, being afterwards transferred to another regiment. The very secretary who wrote asking me to attend this dinner was unknown to me, having joined the battalion after I had left it. So I did not expect to see many there who had belonged to the old original lot, because I knew only too well that a large number of them, some of them my friends, had been killed. But the thought of meeting again the few I would remember, the men who had shared with me those training camps in 1914 and the first half of 1915 and those trenches in the autumn and winter of 1915 and the spring of 1916, was very exciting. There were bound to be a few there from my old platoon, Number Eight. It was a platoon with a character of its own. Though there were some of us in it young and tender enough, the majority of the Number Eighters were rather older and grimmer than the run of men in the battalion; tough factory hands, some of them of Irish descent, not without previous military service, generally in the old militia. When the battalion was swaggering along, you could not get Eight Platoon to sing: it marched in grim, disapproving silence. But there came a famous occasion when the rest of the battalion, exhausted and blindly limping along, had not a note left in it; gone now were the boasts about returning to Tipperary, the loud inquiries about the Lady Friend; the battalion was whacked and dumb. It was then that a strange sound was heard from the stumbling ranks of B Company, a sound never caught before; not very melodious perhaps nor light-hearted, but

miraculous: *Number Eight Platoon was singing*. Well, that was my old platoon, and I was eagerly looking forward to seeing a few old remaining members of it. But I knew that I should not see the very ones who had been closest to me in friendship, for they had been killed; though there was a moment, I think, when I told myself simply that I was going to see the old platoon, and, forgetting the cruelty of life, innocently hoped they would all be there, the dead as well as the living. After all, there was every excuse that I should dream so wildly for a moment, because all these fellows had vanished from my sight for years and years and in memory I had seen the dead more often than the living. And I think that if, when I climbed the stairs of the tavern, I had seen my friends Irving Ellis and Herbert Waddington and Charlie Burns waiting at the top, grinning at me over their glasses of ale, I would not have been shocked nor even surprised, would not have remembered that they had returned from distant graves. Sometimes I feel like a very old man and find it hard to remember who still walk the earth and who have left it: I have many vivid dreams, and the dead move casually through them: *they pass and smile, the children of the sword*.

Never have I seen a tavern stairs or a tavern upstairs so crowded, so tremendously alive with roaring masculinity, as I did that night. Most of the faces were strange to me, but here and there, miraculously, was a face that was not only instantly familiar but that at once succeeded in recalling a whole vanished epoch, as if I had spent long years with its owner in some earlier incarnation. We sat down, jammed together, in a dining-room that can never have held more people in all its existence. It was not full, it was bursting. We could hardly lift the roast beef and apple tart to our mouths. Under the coloured-paper decorations, we sweated like bulls. The ale went down sizzling. But we were happy, no doubt about that. We roared at one another across the narrow tables. The waiters, squeezing past these lines of feasting warriors, looked terrified and about

half life-size. The very bunting steamed. I was between two majors, one of whom was the chairman and (no cool man at any time, except no doubt at a crisis in the front line) now quite red-hot. With him I exchanged reminiscences that seemed almost antediluvian, so far away were those training camps and the figures that roared commands in them. The other major, unlike most of us there, was not a West Riding man at all, but a South Country schoolmaster, known to all his men as 'Daddy', and whose character and reputation were such that through him the whole affected tittering South Country was forgiven everything. In short, he was amazingly and deservedly popular. Rarely have I observed such waves of affectionate esteem rolling towards a man as I did that night. Those rough chaps, brought up in an altogether alien tradition, adored him; and his heart went out to them. I caught a glimpse then – and I am not likely to forget it – of what leadership can mean in men's lives. I had seen it, of course, in the war itself; but long years of a snarling peace, in which everybody tended to suspect everybody else, had made me forget almost its very existence. And I do not suppose that in all the years that had passed since the war any of those men had found themselves moved by the emotion that compelled them that night to rush forward, at the earliest opportunity, and bring themselves to the notice of 'good old Daddy'. In other words, they had known this endearing quality of affectionate leadership in war but not in peace. It is more than sentimentality that asks, urgently and bewilderedly, if they could not have been given an outlet for this deep feeling just as easily in a united effort to help England as in a similar effort to frustrate Germany. Are such emotions impossible except when we are slaughtering one another? It is the men – and good men too – who answer *Yes* to this who grow sentimental about war. They do not seem to see that it is not war that is right, for it is impossible to defend such stupid long-range butchery, but that it is peace that is wrong, the civilian life to which they returned, a condition of things in which they

found their manhood stunted, their generous impulses baffled, their double instinct for leadership and loyalty completely checked. Men are much better than their ordinary life allows them to be.

The toast in memory of the dead, which we drank at the end of the dinner, would have been very moving only unfortunately when we were all standing up, raising our glasses and silent, there came from a very tinny piano in the far corner of the room what sounded to me like a polka very badly played. I tried to think, solemnly, tenderly, about my dead comrades, but this atrocious polka was terribly in the way. I sat down, bewildered. 'Damn fool played it all wrong,' growled the major, our chairman, in my ear. 'Should have been much slower. Regimental march, y'know.' That little episode was just like life; and I suppose that is why I am at heart a comic writer. You stand up to toast your dead comrades; the moment is solemn and grand; and then the pianist must turn the regimental march into something idiotically frivolous, and ruin the occasion. I am certain that if my friends ever want to drink to my memory, something equally daft will happen; and I shall murmur 'What did I tell you?' from the great darkness. Now more men came in; the temperature rose another fifteen degrees; the waiters shrank another six inches; and there were songs and speeches. The chairman made a good speech, and in the course of it told the lads that the last battle in which the battalion had been engaged, on the Italian Front, was the greatest pitched battle in the whole history of the world. As he talked about this battle and its momentous consequences, I stared at the rows of flushed faces in front of me, and thought how queer it was that these chaps from Bradford and Halifax and Keighley, woolcombers' and dyers' labourers, warehousemen and woolsorters, clerks and tram-conductors, should have gone out and helped to destroy for ever the power of the Hapsburgs, closing a gigantic chapter of European history. What were the wildest prophecies of old Mother Shipton compared with this!

I had arranged to meet, in a little ante-room, the survivors of my original platoon, and as soon as I decently could I escaped from the press of warriors in the big room, to revisit my own past. There were about eight of us present, and we ordered in some drinks and settled down to remember aloud. I had not seen any of these fellows for seventeen years. I knew them all, of course, and they seemed little older. The difference was that before they had all been soldiers, whereas now their respective status in civilian life set its mark upon them, and now one was a clerk, another a tram-conductor, another a mill-hand, and so forth. Nearly of all them remembered more than I did, although I have an exceptionally good memory. Details that had vanished for ever from my mind were easily present to theirs. Why? Was it because a defensive mechanism in my mind had obliterated as much as it could from my memory; or was it because much more had happened to me since the war than had happened to them and, unlike them, I had not gone back over and over again to those war years? (A third explanation, of course, is that, living in the same district and often running across one another, they had talked over those years far more than I had.) As figure after figure, comic and tragic, came looming up through the fog of years, as place after place we had been in caught the light again, our talk became more and more eager and louder, until we shouted and laughed in triumph, as one always does when Time seems to be suffering a temporary defeat. Frensham, Aldershot, Folkestone, Maidstone, Bully Grenay, Neuve Chapelle, Souchez - how they returned to us! Once again the water was rising round our gum boots. We remembered the fantastic places: that trench which ran in front of a graveyard, where the machine-gun bullets used to ricochet off the tombstones; that first sight of Vimy Ridge in the snow, like a mountain of despair. We recalled to one another the strange coincidences and dark premonitions: poor melancholy B. who muttered, 'I'll be lying out there tonight,' and was, a dead man that very night; grim Sergeant W. who said to the

draft, 'This is where you can expect to have your head blown off,' and had his own head shattered by a rifle-grenade within three hours. And little Paddy O., who had always seemed such a wisp of a chap, with everything about him drooping, who looked the same as ever, ready to drop at any moment, though he never had dropped and the Central Powers must have spent hundreds of thousands of marks trying to kill him, little Paddy, I say, came close to me, finished his beer, and asked me, stammeringly as ever, if I remembered sending him from the front line for some water for the platoon, on a summer morning in 1916. 'Nay,' he stammered, 'I wasn't gone more than t-ten minutes, and when I c-come back, where you'd been, Jack lad, there was n-nobbut a bloody big hole and I n-never set eyes on you again till tonight.' And it was true. I had sent him away on a ten minutes' errand; immediately afterwards a giant trench mortar had exploded in the very entrance to the little dug-out where I was dividing up the platoon rations; I had been rushed away, and was gone before he returned; and it had taken us more than seventeen years to find one another again.

Several of us had arranged with the secretary to see that original members of the battalion to whom the price of the dinner was prohibitive were provided with free tickets. But this, he told me, had not worked very well; and my old platoon comrades confirmed this, too, when I asked about one or two men. They were so poor, these fellows, that they said they could not attend the dinner even if provided with free tickets because they felt that their clothes were not good enough. They ought to have known that they would have been welcome in the sorriest rags; but their pride would not allow them to come. (It was not a question of evening clothes; this dinner was largely for ordinary working men.) I did not like to think then how bad their clothes, their whole circumstances, were: it is not, indeed, a pleasant subject. They were with us, swinging along while the women and old men cheered, in that early battalion of Kitchener's New Army, were with us when kings, statesmen, general

officers, all reviewed us, when the crowds threw flowers, blessed us, cried over us; and then they stood in the mud and water, scrambled through the broken strands of barbed wire, saw the sky darken and the earth open with red-hot steel, and came back as official heroes and also as young-old workmen wanting to pick up their jobs and their ordinary life again; and now, in 1933, they could not even join us in a tavern because they had not decent coats to their backs. We could drink to the tragedy of the dead; but we could only stare at one another, in pitiful embarrassment, over this tragi-comedy of the living, who had fought for a world that did not want them, who had come back to exchange their uniforms for rags. And who shall restore to them the years that the locust hath eaten?

4

There are nearly always compensations. Thus Bradford is a city entirely without charm, though not altogether ugly, and its industry is a black business; but it has the good fortune to be on the edge of some of the most enchanting country in England. A sharp walk of less than an hour from more than one tram terminus will bring you to the moors, wild virgin highland, and every mill and warehouse will be out of sight and the whole city forgotten. However poor you are in Bradford, you need never be walled in, bricked up, as a round million folk must be in London. Those great bare heights, with a purity of sky above and behind them, are always there, waiting for you. And not very far beyond them, the authentic dale country begins. There is no better country in England. There is everything a man can possibly want in these dales, from trout streams to high wild moorland walks, from deep woods to upland miles of heather and ling. I know no other countryside that offers you such entrancing variety. So if you can use your legs and have a day now and then to yourself, you need never be unhappy long in Bradford. The hills and moors and dales are there for you. Nor do

they wait in vain. The Bradford folk have always gone streaming out to the moors. In the old days, when I was a boy there, this enthusiasm for the neighbouring country had bred a race of mighty pedestrians. Everybody went enormous walks. I have known men who thought nothing of tramping between thirty and forty miles every Sunday. In those days the farmhouses would give you a sevenpenny tea, and there was always more on the table than you could eat. Everybody was knowledgeable about the Dales and their walks, and would spend hours discussing the minutest details of them. You caught the fever when you were quite young, and it never left you. However small and dark your office or warehouse was, somewhere inside your head the high moors were glowing, the curlews were crying, and there blew a wind as salt as if it came straight from the middle of the Atlantic. That is why we did not care very much if our city had no charm, for it was simply a place to go and work in, until it was time to set out for Wharfedale or Wensleydale again. We were all, at heart, Wordsworthians to a man. We have to make an effort to appreciate a poet like Shelley, with his rather gassy enthusiasm and his bright Italian colouring; but we have Wordsworth in our very legs.

Sunday morning, after the battalion dinner, opened wonderfully, so a little party of us took a car into the country. It was plain from the very first that the local enthusiasm had not vanished. All that had happened since the war was that it had taken a somewhat different form. Before we used to set out in twos and threes, in ordinary walking clothes, for our Sunday tramps. Now they were in gangs of either hikers or bikers, twenty or thirty of them together and all dressed for their respective parts. They almost looked German. We passed the hikers very early on our journey, and so I cannot say much about them, except to doubt whether this organized, semi-military, semi-athletic style of exploring the countryside is an improvement upon our old casual rambling method. These youngsters looked too much as if they were consciously taking exercise: they sug-

gested the spirit of the lesser and priggish Wordsworth rather than the old magician who had inspired us. We saw a good deal of the cyclists, however, passing troops of them all along the road up to Grassington; and I remember wondering exactly what pleasure they were getting from the surrounding country, as they never seemed to lift their heads from their handlebars, but went grimly on like racing cyclists. They might just as well, I thought, be going round and round the city. But perhaps they call an occasional halt, and then take in all the beauty with a deep breath. There was plenty to take in too, that morning.

We went to Ilkley, then through Bolton Woods to Burnsall and Grassington, and never have I seen that country so magnificent. The long dry summer had given it an autumnal colouring that was past belief. The morning was on fire. The dry bracken and the heather burnished the hilltops; and all the thick woods beside the Wharfe were a blaze of autumn. The trees dripped gold upon us. We would look down russet vistas to the green river. We would look up, dazzled, to see the moorland heights a burning purple. If we had been ten years in a dark cell and newly released, we could not have stared at a world that seemed more extravagantly but exquisitely dyed. I have never seen Bolton Woods looking like that before, and hardly dare hope to see them like that again. It was their grand carnival, and it will riot and glow in my memory as long as I live. Grassington came, where several water-colouring friends of mine, as well as a number of wool merchants from Bradford, have made their home; and after that we slipped into Upper Wharfedale, which is narrower and less wooded and far more austere than the lower reaches. There are great limestone crags for walls there, and between them the valley is smooth and green. Half-way up we passed the pleasant village of Kettlewell. I always like the story of the woman from one of the remote outlying farmsteads – they look like white crumbs on a vast rumpled green tablecloth – who, when asked by the parson why he never saw her in Kettlewell these days, replied: ‘Oh, I

used to like going into Kettlewell about once a week, but now I can't stand t'racket.' And I remember a woman who lived in one of these remote farmhouses, a solid West Riding country-woman and not one of your fanciful arts-and-crafts misses, who swore that she saw fairies dancing on the hillside. (Have these lonely folk keener senses than ours, or do they merely take to imagining things? It is still an open question, and not to be settled by a report from a committee because a committee would never see anything.) We reached Buckden, towards the head of the Dale, and a notable goal for Bradfordians, who have emptied the barrels at the inn there many a time; and then we turned left, towards the long remote valley of Langstrothdale, up which you may go to Hawes in Wensleydale. We stopped, however, at Hubberholme, a tiny hamlet that had a fine little old church and a cosy inn. There we stayed for lunch.

Once up there you seem at first at the world's end; and indeed you are a long way from anywhere, certainly from a railway station. It is the internal-combustion engine that has brought such a place as this on to the map, just as it has changed – or is changing – the whole face of England. Before the Industrial Revolution, before the railways came, these dales were more thickly populated than they were twenty years ago. (Wensleydale, with its castles and abbeys and ruined farms, must have had quite a considerable population in the Middle Ages, whereas it seems almost empty now.) It was steam power that brought people swarming into a few centres or kept them close to the railway lines. Now, after less than a hundred years of this centralizing and canalizing influence of the railway, people are being spread out again. We thought the railway system would last for ever, and it is dying now and the whole movement of the population is being reversed. The very coaching inns are with us again, their grooms and ostlers transformed into mechanics and garage men. And what interested me at the inn in this remote Hubberholme was that the talk before lunch – with the landlord, a townsman here for his health, leading it –

was all about local festivities, dances here, concert parties there, all manner of urban jollification. You could hardly ask for a better example of the change that is taking place in the country than this, for here was a region remote enough, yet the younger folk were as bent on enjoying themselves as any in the towns. Some of them were bent on other things too, for I heard how two brothers, young farmers from up the dale, had hanged themselves; not at the same time but within a few months. There was nothing wrong, as far as anybody knew, with the affairs of either of them; they were ordinary pleasant sociable young farmers; but both their bodies had to be cut down in their lonely farmhouse and then brought to the village on a sort of improvised sledge. I wonder what strange story that farmhouse could tell. Before I leave this inn I will add that for lunch they gave us soup, Yorkshire pudding, roast chicken and sausages and two vegetables, fruit pudding, cheese and biscuits, and coffee, all for two and sixpence each. And that - when they have a mind to - is the way they do it in Yorkshire.

In the afternoon we returned down Upper Wharfedale, but then cut east and climbed up to Blubberhouses. The sun had disappeared; the day was cloudy and sagging, with imminent signs of rain. Now we got that other and familiar aspect of these moorlands, seeing them as a high, grey desolation, with the winds shooting over them, threatening to shatter the heavy clouds. The long stone walls and the few stone buildings did not suggest man's handiwork or his presence, but seemed to be natural outcroppings of the grey rock. Not a soul was about. A few birds went beating up against the wind and crying desolately, that was all. The country was Thibetan in its height and emptiness. It was impossible to believe that in half an hour we might have dropped into Harrogate and taken the waters. I tried to remember exactly where it was that, years before in this region, I had stumbled upon a genuine deserted village. There it was, on the moors, with two small factories and several rows of cottages, and completely uninhabited. (Something, I believe,

went wrong with the water supply.) I remember eating my sandwiches inside one of the cottages, from which most of the roof was gone. I stared at the gaping doorways and the grass-grown street; and not even a mouse stirred. No village I saw in the war area, I think, gave me the same complete picture of desolation as that empty shell of a moorland village did. And it was somewhere in these parts, though behind what misty ridge I could not remember. The sagging clouds broke, and it rained good and hard, as it always does up there. We bounded down towards Otley, past the reservoirs, which were mysterious lakes in that fast scribble of rain, and ran on through Menston to Baildon, where we found friends and tea. Baildon is not far from Bradford but it is on the very edge of a little moor of its own, so nearly everybody who can contrive it lives out there. The population of Bradford must be nearly half as large again during working days as it is at night and on the census returns, for so many of its people live at Baildon, Ilkley, Menston, Harrogate, Grassington. Before the war, my friends and I used to camp in a wooden shanty on this Baildon Moor, and divide our time pretty cheerfully between opening tins of beans, washing up, reading Walt Whitman, and arguing or scuffling with one another. It was only an hour or so from Bradford, that camp, but I still think of it, as I did then, as if it were a lodge in Labrador. Quite right too. For it needs no effort, after twenty years, to feel the freshness and see the wide glitter of those summer dawns up there. Oh, spaces more wide and open to me than all Montana or the Rhodesian plains, bless you all, and may the lark sing to you for ever and the ling never cease to bloom! With you, have I not flected the time carelessly, as they did in the golden world?

We got back to Bradford, that Sunday evening, between six and seven. It was dark and miserably drizzling. I asked to be

dropped in the centre of the town. 'But what are you going to do?' they cried, staring at me as if I had been suddenly shaken out of my wits. 'I don't know,' I told them. 'I want to see what there is to do in Bradford on a wet Sunday night.' 'But there isn't *anything*,' they almost screamed. I replied firmly, and not without a suggestion of the heroic, that I must see for myself. So I was dropped in Market Street. At first it did not look too bad. There were plenty of lights about, and though of course there were no shops open, some of the larger establishments had left their windows uncovered and illuminated. There were signs too that the evening was clearing up. Such drizzle as remained was not troublesome. I heard music and discovered that a Salvation Army band was playing just round the corner; it was playing quite well too; and a considerable crowd had collected. So far as I could judge only the innermost ring of this crowd was in search of salvation; the others were listening idly to the music, smoking their pipes, and waiting until the pubs opened. I stayed there a few minutes, and came to the conclusion that if I could persuade myself to believe in the Christian account of this life – and the essence of it, the self-sacrifice of a god for men, seems to me too good to be true, and the rest of it, the theological jugglery lit by hell-fire, not worth having – I should either join the Catholic Church or fall in with the Salvation Army. Both of them have the right religious attitude; that is, they are not afraid of being thought noisy and vulgar; they take the thing out into the street. After all, if you really believe that the gates of Heaven are swinging open above you and the pits of Hell yawning below, it is absurd to be merely gentlemanly about it, like the Church of England, or drab and respectable, like the Nonconformists. I felt that the early Christians, with their wildly poetical tales, their glittering eyes, their doomsday-haunted looks, would be able to find a welcome among the incense-swinging Catholics or the drumming, roaring Salvationists, but would be rejected with horror by the good sober Church and Chapel folk, aghast at such Oriental extrava-

gances. Having reached this conclusion, I walked out of the range of the converted euphonium players, and began to explore the rest of the town.

Although it was such a poor night, there were lots of people, mostly young men, hanging about the streets. What were they doing there? Some of them, no doubt, were waiting for girls, or hoping that in some miraculous fashion they would quite casually make the acquaintance of a pretty and amiable young woman. But most of them, I think, were not baffled amorists: they were there simply to pass the time. They had to do something with their Sunday evening. They might have attended at one of the many and various places of worship; but obviously they did not like places of worship. They might have stopped at home or visited a friend's house; but then it was probably neither comfortable nor convenient for them to stay at home or for their friends to stay at home. If you have a lot of people, of very different ages and tastes, all crowded into one small house, in which, willy-nilly, they all have to eat and sleep and wash and dress, spending a whole evening at home, for some of the residents anyhow, may be a most disagreeable and unprofitable business. Thus, if you like reading quietly in a corner, you are unlucky if the rest of the family, including your sister's young man and your brother's girl, have a passion for very noisy gramophone records or the wireless at full strength. Moreover, even if it is not too rowdy for your taste, you get sick of the miserable little hole. Far too many opinions about staying quietly at home happen to be expressed by comfortable professional men writing in warm, well-lighted, book-lined apartments thirty feet long by fifteen broad. And again, even if they have quite pleasant homes, the fact remains that most young people like to go out at the week-end: it is not some temporary aberration of the tribe: such is their nature. They want to go out, to get on with their individual lives, which have a secret urgency of their own at such periods, to join their friends, to stare at and talk and giggle and flirt with and generally begin

operations upon the other sex. Many, too, have stirring in them a desire for colour, rhythmical movement and sound, drama; in short, for some form of artistic expression and appreciation. Such is their nature, fortunately for the history of the race. If the facts of our social life do not conform to this nature, then it is useless preaching sermons or writing rumbling letters to the paper about modern youth: the only thing to do is to alter the structure of our social life. Bluntly, the position is this: the good old-fashioned English Sunday – the Sabbath, as it is called by a great many people who do not seem to realize, first, that they are not Jews, and secondly, that anyhow they are a day out in their calculations – is still being imposed upon large numbers of people, especially younger people, who no longer want the good old-fashioned English Sunday, any more than they want the good old-fashioned English side-whiskers, thick underclothing or heavy meals. It is imposed upon them legally and by force, not by mere suggestion; and the reason that the imposition is still successful is that in most provincial towns the authority is largely in the hands of elderly men who are not in sympathy with the desires of newer generations. And what these elderly men do not want, nobody else shall have: their attitude is a thoroughly dog-in-the-mangerish one. For obviously there is nothing to prevent anyone from having a quiet Sunday night, church or chapel, then cold supper and an hour or two's reading, solemn talk or meditation at home, if he or she really wants to have one. You can have a quiet Sunday evening of this kind in Paris or Buenos Aires. There has never been any talk of compulsory attendance on Sunday nights at dance and concert halls, theatres, cinemas, just as it has never been proposed when discussing local option – and this would be the only sporting conclusion – that in the event of the vote going against them, total abstainers should be compelled to take an agreed amount of wine and spirits. I myself happen to live in a city and in a certain state of life that leave me free to spend my Sunday evenings at theatres, cinemas, concerts, restaurants, and so

forth; but as it also happens that I have more time for these things during the week than most people and I like to spend Sunday quietly at home or with my friends, I rarely take advantage of this freedom, remaining as sedate on most Sundays as a Baptist deacon. But that seems to me no reason why I should impose restrictions on other people, with different tastes. I have the kind of Sunday I like: let them have the kind of Sunday they like. There is in this country far too much grudging envy – too much of the *I had a bad time, you can have one now* spirit – masquerading as religious conviction and austere civic virtue. As for the familiar argument of an open Sunday evening creating too much Sunday work, it is not worth very much. Many of the people concerned are only too anxious to do a bit of Sunday work. And I have noticed that the objectors, in their passion for a workless Sunday, never seem to refuse such things as newspapers and milk on Monday mornings. It is time, however, we returned to Bradford on a Sunday night.

The rain stopped, but it remained a wettish raw night. I explored all the centre of the city and discovered that there were one or two very small cafés open and then, from seven o'clock onwards, all the pubs, and nothing else. You could take your choice and either promenade up and down Darley Street, North Parade, Manningham Lane, or go into the nearest pub. Ever since I can remember, elderly citizens have been protesting against this practice of promenading on Sunday nights. They have always been disgusted by the sight of young people monkey-parading in this fashion. It is, however, these same elderly citizens who have seen to it that nearly all doors leading out of the street shall be locked against these young people. They cannot listen to plays or music, cannot see films, cannot even sit in big pleasant rooms and look at one another; so they walk up and down the street. No doubt some of them would always want to promenade – even on nights like this, though it seems incredible – but most of them would obviously prefer one



of a dozen different ways of spending Sunday evening. They have, of course, to get on with their mating, whatever elderly persons may think of them; but they could easily do it in a much more civilized fashion than this of monkey-parading. Having seen the promenaders, I thought I would try the only places of entertainment allowed to open – the pubs. The first one I visited was very quiet – it was still early – and in the lounge I entered there were only five or six hobbledehoys drinking glasses of bitter and elaborately chaffing the barmaid in the traditional style. Nothing wrong with the place except that it was dull and stupid. The next pub, a large gaudy affair, was doing better business. Its chief customers were either young men who stared, whispered, suddenly guffawed, and a number of youngish females who, if they were not women of the town, had certainly taken the most astonishing pains to disguise themselves as such, even to putting on the swollen greedy faces of the type. Nothing much was happening in there: an occasional guffaw, another order for drinks, a move from this little table to that, with the women of the town grimacing over their stouts and ports and missing nothing. This is not an attack on the place; I have not the least desire to see it closed; but I am puzzled to know why it should be open when so many obviously better places – the Civic Theatre, for example – are shut; I cannot see why playgoing, listening to music, watching films, even dancing, should be considered so much worse – or at least more secular – than sitting and boozing with prostitutes. Incidentally, how ironical it is that the process of turning oneself into a street-walker should be still called 'going gay', for anything less gay, anything more monotonous, dull, dreary, senseless, sordid, than the whole way of life, the surroundings, habits, manners, outlook, of these women here in England, can hardly be imagined. They nearly always look exactly what they are – gross, greedy, and stupid, and worlds away from the frail butterflies, the lights o' love, sentimentalized over by very young novelists. I then had a short

walk and ventured into pub number three, a large establishment that seemed to be doing a very brisk trade. This time the lounge, which was crowded with people and thick with smoke, boasted some little coloured electric lights. That was all; nothing else, not even reasonable comfort; but it was enough, and every table, every seat, was taken. Fifteen shillings' worth of coloured lamps: this was gaiety, this was life; and so the place was selling beer, stout, port, as fast as it could serve them, to patrons of both sexes. I do not think any of these people – and they were mostly young, pairs of boys, pairs of girls; with here and there an older couple – could be said to be really enjoying themselves; but at least they could look at one another, giggle a bit, talk when they found something to say, and admire the carnival splendour of the coloured electric lights. They did not want to go home, they did not want to walk up and down the streets, so here they were. I endured about a quarter of an hour of it, then marched out to walk the two miles or so to my home.

As I went, I considered the pitiful evening I had half passed in the centre of this city, with its three hundred thousand people. What a miserable barbaric affair! I asked myself what I would have done, supposing I were a young man who had come here to work and was living in not very comfortable or amusing lodgings. This was Sunday night, and a dark wettish Sunday night: a melancholy tract of time, with Monday morning waiting to pounce on me at the end of it. What would I have done? What was there to do? It is hard to tell, but I arrived at the conclusion that I would have found one of the quiet pubs and there floated the dismal evening away on a full tide of drink. And if I was tight at the end of it, I told myself, all the better. So much for this fine old provincial Sabbath. I told myself too that if I had a young son or daughter whose work took him or her away from home, to live in one of these towns, I should object if it were a Sabbatarian town of this kind, which could offer its young folk nothing on Sunday night but a choice be-

tween monkey-parading and dubious pubs. Please give me, I would say, a wicked wide-open city, busy dishonouring its Sabbath, blazing with lights on Sunday evening, with concerts, theatre, cinemas, dance halls, restaurants, in full naughty swing. There I could trust my innocent child. But not – oh, never – in this barbaric gloom and boredom. Thus ended, with myself addressing a full applauding meeting of selves, my Sunday evening.

## 6

Having arrived at my old home, I let the journey proper look after itself for a few days while I went prowling about, renewing the past and exploring the present. I did not remain in Bradford all the time, for one West Riding town is not distinctly separated from another and so you are tempted to roam, unless you are so sensitive – and silly – that the whole grim region frightens you into seeing as little of it as possible. I went to Leeds, that companion city which crazily ignorant Southerners are apt to confuse with Bradford, to the disgust of both sets of citizens. With its University, Law Courts, mixed industries, position as the shopping and amusement centre of the West Riding, Leeds is rather more civilized than Bradford, but to my mind – and remember, I am a Bradfordian – far more dismal and less interesting. It has not the authentic, queer, carved-out-of-the Pennines look of Bradford and some of the other towns. It is a large dirty town that might almost be anywhere, and mostly built of sooty brick. Its cheap clothing trade has given it a big Jewish colony, formerly recruited, I believe, from the Polish and Russian ghettos. This Jewish element seemed to be far more in evidence before the war than it is now, possibly because the flow of Jews from Eastern Europe is drying up. But there is still plenty of Yiddish in Leeds, and I can still see on the surface of its life traces of that restless glitter which is the gift of the Jew. I had another look at Halifax,

which is more interesting than Leeds as a genuine West Riding product. It must be the hilliest town of its size in England. There, factories and rows of houses seem to be sticking up and out at all mad angles. The trams, groaning desperately, go mountaineering; and at night they look like luminous beetles swarming up and down a black wall. It is a grim, craggy place, piercingly cold in winter. When I first enlisted I was sent to the barracks in Halifax. They were in Gibbet Lane. I was there in the early days of that fine September of 1914, but I never recollect Gibbet Lane offering us anything but a Siberian bleakness. The folk there are honest, sharp-tongued, but kindly; they make heavy woollen stuff and carpets; and they delight in singing Handel and the Gilbert-and-Sullivan operas. You can meet them, a trifle subdued perhaps but there to the last wart, in the solid downright fiction of my friend, Phyllis Bentley, who writes perched on that Halifax hillside. Beyond Halifax are rum desperate outposts like Sowerby Bridge and Luddenden Foot, and beyond them are the moors. These high moors form the western boundary for all this district: they are just the same as they always were; and there they wait, probably for the ruin of this trumpery textile trade, this flickering episode of man's activity and cunning. The West Riding keeps one eye on the mills and markets and the other on the moors. It is surprising how close their desolation is. One afternoon I ran out to see an old friend at Thornton, an industrial village hanging on the western edge of Bradford and only a threepenny tram-ride from the Town Hall. Ten minutes in a car from Thornton took us to Withens on the moor, where we had some tea while heavy sleet slashed at the windows. We might have been on the Outer Hebrides. Withens itself is a low, square stone building, half farmhouse, half inn, and it stands on the brink of nothing but bog and wild weather. You feel that at any moment Heathcliffe may be roaring in the doorway. It is only up here that you can believe in such people as Heathcliffe. But then up here you could almost believe in anything. What you

cannot believe is that the Bradford Exchange and the Chamber of Commerce are only half an hour away. The world they represent has dropped clean out of sight and mind. These winds, savage and exhilarating, have never known a black load of smoke, and would, it seems, tear down a factory chimney in two minutes. Withens – the very name whisks away all the warehouses and streets and rows of houses and shops and traffic signs and policemen and rate-collectors, and leaves you gasping on the brown wet roof of England.

Most of my time, however, I spent in Bradford itself, renewing old acquaintance with people and places. Among the latter was the covered Market, our nearest approach to the Oriental bazaar. The stalls there are not temporary affairs but permanent fixtures, shops without windows, and most of them have been in the same hands ever since I can remember. On one side there are still queer old-fashioned little eating places, where you tuck into boiled cod and steak pie sitting in pews. On the other side are the music stalls, where if you linger a second the assistants pounce upon you at once and conjure the florins out of your pocket. It was at one of these stalls years ago when I was a schoolboy, that I bought, in a lunatic fit, that most melancholy instrument, a one-stringed fiddle. It cost a pound or two, and I paid for it, laboriously, in shillings and sixpences. 'You oughtn't to do that,' observed the assistant, a supercilious young man. 'Looks as if you've been saving up.' And as that was precisely what I had been doing, I was lost in shame. (A month or two afterwards, I swapped that one-stringed fiddle for a deer-stalker hat, owned by a friend of mine, who had about as much use for it as he would have for the fiddle, or as I really had for either.) Between the music at one extreme and the boiled cod in pews at the other, there are rows and rows of drapery, boot and shoe, confectionery, grocery stalls. There are several bookstalls, and the owner of one of them grabbed hold of me and said in that aggressive tone we use with one another in Bradford: 'Nah, ah've got summat to show you. You've got a

minute to spare, haven't you? All right then. Nah just come with me.' He led me from his stall to the Market entrance, where we climbed some stairs. At the top there were rooms and rooms lined with new books. 'Stock, that is,' he told me, waving a hand. 'All stock. And then they'll tell you there isn't a bookshop of any size here. Look at that lot. All sorted out too – proper alphabetical order. What d'you think o' that?' I told him it was a noble sight and a prodigal display, and did not dare to hint that there seemed to me to be very few good books in this vast collection. But if it was a question of quantity, not quality, he had certainly justified himself. I think that if I had a shop in Bradford, I should insist upon its being in the Market, where they all know one another and are always having cups of tea. You see Funeral Wreaths hobnobbing in a genteel fashion with Cheap Biscuits, Dress Goods and Fents listening to the troubles of Toffee and Humbugs, Ladies' Shoes smiling over the teapot at Scarves and Jumpers. I might do worse, when I am old and out of fashion and bankrupt of ideas, a faded scribbler, than return to my own town, and take a bookstall in the Market, there to smoke my pipe, have my cup of tea like the rest, and lend a benevolent ear to the confidences of the girls in the Sheet Music and the Cut-Price Grocery lines. I should be snug all day under that great roof, could stare at the bright little pageant of humble commerce, could eat frugally in the neighbouring pews, and when I died there might easily come my way a free Funeral Wreath, only a trifle damaged.

I sought out some old business colleagues, for I was once, before the war, in the wool trade, though only in a vague fashion. I returned to the dark interior of wool offices and warehouses, with their great bins of blue-wrapped samples, their counters littered with strands of tops and bits of noil, their dim recesses, in the warehouses, where the massive bales await the sorters, their curiously heavy, greasy smell, their men and lads all in blue 'brats', which is our name up there for overalls. A.W., once a clerk with me, though my senior, I found in his

private office, for he is now in charge of the business and has to pilot it through shallows and whirlpools unknown in the old tranquil days. With him, as warehouseman still, was my old friend N., who looks just the same as he did twenty-odd years ago. He is a grand type of north-country working man, and I was glad to see him still cheerfully pulling the bales about, though he is in his sixties, and to learn that his two sons are both doing well, one in a shop of his own, the other in the city's largest store. N. was a trooper, forty-odd years ago, and was wounded by a spear-thrust in the Khyber Pass. He and I talked about our old boss, who died a few years ago, and was an odd character, quite different from the usual run of wool merchants, who then were earthy, hearty fellows, fond of good living. Our old boss lived only for his business: he was a bachelor, a teetotaler, a non-smoker, who fussed away morning and night with every precious detail of his business, who would come down even on Bank Holidays to brood over his ledgers or write long letters to our foreign agents. It never occurred to him that the rest of us did not necessarily regard the exporting of wool tops as the very centre and peak of our lives, and when he kept us at it night after night, sometimes hours after most decent offices had shut down, he probably imagined that he was doing us a kindness, by not compelling us to go out into the dreary world that lay outside the office, by offering us an hour or two more of this colour and glamour of business. To me, in those days, he did not seem a real person at all, so far removed were his interests from anything that I could enjoy; and I saw him as a sort of powerful robot. It was like working for a Martian. He left about a quarter of a million sterling – mostly to charity, for he was a dutiful kind of man – and I am certain that he never got a tenth as much out of life as his warehouseman, my friend N., on his pre-par wages of twenty-seven or thirty shillings a week and his two-pound-ten now. N. and I talked about him, among the bales in the dim greasy warehouse. 'Nay, Jack lad,' N. observed, 'Ah don't know what t'owd chap lived for. He got

nowt aht o' life, did he? Ah've had more fun i' one night than Ah bet he had i' thirty year. He'd no mates. He nivver went onywhere an' enjoyed hisself. He'd all that brass an' didn't know how to spend it. Ah don't believe he'd ivver owt to do wi' a woman. Nay, you can't imagine him, can you? But mind you, Jack lad, he worn't a bad sort. He wor *peculiar*, as you might say, but not a bad sort. He wor better to get on wi' nor So-and-So.' I agreed, having had trouble with So-and-So myself. 'Ah remember one morning,' N. continued, 'when So-and-So rang me up at t'warehouse abaht some bags. An' he called me a "silly blockhead" cos Ah told him we hadn't got 'em. Ay, he called me a "silly blockhead". So Ah went straight down to t'office and Ah says to him, "Did you call me a silly blockhead?" ' But it is impossible to suggest in print the menacing deliberation of this in an aggressive Yorkshire voice: it is tremendous. 'So he says, "Ah dare say Ah did," and Ah says to him, "Well, don't do it again then, 'cos neither you nor onnybody else is going to call me a silly blockhead. An' we haven't got them bags either." An' he wor careful what he called me after that,' N. concluded. Then he added: 'You know, Jack lad, you wor t'only one o' them lads in t'office who wor nivver frightened o' So-and-So, and Ah've allus said that about you. You didn't give a damn for him or onnybody else, did you? Ah've had monny a good laugh thinking o' things you used to do. Ay, you wor a cough-drop.' Good old N. If ever I go back to that warehouse and find him gone, that day will be very black for me.

For once, I was lucky in my traffic with old friends. I called at a house I had not been to for many a long year, a house I had visited a great deal at one time, for an old schoolfellow had lived there and his parents still lived there. When I called, one evening, the house seemed very quiet and there was a dim light in the bedroom. My heart sank: I had a vision of death, long dreadful illness, misery and evil. Dubiously, tentatively, I tried the bell. Mr W. himself opened the door and peered at me through his steel-rimmed spectacles. We had not seen one

another for at least ten years. Recognition, joy; no death, no dreadful illness! He and Mrs W. were sitting in the back room, and there I sat with him, and we talked of old times in that house and of their son, my former schoolfellow and friend, who had collected several University degrees and diplomas and now held a very important post (you may have heard of him) in another and larger city. Mr W. had recently retired and brought back his bag of tools from the mill for the last time. And now I can confess that it was from him that I took a good many hints for my Jess Oakroyd; borrowing his trade and something of his appearance, his mixture of simplicity and real shrewdness, of independence and deep affection. What were sharply different were their respective domestic lives, for this real man had – and still has – a wife in a thousand, and both a son and a daughter he is proud of. And, for once, it had all ended happily. The tremendous sacrifices these two good folk had made for their son, so that he could collect his degrees and diplomas and solid jobs – and I well remember the extent and severity of those sacrifices – had not been made in vain; he and his wife had recently been staying there; and in a week or two these old people were off to stay with them. It had all turned out as events in the more respected contemporary novels are not allowed to turn out, for the best. And Mr W., beaming, fetched in a jug of beer, in the time-old fashion, and over it we exchanged reminiscences, and he pointed the stem of his little pipe at me, as of old, when he delivered some shrewd thrusts at the Government and the City Council and the pompous big-wigs. Of course, it is shocking that a man of this kind, a sound conscientious hard-working craftsman, should have had to make such sacrifices, should have received so narrow a slice of the good life. Anybody with a glimmer of a notion of what social justice should mean ought to be ready to fight for him and his kind. But on the other hand I for one am equally ready to fight against any scheme that would turn him and his kind into different beings. Bernard Shaw once declared that all he wanted to do was to

abolish the working-class and put in its place some sensible people. But for my part, I would as soon see England filled with men like Mr W. or old N. – and, mark you, it is not filled with them, otherwise it would be a different England – as I would see it populated by average members of the Fabian Society. After all, such men as these, like Mr Shaw himself, stand on their own feet, do their jobs with a will, stoutly resist stupid opposition but give way to affection, and, like him, are grand lumps of character. What – in the name of everything but supermen – more can you want?

You find people writing now about women working in Russia as if this was some new thing in the world's history. Women have always worked in these textile trades, which could not exist – on their present economic basis – without them. One unmarried elderly woman of my acquaintance, up there, had just retired, after working fifty years as a weaver in one mill. Fifty years. During that time, she and her relatives and most of her friends had not only worked in that enormous mill but had lived all their lives in its shadow. Time for them had been marked by the sound of its hooter – locally known as a 'whew'. Fifty years, only broken by an occasional four or five days at Morecambe or Blackpool. Fifty years, living in the same back-to-back houses, just behind the mill. Millions of yards of fine fabrics had gone streaming out, from their hands, to almost every part of the world, to be cut into the fashions of the eighties, the nineties, the Edwardians, the Georgians. Fifty years of quick skilled work, with hours, in winter, lasting from dark to dark. If a world that once went bare is now partly clothed and decorated with fabrics, then these folk may be said to have lent a hand in the great processes of civilization; they have not been passengers in the ship; a brief childhood at one end and a few sinking weary years at the other end, and between them these five solid decades of work: that is their record. Such services do not go unrewarded, of course. A

weaver fit to be kept on working for fifty years has proved herself a valuable old servant of the firm. Therefore she receives a pension of five shillings a week from the mill, five shillings to do what she likes with; and when to that is added the ten shillings that the rashly generous state is flinging her way, it will be seen that she has a whole fifteen shillings a week for herself, which, if she had only herself to consider – and unfortunately, in this instance, she has to help an invalid sister – would undoubtedly leave her splendidly idle and luxurious at the end of her fifty years. It is a pity that she has somebody else to support, because otherwise, no doubt, in this pensioned ease, she could see something of the world for which she has been weaving so long, could be waited on for once in her life, could look at the big shops and buy pretty little presents for her grand-nieces and nephews, could, in short, have a wonderful time with her fifteen shillings. But perhaps it is as well that she cannot go splashing her fifteen shillings about, because if she could, although she is old and heavy and tired, she might arouse the indignation of those honest fiery Tory patriots who write articles for and letters to the newspapers, protesting against the treatment afforded this pampered class, talking like the noblest Romans of us all in this later age of bread and circuses. Perhaps she is better as she is, wishing she had strength enough to work more than those fifty years, wondering how to get through the coming week, and never asking herself, as she stirs in the dark mornings when she hears the hooter blowing and the clatter of feet outside, whether mills were created for men and women or men and women for mills. She does not complain much, perhaps because she realizes, like all the protesting gentlemen who lounge before large club fireplaces, that if, during and after her fifty years of toil, she had been treated with any more consideration it would have meant the ruin of a great country. And, not being a literary sentimentalist, she does not say that a country in these years has no title to greatness, had better face

and risk ruin, if it still allows its people to suffer such damnable injustice.

I had time to note a great many changes in my Bradford, and as some of them may be taking place in a good many other provincial towns, they are worth recording here. I think a few, however, are probably peculiar to Bradford. For example, that sad dwindling of the foreign community in the city, and with it the decline of many things they fostered, notably music. The very building in which I heard the orchestras of Richter and Nikisch when I was boy, the old St George's Hall, has been turned into a permanent picture theatre. Bradford has no proper concert hall now – more shame to it. The old Theatre Royal too, where Irving played for the last time, has also been turned into a cinema. The city used to have three newspapers of its own, one morning and two evening papers; but now it has only two, and one of them is certainly not as good as it was before the war, when, as I well remember, it was publishing some of the earliest travel essays of H. M. Tomlinson. The Arts Club still exists but in a very modest fashion, and is not the institution it was. There is not, to my mind, the wealth in the city there used to be. This is not merely because the wool trade has not been producing the wealth it used to produce, but also because the richer merchants and manufacturers no longer live in the city. They work there, but live well outside, Ilkley, Harrogate, Grassington way. The motor has, of course, encouraged this migration, which is common, I suspect, throughout the north, where the wealthier industrialists are busy turning themselves into country gentlemen and are leaving the cities to the professional, clerking and working classes. (This change may bring about some curious results very soon.) When I was a boy, we had certain wealthy families of manufacturers who came as

near to forming an aristocracy as such a democratic community as ours would allow. Now they are gone, and their places have not been taken by other families. That chapter is closed. The main shopping streets have turned with the tide, and a glance at their windows shows that the shopkeepers are now trying to attract a much larger if poorer public. And of course you no longer notice much difference between members of various classes. Clogs have disappeared, for though they were really very sensible footwear for work, being healthy, comfortable and cheap, they carried a bad social stigma on them, even when I was young. The working woman's shawl is disappearing too. But such changes are general.

Bradford has a Civic Theatre, of which I happen to be President, so I came into contact with the dramatic folk of the city. This Civic Theatre, which used to be a branch of a similar movement in Leeds but now has an independent standing, is an organization of amateur actors, with professional producers, who give throughout the winter months a series of good plays, for which they do not charge admission. People who subscribe a few shillings to the Theatre are given priority in booking seats, but the seats themselves throughout are free, though of course there is a collection to which audiences are expected to contribute as generously as possible. Even now, many people do not realize that there is a chain of such theatres, small intelligent repertory theatres organized on various lines, stretching across the country. Most of them have to struggle along, hardly paying their way; they have not as yet produced any brilliant new schools of drama or acting; they have probably not succeeded yet in creating a public of any real size for intelligent drama; but nevertheless I do not think my own personal interest in the theatre is deluding me when I declare that this dramatic movement, which came into existence after Hollywood had nearly wrecked the declining professional theatre of the provinces, is of immense social importance. To begin with, it is a genuine popular movement, not something fostered by a

few rich cranks. The people who work for these theatres are not by any means people who want to kill time. They are generally hard-working men and women – small business men, teachers, clerks, artisans – whose evenings are precious to them. And they are tremendously enthusiastic, even if at times they are also – like all theatrical folk everywhere – given to quarrelling and displays of temperament. Many of them have not only had to work extremely hard for their theatres, but they have also had to face a certain amount of ridicule; and all this with only their own encouragement, and not – as it so often happens nowadays – with that of the Government or the newspapers. In short, this is a genuine spontaneous movement. If you reckon its supporters merely by quantity, it may seem unimportant; but if you begin to take quality into account, it is a different story. These theatres are attracting to themselves the more eager, impressionable, intelligent younger people in these industrial towns, where depression has hung like a black cloud for the last few years. Some of them, in various places, have told me what this dramatic work has meant to them, and in many instances the persons in question have not been producing, designing scenery, playing big parts, but may only have been selling programmes, taking tickets, or doing the accounts. A dozen of such folk, who use their own wits and form their own judgement, are more significant than a thousand members of that crowd which is at the mercy of all the forces of publicity and advertisement. For this reason we must not allow a mere consideration of numbers to influence us. These theatres are very small and have to fight for their very existence; but the more I have seen of industrial England, the more firmly I am convinced that it would be easier to under-estimate than over-estimate their significance. I see them as little camp-fires twinkling in a great darkness. I am not writing now as an occasional dramatist, whose plays are being performed in such theatres, but as a novelist desperately turned social historian, addressing himself to readers who may possibly not care twopence if every play-

house in the country should close tomorrow. The point is, that in communities that have suffered the most from industrial depression, among younger people who frequently cannot see what is to become of their jobs and their lives, these theatres have opened little windows into a world of ideas, colour, fine movement, exquisite drama, have kept going a stir of thought and imagination for actors, helpers, audiences, have acted as outposts for the army of the citizens of tomorrow, demanding to live, though they should possibly have less food on their table and shabbier clothes on their backs, a life at once more ardent and imaginative and more thoughtful than their fathers and mothers ever knew.

There is something very ironical about Bradford's present position as a theatrical town. (And much of what follows, I believe, applies to a good many of the industrial towns in the north.) While the professional theatre regards it as a very poor place indeed, hardly on the map any longer, actually it is theatrically-minded to a most fantastic and droll degree. It is a city crowded with amateur actors. I have never known anything like it. Operas, musical comedies, farces, dramas, the place hums with them. Every second typist is an ingénue lead somewhere, every other cashier a heavy father or comedian. Acres of canvas are being transformed into rural scenes and library sets every week. All the young electricians can rig you up floats or battens or spots at a moment's notice. The local papers print whole pages of amateur stage photographs. Nearly every organization appears to run a dramatic society as an off-shoot. The young man frowning into vacancy, at the other end of the tram, is probably busy working out the movements of the first act of *The Silver Box*. The large man who just nodded to him is probably about to turn himself into the comic bailiff in *Tilly of Bloomsbury*. There are soubrettes and tragediennes in all the shops. The very factories produce their own revues and pantomimes. All the town's a stage. If all this seems so much fanciful exaggeration, I can offer cold figures. During the last

municipal year, the number of amateur dramatic licences issued in Bradford passed the total of 700. And here at least there is a distinct local drama, written by local men and women in the West Riding dialect. Though the royalties paid by these modest dramatic societies must obviously be very small, there are so many of them that I know at least two local dramatists who are almost entirely supported by such royalties. I am quite ready to believe that Bradford, which, after all, has not a peculiarly histrionic population of its own, is by no means alone in this recent and astonishing passion for theatricals. It is, of course, symptomatic of a change in the whole temper and outlook of the industrial north, of a general desire for more movement and colour and imaginative activity in life, and of a new and healthy protest against that merely passive amusement which is regarded as one of the weaknesses of our mechanical civilization. To me, a pre-war Bradfordian, some examples of this changed outlook took my breath away, as, for instance, when I heard that one middle-aged couple of my acquaintance, both products of a fairly grim Nonconformity, were having their little girl, the youngest child and the apple of their eye, seriously trained as an acrobatic dancer. It did not take much of that to send me wandering about dazed, a stranger in my own town.

'And what seem to you the greatest changes here?' I asked a very intelligent middle-aged woman, an old Bradford friend. She thought for a moment, then startled me by demanding, 'Where are the men?' I asked her to explain, and she continued: 'There never seem to be any men about nowadays, whatever you are doing or wherever you go. Plenty of women, but no men. It doesn't matter what it is - a dramatic society, or lectures, or at the theatre, or even a political meeting - they're all women. Where *do* the men go nowadays? In the old days, there used to be at least as many men interested in everything as women - it was half and half - but now it isn't. Yes, I know there was the war - but even that doesn't explain it. After all,



there's another generation grown up since then. And you see the girls in at everything, but not the boys and the men. What *do* they do with themselves? They don't go to the pubs every night, as they used to do. It's not that. It isn't even the pictures, because they're mostly women there too. Do they just sit at home and play with the wireless, or what? I tell you, it's a mystery to me, and nobody I know can explain it.' Neither could I, though the problem reminded me of what I heard so often in London, from persons who knew more than I do about the youngest generation of adults, especially in the upper middle-class, namely, that in this generation the young men are far more subdued, far less enterprising and ambitious than the girls, who seem to have mysteriously acquired all the dash and virility. Whether this is true everywhere, I do not know. Indeed, I do not know if it is true anywhere; and I suspect it to be one of those grand conclusions drawn from a few hasty glimpses of young people at parties and dances. Certainly, there seemed to me, as a visitor, plenty of young men about in Bradford.

I met one man I was glad to meet, for it proved, as I thought it would, a most odd and illuminating encounter. I was introduced to him on the ground floor of a very dingy warehouse, where he was doing an odds-and-ends sort of business in various textile commodities. He was a man who had been a legend up there ever since the war. I had never heard of him before the war, but afterwards I hardly ever heard about anybody else. He was easily the richest man the West Riding had recently produced, and he was also a character. (And still is.) Nobody knew how much he was worth, at the time when he was striding the whole wool trade like a Colossus, but I gather that it was between five and ten millions. His operations were vast and mysterious, and did not stop at wool business, combing and spinning mills, and the like, but at last even included West End theatres, in which he lost a lot of money finally by speculation and by putting on expensive musical comedies. There

was a wonderful crop of stories about him, in the usual West Riding vein, but the only one I remember that pleased me went something like this: at the time when he still controlled this staggering array of properties, extending from remote industrial villages in Yorkshire to Shaftesbury Avenue, but when the slump was just beginning, somebody asked him how things were, and he replied: 'Nay, out of all t'lot, there's nowt paying but eighteen milk bee-asts Ah've got up i' North Yorkshire.' This story may not be true, but I can certainly imagine the man I met making this reply. He was a tall, well-covered man, with a face at once forceful and droll, like that of a comic pirate. I have not the least idea whether he was a good financier or a bad one, a mediocre man who was lucky for a season or a clever man who was ultimately unlucky, but I do know that he was – and is – a character. I have never understood exactly what happened to all his combines and properties. Apparently the whole pagoda-like edifice collapsed, leaving him – and I will swear, with a droll look – among the ruins. He did not go bankrupt and he had the sense and courage – unlike so many of these financial Napoleons – not to blow his brains out. He began all over again, in a small way; and there he was, on the ground floor of a dingy warehouse. It is quite probable that if I had met him when he was a multi-millionaire, I should have disliked him; but as an ex-multi-millionaire – not, I imagine, the easiest of situations – he seemed to me very good company. It is a pity he could not write a perfectly frank autobiography. In America, where the law of libel does not run as swiftly and remorselessly as it does here, they frequently take you behind the scenes in this super-variety show of high finance; but here in England we are allowed few such visits and a discreet silence is maintained until somebody happens to reach the Old Bailey. Until they are openly proved to be crooks, our own financial jugglers are regarded as distinguished if somewhat mysterious figures, so many benevolent wizards. Nobody but prosecuting counsel, at the right time and in the right place, is permitted to 'de-bunk'

them and their world. My Bradford acquaintance had some amusing things to say about this world, things that confirmed much of what I, an ignorant man of letters, had very privately guessed about it. The height of folly, in that world, is to be clumsy, as Hatry was. It is, I gather, a sphere of action in which all depends on your being able to 'get away with' certain things. In lower spheres, where more stupid fellows are merely trying to do, to the best of their ability, the jobs for which they are paid - they may be making a chair, installing a hot-water system, even writing a book - it is not simply a matter of 'getting away with' things; but then it is not here we find the supermen, the wonder chaps, who have to work with one eye on Maidstone Gaol and the other on the House of Lords. It would be better to set up a Monte Carlo of our own than to let our men with Monte Carlo minds, men with 'a system', loose upon the city, there to play with the nation's wealth. We ought to have got past the gambling era now. My Bradford man solemnly warned me against rash speculation: 'You let some brass stick to your fingers, lad,' he said, more than once. There is no advice I can give him, twenty years my senior. But I take him to be a forceful and astute personality, something more than a dashing gambler; and I do not think that he ought to be starting all over again on the ground floor of a dingy warehouse. Nor do I think that he ever ought to have been in control of more factories than he could ever visit or to have been juggling with half-a-dozen West End theatres when he knew nothing about the drama but only about wool, tops and yarn. I do not blame him in particular, I blame us all for allowing such a daft chaos to go blundering on, wasting men who might otherwise have proved themselves first-class servants of the community. Metaphorical language is sometimes extremely significant. There is only one sphere of action in the more civilized countries today in which men find it necessary, when describing the ordinary operations there, to use metaphors and similes drawn from medieval brigandage or the early life of the Wild West; and that is the world

of high finance. Thus I cannot help feeling, in my innocence, that there must be something strangely anachronistic, crude, violent, barbaric, about that world; and that therefore it is time it was brought into the twentieth century, cleaned up and civilized. I hinted as much to the fallen Titan in the warehouse, and wish I could have complimented him upon bringing out of his crazy vanished Eldorado so much humour and courage, two notable West Riding qualities. But we never pay compliments in Bradford. We are, as we readily admit, not good at expressing our feelings, which only means, of course, that we are bad at expressing our pleasant feelings, for I have noticed that we give tongue to the other kind with great frequency and force. I feel that now is the moment when I should put down some memorable concluding sentence of praise about the whole of the West Riding and its people; and of course I cannot do it. But then I am one of them, and they are the very people who will understand why I cannot do it. So - well, I'm off. Behave thi'sen, lad!