

***JOHN ST. LOE
STRACHEY***



***THE ADVENTURE
OF LIVING :
A SUBJECTIVE
AUTOBIOGRAPHY***

John St. Loe Strachey

The Adventure of Living : a Subjective Autobiography

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THE ADVENTURE OF LIVING

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CHAPTER I

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HOW I CAME TO "THE SPECTATOR"

Sir Thomas Browne gave his son an admirable piece of literary advice. The young son had been travelling in Hungary and proposed to write an account of what he had seen. His father approved the project, but urged him strongly not to trouble himself about the methods of

extracting iron and copper from the ores, or with a multitude of facts and statistics. These were matters in which there was no need to be particular. But, he added, his son must on no account forget to give a full description of the "Roman alabaster tomb in the barber's shop at Pesth."

In writing my recollections I mean to keep always before me the alabaster tomb in the barber's shop rather than a view of life which is based on high politics, or even high literature. At first sight it may seem as if the life of an editor is not likely to contain very much of the alabaster tomb element. In truth, however, every life is an adventure, and if a sense of this adventure cannot be communicated to the reader, one may feel sure that it is the fault of the writer, not of the facts. A dull man might make a dull thing of his autobiography even if he had lived through the French Revolution; whereas a country curate might thrill the world with his story, provided that his mind were cast in the right mould and that he found a quickening interest in its delineation. Barbellion's *Diary* provides the proof. The interest of that supremely interesting book lies in the way of telling.

But how is one to know what will interest one's readers? That is a difficult question. Clearly it is no use to put up a man of straw, call him the Public, and then try to play down to him or up to him and his alleged and purely hypothetical opinions and tastes. Those who attempt to fawn upon the puppet of their own creation are as likely as not to end by interesting nobody. At any rate, try and please yourself, then at least one person's liking is engaged. That is the autobiographer's simple secret.

All the same there is a better reason than that. Pleasure is contagious.

He who writes with zest will infect his readers. The man who argues,

"This seems stupid and tedious to me, but I expect it is what the public

likes," is certain to make shipwreck of his endeavour.

The pivot of my life has been *The Spectator*, and so *The Spectator* must be the pivot of my book—the point upon which it and

I and all that is mine turn. I therefore make no apology for beginning

this book with the story of how I came to *The Spectator*.

My father, a friend of both the joint editors, Mr. Hutton and Mr. Townsend, was a frequent contributor to the paper. In a sense, therefore, I was brought up in a "Spectator" atmosphere. Indeed, the first contributions ever made by me to the press were two sonnets which appeared in its pages, one in the year 1875 and the other in 1876. I did not, however, begin serious journalistic work in *The Spectator*, but, curiously enough, in its rival, *The Saturday Review*. While I was at Oxford I sent several middle articles to *The Saturday*, got them accepted, and later, to my great delight, received novels and poems for review. I also wrote occasionally in *The Pall Mall*, in the days in which it was edited by Lord Morley, and in *The Academy*. It was not until I settled down in London to read for the Bar, a year and a half after I had left Oxford, that I made any attempt to write for *The Spectator*. In the last few days of 1885 I got my father to give me a formal introduction to the editors, and went to

see them in Wellington Street. They told me, as in my turn I have had to tell so many would-be reviewers, what no doubt was perfectly true, namely that they had already got more outside reviewers than they could possibly find work for, and that they were sorry to say I must not count upon their being able to give me books. All the same, they would like me to take away a couple of volumes to notice,—making it clear, however, that they did this out of friendship for my father.

I was given my choice of books, and the two I chose were a new edition of *Gulliver's Travels*, well illustrated in colour by a French artist, and, if I remember rightly, the *Memoirs of Henry Greville*, the brother of the great Greville. I will not say that I departed from the old *Spectator* offices at 1 Wellington Street—a building destined to play so great a part in my life—in dudgeon or even in disappointment. I had not expected very much. Still, no man, young or old, cares to have it made quite clear that a door at which he wishes to enter is permanently shut against him.

However, I was not likely to be depressed for long at so small a matter as this; I was much too full of enjoyment in my new London life. The wide world affords nothing to equal one's first year in London—at least, that was my feeling. My first year at Oxford had been delightful, as were also the three following, but there was to me something in the throb of the great pulse of London which, as a stimulant, nay, an excitant, of the mind, even Oxford could not rival.

For once I had plenty of leisure to enjoy the thrilling drama of life—a drama too often dimmed by the cares, the business, or even the pleasures of the onlooker. A Bar

student is not overworked, and if he is not rich, or socially sought after, he can find, as I did, plenty of time in which to look around him and enjoy the scene. That exhilaration, that luxury of leisurely circumspection may never return, or only, as happily in my own case, with the grand climacteric. Once more I see and enjoy the gorgeous drama by the Thames.

To walk every morning to the Temple or to Lincoln's Inn, where I was reading in Chambers, was a feast. Then there were theatres, balls, dances, dinners, and a thousand splendid sights to be enjoyed, for I was then, as I have always been and am now, an indefatigable sightseer. I would, I confess, to this day go miles to see the least promising of curiosities or antiquities. "Who knows? it may be one of the wonders of the world" has always been my order of the day.

I was aware of my good fortune. I remember thinking how much more delightful it must be to come fresh to London than to be like so many of my friends, Londoners born and bred. They could not be thrilled as I was by the sight of St. Paul's or Westminster Abbey, or by the scimitar curve of the Thames from Blackfriars to Westminster. Through the National Gallery or the British Museum I paced a king. The vista of the London River as I went to Greenwich intoxicated me like heady wine. And Hampton Court in the spring, *Ut vidi ut perii*—"How I saw, how I perished." It was all a pageant of pure pleasure, and I walked on air, eating the fruit of the Hesperides.

But though I was so fully convinced that the doors of *The Spectator* were shut against me, I was, of course, determined that my two reviews should, if possible, make

the editors feel what a huge mistake they had made and what a loss they were incurring. But, alas! here I encountered a great disappointment. When I had written my reviews they appeared to me to be total failures! I was living at the time in an "upper part" in South Molton Street, in which I, my younger brother, Henry Strachey, and two of my greatest friends, the present Sir Bernard Mallet and his younger brother Stephen Mallet, had set up house. I remember to this day owing to my brother that though I had intended my review of *Gulliver's Travels* to be epoch-making, it had turned out a horrible fiasco. However, I somehow felt I should only flounder deeper into the quagmire of my own creation if I rewrote the two reviews. Accordingly, they were sent off in the usual way. Knowing my father's experience in such matters, I did not expect to get them back in type for many weeks. As a matter of fact, they came back quite quickly. I corrected the proofs and returned them. To my astonishment the review of Swift appeared almost at once. I supposed, in the luxury of depression, that they wished to cast the rubbish out of the way as quickly as possible.

My first intention was not to go again to *The Spectator* office, the place where I was so obviously not wanted, but I remembered that my father had told me that it was always the custom to return books as soon as the proofs were corrected or the articles had appeared. I determined, therefore, that I would do the proper thing, though I felt rather shy, and feared I might be looked upon as "cadging" for work.

With my books under my arm I walked off to Wellington Street, on a Tuesday morning, and went up to Mr. Hutton's room, where on that day the two editors used to spend the greater part of the morning discussing the coming issue of the paper. I had prepared a nice little impromptu speech, which was to convey in unmistakable terms that I had not come to ask for more books; "I fully realise and fully acquiesce in your inability to use my work." When I went in I was most cordially received, and almost immediately Mr. Hutton asked me to look over a pile of new books and see if there was anything there I would like. This appeared to be my cue, and I accordingly proceeded to explain that I had not come to ask for more books but only to bring back the two books I had already reviewed and to thank the editors. I quite understood that there was no more work for me.

Then, to my amazement, Mr. Townsend, with that vividness of expression which was his, said something to the effect that they had only said that when they didn't know that I could write. The position, it appeared, had been entirely changed by the review of *Gulliver's Travels* and they hoped very much that I should be able to do regular work for *The Spectator*. Mr. Hutton chimed in with equally kind and appreciative words, and I can well remember the pleasant confusion caused in my mind by the evident satisfaction of my future chiefs. I was actually hailed as "a writer and critic of the first force."

To say that I returned home elated would not be exactly true. Bewildered would more accurately describe my state of mind. I had genuinely believed that my attempt to give the final word of criticism upon *Gulliver's Travels*—that is

what a young man always thinks, and ought to think, he is doing in the matter of literary criticism—had been a total failure. Surely I couldn't be wrong about my own work. Yet *The Spectator* editors were evidently not mad or pulling my leg or even flattering me! It was a violent mystery.

Of course I was pleased at heart, but I tried to unload some of my liabilities to Nemesis by the thought that my new patrons would probably get tired of my manner of writing before very long. What had captured them for the moment was merely a certain novelty of style. They would very soon see through it, as I had done in my poignant self-criticism. But this prudent view was before long, in a couple of days, to be exact, knocked on the head by a delightful letter which Mr. Townsend wrote to my father. In it he expressed himself even more strongly in regard to the review than he had done in speaking to me.

I honestly think that what I liked best in the whole business was the element of adventure. There was something thrilling and, so, intensely delightful to me in the thought, that I had walked down to Wellington Street, like a character in a novel, prepared for a setback, only to find that Fate was there, "hid in an auger-hole," ready to rush and seize me. Somehow or other I felt, though I would not admit it even to myself, that the incident had been written in the Book of Destiny, and that it was one which was going to affect my whole life. Of course, being, like other young men, a creature governed wholly by reason and good sense, I scouted the notion of a destined day as sentimental and ridiculous. Still, the facts were "as stated," and could not be altogether denied.

Looking back at the lucky accident which brought the right book, the right reviewer, and the properly-tuned editors together, I am bound to say that I think that the editors were right and that I had produced good copy. At any rate, their view being what it was, I have no sort of doubt that they were quite right to express it as plainly and as generously as they did to me. To have followed the conventional rule of not puffing up a young man with praise and to have guarded their true opinion as a kind of guilty secret would have been distinctly unfair to me, nay, prejudicial. There are, I suppose, a certain number of young people to whom it would be unsafe to give a full measure of eulogy. But these are a small minority. The ordinary young man or young woman is much more likely to be encouraged or sometimes even alarmed by unstinted praise. Generous encouragement is the necessary mental nourishment of youth, and those who withhold it from them are not only foolish but cruel. They are keeping food from the hungry.

If my editors had told me that they thought the review rather a poor piece of work, I should, by "the law of reversed effort," have been almost certain to have taken up a combative line and have convinced myself that it was epoch-making. When a man thinks himself overpraised, if he has anything in him at all, he begins to get anxious about his next step. He is put very much on his mettle not to lose what he has gained.

It may amuse my readers, if I quote a few sentences from the article, and allow them to see whether their judgment coincides with that of my chiefs at *The Spectator* on a matter which was for me fraught with the decrees of

Destiny. This is how I began my review of Swift and his masterpiece:

"Never anyone living thought like you," said to Swift the woman who loved him with a passion that had caught some of his own fierceness and despair. The love which great natures inspire had endowed Vanessa with a rare inspiration. Half-consciously she has touched the notes that help us to resolve the discord in Swift's life. Truly, the mind of living man never worked as Swift's worked. That this is so is visible in every line, in every word he ever wrote. No phrase of his is like any other man's; no conception of his is ever cast in the common mould. It is this that lends something so dreadful and mysterious to all Swift's writings.

From this time I began to get books regularly from *The Spectator* and to pay periodical visits to the office, where I learned to understand and to appreciate my chiefs. But more of them later. The year 1886 was one of political convulsion, the year of the great split in the Liberal Party; the year in which Lord Hartington and Mr. Chamberlain finally severed themselves from Mr. Gladstone and began that co-operation with the Conservatives which resulted in the formation of the Unionist Party. I do not, however, want to deal here with the Unionist crisis, except so far as it affected me and *The Spectator*. While my father and my elder brother remained Liberals and followed Mr. Gladstone, I followed Lord Hartington, Mr. Chamberlain, and Mr. Goschen. My conversion was not in any way sought by my new friends and chiefs at *The Spectator* office, though they at once took the Unionist side. I have no doubt, however, that my intercourse with Hutton and Townsend had its

effect, though I also think that my mind was naturally Unionist in politics. I was already a Lincoln worshipper in American history and desired closer union with the Dominions, not separation. I was for concentration, not dispersion, in the Empire. In any case, I took the plunge, one which might have been painful if my father had not been the most just, the most fair-minded, and the most kind-hearted of men. Although he was an intense, nay, a fierce Gladstonian, I never had the slightest feeling of estrangement from him or he from me. It happened, however, that the break-up of the Liberal Party affected me greatly at *The Spectator*. When the election of 1886 took place, I was asked by a friend and Somersetshire neighbour, Mr. Henry Hobhouse, who had become, like me, a Liberal Unionist, to act as his election agent. This I did, though, as a matter of fact, he was unopposed. The moment he was declared elected I made out my return as election agent and went straight back to my work in London. Almost at once I received a letter which surprised me enormously. It was from Mr. Hutton, telling me that Mr. Townsend had gone away for his usual summer holiday, and that he wanted someone to come and help him by writing a couple of leaders a week and some of the notes. I, of course, was delighted at the prospect, for my mind was full of politics and I was longing to have my say. Here again, though it did not consciously occur to me that I was in for anything big, I seem to have had some sort of subconscious premonition. At any rate, I accepted with delight and well remember my talk at the office before taking up my duties. My editor explained to me that Mr. Asquith, who had been up till the

end of 1885 the writer of a weekly leader in *The Spectator* and also a holiday writer, had now severed his connection with the paper, owing to his entry into active politics. It did not occur to me, however, that I was likely to get the post of regular leader-writer in his stead, though this was what actually happened.

I left the office, I remember, greatly pleased with the two subjects upon which I was to write. The first article was to be an exhortation to the Conservative side of the Unionist Party not to be led into thinking that they were necessarily a minority in the country and that they could not expect any but a minute fraction of working-men to be on their side. With all the daring of twenty-six I set out to teach the Conservative party their business. This is how I began my article which appeared on the 24th of July, 1886.

In their hearts the Conservatives cannot really believe that anyone with less than £100 a year willingly votes on their side. A victory in a popular constituency always astonishes them. They cannot restrain a feeling that by all the rules of reason and logic they ought to have lost. What inducement, they wonder, can the working-men have to vote for them? Lord Beaconsfield, of course, never shared such notions as these.... Yet his party never sincerely believed what he told them, and only followed him because they saw no other escape from their difficulties. The last extension of the franchise has again shown that he was right, and that in no conditions of life do Englishmen vote as a herd.

Here is how I ended it:

Conciliation or Coercion was the cry everywhere. And yet the majority of the new voters, to their eternal honour, proved their political infancy so full of sense and patriotism that they let go by unheeded the appeals to their class-prejudices and to their emotions, and chose, instead, the harder and seemingly less generous policy, based on reason rather than on sentiment, on conviction rather than on despair. As the trial was severe, so is the honour due to the new voters lasting and conspicuous.

The length of the quotation is justified by its effect on—my life. For me it has another interest. In re-reading it, I note that, right or wrong, it takes exactly the view of the English democracy which I have always taken and which I hold today as strongly as I did forty years ago.

The article had an instant reaction. It delighted Mr. Townsend, who, though he did not *know* it was by me, guessed that it was mine, and wrote at once to ask me whether, when Mr. Hutton went on his holiday, I could remain at work as his assistant. Very soon after, he suggested, with a swift generosity that still warms my heart, that if I liked to give up the Bar, for which I was still supposing myself to be reading, I could have a permanent place at *The Spectator*, and even, if I remember rightly, hinted that I might look forward to succeeding the first of the two partners who died or retired, and so to becoming joint editor or joint proprietor. That prospect I do admit took away my breath. With the solemn caution of youth, or at any rate with youth's delight in irony in action, I almost felt that I should have to go and make representations to my chief about his juvenile impetuosity and want of care and

prudence. Surely he must see that he had not had enough experience of me yet to make so large a proposition, that it was absurd, and so forth. *O sancta simplicitas!*

CHAPTER II

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HOW I CAME TO "THE SPECTATOR" (*Continued*)

Even the success chronicled in the preceding chapter did not exhaust the store of good luck destined for my first appearance as a political leader-writer. Fate again showed its determination to force me upon *The Spectator*. When I arrived at the office on the Tuesday morning following the publication of the number of the paper in which my first two leaders appeared, I found that the second leader had done even better than the first. Its title seemed appallingly dull, and, I remember, called forth a protest from Mr. Hutton when I suggested writing it. It was entitled "The Privy Council and the Colonies." I had always been an ardent Imperialist, and I had taken to Constitutional Law like a duck to the water, and felt strongly, like so many young men before me, the intellectual attraction of legal problems and still more the majesty and picturesqueness of our great Tribunals. Especially had I been fascinated by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council and its world-wide jurisdiction. I had even helped to draw some pleadings in a Judicial Committee case when in Chambers. Accordingly, though with some difficulty, I persuaded Mr. Hutton to let me have my say and show what a potent bond of Empire

was to be found therein. I also wanted to emphasise how further ties of Imperial unity might be developed on similar lines—a fact, I may say, which was not discovered by the practical politicians till about the year 1912, or twenty-seven years later.

Now it happened that Mr. Gladstone's Ministry, though beaten at the elections, had not yet gone out of office. It also happened that Lord Granville, then Colonial Secretary, was to receive the Agents-General of the self-governing Colonies, as they were then called, on the Saturday; and finally, that Lord Granville had a fit of the gout. The result of the last fact was that he had to put off preparing his speech till the last possible moment. When he had been wheeled in a chair into the reception-room—his foot was too painful to allow him to walk—he began his address to the Deputation in these terms:

In a very remarkable article which appears in this week's *Spectator* it is pointed out "that people are apt to overlook the importance of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council as one of the bonds that unite the Colonies and the Mother Country."

He then went on to use the article as the foundation for his speech. I had talked about the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council being a body which "binds without friction and links without strain," and Lord Granville did the same.

But of this speech I knew nothing when I entered The *Spectator* office on my fateful second Tuesday. I was only intent to get instructions for new leaders. Besides, I had been away on a country-house visit from the Saturday to the Monday, and had missed Monday's *Times*. I was

therefore immensely surprised when Mr. Hutton, from the depths of his beard, asked me in deep tones whether I had seen *The Times* of Monday, and what was said therein about my Privy Council article. I admit that for a moment I thought I had been guilty of some appalling blunder and that, as the soldiers say, I was "for it" However, I saw that I must face the music as best I could, and admitted that I had not seen the paper. "Then you ought to have," was Mr. Hutton's not very reassuring reply. He got up, went to a side-table, and, after much digging into a huge heap of papers, extracted Monday's *Times* and with his usual gruff good-temper read out the opening words of Lord Granville's speech. He was, in fact, greatly delighted, and almost said in so many words that it wasn't every day that the Editors of *The Spectator* could draw Cabinet Ministers to advertise their paper.

Certainly it was astonishingly good luck for a "commencing journalist" to bring down two birds with two articles, *i.e.*, to hit one of his own editors with one article, and to bag a Cabinet Minister with the other.

No doubt the perfectly cautious man would have said, "This is an accident, a mere coincidence, it means nothing and will never happen again." Fortunately people do not argue in that rational and statistical spirit. All my chiefs knew or cared was that I had written good stuff and on a very technical subject, and that I had caught the ear of the man who, considering the subject, most mattered—the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

Anyway, my two first trial leaders had done the trick and I was from that moment free of *The Spectator*. Townsend's holiday succeeded to Hutton's, and when the holidays were

over, including my own, which not unnaturally took me to Venice,—"*Italiam petimus*" should always be the motto of an English youth,—I returned to take up the position of a weekly leader-writer and holiday-understudy, a mixed post which by the irony of fate, as I have already said, had just been vacated by Mr. Asquith. Here was an adventure indeed, and I can say again with perfect sincerity that for me the greatest delight of the whole thing was this element of the Romantic.

I was quite sensible that I had had the devil's own luck in my capture of a post on *The Spectator*. Indeed, I very much preferred that, to the thought that the good fortune that was mine was the reward of a grinding and ignoble perseverance. I was in no mood for the drab virtues. I hugged the thought that it was not through my merits but because I possessed a conquering star that I had got where I was.

Curiously enough, I had never dreamed of joining *The Spectator* staff or even of becoming its Editor. I had imagined every other sort of strange and sudden preferment, of frantic proprietors asking me at a moment's notice to edit their papers, or of taking up some great and responsible position, but never of carrying by assault 1 Wellington Street. But that, of course, made it all the more delightful. No one could have prepared me a greater or a more grateful surprise.

It is strange to look back and see how at this moment that mystery which we barbarously call "the force of circumstances" seemed to have determined not merely to drive in my nail but to hammer it up to the head. It

happened that both Mr. Hutton and Mr. Townsend had great belief in the literary judgment of Canon Ainger, a man, it is to be feared, now almost forgotten, but whose opinion was looked upon in the 'eighties and 'nineties with something approaching reverence.

In 1886—my "Spectator" year, as I may call it—when I was acting as election-agent to Mr. Henry Hobhouse, I happened to be searching in the old library at Hadspen House for something to read, something with which to occupy the time of waiting between the issue of the writ and nomination-day. If there was to be no opposition it did not seem worth while to get too busy over the electorate. We remained, therefore, in a kind of enchanter's circle until nomination-day was over. It was a time in which everybody whispered mysteriously that a very strong candidate, name unknown, would suddenly appear at Yeovil, Langport, or Chard—I forget which of these pleasant little towns was the place of nomination—and imperil our chances. As was natural to me then, and, I must confess, would be natural to me now, my search for a book took me straight to that part of the library in which the poets congregated. My eye wandered over the shelves, and lighted upon *Poems in the Dorsetshire Dialect* by the Rev. William Barnes. Hadspen House was quite close to the Dorset border. I was interested and I took down the volume. I don't think I had ever heard of Barnes before, but being very fond of the Somersetshire dialect and proud of my ability to speak in it, my first impulse was rather to turn up my nose at the vernacular of a neighbouring county. It was, then, with a decided inclination to look a gift-horse in the mouth that I retired

with Barnes to my den. Yet, as Hafiz says, "by this a world was affected." I opened the poems at the enchanting stanzas, "Lonesome woodlands! zunny woodlands!" and was transported. In a moment I realised that for me a new foot was on the earth, a new name come down from Heaven. I read and read, and can still remember how the exquisite rhythm of "Woak Hill" was swept into my mind, to make there an impression which will never be obliterated while life lives in my brain. I did not know, in that delirium of exaltation which a poetic discovery always makes in the heart of a youth, whether most to admire the bold artifice of the man who had adapted an unrhymed Persian metre—the Pearl—to the needs of a poem in the broadest Dorsetshire dialect, or the deep intensity of the emotion with which he had clothed a glorious piece of prosodiac scholarship.

I recognised at once that the poem was fraught with a pathos as magnificent as anything in the whole range of classic literature—and also that this pathos had that touch of stableness in sorrow which we associate, and rightly associate, with the classics. Miserably bad scholar as I was, and am, I knew enough to see that the Dorsetshire schoolmaster and village parson had dared to challenge the deified Virgil himself. The depth of feeling in the lines—

An' took her wi' air-reachen arm
To my zide at Woak Hill

is not exceeded even by those which tell how Æneas filled his arms with the empty air when he stretched them to enfold the dead Creusa.

Upon the last two stanzas in "Woak Hill" I may as truly be said to have lived for a month as Charles Lamb lived upon

"Rose Aylmer."

An' that's why folk thought, for a season,
My mind were a-wandren
Wi' sorrow, when I wer so sorely
A-tried at Woak Hill.

But no; that my Mary mid never
Behold herzelf slighted,
I wanted to think that I guided
My guide from Woak Hill.

Equally potent was the spell cast by what is hardly less great a poem than "Woak Hill," the enchanting "Evenen, an' Maids out at Door." There the Theocritus of the West dares to use not merely the words of common speech and primitive origin, but words drawn from Low Latin and of administrative connotation. Barnes achieves this triumph in words with perfect ease. He can use a word like "parish" not, as Crabbe did, for purposes of pure narration but in a passage of heightened rhetoric:

But when you be a-lost vrom the parish, zome more Will
come on in your pleazen to bloom an' to die; An' the
zummer will always have maidens avore Their doors, vor to
chatty an' zee volk goo by.

For daughters ha' mornen when mothers ha' night, An'
there's beauty alive when the fairest is dead; As when one
sparklen wave do zink down from the light, Another do
come up an' catch it instead.

Rightly did the Edinburgh reviewer of the 'thirties, in
noticing Barnes's poems—the very edition from which I was
reading, perfect, by the way, in its ribbed paper and clear
print—declare "there has been no such art since Horace."

And here I may interpolate that the reviewer in question was Mr. George Venables, who was within a year to become a friend of mine. He and his family were close friends of my wife's people, and when after my marriage I met him, a common love of Barnes brought together the ardent worshipper of the new schools of poetry, for such I was, and the old and distinguished lawyer who was Thackeray's contemporary at the Charterhouse. Barnes was for us both a sign of literary freemasonry which at once made us recognise each other as fellow-craftsmen.

Bewildered readers will ask how my discovery of Barnes affected my position at *The Spectator*. It happened in this way. A couple of weeks after I had been established at *The Spectator* as a "*verus socius*" Barnes died, at a very great age. It was one of those cases in which death suddenly makes a man visible to the generation into which he has survived. Barnes had outlived not only his contemporaries but his renown, and most of the journalists detailed to write his obituary notice had evidently found it a hard task to say why he should be held in remembrance.

But by a pure accident here was I, in the high tide of my enthusiasm for my new poet. Needless to say I was only too glad to have a chance to let myself go on Barnes, and so was entrusted with the Barnes Obituary article for *The Spectator*.

The result was that the next week my chiefs showed me a letter one of them had received from Canon Ainger, asking for the name of the "evidently new hand" who had written on Barnes, and making some very complimentary remarks on his work. It was eminently characteristic of them that

instead of being a little annoyed at being told that an article had appeared in *The Spectator* with an unexpected literary charm, they were as genuinely delighted as I was.

In any case, the incident served, as I have said, to drive the nail up to the head and to make Mr. Hutton and Mr. Townsend feel that they had not been rash in their choice, and had got a man who could do literature as well as politics.

Not being without a sense of superstition, at any rate where cats are concerned, and a devout lover of "the furred serpent," I may record the last, the complete rite of my initiation at *The Spectator* office. While I was one day during my novitiate talking over articles and waiting for instructions—or, rather, finding articles for my chiefs to write about, for that very soon became the routine—a large, consequential, not to say stout black Tom-cat slowly entered the room, walked round me, sniffed at my legs in a suspicious manner, and then, to my intense amazement and amusement, hurled himself from the floor with some difficulty and alighted upon my shoulder. Mr. Townsend, who loved anything dramatic, though he did not love animals as Mr. Hutton did, pointed to the cat and muttered dramatically, "Hutton, just look at that!"

He went on to declare that the cat very seldom honoured "upstairs" with his presence, but kept himself, as a rule, strictly to himself, in the basement. Apparently, however, the sagacious beast had realised that there was a new element in the office, and had come to inspect it and see whether he could give it his approval or not. When it was given, it was conceded by all concerned that the