Novelist and Story-Teller:

The Life of C S Forester

by

John Forester
Contents

Introduction ................................................. 6
The Smith Family:
England and Egypt ................................. 18
Camberwell: Lyndhurst Grove School,
Mother’s Alcoholism ............................. 32
Alleyn’s School ............................  60
Dulwich College and War ..................... 83
Guy’s Medical School ......................... 99
Starting to Write ................................. 125
Private Letters, Secrecy and Odd Jobs ..... 159
The Advertising Office .................... 217
Biography and autobiography present to their authors almost opposing problems in depicting character. The biographer whose subject is dead must discover his subject’s character, inferring much from a few letters, discovering and evaluating the infrequent descriptions left by his contemporaries, struggling to know someone of whom only the shadows remain. The autobiographer suffers from such a plethora of knowledge (Who else could know the facts in greater quantity, if not most accurately?) that even if he correctly understands his character he must drastically condense, selecting only the salient
facts, lest his readers become more confused than he. A biography of one’s father presents (to me, at least, an almost unwilling author considering the requirements my work must meet) the worst problems of both genres.

I find I knew my father well, in the double sense that I had been often with him observing who he was, and, listening to his stories of his life, times, knowledge, and opinions, had developed a clear understanding of his character. Yet since his death, information has come to me that indicates that what I knew was illusion, and what I understood was false.

This man I knew so well, whom I loved in life and whose death I mourned, has vanished from my life, yet his memories refuse to be buried. They are a part of me, as much a part of me as many of my memories of my own life, for his life and mine were often one. Through those clustering memories I must see clearly to accurately (and interestingly as well, if you will read for pleasure) delineate his character and tell his times.
So much for the autobiographer’s problem; the biographer’s I also face: to know enough. What have I for facts? I have his works, their characters formed, perhaps not as God made man, in his own image, but at least such characters as seemed real to him and familiar enough to be adequately described within the confines of his skill: William Marble, General Curzon, Captain Horatio Hornblower, and the others. I have his two autobiographical works, one concerning his formative years with his pen, the other describing him at the peak of his powers, fashioning the Hornblower “histories.”¹ I have the remains of a biography by his eldest brother, my uncle Dr. Geoffrey Foster-Smith², which because of outside pressures my uncle converted into his auto-

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1. The first is *Long Before Forty*, a manuscript in the library of the University of Texas, most of which was published by Michael Joseph, London, 1967. The second is *The Hornblower Companion*, much of which is reprinted in the Michael Joseph edition of *Long Before Forty*, cited as LBF.
bio­graphy instead. Geoffrey opens his account with:

“When I began to write this story I thought I was doing it to provide a nucleus or background for a life of my brother Cecil, but I have discovered that it couldn’t work out in that way and it has become an autobiography of a kind.

“No one can pretend to tell the whole truth, in fact it could not decently be done; some thing have

2. Born Geoffrey Troughton Smith; the Foster- was added later. GFS p 56
3. Autobiography of Dr. Geoffrey Foster-Smith, unpublished manuscript owned by his daughter, Mrs. Kate Mulham, Melbourne, Australia. Cited as GFS. Two versions existed, for Geoff himself showed me the first, which told more about C. S. Forester and was intended, so Forester told me, as the introduction to Forester’s autobiographical work. Evidently Forester objected, but Geoffrey was sufficiently interested in his own work to convert it into his autobiography. Now only the second exists.
to be veiled or concealed, but at least I can honestly call it ‘Nothing But The Truth’ as I see it.”

I have some formal documents, his last two wills, selections from his financial records, and the like. I have some seven hundred letters, from among his very first in 1919 to one of his very last in 1964, all written to his first wife, my mother. I have also found in the library of the University of Texas his letters to Frances Phillips, the chief editor of William Morrow & Co., publishers, and an intimate


4. GFS p 1
5. The information from C. S. Forester’s own files, including the financial records, letters from his agents and the penultimate wills, comes from my own hurried and unauthorized examination as I tried to identify the papers scattered by a burglar of his apartment. I was unable to obtain copies of these. Present whereabouts unknown.
6. The letters are deposited in the library of the University of Texas. My copies I have sequenced and numbered. Cited as L# date
friend of his. 7

This written information seems at least as much as any biographer deserves and more than many receive. You could believe that I was in an enviable position with both the formal records of the biographer and the informal records of the autobiographer, able to supplement the written facts with the oral opinions and the non-verbalized observations of character itself.

The task is not quite that simple. As in any other historical record, there are inconsistencies. One record says one thing, another contradicts it. The historian generally places more credence in the contemporary record and less in later records that have been more carefully composed, and this is true of Forester’s records also. Geoffrey Foster-Smith recognized this when he commented that the difference between the report and the truth “is, as I often say, because my brother Cecil is a far better novelist than

7. Library, University of Texas. Cited as CSF - FP date received
historian.”

Geoffrey also closed his autobiography by saying that “I have not told the whole truth, to do that would be boring and difficult besides being bad manners.”

Everybody’s life is composed of coincidences and unpredictable results, but Forester’s life had more than most. His cynical character motivated him to persuade other people to unwittingly fulfill his own selfish purposes, while his skill with words convinced them that they were cooperating in an endeavor of complete reason and high ethical intent. However, the results of such a practice grow far beyond its originator’s initial intent. In Forester’s case, they produced a rabbit-warren of hidden but interconnected events, and people who were first deceived and later perplexed. As he himself remarked in a letter to his intimate friend Frances Phillips, “This damn household of mine might in fact provide a fair basis for a novel.”

8. GFS p 50
9. GFS p 240
grows tentacles like a Dickens novel; if I were to write it as a novel it would be too preposterous for the “willing suspension of disbelief” that a novel requires. I wish I had both Dickens’s skill and freedom in construction. As it is, I must tell you the events I know occurred in the way that best explains their reasons.

Every person’s life has consequences; even novelists leave consequences other than their books. This account tells not only of the circumstances in which Forester wrote his novels and how those circumstances affected his literary works. It also describes the effects of his works, character, and temperament on those nearest to him: the family he came from but publicly denied; the woman he married and the children he fathered. The secondary theme of this story is the effect of my father’s life on my life and character. In that sense this is a story of a father and his sons.

Some of the stories that I tell about my father

10. CSF - FP 21 August 1950

14
directly contradict his own published record. Events did not occur as he described them for publication; his character was not as he implied. In justification, I can only say that I have weighed the evidence available and have decided, to my own satisfaction, which version is more likely to be true. Whatever bias may enter this judgement, I express as accurately as I can recognize it by saying that, in general, I have preferred the contemporaneous, informal, private record to the later, carefully composed public version. Cecil knew the truth of what he wrote, for he closed his autobiography with the following words. “If ever it should happen that I write one entitled Soon After Seventy to supplement Long Before Forty, I expect I shall by that time have devised enough lies to add pleasing touches of excitement.”¹¹ That statement also errs; C. S. Forester consistently lied to conceal the excitements of his life.

¹¹ In the typescript version at the University of Texas.
C. S. Forester was a story-teller, and his most successful novel was the story of his own life.

My brother, George, has read much of this and would not, of himself, publish such an account. Here are his words, written for this introduction:

“As you know, I have strongly recommended to you that you do not include as much of your own personal life in this book as you have. If I were to write about CSF I would be very brief about my own personal life. I do not believe that writing about yourself as you have will necessarily dissolve from your life the shadow cast by the lies of our father. What you have said about CSF rings true to me; for each of the events you describe, either I know the even to be true or my own analysis gives a high probability that the event, as you describe it, is true.

“I see CSF as an unloving, faithless, money-hungry liar. He spent much of his leisure time protecting himself from unseen enemies by breaking as many loving bonds between those people close to him as he could. He was the loneliest man I ever knew, who felt it most important to be “the top.”
And whenever anyone close to him seemed to be garnering a little of the spot light, he would turn against them in very devious and, he thought, hidden ways, so their light would be tarnished. And yet in a few ways he was very generous—when there was no thought of gain, he would help someone. He seemed to me to be a very mixed-up man, who spent a lot of energy devising devious ways to show how great he was—and many of the people to whom this energy was directed against couldn’t care a hoot. They saw through him, and thought little of him. What you have gathered together in this book sheds some light on CSF as a storyteller. I hope that your readers will bear a kind heart toward you and an open mind. And I hope a cleansing can occur within our family through your work.”

The decision about what to include in this account is mine alone. I think that an account of Forester’s life would be incomplete without an account of its effect on those close to him, which also includes the ironies that his devious, camouflaged, actions regarding me, at least, often pro-
duced an effect opposite to his intent. Certainly, my first effort along these lines, three years after he died, was an effort to develop an understanding of the problems that his life had caused me. Mixed with that was the desire to end the endless comments of people who assumed that having C. S. Forester for a father had conferred great advantages upon me. It would have been bad enough had that state conferred advantages upon me, but it was worse to be told of my advantages when I had received disadvantages instead. However, as I worked on this aspect of the story, I came to think that it had its own merit, that the combination of biography with autobiography was most appropriate to the subject and to my knowledge of it. Well, that is for you readers to decide.
Cecil Louis Troughton Smith, later known as C. S. Forester, came from a family of teachers. The Smiths had been millers at Thirsk, in Yorkshire, until the need to import grain to feed the growing population encouraged the centralization of milling near the ports. His grandfather, Jonathan Smith, was born at the millhouse in the 1830s but left to become a teacher. He trained at Battersea College in London, run by the Church of England to train teachers for its schools.

Before compulsory schooling in the tax-supported schools, the Church supplied much of the
low-cost provincial education. Jonathan married
another teacher, Eliza Broadbent of Bradford, and
by several stages moved to the isle of Jersey. Their
third child, George Foster Smith, who became
Cecil’s father, was born in 1863, just before they
moved to Jersey. Eliza died in 1874, leaving six chil-
dren, whereupon Jonathan married again and pro-
duced six more. He left teaching to manage a bank,
which collapsed in the depression of 1886. Jonathan
then retired to London, where he developed and pat-
ented a method of processing Ramie fibers into a
usable yarn. The factory to perform this marginally
successful process operated until 1898.

Of the six children of Jonathan Smith’s first
marriage, five survived into adult life. Four of these
became teachers, but one, Geoffrey John, ran away
to join the army under the assumed name of Senior.
His children will re-enter this story later. As Cecil
told me several times, Geoffrey John adopted the
name of Senior by appropriating it from a tobacco-
nist’s shop window. He became an officer, served
with distinction, and was killed in the Boer War.
After his death, a woman who had been his mistress announced herself to the family. She had been a barmaid and was definitely not the type of woman an officer could marry, but she was both pretty and charming. Geoffrey had lived with her for some years, and she had born him three sons and a daughter. These sons received places in the Duke of York’s School, a military school established for the care of orphaned sons of slain non-commissioned officers, on the basis that the illegitimate sons of an officer were on a par with the legitimate sons of a sergeant.

Cecil’s brother, Geoffrey Foster-Smith, records these events in a much less interesting way. “The fourth child Geoffrey John, who enlisted in the army, travelled far and wide and in 1897 my father took me to Preston barracks in Lancashire to see him, and I can remember the crowded and rather squalid married quarters where he lived as a sergeant with a wife and three children. He was a fine tall man with a moustache and one of those porkpie hats and an elegant figure. They were under orders for South Africa though the regiment didn’t leave
until some time later. He served in French’s mobile column, was at the capture of Cronze at Paardeberg, the relief of Kimberly and Mafeking, surviving until 1902 to be killed by a chance shell almost at the end of the war. He never saw his fourth child Geoff who was born after he left England.”¹ I believe that Geoffrey Foster-Smith’s date of 1897 should be 1899, for the war did not start until the late summer of that year, and the first troops (two battalions of infantry) were not dispatched until August, 1899, to Durban as a precautionary move in case of war. That would make Geoff ten years old at the time, well able to remember what he saw, and the time of year agrees with the time of his father’s summer holiday.

The Duke of York’s School, as one might expect, tended to prepare its boys for service in the army, and there Geoffrey John’s two eldest went before 1914. Both reached the top of the non-commissioned ladder as quartermasters or some such rating. One was killed in World War I, the other sur-

1. GFS p 5
vived. Geoff Senior, the youngest, entered later and became a bandsman. Their military training in supply and music is the cause of their re-entry into this story some fifty years later.

The maternal side of Cecil’s ancestry also contained teachers. His mother, Sarah Medhurst Troughton, came from a teaching family. Her father, James Troughton, taught in the same kind of school as Jonathan Smith. Of his sixteen children, ten reached maturity. All the girls became teachers; the eldest, Eliza Jane, taking over her father’s position upon his death in 1869. The eldest son, James, while ostensibly managing the small family patrimony, embezzled and squandered it, leaving his widowed mother and the younger children penniless.

In later years, Cecil used to tell three stories about his ancestors. The first was that one of them was the master woodcarver who carved the pews for St. Paul’s Cathedral. The second story was that others of his ancestors were the famous mathematical instrument makers named Troughton, who made
Isaac Newton’s telescopes. Two Troughtons were the instrument makers who developed the process of making accurate dials and scales for precision surveying and navigating instruments, but as neither of them had any children they couldn’t be ancestors in the literal sense.²

The third story was that one of his uncles at one time owned one-third of the rights to the Welsbach gas mantle.³ “He was typical of my family,” Father told me in a cautionary way, “A passionate, red-haired man. Just before the Welsbach gas mantle became a commercial success he sold his rights to pay for women.”

The story is only possibly true. Welsbach first

² I found this information long ago in a technical history of telescopes, but I have been unable to find it again.
³ Nowadays, this is the mantle of the Coleman lantern. Used with piped gas, these provided the principal lighting of houses like my grandfather’s in London until well after World War II.
patented his mantle in 1866, but that version gave a green light. It was not until 1887 that he developed a white light, and commercial success did not start until two years later. James, presumably, was squandering his patrimony in the 1870s and 1880s, when rights to the Welsbach mantle would have been worth little. On the other side, one does not associate a gamble on a research and development project with the inherited patrimony of a schoolmaster.

So far as these stories go, Geoffrey Foster-Smith writes only that “As far as we know, and that isn’t very far, our ancestors were all respectable mediocrities.” Another member of the family was Medhurst Albert Troughton, born in Milton, near Gravesend, on Christmas day 1839. He was a well-known local cricketer, making 206 not out for Gentlemen of Mid-Kent vs South Norwood in 1873, among other

4. GFS p10. Geoff also remarks that all the Smiths were blue-eyed blonds, but he does not mention that the Troughtons had any particular tendency to red hair.
accomplishments. He died January 1st, 1912 (1913?).

Cecil’s parents, George Foster Smith and Sarah Medhurst Troughton, both taught at a London School Board school in Beresford Road. As their eldest son later wrote, “There is one definite quirk in this story, and when George Foster Smith married Sarah Medhurst Troughton in 1888, not only were they both school teachers but also they had each had school teachers for each of their parents. We children were therefore steeped in method, and although none of us and few of our cousins were far removed from the poverty line, we were ingrained with a peculiar snobbery about the indecency of trade and of the unsocial habits of shopkeepers who bought cheap and sold dear.”

Most unusually, schoolteaching diverted George from his provincial and suburban path, sending him to Egypt. Although Egypt was nomi-

5. GFS p 1. Geoff kept the family tree. If he didn’t know more, I doubt Cecil would.
nally a province of the Turkish Empire, the Egyptian government had since 1882 been controlled in its foreign affairs and advised in its internal affairs by the British government, which had replaced the French influence. Establishing a new educational system with three schools “run on British public-school lines”, the British advisor to the Egyptian Minister of Public Instruction faced a recruiting problem. Egyptian teachers of the required caliber were not available. British teachers who could speak Arabic were also unavailable. Since French had been the primary foreign language taught in Egypt, he determined to recruit British teachers who could speak French. George, having been brought up bilingually on the island of Jersey, was one of the successful applicants.

In 1889, just weeks after the birth of Geoffrey Troughton Smith, George left his family behind and traveled to Egypt. He taught at one of the new schools.

6. GFS p12. The schools were the Tewfikieh and Khedivieh in Cairo and the Ras el Tin in Alexandria
ondary schools where the teaching was in both English and French. For a time he lived on the island of Rhoda, in the Nile near Cairo, with a Mr. van Dyk, an American who had married a Syrian and who was one of the very few Europeans who had a complete knowledge of both classical and colloquial Arabic. George passed the examination in Arabic required for retention in his job, and at the end of the year sent for his wife and son.

They came to live in Cairo, in a top floor apartment on the Shoubra Road, with a view of the pyramids from its front balcony. There Sarah bore twin daughters in 1891, who died at birth. Therefore, when expecting her next child in 1892, she returned to England, where her second son, Hugh, was born in her mother’s house in Kennington. She returned to Egypt, where her first surviving daughter Marjorie was born in 1894. Grace followed Marjorie in 1897, and on August 27, 1899 Cecil was born. The story he told later was that because he arrived a little earlier than expected, his mother could not reach Cairo, so he was born outside a mud hut that stood
beside the road to Cairo. Geoff writes nothing of this incident, and since the Shoubra Road is a main road out of Cairo and since at that time even among the Europeans most births were at home, the story appears to be an embroidery of the plain facts.

George’s first assignment of teaching in Cairo lasted until 1902. It was an extraordinarily pleasant period. Though not of the diplomatic society, the European teachers were representatives of the governing class. George taught many of the future leaders of Egypt, and doubled his income by taking private students for special studies. Geoff remembered this period well, although he was sent back to England to live with his Uncle Harry and Aunt Marie during school times from 1895 on. In 1899, perhaps because traveling to England would be uncomfortable for his mother, who was about to give birth to Cecil, he returned to Egypt for a year. He writes of sailing feluccas on the Nile, of visits to the pyramids and fossil beds, of knowing that his parents attended the parties and entertainments of
their circle, and of recognizing that his mother’s friends were “schoolmaster’s wives or those of the very few British tradespeople.” George and Sarah both had bicycles; Sarah rode hers for pleasure (it had an 1897 nameplate) while George rode his to and from school as well. The children played with their neighbors: Levantines, Egyptians, Greeks, and others. After the summer of 1900, both Geoff and Hugh were left in England for schooling, in care of their uncle and aunt. Cecil, born on August 27, 1899, remembered little of this except the distinction in social standing between those who spoke English and those who spoke Arabic.

In 1902 this was terminated by George’s transfer to the Ras el Tin school in Alexandria. This transfer may well have been due to George’s lack of a degree. He had been trained at Battersea Teachers’ College, which was not equivalent to earning a university degree. When teachers were in demand in

7. GFS 13
8. GFS p 30
the early years of British compulsory education this was no hindrance, but once more university graduates entered teaching they obtained preference in promotion to the better positions. The transfer cut off George’s private teaching and removed the family from the Cairo which they loved. Sarah was convinced that Alexandria would not be nearly as happy a place, and the children, in any case, had to be at school in England. Sarah and the children returned to England permanently, while George came with them for the summer of 1902, then returned to Alexandria for the academic year.

The five children who left Egypt could already be divided by their appearances. The four eldest were fair haired and blue eyed, with the broader face of the North European. (When some years later Kathleen Belcher [later Cecil’s first wife] first saw Marjorie, who was then a young woman, she thought how beautiful Marjorie was with her masses of flaxen hair and light-blue eyes.) The youngest, Cecil, was darker in hair, skin, and eyes, with a narrow face and a long nose which, in adolescence,
developed into C. S. Forester’s distinctive beak. Cecil had a distinctly Near Eastern cast to his looks. It’s a wise child that knows his own father. Whoever Cecil’s father was, and he may well have been George Foster Smith, Cecil’s looks, when coupled with the breakup of the family shortly after Cecil’s birth, were enough to suggest to susceptible minds that Cecil might be the son of a man Sarah had met in Egypt. In later years I know that Cecil’s looks caused some to mistake him for a Jew, and I also know that even as a child he was always thought to be “different” in some unspecified way. Whatever the truth of Cecil’s ancestry, and about this matter speculation is now useless, there is ample evidence in Cecil’s later actions to suggest that Cecil himself doubted his parentage.

The voyage from Egypt gave Cecil his earliest memory that persisted into adult life. The opening paragraphs of Long Before Forty describe his ship aground at the mouth of the harbor of Malaga, suddenly revealed as the fog cleared.
The new living arrangements in London required more money, and at a time of reduced income there was nothing left over. Geoff remarks that his parents had made no financial plans for this event, and they were very short of money in consequence;¹ the removal to London may well have been a hurried decision. They selected a house on Shenley Road, Camberwell, not far from George’s brother Harry, who was also a teacher and who lived at No. 121. Twenty-eight years later, when Cecil wanted to exile

1. GFS p 30
one of his characters to the dullest possible place, he sent him to live in “Camberwell [and] the drab surroundings of that drabbest of suburbs.” They managed to shabbily furnish most of the house, except for a large top-floor room that was left empty.

George’s eldest son, Geoffrey, started at Alleyn’s School in nearby Dulwich, a private school that had been founded by the most famous actor of Shakespeare’s time, later the owner of several theaters. The original foundation had been revised in 1857 to become Dulwich College, Alleyn’s School for boys and James Alleyn’s School for girls. (I attended Alleyn’s before coming to America and remembered praying for the memory of “Edward Alleyn, our founder and benefactor.”) The other children, including Cecil as soon as he was old enough, started at the local London County Council School named Lyndhurst Grove, where Geoff had attended while he lived with his Uncle Harry.

Cecil apparently started school in 1903 or 1904

2. Cyril Leigh in Two and Twenty
at the age of three or four. Lyndhurst Grove was remarkably effective, far more than one would expect from the background of its students. Cecil writes that he was exceptionally well-dressed for that school, adding that indeed some of the students came barefoot, dressed in rags, and never had a square meal. Geoff says nothing of this, but writes that his cousin Harry (whose father, as I have said, was also a schoolteacher) had attended Lyndhurst Grove before him and had preceded him to Alleyn’s. Probably Lyndhurst Grove drew its pupils from a mixed area, some very poor and others very lower-middle-class.

The teachers at Lyndhurst ran a special scholarship section in which all the brightest children were placed for their final three or four years of elementary school, regardless of age or nominal grade. There were sufficient scholarships available to make this procedure attractive — in every year several students won substantial scholarships that enabled them to enter better levels of Britain’s highly stratified educational system.
The snobbery associated with that stratification is unfamiliar to Americans. Privately operated schools ranged from the great *public* schools that were intended to educate gentlemen and scholars
(the word public was used to separate schools which were open to others from the private tutors employed in the houses of the very wealthy) to private schools run by half-educated men or women that provided a veneer of gentility to those whose parents aspired to be a little above the working class. In contrast, the recently-established government-run schools (corresponding to American public schools) were taught by trained teachers and were intended to develop a population with useful skills. Other British class distinctions were those between inherited wealth, the professions who served those with inherited wealth, the tradesmen (businessmen) who served both, and the manual workers. Geoff describes the effects of these class distinctions on his family. “It was a very snobbish and narrow world we lived in [but] our family had the greatest contempt for private schools which were often run by half-educated men and women who catered for the better-off tradespeople.”³ Despite their poverty, the Smiths felt

³ GFS 16
themselves to be intellectually superior professional people who were far above those in trade, who in turn were above those who did manual work. The crucial difference was whether one took money for specific transactions. People in trade sold an object or a service for a specific sum of money. Even the teachers in the small private schools that the Smiths denigrated charged each student so much per week. However, the teachers in the new state schools in which the Smiths taught were paid a salary for performing the profession, much as a clergyman was paid a living regardless of the amount of work he performed. While such snobbery often promotes in young people the ambition not to fall below the standards of the class, it also promotes unrealistic dreams and alienation among those who fail those standards.

When Geoff entered Alleyn’s, he found at least two other friends from Lyndhurst Grove who lived near him and had preceded him to Alleyn’s by winning scholarships. The remaining Smith children won scholarships from Lyndhurst Grove to various
schools. Hugh, in 1905 or so, won one of the best scholarships available in Britain, a full tuition and some travel and uniform allowance to Christ’s Hospital School that had recently moved from London to Horsham in Surrey. (Christ’s Hospital School is a public school intended to educate gentlemen and scholars.) Marjorie and Grace won scholarships to Askes Hatcham in 1906 and 1908. Cecil’s scholarship story will be told later.

When Geoff had first been left in England for school he had been given as a parting present an elaborate cardboard model of a Napoleonic ship of the line. This had stimulated his reading of Marryatt, Clark Russells, Smollet, and Herman Melville; anything about the sea. When the rest of the family returned to England, he introduced them to these stories. Upon the bare floor of the empty room upstairs the children set up war games with cardboard ship silhouettes, just as shown in the battle plans they had seen in the naval histories. These games developed into a strategy game that pitted armies and fleets against armies and fleets, Napo-
leon against Wellington and Nelson against Ville-
neuve. Cecil, being the youngest, literally learned to
read and to reason upon this curriculum of sea
story, naval history, and strategy; interests that
remained with him all his life.

The local branch of the public library was not
far away. The children each had a card, as did their
mother, and all read omnivorously. Cecil later told
the story, by inference in Long Before Forty, and
explicitly in conversation, that he monopolized the
family library cards to obtain the maximum num-
ber of books, staggering back, a small child carrying
a stack of books that reached headhigh. The story
must have had wide airing, for Geoff goes to the
trouble of explicitly denying it, attaching to his
description the remark that his brother Cecil was a
far better novelist than historian. Still, Cecil man-
aged to read an enormous amount.

Necessarily, since the local library was only a

4. LBF p 40
5. GFS
small branch, this meant that he read in all the subjects that it contained (except, as he later told me, “books on music and philosophy”), and it meant also that he reread many books. Repeated re-reading of books for older readers enabled him while but a child to attain a creditable understanding of the concrete portions of their contents. The emotional and philosophic portions, however, remained above his understanding. His reading in the histories of the Roman emperors provided descriptions of the maddest imaginable uncontrolled conduct, without developing any appreciation of its madness beyond the simple idea that under suitable circumstances it would be possible to get away with behavior that society normally prohibits. Cecil describes it as how he could behave “with no policemen and no God.”

Shortly after George Foster Smith’s return to Egypt for the 1902-3 academic year, Sarah began drinking in secret. Originally liquor had been pur-

6. LBF p16
chased by Geoff as part of his responsibility in doing the family Saturday shopping. The effect of Sarah’s drinking was unnoticed until Geoff found his mother helplessly drunk, dependent upon his help to get to bed. The situation rapidly became chronic. Sarah found herself drinking a bottle of whiskey a day. The children became ashamed of her condition, and attempted to conceal it from outsiders. This meant, of course, that they kept their friends away unless they were sure that their mother was not then drunk.

Geoff refused to buy any more liquor, but of course that didn’t stop Sarah because she, after all, kept the money. Before Geoff was fourteen, in other words during their first year in Shenley Road, he wrote to his father to send him the money instead so he could control his mother’s access to liquor, but his father refused. Geoff writes: “I can see now that I thought him weak and indifferent not to make an attempt to control her ... However, he loved her and would not restrain her and procrastinated.”

The expense of Sarah’s habit was increased by
the children’s habit of hiding and throwing away the bottles that they found around the house. They probably were not successful in materially decreasing her consumption, because she was able to pawn household items for liquor money. The children first missed the items, then found the pawn tickets. All in all, her habit meant financial deprivation and years of strife.

Sarah disliked housework. She let it go, and the house was always somewhat messy. However, she may not have let her cooking suffer, for Geoff says she became a better cook. Cecil, however, told me that the reason that he rarely ate dessert, and particularly detested stewed fruit and custards, was that those were all that she ever served.

“Your grandmother was a very beautiful and intelligent woman,” my father told me, “who felt she hadn’t married as well as she could have expected. She therefore took to drinking too much.

“She used to cook in the morning before she became incapable, putting the food on separate plates stacked with separating metal rings between
them, above a pan of water simmering on the back of the coal cooker. As each one of us came in from school, he would extract the hottest plateful for his dinner and eat it then. Dessert was also waiting. Since she liked stewed fruit and custards, but could not remember more than one day back, she provided an unalterable alternation of custards one day and stewed fruit the next.”

Geoff remarks that Sarah was still able to obtain some work as a substitute teacher, adding significantly that when such work was available she was better able to control her craving. Similarly, George’s return each summer materially eased the situation. As Geoff wrote: “Our home life was rather drab and haunted by the shame we felt about our mother’s alcoholism. Hugh at C. H. [Christ’s Hospital School] was only home for the holidays, but the rest of us struggled to keep up appearances. In the summertime things were easier and for one year even Father was able to take us to Margate for a fortnight, but usually our holidays were spent on bicycle rides either with boys from school or occasionally
alone."

Geoff doesn’t remark so, but I believe that George did not realize how much better the home life was in summer, when he was home, than when he was absent. Because Sarah was happier in George’s company, she drank much less then. Therefore, George believed that the letters he received from England during the rest of the year were but exaggerated and overwrought descriptions of the same conditions that he observed each summer.

George sacrificed one-third of each summer vacation to earn additional money. Each year he undertook the additional assignment of preparing the annual examination papers. Because of the venality of the Egyptians, all work on the examinations was retained by the British staff. George became one of the printing staff, setting type in the Government Press, packing, sealing, and guarding the printed examinations. Later in June he proctored examinations, graded papers, and published results. The bonus for these added tasks provided
his passage money home and something extra for the summer holiday in England. I remember him telling me that in those days no country in Europe (except Russia) required passports, and the golden sovereign was accepted everywhere at equal value. He placed his bonus sovereigns in his money belt, under his shirt, and started on the return trip by whatever route suited him at the time. (Sometimes he would arrive before the last of the strawberries were gone, sometimes after.) His arrival with the belt full of golden coins was an impressive event, one that Cecil naturally always looked forward to and always remembered.

The anticipation was heightened by their father’s letters. The first six letters in the Forester collection are letters written by George to his son Cecil in 1903 and 1904. Each is decorated by at least one charming pen and ink sketch, and five of the six concern Father’s prospective homecomings. There are drawings of three hansom cabs, each in a separate letter, fetching Father from the station; some of Cecil’s toys; a new bicycle that will be a present for
Geoff; Cecil himself in sailor costume carrying his satchel of books to school. (The odd letter, the fourth, shows a willful donkey attempting to plunge over a cliff, restrained by its owner pulling hard upon its tail, with a little fable underneath whose moral is to not be willful but do what Mother and Teacher say.)

In *Long Before Forty* Cecil states that his father “had an income that was considered large in those days,” and records his admiration for his father who could earn such an unimaginable amount of money. Certainly, during the summer holiday, George took his children up outings, trips to the South Kensington Museums and other places of interest in London. From Cecil’s point of view, his father was unrestrained by the normal requirements of working daily at a job and being careful with money — that was for other people at other times, not for his father at the times that Cecil saw him.

In *Long Before Forty* Cecil wrote of the summer holidays, times when “my all-powerful father had only to say the word for wonderful things to
take place. He said it so casually and frequently; he was never in the least impressed by the fact that he had merely to decide on a course of action to carry it out.”

The only times that Cecil saw his father were when he could act without the normal restraints of society, as they were appreciated by a small boy. That is, his father did not have to go to work, he could spend his time and money on anything he liked. Cecil did not consider the penurious savings during the rest of the year that made that possible, he had no conception of luxuriously spending large sums of money, and he did not understand the painful sexual arrangements that his parents had to make. So far as a small boy was concerned, his father was as free as a Roman emperor. At an early age Cecil already appreciated the personal advantages of being free of society’s restraints.

The difference between Geoff’s and Cecil’s perceptions at this time is not surprising. What is surprising is that Cecil, writing thirty years later, did

7. LBF p 29
not remark on the difference between what he saw then and the reality that he later recognized. An inability to recognize that difference might, perhaps, be the stuff which gives such charm to our nostalgic childish memories; the excitement of the hansom cab arriving, Mother’s careful preparation to look her best and her uncontrived delight, the staccato flashes in the flaring gaslight as the gold coins tumbled onto the bureau top. Perhaps, instead, Cecil’s recognition of the difference between this two-month reality and the more normal, poverty bounded, disorganized, grey-shaded life of ten months of the year initiated the conscious pretense that what was more enjoyable was the most real.

It is perhaps well to be sympathetic to the unconsciously enhanced memories of a happy childhood, spurious though they may be. Notice, however, that Cecil (in the sentence immediately before the one describing his father’s freedom of action) calls his father’s visits “returns from Egypt on leave,” as if George Smith were a government official. Technically true, I suppose, but George Smith
was a schoolteacher, another fact that Cecil never mentions, who returned only for that portion of the summer holidays when he had no other work to do.

In 1966, Cecil’s first wife, Kathleen, who had met Cecil in 1912, first read Geoffrey Foster-Smith’s autobiography. As she remarked then to me: “Your grandfather [George Smith] was only a schoolteacher! Why, I always thought he was the British chief advisor to the Egyptian Minister of Education — the Egyptian having the nominal rank while the Briton had the knowledge and did the real work. I always wondered why they chose to live in Shenley Road — I can see now it was necessity.” I can add that I had the same shock when I first read Geoff’s manuscript in its first version in the summer of 1962; I suffered from the same misapprehension because my father had told me the same story.

In his first year in Alexandria, perhaps spurred on by his lack of private students, George Smith wrote an English primer for Egyptian students, based on his experience teaching English since
1890. This was adopted by the Egyptian Ministry of Education, published in 1904 by George Phillip and Son under the title *Talks With The Children*. Geoff remembers helping with the proofreading and the excitement of receiving the first copies. \(^8\) *Talks With The Children* brought in royalties that made a substantial improvement to George’s income. Later on, George wrote two more books for secondary schools, *Longman’s Direct Compositions Number One* and *Number Two*, which were also adopted. Their royalties were considerably less because of the smaller number of students in secondary schools, but they earned royalties until publication was stopped in World War II. \(^9\)

By these events, and perhaps others, George Smith acquired some experience of writing and an acquaintanceship with at least two publishers. His family observed — Geoff certainly did because he writes of it, and there is no reason to believe that he

\(^8\) GFS p 43
\(^9\) George Smith to Kathleen, 28 May 1941
was alone — that writing books could produce an income sufficient to noticeably aid a man with a family. It is only a small inference that an income of that size would be just sufficient for a single man. More than that, George Smith had also, in 1909, enough knowledge of publishers, and influence with them, to find a job for his second son Hugh “in Philip and Tacey the publishers, which seemed to have some future.”

Cecil tells a different story regarding the relationship of the family with writing and publishers. Concerning the time he informed his family of his decision to become an author (in 1919 or so), he wrote (in 1930 or 1931), “the practice of literature was a quite unknown profession to the Family, despite the fact that every member of it was a voracious reader. By a strange chance no one in the Family knew any authors, or publishers, or reviewers — how it was I cannot imagine, for nowadays they seem to grow on every bush — and that made the

10. GFS p 93
respectability of the profession of literature extremely suspect, more so even than it would have been to most middle class families.”

Sometime in these years Cecil produced what he called The Big Bang, exploding a gunpowder mine in the middle of a neighbor boy’s garden. It is a story I have heard many times, but he tells it in *Long Before Forty* far better than I. The story appeared to have great meaning for him, for he told it quite often in conversation. He had learned that small quantities of gunpowder were easily purchased in the local hardware store. From experimentation and reading he learned that gunpowder must be confined to explode, and confinement meant ignition by a fuse, which he learned to make. He and a neighbor boy packed the in-the-ground socket of a clothesline post with gunpowder, inserted the fuse, followed by the clothesline post, and lit the fuse.

11. LBF p 115
12. LBF Chapter 4
The mortar so produced fired the clothesline post into the air in pieces and broke all the neighboring windows.

While Cecil was attending Lyndhurst Grove School, his older brothers and sisters were progressing in other schools. Geoff, who you will remember was ten years older than Cecil, progressed on scholarships through Alleyn’s and in June, 1906, passed the qualifying examinations for Guy’s Medical School in London. In this he was again following his cousin Harry, who had preceded him to Alleyn’s. Because his father hoped that his connections in Egypt would promote Geoff’s medical career in that country, he suggested that Geoff appropriate his middle name of Foster, to make the recognition easier, and so register at the start of his medical training. Thereafter Geoffrey was Geoffrey Troughton Foster-Smith, while his siblings remained Troughton Smiths until Cecil renamed himself Forester.

Alleyn’s granted Geoff a kind of scholarship called an exhibition, money paid to graduating students to encourage further academic work at col-
leges, and with this, and money borrowed from the father of Sydney Clifford, a schoolboy friend,\textsuperscript{13} and money provided by his own father, he was able to enter Guy’s that year.\textsuperscript{14} Geoff remarks that he was very close to being the youngest and worst-prepared student that year at Guy’s, but he did creditably well there. At Guy’s each student’s record was kept upon a “signing up” card which also bore the student’s photograph. The course of study was not formally organized — students could take their own time as long as they paid their fees each semester and completed at one time or another all the required work. All hospital appointments (some for students, some for graduates) were awarded on the basis of the record shown on the card. Geoff completed his medical school work and became a licensed physician when he was twenty-one in July, 1911.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{13} Sydney Clifford, “Bundle,” was later a chemist and managing director of Waterlow’s, manufacturers of inks and paints.
\textsuperscript{14} GFS p 53, 57
Just as with Geoff’s initial medical-school fees, his father hadn’t the money to pay Geoff’s final examination and registration fees. Geoff had to borrow again from Sydney Clifford’s father in order to get his name registered with the General Medical Council.

Hugh, who was seven years older than Cecil, had won a scholarship to Christ’s Hospital School. He lived there, returning home only for holidays, until summer, 1909. Upon graduation he had to go to work; he had not quite achieved the extremely high grades (become a Grecian, as Geoff termed it) that would have produced a scholarship to Oxford or Cambridge, and the family had no money to send him to such expensive universities. Geoff’s medical education was as much as the family could afford. However, they did not consider sending Hugh to London University, a decision that was influenced by lack of money but may have also been influenced by the family’s snobbery and the British class sys-

15. GFS p 95
tem. Hugh had been given a gentleman’s preparatory education, suitable for one of the upper or professional classes, but his only chance to become a gentleman was to win one of the very few full scholarships to Oxford or Cambridge. He was not psychologically prepared for the *trades* that one might learn at London University. If he could not reach Oxford University, then he should stop trying and start working. The job his father had helped to arrange at Philip and Tacey was a typical starting job in a publishing firm, making up shipments to bookshops. The person with a reasonable education who takes such a job is available for more important work whenever the opportunity occurs, and can make such an opportunity. However, the feeling in the family that such a job had no future was perhaps magnified by its manual labor and working-class aspects. Working in a bank was seen as higher class with more future, so George managed to get Hugh a job in a bank associated with South American commerce. “[Hugh’s] initial salary was £40 per year, on which he was passing poor.”16
Cecil records these incidents and his reactions to them in a somewhat different tone: “For it never occurred to me in the least to doubt the possibility of my own success in life. Success was such an easy thing to come by; my family had enjoyed it in huge quantities. There was my father — but no one could dream of thinking that he might sometimes be unsuccessful; my elder brother went through examination after examination in the course of his medical studies with flying colours, eventually qualifying at the age of twenty;¹⁷ the other brother had climbed to the dizzy heights of cricket and football colours at Christ’s Hospital before he made an abdication of his own free will (comparable in my mind to the abdications of Charles V and Diocletian and Sulla) and, turning his back on a possibly brilliant...

16. GFS p93
17. Cecil’s story to me was that Geoff had qualified at twenty but could not receive his license to practice until he reached legal age; “The last man in England to do so.”
Cecil does not mention Grace and Marjorie, who were at Askes Hatcham School on scholarships. Marjorie, at least, did well enough at mathematics to become a statistician in one of the government’s economic control offices during World War I.

In 1911, while at Lyndhurst Grove School, Cecil repeated Hugh’s feat of winning a scholarship to Christ’s Hospital School. The announcement was first made at a special school assembly, with the headmaster speaking. Cecil describes the scene: “Well, boys, I have some very good news for you. One of the boys of this school has won a Christ’s Hospital scholarship. You all know how difficult that is to do, and I want you to give this boy a good hearty clap and three cheers for having brought so much honour to this school. No, wait until I give the word. It is eight (sic) years since the last scholarship to Christ’s Hospital was won by a boy from this

18. LBF 30-31
school, and then it was won by the brother of this year’s winner. Now you know who it is — Cecil Forester (sic)! Hip, hip, hip — .”\(^{19}\) Of course, the headmaster used the name Cecil Smith, because the name of Forester was still some twelve years from invention and sixteen from general acceptance.

According to Geoff, Cecil applied for, competed for, and was academically successful for both Bancroft School and Christ’s Hospital scholarships. The Bancroft scholarship was denied because George Smith’s income had climbed above the maximum limit for scholarship assistance, but the Christ’s Hospital scholarship was extended and accepted. However, on the very day that Cecil was to enter school, this scholarship was also cancelled for the same reason. New schooling arrangements had to be made immediately. On one day’s notice, Alleyn’s agreed to accept him.

\[\text{19. LBF 32}\]
In somewhat of a hurry, Cecil entered Alleyn’s as a fee-paying student, as had Geoff before him. He was entered in the only vacancy, in a class two years older than his nominal class. Later, when Alleyn’s realized he was still competing for scholarship assistance at other schools, they granted him one to remain there. He writes extensively of Alleyn’s in *Long Before Forty*. It is his second school, the “extremely good secondary school (nominally now a public school)”\(^1\) that is not mentioned by name. This is one more

1. LBF p 39
example of the care that C. S. Forester took to prevent the reader from learning who he really was. Cecil asserts that Alleyn’s taught him well, though that is not Geoff’s opinion of his education there ten years previously. But they both agree that the students had a code of honor that frustrated the teaching as much as possible by denigrating scholastic work. “We learned a good deal, being well taught, but we worked as little as we possibly could. I think our attitude toward work was that any fool could do it, but it took a clever chap to avoid it.”

Because Cecil was small, because he was out of his age group, probably because he let the other boys know he had won a Christ’s Hospital scholarship, and because of his looks, he was bullied during his first years at Alleyn’s. He writes of it in Long Before Forty, and Kathleen confirms this. Trousers were called bags, so that removing the trousers of a persecuted boy was sufficiently frequent to be called debagging, and Cecil was debagged quite often.

2. LBF p 55
Kathleen recalls that “Cecil was always the shrimp of the crowd. He was treated miserably. It was always Cecil who was tied to the railings, his trousers stolen, and whose books were dumped in puddles. If any bully wanted a victim, Cecil was the natural choice.” Kathleen added, when telling this to George, the additional motive that the boys thought that Cecil’s semitic appearance indicated that he was of Jewish blood.³

Three events helped Cecil out of this mess. The school kept him back that year, making him only one year younger than his new classmates. He started growing fast two years later, and took up boxing in school competition. He writes that the confidence developed by boxing gave him the courage to face these terrors, the ability to resist them, and the “class” which rendered their application meaningless.

Among his new classmates was Frank Belcher, four months younger (and across the school-age

3. Oral communications

63
dividing line) than Cecil but in that class because he was a scholarship boy (scholarship boys were entered one class ahead of their age). Frank, Bill Clarke, and Bob Owen had become buddies the year before, and Cecil joined them in a group that stuck together for decades.

Frank invited Cecil to his home, where Cecil met Frank’s sister, Kathleen, three years younger, who was always called Kitty in conversation. This was when he was thirteen and she was ten. At this time Cecil told the Belchers that his father was a high official in the Egyptian Ministry of Education.\footnote{Kathleen tape, 10 Nov 1984}

In addition to what Cecil wrote in \textit{Long Before Forty}, he told me the following stories.

His two bosom buddies were also boxers in different weight classes. They were somewhat bow-legged; Cecil was somewhat knock-kneed, so they were called the OXO gang after the popular British beef extract. Since each boxed for the school in his own weight class, they were literally unbeatable by

4. Kathleen tape, 10 Nov 1984
any combination of Alleyn’s boys, and, of course, there were no girls to tattle. They became the lords of the school, able to successfully carry off any endeavor they set their minds to. The teacher who determined that Cecil must turn in neatly written essays (which their manner of studying itself prevented, without considering whether Cecil’s own handwriting was passable in itself) undertook a difficult enough task. (He is mentioned in *Long Before Forty*, page 54.) He compounded his difficulties by returning Cecil’s after-school copy lines for rewriting with the unkind remark, “I know why these lines are so disgracefully untidy. You were in a hurry to go to the boxing competition.” When he added the pedagogically insignificant remark, smacking so fatally of *lese-majeste*, “And when you got there in such a hurry, you were beaten,” his days were numbered.

At Alleyn’s the teachers went from class to class, not the students. Not only did this teacher find glue upon the doorknob in palpable but not obvious quantities every time he entered Cecil’s classroom,
but there was often lubricating oil upon the blackboard in amounts sufficient to make writing difficult but insufficient to prove guilt. The teacher was growing a little bald and carefully concealed his bald spot by careful brushing. On Mondays, when his predecessor had been teaching religion, he found questions on the blackboard concerning the prophet Elisha. “What distinguished Elisha?” asked one; “What did the little street boys shout after Elisha?” asked another, to which of course he knew the answer: “Go up, thou bald-head.” The boys found it was possible to jam his desk drawer by sliding its high-piled papers to one side until some stuck in the space between the drawer and frame. A little working of the drawer crumpled them up until the drawer jammed, after which a hard kick returned it to the closed position unamenable to any force that could be applied to its handle.

The prize stunt was performed in late spring, when the classroom windows were open to the spring breezes. Cecil and his friends took a wooden chalk box, knocked the bottom out, and strung the
open space with bands of the best quality gum rubber. These were stretched until they were tuned to the major chord of C, and the instrument was suspended on a string below the windowsill so it would rotate in the breeze. The two solid sides of the erratically rotating box allowed the breeze to play first one band, than another, giving the impression that an unskillful musician was attempting to play an abstruse tune upon an unrecognizable instrument.

At first the teacher thought the school band was practicing, but on looking outside realized that the music was coming from close at hand. The windowsill was just too substantial for him to see the instrument below it. He stood all the boys up and examined their pockets, but the music continued. After careful thought, he stood the boys up again and searched both pockets and desks, without in the least affecting the maddening music. He never did trace its true source, but he guessed enough. At the end of the school year the teacher stood before the boys with tears in his eyes.

“I have been offered a promotion,” he
announced, “to teach the more advanced subjects which you boys will be studying next year. For that very reason I have refused the promotion, and I no longer need to see you again.”

These events were not explicitly discovered by the school authorities. There was probably at least some uncertainty whether or not these unpleasantnesses were mere happenstance, and without some evidence (which no boy would give) that they were both deliberately planned and executed by Cecil, nothing could be done. Cecil refers, however, at the end of this chapter in *Long Before Forty*, of behavior which caused Alleyn’s to regret having granted his scholarship in order to prevent him from going elsewhere.5

Cecil’s puberty occurred during his last two years at Alleyn’s.6 In association with Alleyn’s School for boys was a girls’ school named James Allen’s, not far away, at which Kathleen Belcher was

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5. LBF 58
6. LBF 59
one of the students. Cecil persuaded her to pass on to one of the older girls a letter from him. Kathleen, not meeting with the older girl but knowing what class she would be in, ingenuously left the letter with the teacher, Miss Adams. The teacher, realizing that the letter was not a parental note, opened it and the scandal was abroad. Whatever the note said, it apparently was not serious enough to have the boy who wrote it expelled from his boys’ school, but it was sufficient to send the girl to whom it was addressed away from her girls’ school.

In later years Cecil privately showed a marked fear of society’s disapproval of the impropriety of the things he wrote even for publication, and a horror of having his letters read by anyone except the person addressed, especially by a schoolteacher. He always destroyed the letters he received, and attempted to ensure that those he sent were also destroyed.

Another of the disapproved incidents was the time he lost his walking stick in a tree. In those days young men of the highest fashion in summer wore
straw boater hats and carried fancy walking sticks. Late one summer afternoon Cecil arrived home both hatless and stickless. On being asked why, he said he’d been chased by a policeman, and on being asked the cause of that he said he’d lost his walking stick in a tree. He had been walking alone, so he said, twirling his stick in the approved manner, when his grip on the handle had slipped during the stick’s upward arc. It had flown up and stuck among the branches of the tree beneath which he had been walking. Naturally, he climbed the tree to retrieve his stick. A policeman had discovered him descending from the tree after freeing the stick, and had given chase. Hence he had arrived home hatless, stickless, and breathless. This odd story was told circumstantially enough to be believed — and indeed most of it was true. What was not mentioned was that the stick was never in the tree, but left at its foot, for the tree overlooked the bedroom of a pretty girl who was changing her clothes. Evidently she had inadvertently disclosed enough through the window to suggest that he would get a better view if
him climbed the tree, which he did. While Cecil was in the tree a patrolling policeman had appeared. Cecil, fearing discovery, jumped out of the tree and ran. The policeman, who probably had not suspected much before, gave chase but was outdistanced.

Cecil’s first experience with coitus occurred when he was fourteen, with an unmarried lady in her late thirties named Carswell. Years later, Cecil was astonished to read the obituary of her brother, who had lived for years and then died near Berkeley, California, where Cecil was then living. The astonishing coincidence moved Cecil to describe his first experience to a much later lady friend, Frances Phillips. “She was a nice woman—it wasn’t the vulgar horrible business you might imagine from our respective ages—at least it wasn’t on her part but it was on mine, for at that mature age I knew just what I wanted and went for it like a brute; up to that time I think she thought of me [as] a nice little boy of vaguely interesting maturity of thought.” After the
difficulties typical of sexual inexperience, the relationship continued for a year or two. “If it hadn’t been for her I would never have known anything about nice Edwardian—or even Victorian—womanhood. She died (diabetes) after only a year or two when I was really fond of her (of course I had no one to confide in about it) and I can still feel the sadness I felt then.”

One of Alleyn’s masters was Mr. Callaghan, who lived on Belvoir Road, just around the corner from Cecil’s house. Because of this proximity, Cecil visited Callaghan’s house and there met his daughter, Phyllis, who was approximately ten years older than Cecil. Their acquaintanceship continued through the war years and, perhaps aggravated by the shortage of men of her own age, before it was over Phyllis had fallen head over heels, or at least to the extent felt proper of a very proper schoolmaster’s daughter, in love with Cecil. Whatever Cecil originally did to encourage her was enough for

7. CSF-FP 21 November 1953
Mr. Callaghan to become worried at the prospects of their marriage. Before it was over Cecil ceased to encourage her but did not reject her. Perhaps he waited for escape through the tuberculosis that attacked her, but its progress was slow for she lived until the late nineteen-twenties.

Cecil had a complicated love life. He wrote of “the load of trouble set on my shoulders by women. ... There was little enough vulgar scandal; I had enough tact and sufficient ingenuity in the matter of lying to keep out of that sort of thing. ... I divided women into ... the fools and the whores–the fools ran after me and I ran after the whores, foolish though I realized such a proceeding to be. And when the whores ceased to afford diversion I would turn back to the fools–with a feeling of contempt for myself both that I should waste my time over them and that I should put my talents to such unworthy uses. ... There was always trouble, and subterfuges, and harassment, to poison the pleasant gratification of a instinct and the rather subtle feeling that you were scoring off a world that was hurting you atrociously.
And in the end you felt dreadfully sick at heart.”

While most people keep some aspects of their sexual life secret, there are many other aspects, such as first loves, courtship, and marriage, that are publicly recognized. However, Cecil started his sexual life entirely with matters that had to be kept secret, and that habit persisted throughout his life.

In the eventful year of 1914, not only was Cecil preparing to leave childhood behind, but he was preparing to graduate from Alleyn’s, his family was preparing to leave England, and the world was preparing to leave peace behind. The first two of these four events were normal and expected, the fourth is now common knowledge, but the third requires some explanation. Geoff had become established as a physician by a very haphazard series of events. From 1911 to 1913 he had supported periods of postgraduate hospital appointments by serving as a relief doctor when physicians with a practice had

8. LBF 83-4
temporarily been away. This kept him quite busy and he hadn’t been home much. “It is pretty clear that during that last year or two I hadn’t had much time for affairs at home. There was no change in the circumstances there and no hope of any. As I have said, there was no inducement to take our friends home to be subjected to embarrassments ... My frequent and prolonged absences from home had spared me a good deal of the humiliation that fell to my brothers and sisters.”

The embarrassments were not only social but financial. Both simultaneously occurred to Hugh, who still worked at the bank but now earned £80 per year ($400), although he still lived with his parents at Shenley Road.

Hugh intended to marry Dorothy “Dolly” Bowen, and one evening, anticipating her arrival at his house, he arrived at home after work anxious to clean up the place and transform its customary air of dirt and shabbiness. A truck stood outside the

9. GFS p 111, 114
door, into which their furniture was being carried. Cecil, aged thirteen, told him that a chattel mortgage for £20 was unpaid. Hugh had very little more than that saved toward his marriage\textsuperscript{10}, but he wrote a check, sent the men away, and sat down on the stairs in misery. “This incident serves to mark the perpetual nightmare in which we lived.”\textsuperscript{11}

Geoff’s father, George, “had been suggesting to [Geoff] for some years that with his name, fortune and success would attend [Geoff] if [he] went to Egypt.”\textsuperscript{12} Geoff applied for a position as medical officer of an Egyptian scientific expedition, explaining his interest in the country but was rejected because he did not know enough physical anthropology. George obtained a single-voyage position for Geoff as medical officer of an Egyptian cruise ship, and a half promise of work as an examiner at the medical school. In November, 1913, Geoff left for

\textsuperscript{10} The £20 was six month’s of Hugh’s starting salary.
\textsuperscript{11} GFS p 114
\textsuperscript{12} GFS
Egypt, arriving with £5 in his pocket. George had returned to Cairo and the flat on the Shoubra Road, and was then teaching at the Normal College for Teachers. “He was too old for promotion at an ordinary secondary school and had no degree which might have given him a better standing. There was no doubt that he was an excellent teacher. He did not mix very much with the British community. I think he felt too poor to give or receive hospitality.”

Back in England, Cecil had just met the Belcher family, telling them that his father was the chief British advisor to the Egyptian Minister of Education.

The promised fame and fortune turned out to be illusory. Geoff received a leisurely cruise up the Nile aboard the Rameses the Great, more as a tourist than a doctor, wondering whether any of the passengers would get ill enough to enable him to pay his modest laundry and wine bills aboard the ship. (His passage itself was naturally free, but his per-

13. GFS p 116
sonal expenditures had to be recouped through medical practice.) Only a smallpox scare, which prompted many of the passengers to get vaccinated, prevented bankruptcy.

Very unexpectedly, Geoff received during this cruise a telegram offering him a temporary position as medical officer to a Shell Oil drilling crew at Res Gemsah on the shores of the Red Sea. He accepted, arriving there early in 1914, and for the first time in his life had a lucky break. Not only did the position become permanent just as soon as management assessed Geoff as markedly better than his predecessor (who was being sent home for excessive drinking), but the drilling crews struck a gusher and Res Gemsah turned into quite a busy oil port and base.

Geoff found himself earning £680 a year, plus his free food and housing. The money alone was more than his father and brother were earning together. “My expenses were a few piastres a week for my drinks and smokes and all the rest I was able to send home. I still had no bank account. I made great plans for my family. Cecil was to go to Dulwich
[College] and later to Guy’s, my two sisters and my mother were to come to Egypt in September, and I would pay for their passages so that they could have a winter there and see something different from suburban life in England. I would be able now to do this and still save more than half my pay.”

His father returned to England in July for the summer, and arrangements were started for the journey to Egypt. Cecil was to stay in a flat in Dulwich with his brother Hugh, but war came before school started. Geoff wrote: “Soon I had a letter from father to say that all passages to Egypt were cancelled, that mother and the girls would have to remain in England and he himself would return in a special ship to bring civil servants back to Egypt. With the passage money I had provided he leased and refurnished another house in Dulwich [58 Underhill Road] and moved the family there from Shenley Road. I was bitterly disappointed but as I intended to leave [Egypt] as soon as I could decently

14. GFS p 120
58 Underhill Road is next door to this, but same design.
do so [intending to join the Army Medical Corps] I felt we must postpone any ideas I had of settling the family back in Egypt.”

Hugh, being a subaltern (second lieutenant) in the Territorial Army before the war started, immediately entered active service as a machine-gun officer. This despised specialty, in a war that turned out so different in manner from the expectations of its original participants, became the “ruler of the battlefield.” Hugh became a company commander, serving in France and later in the Middle East. The wounds he received at the front ensured that he spent much of the rest of the war in instructional positions. This left his mother, Sarah, at home with Grace, Marjorie, and Cecil. Marjorie found work as a teacher, Grace in the Canadian War Office in London.

Geoff resigned from Shell Oil in order to enter the army. He was not released from his job until he found an Egyptian replacement, and arrived back in

15. GFS p 120
England in September, 1915. Before he was assigned to duty he had a month at 58 Underhill Road, the house that his parents lived in for the rest of their lives. Here he saw Cecil starting at Dulwich College.
Cecil ascribes the idea of his attending Dulwich College to his father, writing: “Instead, I was to go to a Public School, a real school. It was most unusual that such a school should admit a new scholar who was nearly sixteen, and who had already matriculated [has passed the University entrance examinations], but it was agreed upon as a result of a special arrangement — most of my education was the subject of special arrangement, it appeared to me. It was a very complete change of conditions to me — to move a boy from a secondary school to a public school makes quite as great a change as to move an adult
from England to France, let us say. My father appreciated the fact, but his canny idea (an extremely good one, too) was that having had the best education to be found in England (which is at a good secondary school, beyond any doubt) I should have the further advantages given to me which only a Public School could provide.”

However, Geoff is clear that this was his idea and based on his money, as he is quoted in the previous chapter. The objective, to combine the advantages of a Public School with the already achieved education provided by the secondary school, is another example of the combined intellectual and class consciousness of the family. Cecil had been educated at a school that taught well; now he would be given some higher-class finish. A reason of equal importance might have been that Cecil was somewhat young for medical school.

Dulwich College was already known to the family, for it had been the source of both Alleyn’s

1. LBF p 67

85
school and the James Allen’s School for Girls that Kathleen had attended. Edward Alleyn, a famous actor and theatre owner of Shakespearian times, had founded Dulwich College in 1619, and the foundation had been reformed in 1857 to produce the
three neighboring institutions. Dulwich was not a college in the American sense, for it served the same age range of students as Alleyn’s did, but it served a higher class in society. Dulwich trained for acceptance into the Universities, meaning Oxford or Cambridge, while those graduates of Alleyn’s who continued their education (many did not) were expected to enter institutions such as the Guy’s Medical School at the University of London. This meant that Dulwich concentrated far more on the classics than on science. The Oxford course of study termed Greats, consisting of Latin and Greek Literature, Ancient History, and Ancient and Modern Philosophy, had been the education typical of governmental leaders, and Dulwich prepared for this type of education.

By Cecil’s account, the war had its effect upon the school. The general effect, as it dragged inconclusively on, was a stoic realization that every student would die in the trenches as soon as he was old enough. The boys stood that frightening thought pretty well, without the moral revulsion from war
that swept the world later on, and which reappeared in the U.S.A. during the time of the Viet Nam War. Quite possibly their attitude was the result of Public School training, of which more later on. In any case the boys looked on ahead to those already fighting, each boy achieving some measure of prestige according to the prominence of his family and connections among the warriors. Cecil did pretty well at this. One brother was that new technical hero, a machine-gun officer; another brother and his cousin Harry were medical officers; his Senior cousins were well-placed in their regiments. (That they were non-commissioned officers Cecil did not mention, but they were the “innumerable cousins who were all soldiers, many of them since before the war.”) To crown the list, his father wore a uniform with two stars, the emblems of a colonel, whose photograph Cecil displayed at school.

Perhaps not by chance, Geoff was assigned to

2. LBF p 65
3. LBF p 68
duty at a hospital in Egypt, treating the sick and wounded from the Gallipolli adventure, the Palestinian conquest, and varied incidents with Turkish forces in the Middle East. In the hospital he met an Irish nurse, Edith Caroline “Molly” Anderson, and married her.\textsuperscript{4}

In Egypt he found that his father, too, was in different circumstances. He had given up school-teaching and joined the Egyptian Coast Guard Service. “He was made a bimbashi, and in Egyptian uniform he turned up one day at our hospital mess. He was a bit portly and had a stoop but was very happy. As a bimbashi he wore an Egyptian crown and star on his shoulder, and to my colleagues he looked like a Lieutenant-Colonel and they knew no better.”\textsuperscript{5} The equivalent army rank was Major. George “had been given charge of a long section of the coastline of Egypt from near Alexandria to Domietta, and it was his job to patrol this on horse-

\textsuperscript{4} GFS p 154
\textsuperscript{5} GFS p 144
back with his men and take care of anything untoward which happened. They had to look for mines coming ashore and then mount guard over them until they could be dealt with by British experts. They also had to watch for unauthorized landings and smuggling. He hadn’t been on a horse for years and was soon very saddlesore, but this life was better than schoolmastering.”

In the Spring of 1917 Geoff was transferred to France, and was able to take a week’s leave in England. He saw his brother, Hugh, who had recovered from wounds and was teaching machine-gun skills to recruits for the tank corps. He met Victor Hobbes, the Canadian soldier who was engaged to his sister Grace, and decided that neither of them was ready for marriage and that Grace’s motivation was to escape her mother’s house. He found his mother, sisters and Cecil living at 58 Underhill Road. “Cecil was at Dulwich College and was to go to Guy’s in October.”

6. GFS p 144-5

7
the previous one that Cecil would be drafted into the army (he would be 18 on August 27, 1917), shows that at this time Cecil had already been medically rejected. Cecil makes much of the incident, writing that the examining doctors, having listened to his heart, told him “that there was no chance of [his] being accepted for service and that really [he] should be surprised to be still alive.”

With that news, and being a doctor, Geoff would have examined his brother. About whether he did, or what he found, Geoff does not write a word.

Whatever the sequence of events, Cecil completed his last year at Dulwich in the Science VI Form (as opposed to Classics VI); absurdly, though a medical reject for the real thing, he served in its Officers Training Corps. Whether or not his attendance at Dulwich served to educate him further is a point about which even he was baffled. “I was filled with a comforting and blase sense of my own superi-

7. GFS p 158
8. LBF p 79
ority to everybody, which was not due to wane for some time. Those boys were grossly uneducated. Even on the vaunted science side not one in ten was equal to any job beyond that of vanboy [truck-driver’s helper] or lift attendant [elevator operator].” The Dulwich boys may well have had a greater depth of classical education than Cecil was able to recognize, but Cecil was immediately able to recognize the superiority of his technical and general knowledge, limited though it was. This could well be the start of Cecil’s assumption that he had good scientific knowledge. This wasn’t so; although he later picked up technical facts, he never developed much understanding of either science or technology.

Cecil continued with observations about the Dulwich College society. “They had the morals of the Stone Age, and were blindly obedient to taboos more absurd than any to be found in Polynesia. With few exceptions they were insensitive to beauty, and would have hated to be otherwise. Their general knowledge was incredibly small; their outlook incredibly limited, and they never had an original
thought in all their short lives — nor wanted one. But with all that they were good specimens in a manner hard to define. Either because of or in spite of the system in which they had been reared they led one to think that mankind was a good deal nearer to the angels than the catalogue of their faults and deficiencies would lead one to believe. The knotty point to decide is between ‘because of’ and ‘in spite of.’ If you decide on the one, you will be a sturdy defender of the public [American: private college preparatory] school system; if on the other, you will oppose it. I cannot give my opinion because try as I may I have never been able to make up my mind about it.”

Cecil’s ambiguity about results was justified, because prominent among those boys was the Captain of the School, Vivian Dykes, later Brigadier Dykes. They met again, in 1942, when Dykes was a member of the British military mission to Washington during WW II and Cecil was part of the British

9. LBF p 75-6

93
Information Service. Dykes wrote of Cecil: “I did not remember his face. He is a quiet sort of bird, quite pleasant.” His memory might be vague because Cecil was then Cecil Smith.

Although a small school, Dulwich had, in twenty years, produced three creators of popular fictional characters, none of them, either creators or characters, considered to be intellectuals. Out of Dulwich came the satirically humourous portraits of the inane aristocrats Bertie Wooster and his circle, and his mightily competent man-servant Jeeves, written by P. G. Wodehouse, who had preceded Cecil by about twenty years. The creator of Philip Marlowe, the fictional private detective in a grim and sleazy Los Angeles, Raymond Chandler, attended Dulwich ten years later. The last of the three was Horatio Hornblower, C. S. Forester’s cre-


94
ation. At the time Cecil was writing of his time at Dulwich College, Wodehouse was in full flower as a comic, with only the respect that jesters attain, while Chandler was still an oil-company executive, not yet in the poverty that forced him to write, and ten years from his achievement. Wodehouse portrayed society, specifically almost-high society, as so ludicrous that we must laugh at it. Chandler portrayed society as rotten at the core, and even its heroes as flawed. For-ester, not only through Hornblower, but more so in General Curzon, and generally in much of his work, portrayed society as fate, in which the rewards and punishments were handed out with splendid indifference to selecting the recipients. I wonder to what extent Dulwich College was the microcosm of these views that surfaced in later life.

“Violence ruled in a way which astonished me on my arrival,” Cecil wrote. Considering the experiences he had already undergone at Alleyn’s, both receiving and giving, the violence at Dulwich Col-

11. LBF p 70

95
lege must have been extremely fierce and pervasive. It was here that Cecil observed the brutal bullying which reduced two clever boys to mental impotence.12 “And I can remember the expression of inane cruelty on the faces of the boys who did the bullying in one of those cases.”

From his own narrative several points emerge. Because of their many differences, Cecil felt aloof from his fellow students. He already knew most of the academic work they were supposed to be learning, and in which, perforce, they had to expend some interest. He had not been raised under the important customs and taboos peculiar to that (or any other) Public School, rendering him emotionally detached from them and probably uninterested in maintaining them, a duty expected of a member of the Sixth Form (senior class). And he differed about the strategy of the war. The war, of course, was of intense current interest to them, except that they, like the British population and most of the

12. LBF p 43
army officers, managed to be interested in its strategy only in an unintellectual, uninquiring way. Cecil could have supported his unorthodox opinions, had he chosen, with historical precedent and twelve years of war gaming, but he was largely silent.

Cecil writes, also, of observing in a detached way the investigations, exposures, and punishments that resulted from the discovery that several boys of high social standing in the eyes of their schoolmates had maintained extensive sexual liaisons with several girls from a nearby girls’ school. (Was this James Allen’s School again?) In this, apparently, Cecil not only had not been involved, but there was no suspicion that he might be, because he had only recently entered Dulwich College and had not, apparently, been in social contact with these boys before. Besides, his amorous adventures, except for the latter incident, had been conducted among entirely different classes of women. He therefore observed the consequences at close hand from a completely safe position.

Cecil also kept up his friendships with the
Belchers. Kitty tells of the first camping experience among their circle, in 1916 or 1917. The participants were Kitty, Cecil, Frank Belcher, a boy friend of Kitty’s, the boy friend’s sister, and another boy. They were supposed to be chaperoned by Cecil’s older sister Marjorie, but at the last moment she became ill and could not go. They had made two tents and had sewn sleeping bags from blankets, they had a small stove and a wicker hamper full of food. They had made arrangements to camp in a farmer’s field 15 miles away, still out in the country in those days. They went by bicycle. It rained all weekend, causing them to dress in their bathing suits, one tent collapsed, and the food got wet and squashed, but they laughed through it. Kitty remarked it was like a scene from *Three Men in a Boat*. 13

One of the objectives of schooling — and in particular of Public Schooling — is character development. The sense of Cecil’s account of his two years

13. Kathleen tape, 10 Nov 1984
at Dulwich College is that he acquired nothing else. Considering his later character, he didn’t improve on the one that he brought with him from Alleyn’s, and his description of Dulwich society suggests greater cynicism and skepticism than when he arrived.
From Dulwich, Cecil entered Guy’s Medical School in October, 1917. His story to me was that he entered the army and was placed in a training camp in Norfolk that used its men, while they were being trained, as a reserve coastal defense force. There he claimed to have had much sentry duty, he guarded port facilities and he stood dawn patrol, watching out to sea lest the German invasion was coming over the horizon. This was a strange amalgam of his father’s activities in Egypt, accounts of the invasion crises during Napoleonic times, and the 1914 fears of the British population that had been stirred up by books such as
The Riddle of the Sands. (Cecil laughed at these fears. He knew that the Germans could never land an invasion without control of the North Sea, denied them by the existence of the British fleet. The battle of Jutland, regardless of later German claims that they had not lost it, had determined that. When Admiral Scheer had found that the horizon was filled with British battleships firing at him he turned tail and fled. However, before Jutland the Germans had conducted hit and run naval bombardments of several British east coast ports.) Before his training was completed, so he said, the war ended and he was demobilized without leaving England. Did he believe that knowing that he had once been thought to have a weak heart would be unsettling to me at the age of eleven or twelve? Hardly likely; for years I had seen him playing vigorous tennis.

At Guy’s he would be following in Geoff’s footsteps, for which Geoff himself was paying the bill.¹

1. GFS p 185
As Cecil wrote, this course was for lack of anything that he liked better. “The profession of medicine was not entirely to my taste, but I decided that any other profession would be equally distasteful, and to that extent I was reconciled to it.”

England at this time was desperate for manpower, as Cecil well knew. His sisters, five and three years older than he, both now worked for the government, Grace in the Canadian War Office in London, while Marjorie had entered the Labor Office as a statistician, the office that allocated available manpower. Before that, his brother Hugh had entered commercial life directly from a better school than Cecil had attended. In other words, there was both opportunity and example to go to work of national importance, reinforced in part by national need. The national need for doctors and other trained scientific and engineering personnel was not yet recognized by the government, and the half-trained doctors who had been conscripted were still serving.

2. LBF p 82
in the ranks, those who had survived the carnage. Geoff, remembering his own financial struggles at school, offered to continue to pay his brother’s fees as he had done at Dulwich and provide twice as much pocket money as he himself had ever received. Cecil accepted this with equanimity, probably without any intention of doing more work at Guy’s than he had been doing at Dulwich.

During that first year at Guy’s, Cecil must very nearly have come to disaster. He writes at length in *Long Before Forty* about the emotional troubles he caused himself, but he camouflages the chronology so that without Geoff’s account it is impossible to tell what happened when. In addition to the fear that he might die soon of natural causes instead of in the trenches, Cecil’s troubles stemmed from five main causes. First, he developed a mounting horror for the war and the way it was being conducted. He writes that while at Dulwich he was as prepared as any other boy to enter the army, although he had personal doubts about the quality of the strategy and tactics employed by both sides, and further
doubts about the truthfulness of the public information disseminated about the war. (In terms used later on, he recognized the overdone propaganda of the time for what it was.) Second, he had to combat the sympathies of both those who thought he wanted to be in the army, and of those few wounded whom he met who had been in and recognized how lucky he was not to be in. If this sounds unlikely, I point out that World War I was probably the most horrible war ever fought (even if the Nazi and Japanese excesses of World War II are included) but this was not recognized by the generals and not admitted on the home front. There is a famous scene of one British general who almost at the end of the war first observed the actual fighting conditions and exclaimed, “My God, how could I ever have ordered and expected men to fight under these conditions!” Thirdly, there was the laziness caused by the feeling that he was only attending medical school for lack of anything better to do and in any case he knew it all already. Fourthly, there “was the load of trouble set on my shoulders by women” that has been men-
tioned before.

By the standards of the time for English school-boys, Cecil had already shown by his actions a greater interest in and success with women than was considered normal and proper. From the way in which he went about it, this interest was primarily due to a well-developed interest in sex itself, without the social, competitive, and emotional factors which sometimes impel men not extremely sexually developed to carry on in this way. I think, from later developments, that the “secret trouble” he mentions was fear that he might be, or might be discovered to be, of homosexual inclination. Whether he was or not is another matter which I find more difficult to answer, as will be shown later. It could be that he was simply highly interested in sex in all its manifestations.

In any case, in later years he showed a fear that he would be so suspected, and, from his description of the effect of this secret trouble, what else would more likely drive him to excesses with women? Considering the flood of revelations of the prevalence of
homosexuality among the university students and intellectuals of the periods just before and just after the war, it is not surprising that with the concept in the air any boy with an acute sexual need would at least consider it, whether or not that consideration resulted in attraction or repulsion.

Cecil bitterly classified women into fools and whores. Not, as you might expect, did he classify those who ran after him as whores and those he successfully pursued as fools. To the contrary: “the fools ran after me as I ran after the whores.” There is here a sense of moral degradation, as if no woman with the sense to recognize him would pursue him, and as if his own nature was attracted only by the more degraded aspects of womanhood.

The fifth source of emotional difficulty was a continuous comparison by people at Guys with his brother Geoff. Cecil suffered under their remarks and probably also himself compared Geoff’s honesty, success, honorable war record, and financial support with his own discreditable attitudes. Presumably, at least in part, to justify the injustice of
the comparison, Cecil makes Geoff into a near genius. “My brother had matriculated at fifteen and had gone on to qualify brilliantly at twenty. The brute had actually made a record.”3 “My elder [sic] brother went through examination after examination in the course of his medical studies with flying colours, eventually qualifying at the age of twenty.”4

Cecil always told me that Geoff qualified for his license when only twenty, saying, “A feat which no man in England has since achieved, and, considering the extensive education required nowadays, no man ever will again.” As Cecil told me, this situation denied Geoff his license to practise medicine, although he was qualified, until he became of legal age.

As you read Geoff’s account, he did not qualify at twenty; he qualified when he was almost twenty-two. As well, Geoff failed one complete year’s work at one time in his career. “I went back to Guy’s in

3. LBF p 82
4. LBF p 30
October in 1907 to do my second year in the dissecting room. The subjects for the [examination] ... were Anatomy, Physiology, and Pharmacology, and I had by reason of my previous good fortune begun to think that concentrated work wasn’t necessary ... In July, 1908, we sat for our [examination]. I was horrified and alarmed; I knew immediately that my work had been quite inadequate ... Soon after I received a letter from the University to say I had failed in all three subjects.”

Cecil also told me that Geoff was a noted surgeon who had invented “the internal aluminium splint,” an aluminum strengthening member that joined fractured bones, and, being aluminum, dissolved in the body tissues as fast as its strength was no longer needed. At the time I believed him, but did not know then that the prime requirement for any material used to join broken bones is chemical passivity, which is why stainless steel, tantalum, and the like are used.

In any case, Cecil did little work and barely

5. GFS p 64-66

108
passed his first year examinations. He passed physics and chemistry easily, but failed biology. The relative difficulty of these subjects had been noted by Geoff twelve years before. With his excellent Alleyn’s training in chemistry and physics, Geoff had passed with ease, but with biology, in which he had been individually prepared at Alleyn’s, Geoff too had had difficulty.⁶

During the August holidays there was not even the pretense of attending Guy’s to keep Cecil in London and at home. Very sensibly he packed up his tent (borrowed from somebody else, if the absence of tents in the family a few years later is significant) and camped for a month on the banks of the Wey Canal. The relief from his troubles and the pressure of his life in London, combined with the idyllic, lonely life which the English countryside will provide for those who seek it, provided a cure for much of his personal difficulties. He returned to London “almost a natural young man.”⁷ As some

6. GFS p 58
measure of his improvement, he took the biology examination again in October and passed, although he says he did not open a textbook between one examination and the other. Nor was this the only change. The end of the war brought three more changes to Cecil’s life. Immediately, the social pressure caused by his remaining a civilian ceased. In the next few months veterans began entering medical school (some who had started before 1914 had already been released before the armistice because the shortage of doctors had finally been recognized by the government). The enrollment tripled overnight, in the same way it did in every American college in 1946. Not only did the veterans affect the medical schools, but life itself. With the veteran’s stories, and the cessation of propaganda, the general public finally accepted the idea that the war had been an unmitigated, pointless horror, a change which made respectable Cecil’s formerly outrageous opinion.

7. LBF p 84
One would have thought that the way was now open for Cecil to do some honest studying, but it didn’t happen that way. The dissection rooms were crowded. The students were paired, so that two worked together on a part of each cadaver. “It was by favour now that you were granted a new ‘part’ when you had finished your old one, and canny young men put their names early on the waiting lists.”

What to Cecil was a great change in dissecting-room procedure was merely the resumption of pre-war practice. Geoff records that “each new student was allotted a partner and a ‘part’ for dissection. There was always a shortage of bodies. When it is realized that each limb had two partners working and two more on the head and neck and two on the abdomen and thorax, the table was somewhat crowded until the poor body was nearly dismembered.” Not only did it now take more care on the

8. LBF p 93
9. GFS p 58
part of each student to arrange to complete all his required work, but the veterans did not appear to apply themselves particularly hard. It is perhaps a measure of the relative horror of World Wars I and II that those who survived the first took up riotous living, while those who survived the second became a generation of students dedicated to being told the “right answer,” studying without imagination and graduating without delay into comfortable jobs and suburban living. It may well be that the veterans of 1918, with several years’ experience of the army and its ways, which we later termed “Hurry up and wait,” took the time to arrange their course of study and then enjoyed themselves to the utmost during the inevitable delays. Whatever the reason, Cecil did not do his dissections, and suffered the consequences.

The purpose of doing dissections was to learn anatomy. The anatomy textbook described the human body, the process of dissection enabled the student to discover those items that were too difficult to easily and simply explain in words, and con-
firmed the textbook information to the student’s own eyes, reinforcing his memory so the information stuck.

As Cecil found out, a man intent on other matters cannot successfully study anatomy. He wasn’t lazy in the sense of doing nothing, he simply let his energies take him into all sorts of adventures. On the respectable side, he wrote humorous articles for the Guy’s Hospital Gazette. On the semi-respectable side, he got his friend “Puggy” out of an undesired engagement to be married (as he tells in Long Before Forty, chapter 13). On the unrespectable side he continued his amorous adventures, financed, among other ways, by stealing a piano. He writes in Long Before Forty that it was a chair, but Kathleen remembers that it was a piano. With several medical students to carry it, a mere chair would not have required hiring a barrow to carry it, as Cecil recounts.10 Also, at one time, in 1919, he sang on the streets, presumably giving the inhabitants the

10. LBF p 93
impression he was a returned veteran, and obtained enough to entertain his current flame, the ballet dancer, Pally Summers, whom he had met at the Belchers’ house.

Whatever Cecil did, he still lived at home with his mother and sisters, and kept up the pretence of attending Guy’s. There was only some sort of suspicion at home that all was not right. Geoff and his father, George, were still in Egypt. Shell Oil offered Geoff a position as medical officer in Borneo as soon as he could be discharged from the army, an offer that Geoff accepted. Before leaving Egypt he took a few days’ leave in “Cairo, where I stayed with my father. He was reluctantly out of uniform and was back with the Ministry of Public Instruction. He had been given again a post as professor at the Normal College for Teachers. This would occupy him for the few years before he took his pension. We knew that Cecil had gone from Dulwich to Guy’s, on my advice, and was ostensibly working as a medical student, having been rejected for the forces. We were worried because we didn’t feel he was happy there
and there was something wrong and we agreed that I should visit Guy’s on my return.”

Once back in England, Geoff was able again to live with his wife, Molly, and their son. Hugh had recovered from influenza and had returned to his home with Dolly and to his position at the bank. Grace had married Victor Hobbes and they planned to return to his home in Canada. Marjorie was still working with the Ministry of Labour and living with her mother and Cecil.

Geoff accepted the offer from Shell Oil for a medical position in Sarawak, leaving London in two months time, and continues: “I visited Guy’s, which I hadn’t seen for over five years and called on the Dean, now Professor Pembury whom I had known well in my student days, and asked about Cecil. He looked surprised and said, ‘I didn’t know you had a brother here.’ As I mentioned earlier, for every student the Medical School keeps a confidential document with a photograph on it, on which are

11. GFS p 180-1

115
recorded the marks he receives for each part of his course. Pembury sent for this ‘signing up card’ of Cecil’s. When he saw it he burst out laughing. ‘I know this chap. He is good enough, of course, but he hasn’t been here for a year!’ This looked like trouble for Cecil and would need some explanation. It was then that I visited Underhill Road in Dulwich and inquired the reason for his nonattendance. Cecil, who was now nearly 20, was not seriously embarrassed but broke the news to us that he had been trying to write, that he didn’t really feel interested in medicine and disliked and was horrified by what he had seen as a student.”\(^{12}\)

Geoff was probably correct in reporting Cecil’s feelings as “horrified.” Kathleen, Cecil’s first wife, recalled that he took the trouble to cross the street to avoid having to walk close by a crippled man. Dorothy, Cecil’s second wife, told me that in a public building, they were accosted by a blind man who asked to be taken to the men’s toilet. Cecil refused,

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12. GFS p 184-5
forcing Dorothy to do the distasteful task for him.

Geoff continues: “It was there that I probably made a mistake. I thought it better for him to go on with his medical career and at least have that behind him before he should write for a living. I had never heard of a case of a man giving up medicine to take up writing with success, although many had done well in literature after qualifying. I cited Conan Doyle, Somerset Maugham and Brett Young. Cronin was another. However, he agreed to have another try and so we left it.

“It is fair to say that I had made myself responsible for his medical school and university fees and a small amount of pocket money. Small I realized, but twice as much as I had had myself when I was a student. I had little hope of any return although as will be seen the day would come when it was all repaid and more besides.

“I haven’t mentioned my mother yet, her condition was much the same, she loved us and was kind after her fashion, in spite of her addiction to alcohol which still continued, her brain was active and her
tongue could be very sharp.”

Cecil returned to Guy’s, changing his course of study from that required by the University of London to that required by the Royal College of Surgeons, because of the relative freedom in scheduling examinations that the R.C.S. permitted. For a time he worked at his studies and spent more time with more reasonable friends than his London crowd. Kathleen tells of Cecil studying in the Belchers’ warm kitchen. Kitty’s brother Frank, recently demobilized, was studying for the civil service examination. Cecil, sitting in Mr. Belcher’s chair, was studying the pharmacopoeia, Kitty was doing her homework. Kitty’s mother, Florence, was doing the ironing on the table (no ironing boards in those days) with a copy of the pharmacopoeia text before her. She asked Cecil questions to review what he had learned. Kitty said that later that year Cecil proudly exhibited a gold medal for dissection, but of course

13. GFS p 185
Kathleen’s House, 34 Hawarden Grove
it was Geoff’s medal, earned ten years before.\textsuperscript{14}

I myself now have his collection of “medals,” principally little bronze heads of Edward VII awarded for perfect school attendance, and it certainly is not among them. Cecil does not mention it in any of his writings.

Cecil also became enamoured of Kitty, whom he had known since she was ten and who was now sixteen. She told me (and Cecil so remarks in one of his much later letters) that puberty tends to come late in the Belcher family, and Cecil became her first boyfriend.

One evening at the Rains’s house\textsuperscript{15} Kathleen found herself sitting on the corner of their ping-pong table while Cecil kissed her passionately and clumsily, but rhythmically pressed his body against hers. As a result, he wrote her a little letter on a page torn from a notepad (dated ‘1919’ by Kathleen — Cecil never put the year on his letters):

\begin{center}

\end{center}

\textsuperscript{14.} Kitty tape, 10 Nov 1984
\textsuperscript{15.} Another of the group, otherwise unknown
“Kitty dear,

“Have you ever had a love letter before? Because this is going to be one. I don’t know whether you acted as you did at the Rains’ from devilment, or curiosity, or any reason like that, but you have got me cooked now, all the time. If ever you want a man to die for you, or any little thing like that, just come to me. Of course, I would have done it before — but I would like to do it now. Another thing I can’t understand is why we’ve never been out for walks together — you go with West, and Bob Owen, even. And now I want you to come for one with me, as soon as possible. Don’t worry, I can be perfectly sensible. So come out with me this evening (Friday). I will meet you at 7 to 7:45 at the corner of Court Lane and the Village. If you have anything better to do, of course don’t worry, but I shall be there for that time waiting for you anyway. If you can’t, let me know when and where on Saturday. But do come — I want you so.

Yours,
Cecil

Remember, I can be sensible.”

That the tone and style of this letter do not agree with Cecil’s description of himself as a man about town with the women is a puzzle. Cecil may have used a naive approach to conceal his skill and experience.

This episode didn’t come to much at the time. Kathleen recalls that they necked a little in the bracken in Richmond Park, and shortly after she told him she wouldn’t be his girl. They were walking back together from the library to his house on Underhill Road, not a long walk at all, while they talked about it. Just before they reached his door, Kathleen told Cecil she definitely wouldn’t be his girl. Cecil opened the door, stepped inside, and fainted dead away. It was some minutes before she could arouse him. The parting was not final. Kathleen went on to become engaged to A. G. West, who unfortunately contracted tuberculosis and died before they could be married. Five years later Cecil
successfully renewed his wooing of Kathleen.

One misguided girl presumed on Cecil’s reputation as a medical student, at the risk of her life. Cecil told me so himself, in the course of a short lecture on the danger an innocent person runs from blackmail and coercion. “A medical man is particularly susceptible to such pressures,” he said. “He must always be on his guard. Even as a medical student I was not safe. One day I received an urgent call from a girl who was one of our crowd, requesting to meet me at a secluded corner of Dulwich Park. Believing that the request had something to do with our crowd that she didn’t want spread about too early, I went to meet her at the time she specified. Arriving there, I found her lying back upon the park bench with her skirt covered with blood. The little fool had performed an abortion upon herself, correctly counting on both my skill and my silence to see her through. My skill as a medical student, and my silence because nobody would believe that I had not initiated the abortion.”

However, appearances were deceiving, and
George Smith made the second unpleasant discovery about Cecil’s medical career. He had returned to England for his 1920 summer holiday, and wrote to Geoff of it. “He wrote to me that he had been talking to Cecil, he had been going through the counterfoils of his cheque book and had discovered that one cheque had never been presented and cashed. It was the cheque for Cecil’s fees at Guy’s. Cecil then produced his pocket book and the cheque was still in it. He volunteered that he hadn’t been to the hospital and was writing and hoped to have something published.”¹⁶ Kathleen says that George gave Cecil six months in which to live at home without paying room and board, in order to get started as a writer. Except for one trip to France, following Pally Summers, a ballet dancer Cecil had met at the Belcher’s, Cecil did not leave home until late in 1927, and whether or not he paid room and board in that period is a moot question.

As you can see, there is hardly one grain of

¹⁶ GFS p 212

124
truth in Cecil’s account of these events in *Long Before Forty*, Chapter 14. The members of his family were familiar to some extent with publishers; George Smith himself had written three textbooks and had earned money from them; George had sufficient influence with publishers to get Hugh a job with one, although the position had not worked out; the family were not in a position to exert much influence to obtain Cecil a good position in any other profession; and the 1920 episode was the second time that the family had gone over all this with Cecil.

Cecil in 1920 was then privately acknowledged by his family to be a struggling would-be author, who was then beholden to them for the subsidy they had unwittingly provided and would continue to do so for some time to come. Perhaps it is as well that he was also the youngest child of the family.
Cecil’s early years as an aspiring writer were little different from those before, except that he was released from the necessity of pretending to be a student. He adopted no particular course of study — one could say that this was wise, if he had a formed opinion that study does not train writers much, but in the absence of such evidence (a far more likely state of affairs) this choice was more probably laziness. He frequented the same circle of suburban and school-day friends, particularly the Belchers, and it was to them that he owed his first introduction to artistic society. At their house he met a girl who had danced
a few leading roles in the ballet, Pally Summers. They became at least friends, and Pally introduced Cecil, for the first time, to the fringes of Chelsea artistic circles. (He was re-introduced in 1927 by another woman, so the 1920 introduction apparently did not lead to permanent associations.) When Pally went on tour to Paris and Monte Carlo, Cecil managed to go along. At least, that was his introduction to me of the circumstances in which he became involved in the French waterfront brawl he describes in *Long Before Forty*.¹

He also managed to live for a time in Paris, for he mentioned that period quite frequently when telling stories. He gave one to believe that he lived among the American expatriates and the lively artistic and literary society of the time. He told me he met Hemingway there, but under circumstances in which it was unlikely that Hemingway would remember him. He was still Cecil Smith (not that he told me that), and Hemingway, or anybody else who

1. LBF p 99
might have met him, would not have connected Cecil Smith, the ex-medical student, with C. S. Forester, the author, unless he had maintained an acquaintanceship over the years between the two roles. Whatever the circumstances of his trip to Paris, he did not stay long enough for people in Paris, or in England, to remember it.

In 1919 George and Florence Belcher first set up the summer camp at Winchelsea which was maintained until 1940. Florence (Flo) was the prime organizer and the camp was commonly called Flo’s camp. It was in the fields just below the cliffs of the town, and about a mile inland from the beach. It was, I suppose, close by the harbor which existed in the thirteenth century, but which became silted up. The camp consisted of a rented field in which were erected each summer about a dozen war-surplus bell tents for sleeping quarters and two ridge-topped tents for the kitchen and mess hall. Some two hundred yards away, on the road between Winchelsea and the sea, were several cottages clustered around an inn. Water needed at camp was drawn from the
inn well and carried over the fields in buckets. Each waterboy wore a yoke, from whose ends were suspended two buckets or water cans. When I stayed there I learned to float a square of wood on the surface of an open bucket to prevent the water from jiggling over the rim. In 1919 or 1920 Geoffrey Belcher (one of Kathleen’s younger brothers), Cecil, and two other boys walked to Winchelsea from London in two days, doing about thirty up and down miles each day. Cecil stayed at Flo’s camp almost every summer thereafter, as I did as long as I lived in England.

In any case, except for these trips, Cecil lived at 58 Underhill Road. His mother and his sister Marjorie lived there all the time. His sister Grace had been divorced from her Canadian husband and had returned home. She later married another Canadian, Anglin Johnson, who lived in Toronto. Somehow Grace and Cecil became estranged; perhaps Grace also grew to understand Cecil too well. When Cecil later moved to the United States in 1939, he never went to see Grace, writing that the prospect
Cecil Louis Troughton Smith
at Winchelsea Beach

130
was too painful for him to bear, while Grace never understood why. Cecil’s father returned to London from Egypt each summer until he retired about 1924, after which he lived there permanently. Cecil contributed neither effort nor money towards the support of the house until after his father had retired, when he started, according to an irregular schedule, to pay a portion of the rent or mortgage. He was entirely free for writing, except for earning sufficient money to replace his clothes and provide his own amusements.

He earned this money in irregular ways. In *Long Before Forty*² he writes of working as temporary help at the Olympia Exhibition Hall, and of escorting an older woman about town. He told me, when he hired Marjory Manus as housekeeper in 1947, that he had been the bridge professional at the bridge club she operated in the early twenties. Bridge had been a passion with Cecil since his medical-school days, or before. Geoff introduced bridge

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2. LBF Chap 16

131
to Egypt when he went there in 1913, and Cecil always said that Geoff was a marvellous instructor. “Your Uncle Geoff knew every game there ever was. Not only card games, but pencil and paper games and board games. He taught us all.” Probably, therefore, Cecil played bridge before 1913. The Belchers were also enthusiastic players and Cecil often played there. Cecil’s later letters often discuss the money he won or lost at bridge. Hornblower’s passion for whist (the contemporary predecessor of bridge) and the importance of his winnings or losings as a midshipman and lieutenant are another indication, but the unpublished story Playing Bridge Professionally\(^3\) is an almost conclusive indication that Cecil was indeed a bridge professional, even if only for a short while.

Cecil also managed to write and sell some literary work. He recounts that he was so unfamiliar with writing that he counted the number of words in novels to determine the length that was satisfactory.\(^4\)

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3. University of Texas library

132
This concern about putting enough words on paper, and finishing the book when he reached that number, bothered him for many years.

The actual events of his writing, however, were not as he tells it in *Long Before Forty*. There is, of course, the question of his name. He did not want to publish under the name of Cecil Louis Troughton Smith. His official excuse always was that Smith was too frequent a name to be noticeable on the spine of a book. That passed with the family, but I doubt that was the real reason. For years Cecil had been lying to outsiders about his family, inflating his nominal father’s profession and wartime rank while hiding his mother’s alcoholism. Because his looks were so different from those of the rest of the family, because the family broke up soon after he was born, and because his later actions showed an acute fear of bastardy, he might well have been concerned, proud or ashamed, as the case may be, that his real father was some grand upper-class Egyptian instead of that

4. LBF 119

133
teacher who could not control his drunken wife. Cecil wanted to escape being Cecil Louis Troughton Smith; therefore he took the opportunity that authorship offered of starting a new person. But what should his new name be? He had finished his first submitted book in a great hurry and needed a new name to go on the title page. He asked the young woman who had typed the manuscript, Gladys Roberts, if she could suggest a name. “Cecil, Cecil,” she replied, trying out the name. “I think that it should be Cecil Forester.” And so it became C. S. Forester. Mrs. Cecil Forrester appears as a satisfied client of Sherlock Holmes, whose recommendation caused Mary Morstan, who later married Doctor Watson, to consult Holmes about her mysterious pearls in *The Sign of Four*. Is it too much to think that some memory of the combination of Cecil with Forrester struck Miss Roberts’s mind when Cecil asked the question?

As I read *Long Before Forty*, Cecil wants to give the impression that he wrote four novels, parts of two more, and two biographies in the short space
C. S. Forester writing, drawing room, 58 Underhill Road
of time between leaving medical school in his third year and before his twenty-fourth birthday, achieving success with the fourth complete novel, *Payment Deferred*. The evidence for this assertion is contained in *Long Before Forty* Chapters 15 through 19. To really understand how Cecil puts this idea across requires reading almost every word in those chapters. A few selected quotations will not do it. Cecil was deliberately concealing most of the definite information, which after all was readily available to him both in written and in memory form, for *Long Before Forty* was written almost exactly six years after *Payment Deferred*.

The sequence of his work, as Cecil describes it in *Long Before Forty*, is as follows:
1. A never-published novel, written in two weeks immediately at the start of his writing career. This was full of schoolboys and medical students, material so familiar to Cecil.
2. *The Paid Piper*, written in six weeks starting a month or so (time for two rejections) after
the first novel was finished. I read it as a child but haven’t seen a copy since.

3. *A Pawn Among Kings*, started as soon as *The Paid Piper* was finished, and completed within six months of his start at writing. This novel concerns a fictional woman who kept turning up in Napoleon’s life, influencing events so that history turned out as it did, although we today give different reasons for these events. This sprang straight from Cecil’s early knowledge of Napoleonic history.

4. *Napoleon and His Court* was started while *A Pawn Among Kings* was being set in type. The editors of Methuen, the publishers who had accepted *A Pawn Among Kings*, discovered that for the first time in years they had no biography of Napoleon in print. Since Cecil apparently knew so much about the period, they asked him to produce one.
5. *Empress Josephine*, whose schedule Cecil does not give. This followed naturally from *Napoleon*.

6. A few chapters of an historical novel about Italy in 1848-9.

7. The greater part of a novel about a minx of a girl, Margaret, which Cecil says was not completed.

8. *Payment Deferred*, completed when Cecil was twenty-three years old.

   Cecil definitely emphasizes his age at the completion of *Payment Deferred*, and may be referring to the list of works which preceded it, by writing:

   “But the book as it stands is the very best I could have written at twenty-three and in the circumstances in which I found myself. I knew that the moment I had finished it. And I do not think that many people will contradict me when I say that it was a very remarkable achievement for a young man of twenty-three.”

To be finished when Cecil was 23, it would
have to have been finished between August 27, 1922 and the same date in 1923. It was actually finished in May, 1925, as will be told.

Whatever his income might have been, Cecil was still living at his parent’s home in dire financial straights in 1925, when he started writing to Kathleen. His financial crises reached such heights of personal misery that he even took a job as an advertising copywriter, which he was able to hold for four weeks in October, 1925.

This brings Cecil’s story back to Kathleen Belcher. Kathleen, her family also teachers, had trained to be a teacher of physical education. She had become engaged to A. G. West (one of the young men mentioned in Cecil’s first letter to her), but the engagement had ended tragically. West had contracted tuberculosis, had required a lengthy hospitalization, and had slowly died. During this time the group of young people scraped together enough

5. LBF p 166
money to pay for the little extras that meant so much to their friend during his gradually worsening illness. Geoff included this story in the first version of his autobiography, which he showed to me, but it is not in his second version. Because he was away in Borneo, Geoff heard this story at second hand. According to him, this was an ordeal which required a considerable amount of sacrifice and self-control from everybody, but provided a situation which brought out the best in Kathleen and perhaps fixed her youthful attitude for life. West had died in the summer of 1924, when Kathleen was twenty-one years old and had just completed her training.

Cecil, for his part, had become engaged to the girl mentioned in *Long Before Forty*, and who is known in Cecil’s letters to Kathleen as L, and who, when she later married, became Lillian Artesani. Cecil writes in *Long Before Forty* that he and Lillian had had an emotionally difficult romance. “With the very best of intentions and the utmost purity of

6. LBF p 158-9
motive and with complete angelic idealism we had been lacerating each other’s nerves for years on end. It is only young people, I think, who can hurt each other so. She would hurt me and I would hurt her with fastidious cruelty ... We acted and reacted upon each other in a manner fatal to any hope of happiness at that time.” I think that their relationship combined fascination with chagrin. Lillian understood Cecil, which he liked, but that meant she told him unpleasant truths about himself, which he hated.

In the summer of 1924, Cecil went down to Winchelsea to the Belcher’s camp as usual. Kathleen went down in August after West’s death. Of course, Cecil and Kathleen were old friends, and many other of their friends and relations surrounded them. But there was sufficient similarity in their situations to bring them together, and sufficient complementarity in their attitudes to cement their relationship. Both of them were at the unhappy end of love affairs that had attracted each of them since Cecil had last wooed Kathleen, and that in itself
gave them both much to talk about in different ways. Besides, Cecil was so in need of help, and Kathleen had been so used to giving help. As she saw it, he needed her strength and help to overcome the handicap of his situation and reach his full potential, motives which particularly appealed to her in the sense of self-sacrifice which hung over her after West’s death. In addition, his sexual need was acutely and interestingly obvious. Once her interest was aroused, the objections and cautions of others only increased in Kathleen’s eyes the unfair handicaps Cecil faced, and therefore his need for her help.

From his standpoint, Cecil saw an attractive petite girl who did not mind his idiosyncrasies, in fact rather encouraged them, who thought that he was not wasting his time dawdling at home, and who, perhaps, could provide him with a substitute attraction to Lillian.

In any case, whatever the emotions that brought them together, their relationship was signed and sealed by lovemaking in the summer afternoons in the shelter of the yellow gorse bushes below Cam-
ber Castle. For Cecil this certainly was not the first time, for Kathleen it was.

Upon their return to London, there remained the problem of what to do about Cecil’s relationship to Lillian. Cecil would not tell Lillian what had happened. “It will be far better for her,” he said solicitously, “if she gets tired of me rather than realizing I have left her.” So in the next few months, the fall of 1924, Cecil was calculatingly indifferent to Lillian, arriving late for dates, forgetting things of importance to her, and the like. Lillian apparently did not understand what he was doing, until the next spring. Lillian and Kathleen remained friends, though not confidants, for the ensuing sixteen years of Kathleen’s marriage to Cecil. After Lillian had married Donald Artesani, Cecil warned Kathleen that they should stay clear of the couple because Donald was both a jealous Latin (despite his name, he was as English as anybody) and somewhat mentally unstable. This was one of Cecil’s techniques for separating people who might know too much about him. I remember Lillian as one of my parents’ set,
an irregular visitor to our house. After Kathleen’s divorce and World War II, Lillian and Kathleen again became friends and confidants and discovered why they had not been confidants in the intervening period.

The new relationship between Cecil and Kathleen was not at first publicly admitted. The nominal reason was to avoid hurting Lillian, but another reason was that Cecil was thought to be unsuitable for Kathleen. However, when Kathleen accepted her first job, which was at a girl’s school in the country, her family at least knew that she and Cecil would be corresponding regularly, and on occasion asked Cecil to pass on messages from them. Kathleen would be teaching gymnastics at the Holloway College for the Higher Education of Women, near Acton Renald in the west of England.

Kathleen’s job started after the Christmas holidays in January, 1925. Cecil wrote to her every day, collecting the pages together and mailing them twice, later three times, each week. To start reading the letters after reading *Long Before Forty*, or as I did,
after a lifetime exposure to Cecil’s posing, is something of a shock. Could this collection of uncultured suburban slang be C. S. Forester? Here he is, at twenty-five, supposed to be the author of *Payment Deferred*, living penniless at his parents’ home, learning to type on a battered wreck of a typewriter, unable to afford the money to travel to see his best girl who works 90 miles away, struggling through writing the *Empress Josephine*. There is no hint of any social connection with a world outside the suburbs of Dulwich and Streatham, or with people outside the circle of his boyhood schoolfriends from Alleyn’s and Dulwich.

Yet these early letters are so typically Cecil, once you have arrived at an understanding of his personality. They contain the attitudes and interests that occupied him for life: the longing to “go on the river,” repressed by his poverty; the interest in marionettes; the ponderously detailed (sometimes to a ridiculous extent) plans for traveling the 90 miles to meet Kathleen in secret; the emphasis on money (or poverty — that coin has both head and tail); the
grandiloquent hopes, rushed at planlessly and confusedly; the ever-present interest in sex, expressed in terms of a schoolboy’s dirty joke; the fear that his real self and his attempts to conceal or allay suspicion might be discovered; the concern about the propriety of his work, and his continued fear that he somehow upset the proprieties of the suburban Dulwich which formed his world; the interests in bridge, tennis, and crossword puzzles (called word squares in those days). Such are the contents of the letters. There is not enough general interest in most of them to warrant publishing them all. In these early letters there is, in fact, nothing that concerns Cecil’s relationship to either the literary world or the world of public affairs, either as a participant or as an onlooker. Frankly, these early letters make tedious reading, describing a narrow circle of interests endlessly repeated. There is this excuse: the usual suburban life does not contain enough of interest to warrant several pages a day, and Cecil’s skill was not yet sufficiently developed to make interesting to the casual reader subject matter which does not have
that inherent interest.

Cecil had two places in which to write. The first was his upstairs bedroom at 58 Underhill Road, the second was on the downstairs living room table. The first tended to be cold, while at the second he was likely to be interrupted by his mother, often drunk. There is a photograph of him, posed as a writer, at the living room table, but probably most of his writing was done upstairs.

From these letters the following facts emerge. Cecil had apparently started *Josephine* the day after seeing Kathleen off on the train for Acton, just after New Years of 1925. Before 24 January, *Josephine* is one quarter done, and Cecil mentions that the next work after her will include “corpses buried in backgardens and suicides and seductions and lord knows what.” This, of course, will become *Payment Deferred*. By 24 January, Cecil has done more of *Josephine*,

7. Kitty tape, 10 Nov 1984
8. CSF-K, 2, 15 Jan 25
9. CSF-K, 5, before 24 Jan 25
and is worried about having enough material. “I am nearly up to page 100 now, and I have only to get to page 240. The only thing that worries me is the thought that perhaps I won’t be able to spin it out that long, and if that happens I don’t know what I will do.” In letter 8-1 Cecil reaches page 100, and is quite pleased with it so far. “I am growing more pleased with Josephine every day. I have done some really good work on the book. In fact, I am already looking forward to what the Times Lit. says about it. But it is very naughty in spots, and some of the politics are almost socialistic. My people won’t like it at all. Nevertheless, although I have quite enjoyed doing it, I am quite sure that I shall never write another serious book about the period. I know it off by heart, and it is beginning to bore me rather.”

He is still worried about the length and proposes to cure that in cavalier manner. In letter 12-2 he writes “Josephine has reached page 175, and now

10. CSF-K, 7, 23 January 1925
11. CSF-K, 8, 27 January 1925
I find that I am going to have some difficulty in spreading it out to the length guaranteed. I could finish her off in twenty pages now, but I must get to page 230 at least. That means I must go up to the British Museum next week and collect a few anecdotes. I doubt now I shall finish the book before next Tuesday week or so.” By letter 16, sometime in February, 1925, Josephine is complete, at least for the time being. “Josephine is finished. She came to an untimely end last Saturday, and she is a little bit shorter than I would have liked, but still, I think she is long enough for all practical purposes. I am quite pleased with her.”12 However, the day after writing that Cecil added some more. “I found this morning that there was lots of things I hadn’t said about Josephine that I wanted to say, and so I have been writing another chapter this morning. It is very convenient, as this addition just makes the book the right length, and now it is done for certain.”13 Cecil

12. CSF-K, 16, 16 February 1925
13. CSF-K, 16, 16 February 1925
had to select the illustrations, after which he could start on *Payment Deferred*. (Between the two, *The Paid Piper* was published and nicely reviewed, as Cecil noted in L 21-2.) His own copy of the manuscript of *Josephine* he lent first to the local subscription librarian, and then sent on to Kathleen, while the publisher’s copy he sent to his agent, Curtis Brown.

He was not quite ready to start *Payment Deferred*; he required some information from his brother Hugh, who worked in a bank.¹⁴ “I have not yet quite got the plot of the new book straight in my mind as yet, but I have very nearly, and I shall probably start it next Monday. But I want to talk about one or two of the details with Hugh first, as the hero (or villain) is a hardup bankclerk, and Hugh certainly ought to be able to give me a hint or two on how bankclerks become hardup. You see, I haven’t decided that yet. Later he is to make a lot of money, and I haven’t decided that yet, either. But I am very

¹⁴. CSF-K, 20, 26 February 1925
much in love with the general idea.”

*Payment Deferred* tells the story of a murderer who is hung for a death he did not commit but which was caused by his efforts to conceal the undetected murder that he had committed. William Marble is a feckless, married, somewhat alcoholic and debt-ridden bank clerk handling foreign exchange. He poisons a relative visiting from foreign parts for the cash to repay his debts and buries the body in his back garden. The crime produces sufficient money for Marble to trade in foreign currencies, using a bookmaker as accomplice to conceal the transactions, and Marble makes a lot of money. However, Marble cannot leave that house with the body buried in its muddy back yard. His wife, son and daughter spend money, largely without taste, producing a great contrast between house and lifestyles. Annie, his muddled wife, suspects something, but buys expensive, garish clothes, some from the local French dressmaker, Marguerite. His son, John, buys a powerful motorcycle that substitutes for a best friend. His daughter, Winnie, attends a board-
ing school and rises socially, as long as she conceals her family. Marble is seduced and blackmailed by Marguerite, who aims to leave her husband and return to France with plenty of Marble’s money. Marble is afraid of ever leaving the house, for fear that someone will disturb the back yard. While his family vacations at a resort hotel, Marble stays behind, partly from fear and partly for Marguerite’s company in bed. Son John returns unexpectedly on his motorcycle, inadvertently opening the door on their lovemaking. Horrified, he drives off too fast and is killed. Marguerite blackmails Marble and returns to France. Winnie feels above her family, quarrels bitterly with them and leaves home without giving a forwarding address. Annie goes from misery and suspicion to renewed love with Marble to discovery of a blackmailing and sexually obvious letter from Marguerite. She kills herself by using the same poison that Marble had used on his relative, and Marble is hung for her murder.

Cecil apparently started *Payment Deferred* a week or so after he completed *Josephine*, but aban-
doned it. By March 4, ’25, he writes of having to restart it.  

“...I haven’t restarted Payment Deferred yet. I think it is just as well from most points of view, but now time is getting a bit short. It must be finished by the end middle of May at the very latest. If I start it next week and work really hard at it and everything goes well I ought to have it two thirds finished by the time you come home. And then if I do a little while you are at home I ought to get the preliminary copy done by the end of April, and everything will be all right. But one never knows, especially with books.” Two letters later, about one week, Cecil writes that he had completed nine pages total, having been held up by a balky typewriter which he now believes he has correctly repaired.

In the next letter Cecil starts out by saying how well Payment Deferred is going and how long it will be. “Payment Deferred is going very well at present. I have reached page 40 already, but I don’t

15. CSF-K, 23, 4 March 1925
16. CSF-K, 25, 9 March 1925
know how long I shall be able to keep up this pace. I am frightfully pleased with what I have done so far, but it is going to be a horribly gloomy book. That isn’t really a disadvantage of course, but I think I shall find it depressing myself. I am trying to do ten pages a day at least, but I don’t think I shall be able to manage it. I have nearly come to the conclusion that eight pages a day is the absolute limit for any prolonged period. That means forty-eight pages a week. I can’t form any idea of how long the book is going to be yet. It must be over 220, or else I can’t sell it, but at times I have fears that it will stretch to over 300. I don’t like long books anyway, and if this really does last as long as that it means that it won’t be nearly finished by the time you come home. That will be rather a pity. There are only 21 working days before the happy time, dear, and at eight pages a day that means that I shall only have got up to about page 200 by then anyway. But I shall do my best.”

By the day after, Cecil was worried that Pay-

17. CSF-K, 26, 12 March 1925
ment Deferred would, on the contrary, be far too short. “I am rather worried about the new book. The idea is fine and I am very pleased with what I have done at present, but I think now that it is going to be appalling short. It may turn out longer, of course, but it if doesn’t I shall either have to pad it or else leave it short and then sweat up some short stories to put in along with it to make it book length. But I don’t like the plain volume of short stories, I much prefer the connected ones like the Paid Piper, but, of course, there is no chance of that in this case. Altogether I am a bundle of worries at present ... When I have got Payment Deferred finished I shall feel better. What is really the matter with me is that I have written three books in seven months — or at least that I am trying to.”

The first of these three was Margaret, “about a minx of a girl,” which was finally rejected in January or February, just as Josephine was being finished. These worries about the length of Payment Deferred

18. CSF-K, 26, 12 March 1925

155
came to a head, for Cecil wrote, “I have dropped work on *Payment Deferred* for a bit as there is a chunk of the plot that I haven’t worked out fully, and I am having to give my subconscious mind time to get it going properly.”¹⁹ Cecil regrets twice in the next letter (L28) that he had done no more work on *Payment Deferred*, says so again two letters later (L30-2), but is able to report “about 30 March, 1925” that “*Payment Deferred* has at least got a new move on. It is progressing slowly but surely now. I like it very much, but it is another question as to whether Methuen’s [Cecil’s current publisher] do. I am going to stick to a slow, solid, seven pages a day from now on ... And although a lot of what is said to be ‘inspiration’ is all tripe there is some truth in it.”²⁰ Cecil writes a bit about his frame of mind and his loneliness without Kathleen and his happy thoughts about seeing her again in the next week. “I am just like a kid going to the circus or something ... It isn’t

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19. CSF-K, 27, 16 March 1925  
20. CSF-K, 31, 30 March 1925
the best frame of mind in which to write the gloomiest book of the year, but I don’t think that matters very much, as it is well to be moderate in gloom. My hero has just begun to make his fortune — about twelve thousand pounds acquired in a single day. I should like to do that myself. It is done by perfectly possible means. So that isn’t a very gloomy chapter, anyway. It ought to be a pleasant break in the sequence of terrible things.”

This was approximately the third week in April. Kathleen had two weeks or so at home during the spring holidays, then returned to Acton. Cecil’s first letter to her after that holiday is dated 6 May, 1925, and in it “I am trying to rally myself together, and muster up all my energy for a last supreme assault upon Payment Deferred. If only I can once get fairly restarted upon it and make one big effort that ought to see the thing finished, and I shall be very relieved.”21 One letter later, he has reached page 160. By Wednesday, 13 May,22 he has reached

21. CSF-K, 37 6 May 1925

157
page 177, and by Sunday, 17 May, *Payment Deferred* is complete.

“This will only be a very hurried note and a short one, dear. For these three days I have had a most fearful urge to work at *Payment Deferred*, and I have been slaving at it like blazes. And I finished it just two minutes ago. I am awfully relieved about it, it is a great load off me. I am quite pleased with the work, it all fitted in so beautifully. Of course, the great question is whether there will be anyone brave enough to publish such a miserable story. But I can let Methuen’s have it tomorrow, and I will soon know about them.

“I am feeling just about dead with tiredness. The book went to 210 pages, all of them meaning the devil of a lot of thinking and worrying, and I am tired out.”

There is Cecil, sitting at the typewriter at the

22. CSF-K, 40 13 May 1925
23. CSF-K, 50 17 May 1925 There are no letters numbered 41-49; my mistake.
drawing-room table of his parents’ house at 58 Underhill Road, with the typewritten sheets stacked into leaning piles about it. He is tall for the period, almost six feet, lanky in build, with his shoulders rounded from much writing. He wears his hair just long enough for the curls to show, and across his beaky nose are his steel-rimmed eyeglasses. At the age of twenty-five, after six years of nominally full time writing experience, he has completed his first major work, the novel which for the first time would bring him a little fame and almost enough money to live while he continued to write. In Cecil’s own words, written to someone he certainly wished to please, but not written to prove a point, this little narrative contradicts much of what Cecil later wrote in *Long Before Forty* about the start of his writing career, his age when he achieved success, and the methodical habits of thought and composition he had developed by that time.
These early letters show some other sides to Cecil’s character and interests. In his first letter to Kathleen at Holloway, Cecil remarks that “that marionette book that I ordered [from the circulating library] when I was with you on Monday turns out to be a bit of a swindle. It is supposed to be a handbook on the making of marionettes, but it only has five chapters in it, and two of these are about the history of marionettes, which I knew already, two are marionette plays which I could have written better myself, and only about ten pages are devoted to how to work marionettes. But there are one or two little hints
which I might find useful.”¹ Obviously, Cecil already had a certain familiarity with marionettes, and wanted to acquire some practical knowledge about making them. This interest lay dormant at least until after 1929, but in the early thirties turned into the ‘Forester Marionettes,’ a hobby that demanded much time and enterprise from Cecil, Kathleen and others who assisted them.

In the next paragraph Cecil mentions the Thames. “I want to have my cake and eat it at the same time. I spent a bit of yesterday evening reading anathemas guide book, but that did not help at all — it only made matters worse. Six weeks to Stratford [Cecil and Kathleen were planning a weekend there], twelve till Easter, and nearly eight months until river-time.” They succeeded in getting on the River several time in the next three years, presaging the French and German trips in Annie Marble and the British canal trips when I was a baby in 1930.

There is one expression of a didactic attitude

¹. CSF-K, 2, 15 January 1925

161
there. Cecil tells Kathleen, “if I were you I should subscribe to a decent newspaper while you are away — the Daily News is about the best — and read it thoroughly. That will keep you from becoming too much out of the world while you are away from masculine society.”

Kathleen didn’t; she had too much to do already.

These letters are typewritten. Obviously these and *Josephine* are Cecil’s first attempts at typing. “Don’t you think that my typewriting is improving? Nowadays I hardly make any mistakes, and my speed is increasing every day. You don’t mind if I type my letters to you do you? It is very much easier for me, and I expect it is easier for you, too.”

“I don’t know whether there is such a thing as typewriter’s cramp, but if there is I am going to get it. I expect when you see me next I will have all my fingers spread out at the tips. Like mushrooms. Can you massage such things away?”

Surely, had Cecil

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2. CSF-K, 2, 15 January 1925
3. CSF-K, 2, 15 January 1925

162
paid more attention to the world in which many women, and men, typed all day long for a living without ill effects, he would not have attempted such a feeble joke.

His typewriter was not in the best of repair. “I am having lots of trouble with the typewriter just at present, as you can tell from the appearance of this, perhaps. Now that I have a firm grasp of its little eccentricities I am trying to break it of its evil habits. It is deadly work, but I have hopes of success in the end, if only I am firm. The ribbon reverse will only work when it thinks it will, with the result that when I come to the end of the ribbon it takes hours to persuade it to take up work again — unless I am weak and ease it round by hand all the time until it kindly consents to go round on its own. I am solving the problem gradually. At present I am working on a new theory. You will know if it is successful because if it is the writing will be equally clear all the way along. For this page it looks as if it is going to be.

4. CSF-K, 3, 16 January 1925

163
wonder. I know this little brute by now."\textsuperscript{5}

Cecil still did not own the tools of his trade. The typewriter was Geoff’s, having been brought back from Borneo, after unknown adventures, when Geoff returned in the fall of 1924. It seems quite probable that Geoff’s return, his loan of the typewriter, and Kathleen’s encouragement all had something to do with Cecil’s spurt of work at this time. One year later, Cecil had to return Geoff’s typewriter: “The one unpleasant feature of the weekend was that Geoff asked for this typewriter back — of course, he has got to have it if he wants it, but it means that I will have to get another, either by hire or by purchase. And money is very short now.”\textsuperscript{6}

These aren’t love letters in most part, but Cecil writes so obviously that he misses Kathleen and can hardly wait until he sees her again. The letters show that they are a young couple for the first time on intimate terms, enjoying talking about their own

\textsuperscript{5} CSF-K, 25, 9 March 1925
\textsuperscript{6} CSF-K, 134, 15 February 1926
intimate personal matters, that one is naturally sympa-
thetic. Yet Cecil’s stilted words hardly fit the occa-
sion. In January, 1925, he contemplates going down
to Winchelsea and recalls their summertime love-
making in the gorse bushes below Camber Castle. “I
should not be surprised if I were to run down to
Hastings in a few days just for a bit. It would be a
pleasant change from London now that London has
so few attractions. Have you any message for Cam-
ber Castle?”

He keeps track of Kathleen’s menstrual cycle,
anxiously calculating whether her “cousin” will be
with her when they next meet. “It is a little bit of a
pity that there is no news at present about your
cousin, as now it seems certain that she will inter-
fere with the end of term. Not that it really matters,
but it would be nice to have everything as straight as
possible, and be prepared for anything, so to speak.
Let me have news of her the next time you write,
please dear.” He also mentions the vital matter of

7. CSF-K, 3, 16 January 1925

165
condoms, their procurement and care. “Next week I am going to buy (not necessarily for use) a brand new gadget in honour of the occasion. But as I said, it is not necessarily for use.”

Later he reports, “Tomorrow I am going to purchase something useful, and some time I shall work it to be quite safe. It will need some wangling if mother is anywhere about. It would be a jar if I found at Birmingham that I had left it behind, wouldn’t it? But I won’t. And remember what I told you about my not being disappointed if you are not inclined to use it.”

Too stilted and awkward, consciously inhibited for words between lovers, is the impression of these words. Perhaps indeed, in terms of Cecil’s and Kathleen’s milieu, they are not out of the ordinary, but of that there is little evidence. Kathleen’s letters, such few as have survived, are decidedly different — much more romantic in con-

8. CSF-K, 25, 9 March 1925
9. CSF-K, 10, 1 February 1925
10. CSF-K, 16, 16 February 1925
cept but plain-spoken in the words she chose.

There is a deeper, darker material also in Cecil’s early letters. He was naturally worried about money. His needs were small, but his resources were smaller, and sometime in the future his family would require him to pay his debts to them. Yet Cecil could not bring himself to the self-realization that his financial affairs were in a mess and that he was actually dependent upon others. Geoff had returned from Borneo with sufficient money (£5,000 he wrote) to buy into an established medical practice, and was looking around for a good location. In his second letter of 1925 to Kathleen, Cecil writes, “I believe Geoff has decided definitely on Southend. That will take all his money, which is rather a rash act, and may react on me rather badly if he expects much from me.”\(^{11}\) Cecil writes as if he would be helping Geoff out, rather than returning the money that Geoff had lent him before. A month later\(^ {12}\)

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11. CSF-K, 3, 16 January 1925
12. CSF-K, 9, 29 January 1925
Cecil played bridge with Mr. and Mrs. Belcher [George and Flo], Geoffrey Belcher, and Ken. “I joined in and lost three and sixpence – most of that through a redouble which did not quite come off. Geoff was my partner at the time. He did not like it. George is most deadly broke. He could only pay his debts by passing on a debt of Trim’s. It seems likely that Trim is broke too, as he was not able to pay his debt last Sunday. What a gang! They ought to be ashamed of themselves. I am never hard up, and I don’t see why they should be.” Here is Cecil, living on the charity of his parents, complaining that those who have to support themselves run short of money. But two letters later he complains that he will also run short of money, and implicitly relies on Kathleen’s charity, without seeing the irony of the situation. “I shall only start being broke about the time of your return from Shrewsbury. That will be very convenient, seeing that that will be your payday.”

13. CSF-K, 11, 4 February 1925
hard up when the end of term comes.”\textsuperscript{14} Methuen’s relieved the situation somewhat with an advance payment against Josephine’s sales. Cecil writes of this in two ways,\textsuperscript{15} “Yesterday I heard from Methuen’s that they liked Josephine very much indeed, and I went up to see them. They were very cordial ... I sounded Rieu about an advance, and he promised it to me if he could get it past Lucas. I think it will be all right, I hope so, anyway. I shall probably know before I send off this letter to you.” He did find out, for he continues two pages and one day later: “Everything has gone well at present. Methuen’s let me have that money without any difficulties. I went up there this morning, and had a long conversation about Josephine, and then they handed over a fistful of notes, which I proceeded to spend. I have bought — and paid for — a new suit which will be ready for the end of term, and I shall also have enough to make that occasion a comfortable one. We shall not

\textsuperscript{14} CSF-K, 17, 18 February 1925
\textsuperscript{15} CSF-K, 28, 19 March 1925

169
be short of cash now all the time you are home, I hope.” Apparently forgetting this description of the professional and cordial atmosphere of Methuen’s when he received his money, Cecil continues on the next page: “This morning I had a long lecture from one of the directors of Methuen’s on the subject of bank accounts and financial stability and all that sort of thing. I pointed out to him that if they would give me some more money my position would be more stable; he didn’t like that argument, but we parted the best of friends.” Cecil, of course, as he admits in another letter later, was playing his role of the young man of well-to-do middle-class parents who happens to be writing successfully, just the act that he wrote up in *Long Before Forty*. He could not bring himself to admit to his publisher that his only income was the very small sums his books had earned. Rieu or Lucas may well have guessed, but they certainly wouldn’t say so as long as Cecil told them otherwise. The other side of the play-acting is Cecil’s story, written and told after he had achieved success, that he left this well-to-do home and the
advantages of family influence to go out on his own; endured poverty, cold, and hunger, but succeeded before starvation came upon him. All his stories about writing in public libraries and being ejected therefrom are fabrications. He lived with his parents at their home, 58 Underhill Road, Dulwich, where he wrote on their drawing-room table (a room and table I know well — for upon it I played my first games of dominoes and chess). Until Cecil persuaded Kathleen to take over, his mother fed him, made his bed, washed his linen and ironed his shirts. Cecil was so helpless that he wrote to Kathleen that he couldn’t plan on being with her for more than three days at a time because his shirts would be getting dirty and he had to get home to get them washed.¹⁶

Just the same, Cecil couldn’t bear living at home. Geoff, of course, has described this as being pretty awful, a place where the younger generation avoided bringing their friends. However, both Cecil

¹⁶. CSF-K, Letter?
and Marjorie still lived there, Marjorie almost an old maid by contemporary standards, and working as a teacher. Without the modern apartment, life for a single person alone was much more difficult than now, but single people had the option of living in rooming houses. Marjorie, at least, evidently chose not to. Cecil did not, preferring writing and home to working and rooms, even though he strongly disliked his living conditions. The day that Josephine was ready to be taken to Methuen’s, he writes:17 “There is one thing that I have been thinking seriously about, regarding myself. You know what conditions are like in this house, and I am getting very tired of them. I have nearly made up my mind to get a journalistic job and clear out. I really can’t afford to go unless I have a job. The point is that I should have to start in the provinces almost for certain. That would interfere with us pretty considerably, and it is that which puts me off. But it would only be for a year, I should hope, as after that I ought either

17. CSF-K, 19, 23 February 1925
to get a job in town or else be able to afford to do without one. But I really think something must be done. I have asked Curtis Brown to look out for something like that for me, and I shall tackle Methuen’s seriously on the subject as well next week.

“But I am afraid it will have to be the provinces. It would be nice in termtime if it were Shrewsbury or Wolverhampton, but it would muck next summer up pretty hopelessly. What do you say? I will do just what you like, if you care to decide, and I can, of course, put up with life at home if necessary. Away from home I might save a bit more.” Whatever she understood from that tangle, particularly the final sentence, Kathleen evidently approved of her boyfriend getting himself a job, for he replies to her two letters later. “I am glad about what you say about the job. I have applied for one this morning in consequence. I won’t have to start quite at the bottom, old thing, because as a novelist I am a fairly well known person, you know, and I have as well the experience I got on the TBR last year. If anything,
that makes it a little harder to get a job, but means a better one in the end. But there are a fair number going, and something ought to turn up sooner or later. What I meant about saving money is that I ought to live on what I earn in that way, and should consequently save my book money. Things are going to be a bit tight for this year, but after that if they aren’t all right they never will be. And I am quite sure they will.”

This little charade goes on periodically throughout the letters, reaching a crescendo in the absurd schemes of 1927. For the moment, the early 1925 scheme of getting a job fades away. Four letters later, Cecil reports: “So far I have applied for three jobs, and none of them have materialized. I think I shall put in an advertisement on my own.” One week later Cecil writes: “Not one of the jobs I was after has materialized. Curtis Brown thinks that I am soon to get one, though. I am going to put off

18. CSF-K, 21, 27 February 1925
19. CSF-K, 25, 9 March 1925
advertising until after Easter now, as I shall have something much better to do than just running after money.” In May, after *Payment Deferred* was finished, he writes again: “Jobs, for instance. I shall probably advertise on my own next week. It will satisfy my conscience if it does nothing else.”20 One wonders which employer would hire a man who places a ‘position wanted’ ad merely to salve his conscience. Cecil’s final lines on this scheme are, “Next week I am advertising for a job. I really am, without any more shinoniking. I don’t think I shall get one, but if I do it will be all right, and if I don’t I will at least be satisfied. And if I get one I will be able to afford an engagement ring. That will be an advantage, won’t it?”21

Of even greater concern to Cecil, judging by his tone and the amount of space he devotes to it, was his fear of being found out. What was he doing that warranted suspicion? Well, on the infrequent

20. CSF-K, 51, 18 May 1925
21. CSF-K, 57, 30 May 1925
occasions when they could meet, Cecil was having sex with his best girl. This isn’t something one normally publicizes, but to prevent anyone from knowing one doesn’t warp one’s personal relationship into a counterespionage pose. There were also the affairs of Lillian and of Phyllis Callaghan, and perhaps Miss Beale and a few others as well, that had to be kept quiet, and this was of greater importance to Cecil.

Fears of discovery are already afflicting Cecil when he starts writing the letters. Presumably, therefore, they were not started by the act of putting words on paper, but that act brought to the fore the caution that Cecil naturally practiced, and in addition, required him to initiate Kathleen into the arts of secrecy. In his second letter to her at Acton, Cecil writes of his first precautionary measure: “I am going to type the address on this envelope, and I will write and type them alternately, just in case there is anyone at the school interested in your cor-

22. CSF-K, 3, 16 January 1925
respondence.” He goes on later: “By the way dear, I am not very keen on the remark you make about Miss Town having noticed the length of the letters you receive. I am sorry to say so, but you must understand that if by any accident one of these letters were to fall into the wrong hands it might easily mean the sack for you, and you must keep the tightest hold on all your correspondence. There are lots of people in the world who aren’t half as nice as you are in the matter of other people’s letters, so watch out. If I were you, honestly, I would destroy them. It is a hateful subject but it must be mentioned ... And that reminds me. When you come away on Feb. 22, don’t say much about what you propose doing with yourself. Schoolteachers are the most gossipy old things in the world, and they always enjoy gossiping about the young members of the staff, so that if you can mislead them at all it would be a good thing. The most important Commandment of all is “Thou shalt not be found out.”

23. CSF-K, 7, 23 January 1925
been discovered by a schoolmistress as the writer of a letter to one of her schoolgirls, which ended in a scandal for Cecil and in the girl’s leaving the school. Evidently he considered that schoolmistresses pried into each other’s letters as well as the classroom notes they intercepted. Kathleen had more sense — she kept her letters because she loved him, and because she kept all her letters from everyone. Still, Cecil may have been right. At least one crisis in his later life was caused by Kathleen discovering fragments of letters Cecil had, in a hurry, inadequately destroyed.

Perhaps, also, Cecil would consider his letters, which he wished destroyed, to be “in the wrong hands” as they lie upon my desk. Cecil performed his responsibility as he saw it, and destroyed the letters he received. “I have just had a grand bonfire. All my pockets were stuffed with the letters I have received — mainly from you — this term, and I spent an hour reading them all over again before I burnt

24. CSF-K, 7, 23 January 1925
the whole lot. You know, this house is no place to keep letters except under your own eye, and I couldn’t have got another one into my pockets however much I tried. So I burnt them, and as I sat by the bonfire I couldn’t help thinking about how I had waited and waited to receive those same letters, and how they had brought me such a lot of peace when they did come. I am really quite miserable now just because of thinking about them like that.”

Two weeks later, on the 25th of June, he writes again: “And I have been feeling very much in love with you, dear. I had a grand read of all your letters (recent ones) before my periodical bonfire, and I felt distinctly sentimental after it.”

Not only was Cecil suspicious of his parents or sister reading his mail, but he suspected them of other dark designs. He had a spell of diarrhea, intestinal flu or something like that, and writes, “My tummy has been very upset just lately — or else my

25. CSF-K, 61, 9 June 1925
26. CSF-K, 69, 25 June 1925

179
people have been dosing me without my knowledge — and I have been most uncomfortable. It is only by a miracle on several occasions lately that haven’t spoilt my pants.” 27 Of course, a predilection for chamber pots, bowel movements, constipation and the like is typical of the period (even Geoff, despite being a medical man, had it quite strongly), but I don’t read that interjection as either a sign of that or an attempt at humor. It just appears as unwarranted suspicion.

Cecil had other reasons for desiring secrecy. For one thing, Lillian still did not know that Cecil’s relationship with Kathleen had been the cause of Cecil’s dropping her. In March Cecil writes to Kathleen: 28 “Marjorie has met L. several times lately, and she says (she doesn’t say it with a purpose, I am sure) that she is looking fine and well and is getting fat, and without doubt there is a man somewhere in the offing. So, that’s all right, anyway. But for all that I

27. CSF-K, 8, 27 January 1925
28. CSF-K, 20, 26 February 1925

180
am glad I have never seen her since last year. I don’t think I shall mind so much now if I should happen to do so, but even now I think I would rather put it off. I have an idea that Peter [A girl’s nickname; she later married Kathleen’s brother Geoff] knows more about that business than she ought, but she doesn’t think it is very discreditable to me, apparently, thank heaven. But the last thing I want is for it to be generally known.” The meeting occurred, nevertheless. “I have a little bit of news for you today. It has happened at last, what I have been waiting for for ten months. It would happen just as soon as you had gone and I haven’t got your moral support. But still, it went off all right. Of course, you know what it was. I met L. yesterday — in fact, I met her twice. The first time was when I was going down to the library in the evening. She was with another girl, and I think my appearance took her by surprise, for she just looked at me and didn’t do anything. But when I was coming back I met her again and she was alone. This time she grinned at me and said, “You’re quite a stranger.” That was all. She wasn’t a bit
embarrassed. But she wasn’t looking very well. I didn’t stop and talk, although I think I could have done. But let’s hope that it will be another ten months before it happens again.”

Not only was there Lillian, but Phyllis Callaghan was still in love with him, though to Kathleen he called her ‘Miss Callaghan.’ Cecil was also very friendly with Dorothy Beale, whom he also called ‘Miss Beale’ to Kathleen, and whom he often visited to have tea and discuss books. The two women also knew each other.

In early March, 1925, Miss Beale telephoned Cecil about Miss Callaghan, and Cecil became quite nervous lest the information and accusations reach Kathleen before his explanation. He sat right down and typed a two-page letter and mailed it the same day — a most unusual thing for him to do. He was so upset that he didn’t even make a salutation. The opening five lines concern another worry, the rest

29. CSF-K, 38, 8 May 1925
30. CSF-K, 26, 12 March 1925
concern Miss Callaghan.

“58 Underhill Road,  
E. Dulwich,  
S.E. 22.  
6.3.25

“Friday.

“If you haven’t already acknowledged the letter I posted you yesterday, would you mind doing so at once, dear? You see, as a treat I let little Geoffrey [Geoffrey Hobbs, the son of his sister Grace, visiting from Canada] go out to the post with it, and since then we have found that he may not have posted it after all. There was a fair amount in it that I wouldn’t like anyone else to see, and I am a bit anxious. [Geoffrey did post it, Kathleen received it, and it is quite innocuous, except for a spiteful two lines about the boyfriend of Ella Renard who thinks he can write.]
“I have got a little bit of unpleasant news for you, dear. Yesterday Miss Beale rang up and asked me to see her, and she told me that Miss Callaghan is rather worse than better, and that the main cause of the trouble is me. I know you believe me when I say that it is not in the least my fault, but it is a little bit awkward. I told Miss Beale that I wasn’t going to do anything about it at all, and that I couldn’t — she knows all about you and me, although Miss Callaghan doesn’t. All that she knows is that there is nothing now between L. and me. I am not going to do anything in the matter. I simply can’t, but there may be some talk, as I gather that Miss Callaghan has been a bit unguarded about the way she has spoken about me. The old man hates me, it seems, anyway (it began when he thought that there was a chance that I might marry her) and even when he finds that I certainly am not he will probably hate me worse than ever. So as I say, there may be some talk, which I hate, but you won’t let it worry, will you dear? I have thought it best to let you know all this, as I [here he starts a fresh page] You won’t let it
spoil things for us, but at the same time I am a little bit frightened. We ought to be engaged next summer (I am sure we will) and then of course all this trouble will stop. I have given Miss Beale a free hand to tell Miss Callaghan what she likes. She has got some sense, and will do the right thing, I am sure. [Kathleen thinks that Cecil had good reason to believe that Miss Beale would see things his way and do her best to avoid greater developments.] You see, the trouble at present is that with nothing to go on Miss Callaghan is worrying more than is good for her, and yet Miss Beale thinks that it would be bad for her to know everything all at once. But whatever happens I am not going to let anything interfere with us, dear. If you will only tell me that everything is all right, I shall be happy again. People can only talk, and although I hate the thought of that they won’t talk to my face, nor to yours if I have anything to do with it. I simply can’t do anything else. You and I have gone through too much lately to let anything else come between us. Write to me as soon as you can, dear, and tell me that it is all right.
“I can’t write any more just at present. I am too worried about this business.

[Signed] Cecil”\(^{31}\)

(Note: Material in square brackets added, material in parentheses original.)

By Monday Cecil was grateful for Kathleen’s reply. “I am very glad to hear from you this morning, that it was all right about things. I really wasn’t afraid that you might be upset about it all; what was worrying me was the prospect of all the talk that may happen. I don’t mind being talked about myself, but somehow the idea of your being talked about drives me absolutely balmy. But you won’t know much about it, I expect, unless some interfering person tells you about it, and now you are prepared for it as well. But I am very glad that the business is settled as far as we are concerned.”\(^{32}\)

31. CSF-K, L 24, 6 March 1925
It is strange that Cecil should attempt the ploy of pretending that his only concern is lest Kathleen’s sensibilities be upset. Kathleen didn’t then, and didn’t to the end of her life, care about satisfying the common proprieties. Had she cared, as did Dorothy Foster [Cecil’s second wife], she wouldn’t have cared for Cecil when he was a struggling young author in such unpleasant circumstances.

The picture that emerges from these letters of the first five months of Cecil’s correspondence with Kathleen continues for two years, through the summer term of 1927, when Kathleen left Acton Renald and returned to London. The action occurs against the same backdrop of the local tennis club, suburban bridge, and the Smith-Belcher circle of friends, but the characters drift on and off without continuity. In the spring and summer of 1925, Cecil writes about Misses Beale and Callaghan. For two weeks at the end of the year the ballet dancer Pally Summers returns to his letters. For another two months it is

32. CSF-K, 25, 9 March 1925
Dorothy Foster. Then in 1926 it is Mary Lawson. The period is also enlivened by Cecil’s poverty, which drives him into the peculiar story of the job at Imperial Advertising Agency and its aftermath, the advertising space gamble, and ends with the almost incredible game of social success for money.

I will tell these stories, and they are more intrinsically interesting (except perhaps to literary historians) than the events you have just read about. I have two reasons for quoting these passages from Cecil’s early letters and for describing his life in 1925. Because he publicly wrote about this period in other terms, it seemed that his own words were the only satisfactory means of clarifying the truth. Because his later letters become much more polished, much more the work of a professional writer, the early letters best serve to elicit his real character, which continued unchanged over the years while his writing, both in his work and about himself, developed greatly. His character did not change; he merely became more competent at concealing it.
Completion of *Payment Deferred* did not bring fame or fortune in itself. Books require publication and recognition, neither events that merely occur of themselves, and in *Payment Deferred*’s case these events were fraught with additional difficulties. Submitting *Payment Deferred* required a corrected typescript. “There is still a fair amount to do on *Payment Deferred*. It has to be punched and bound and corrected — all the jobs that I hate worst. I have done the punching and a bit of the binding, but I have left the corrections until tomorrow, when perhaps I shall be feeling a bit clearer in the head.

“John [Belcher, Kathleen’s brother] is coming up this evening to help me in the final revision of *Payment Deferred*; it is a two man job, one calling over and the other comparing the other copy. And it will all be settled tonight. There will be no more need to worry about it at all, and no more creative work to be done for weeks. I am most frightfully thankful about it; I am quite sure now that I have been on the edge of overwork for the last several months.”33
“Last night John and I had a redhot evening, putting the final touches to the book. It took the devil of a long time, but we got it all out satisfactorily. The more I have read it recently the better pleased I am with it. Supposing it should be a best seller!”

Now it was finished, Cecil had to try it on his lady friends. “Marjorie [presumably Smith, Cecil’s sister] has read the book now. She could not guess the end until she was half-way through the last chapter, so that is something. She has quite a good opinion of it. And reading it through for corrections, I was surprised at how easily I had got over all the difficulties. I think I am past my apprenticeship now, and tell a story as it ought to be told. It is the first time I have thought that regarding fiction. Always before I have been in doubt about the actual technique. Then I am going to send a copy to Olive Matthews. She does not know anything at all about the

33. CSF-K, 51, 18 May 1925
34. CSF-K, 52, 20 May 1925
plot, and I want most frightfully to try it upon some-
one who will find it a surprise. And her judgement
is fairly good, too.”\(^{35}\) Somebody else had read the
typescript. “Miss Youngman at Boot’s [circulating
library] thinks it ought to be [a best seller].”\(^{36}\)

In this spirit of optimism Cecil took *Payment
Deferred* to Methuen’s. “I am really satisfied with the
book — I can’t help going on writing about it — and I
shall be very interested to see what Lucas and Co.
think of it. As it will put me out of bondage to them
they will have an additional reason to be interested
in it. I am comfortably in time for Autumn publica-
tion, anyway, and they are awaiting the book expec-
tantly, so they tell me on the phone.”\(^{37}\)

Besides carrying *Payment Deferred* and his opti-
mism to Methuen’s, Cecil bore a healthy resent-
ment. “I haven’t had my bally money yet. Methuen’s
are running it close. Monday is the last day on which

\(^{35}\) CSF-K, 51, 18 May 1925
\(^{36}\) CSF-K, 52, 20 May 1925
\(^{37}\) CSF-K, 51, 18 May 1925

191
they can make payment. If I don’t get it then I can make a serious row about it. As it is, they are running rather a risk in case there is a mistake or anything. And I am simply bursting with curiosity to see how much it is ... I have decided that if my money is very much less than I want I shall try to give up smoking. It means about five bob [five shillings] a week saved if I do — enough to pay in six months for a trip to Shrewsbury [to see Kathleen] and even one to Winchelsea as well. But I don’t know yet whether I can, and I’m not going to try until I jolly find I have to.”

In the next letter Cecil had to explain that he didn’t really mean to state his choice between seeing Kathleen and continuing smoking.

“But what a cat you are, dear, to talk about whether I should like to see you. You know there is nothing I want more. I only wrote that about the chance of my being hard up just in case there might be trouble, so that you would not be too disappointed. For there is the chance, dear, there is no getting away from it.

38. CSF-K, 50, 17 May 1925
But I shall know by tomorrow morning, or else there will be somewhat of a row, in Essex Street on Wednesday, as I shall be up there to take in Payment Deferred.”\(^{39}\)

That row may have occurred. “Methuen’s have torn it this time, in not sending me my money. They are on the wrong side of the law for once, and I am going to raise Cain there tomorrow. It is a blinking nuisance, because I can’t be sure how I stand until I hear ... Anyway, it is the principle of the thing that matters most, if I had a family dependent on me this delay might be really serious. So, as I said, there is going to be a row. I can’t imagine a respectable firm doing such a thing, it is not as if it was a payment that they can wriggle out of, or one which they are making compassionately.”\(^{40}\)

Whatever the cause, Methuen rejected \textit{Payment Deferred}. Their words “though struck with the ability of the work, they think it is distinctly too morbid to

\(^{39}\) CSF-K, 51, 18 May 1925
\(^{40}\) CSF-K, 51, 18 May 1925

193
have a popular appeal”⁴¹ might well have been in part influenced by Cecil’s attitude toward them. A morbid book by a normally happy author may be acceptable as a one-shot event, but a morbid book by an author whose personality is also morbid might quite easily be interpreted as too morbid and the harbinger of more to come.

Kathleen, perhaps more than Cecil, had been counting on *Payment Deferred* to further their marriage plans. These had to be given up and an attempt made to find a willing publisher. Cecil discharged Curtis Brown as his agent and engaged another. Over the summer *Payment Deferred* was considered and rejected by Collins, Heineman, and Jonathan Cape.⁴² *Margaret* was also making the rounds, and was rejected by Grant Richards.⁴³

Cecil did give up smoking, and was sleepless

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⁴¹. CSF-K, 59, 4 June 1925
⁴². CSF-K, 60, 7 June 1925; 69, 25 June 1925; 74, 9 July 1925
⁴³. CSF-K, 61, 9 June 1925

194
and miserable in consequence. He played a lot of tennis and bridge, attended a few dances and in a month had three different novel plots started in his mind. “My uncontrollable mind has already set out devising a plot for my next book. I have a hankering toward writing a historical novel about the Peninsula War, but I don’t think I shall do it. Historical novels don’t pay very well, and they mean a devil of a lot of work, and it is always difficult to adapt the plot to the events. The point is that if I write a historical novel I make a safe but small sum; there is no chance whatever of making a lot; other kinds of novels make just as much anyway and may bring in a big success. But it is three months before I need worry at all about it, and what with halfterm and Winchelsea and going on the river and tennis tournaments and so on I won’t have much chance of worrying about it after this month.”44 Written just before Methuen rejected Payment Deferred, the prediction of this letter, by the irony of fate, was contra-

44. CSF-K, 52, 20 May 1925
dicted by events in all particulars except that Cecil would write about the Peninsula War, some eight years later. “Today I am feeling very restless and irritable. I know what that means. It means that I have got a plot hidden somewhere within me, and it is beginning to nag at me. I haven’t the least idea as yet what it is, but there is one there. For about a fortnight now I shall be simply terrible to live with, until I have got the thing worked out to some extent. Then I suppose as usual I shall put if off as long as I can, until at last the impulse gets too much for me, and I shall start the wretched thing and I shall then be miserable until I have finished it.

“But I am sure of one thing. It isn’t the plot that I have been dallying with for some time now. That is the plot that I do not know whether I want to write or not. You see, dear, I have had an idea for some time now about a novel about a man who is in love with a woman who at some time past has loved another man, and the hero is jealous of the past. You understand? [This, of course, was the situation between A. G. West, Kathleen, and Cecil.] I don’t
want to write that especially, and before I started, if ever I did, I would ask you if I ought to. You had better let this be a warning to you. There is nothing sacred to a man who writes. He would find copy in his mother’s funeral. J. M. Barrie actually did. And I, as you see, am actually tempted to write about things which are my most carefully treasured secrets.”45

*Payment Deferred* brought another chance to its author. “This morning I had a letter from the publishing firm of Jonathan Cape. They returned *Payment Deferred*, curse them, saying that it was a jolly good book but they would lose money if they were to publish it, but they asked me to go and see them. I went along; in fact I have just got back. They asked me if I would care to write a detective story for them. I said that I didn’t like detective stories. They said that they were thinking that a really good detective story or mystery story was a goldmine, and they were thinking of starting a series. I was the first one

45. CSF-K, 68, 22 June 1925
they had suggested it to, and they were doing this because they were so struck with *Payment Deferred*. They are a good firm, and I would rather like to be published by them. I said in the end that I would see what I would do, and that I would swot up a plot and let them have a synopsis in the course of the next few days. I am not frightfully in love with the scheme, but there are certain advantages about it. It is as well to get friendly with publishers always, and there is a certainty about a commissioned book which appeals to me nowadays. The firm itself are quite decent, and are not particularly inclined to swindle young authors — no more than most honest firms are. I shall do it if I can get up a plot during the next few days. I suspect I shall, although at the moment I haven’t the slightest ghost of one of the sort they want. So that’s that. And a good advance on acceptance would clear away some of the money troubles.”

“I have been pondering over Jonathan Cape’s

46. CSF-K, 74, 10 July 1925

198
offer, and the more I think about it the more I like it. Of course, the first thing to do is to think of a plot — a mystery story without a plot wouldn’t be much good, would it? — and I haven’t got that far yet.”

One week later Cecil sent the synopses of two plots, neither of them a detective plot, to Jonathan Cape. The end of these is uncertain. Cecil worked on a later plot for Jonathan Cape also, but nothing was ever published by Cape. One of these plots may have been the forerunner of *Plain Murder*, published in 1930.

These last letters were written from St. Leonards where Cecil was staying at Olive Matthews’s house. Olive was a middle-aged lady of moderate means who had somehow drifted into the Belcher-Smith circle. She had taken an interest in Cecil’s work and encouraged him, and had invited him down to her home at St. Leonards, a seaside resort about ten miles from Winchelsea, for the start of the summer. Cecil played tennis, which he liked,

47. CSF-K, 75, 11 July 1925

199
went to church, which he didn’t, and went on picnics, with mixed emotions. He was almost, but not quite, allowed to play the role of visiting novelist. “The bedroom that I have is a double one, with double washstands (and double other things, too) and all the time that I am in the double bed I think and think how splendid it would be if you were there to share the room with me. I can visualize it perfectly, and it makes me simply ache for you. I wonder if, in time to come, we shall ever be invited to stay together here. If so, we shall have that room for sure. But I don’t think that Olive will ever own to that. She knows about you, of course, and she is able to bear that so long as she nevertheless is able to command all my time (except for the periods when I am writing to you) but I don’t think that she would stand having to take a second place in my attentions. I don’t mean by that that I don’t think we shall be able to come here for the day or something this summer. That is quite all right, and I shall arrange it before I leave.

“On Friday afternoon Olive took me off on a
picnic, just us two, and off we went down the Crow-hurst road until we found an unfrequented bit of common, and we sat down and talked for hours about books (my books, mainly, of course) and had tea, and made polite excuses for separating for a few seconds when the time came (at least we made no excuses, we just drifted apart without a word spoken: we would never dream of mentioning such things to each other) and gabbled and gabbled until I could have screamed. There we were, on a lovely gorsey hill, without a soul in sight. It was absurd that it should have been her that was with me. One of these days we will go there on our own, you and I, and we will make an offering to the gods of these places to make up for it. A week there may do me good, but I am sure that a month would drive me absolutely balmy. And Olive always thinks of me as an author and talks about inspiration and that sort of thing. There is no such thing as inspiration, but if I tell her so she is either hurt or thinks (and says) that I am being modest. It is maddening either way.”
Cecil here denies what he has described in himself just a few months before: the stories just boiling up within him and struggling to get out. It may be that he who is inspired does not recognize the process, while those whose minds do not work in that way have to label as inspiration that which they do not understand.

Kathleen’s return from Acton Renald for the summer holidays broke up the sequence of letters, except for a few while she was at Winchelsea and Cecil was back in London for a while. Cecil started work on a new novel, but it was difficult going. “The new novel is not making all the progress I hoped. I only have ten pages out of the forty I must do. It comes very slowly and with a lot of effort.”

48. CSF-K, 78, 19 July 1925
49. CSF-K, 80, 10 August 1925

202
to be witty all the way through, and that takes a lot of time, as I have to keep stopping and thinking out smart things to say. The hero is a young novelist with a very long tongue, and it is a strain having to work out all the things he says.”

Although Cecil submitted this work to Jonathan Cape, who “liked those thirty pages enormously,” this road came to a dead end, partly because Cecil was offered (through Curtis Brown, his agent for his first books) the job of editing the memoirs of an old Greek gentleman who lived near Dulwich. In the same letter that he mentions the forty pages to be done, Cecil writes, “On Saturday I had a note from Curtis Brown’s offering me some more work. They want me to get some old duffer’s memoirs ready for publication. Don’t tell them this at camp, as it is more or less confidential. Tomorrow I shall go up and find out more about it; at present I now no more than that, and that they are nearly written. I shall take on the work if they offer me enough for doing it, and if it doesn’t call for

50. CSF-K, 81, 11 August 1925
too much hard labour.”

“I have just got back from Curtis Brown’s, and I have had a lot of satisfaction. The old boy who wants his memoirs put into shape is a Greek, nearly ninety, and a millionaire, who, curiously enough, lives at Forest Hill. Apparently his memoirs are full of good stuff, and ought to sell well, but I am not going to touch the business on a royalty basis. I want to get a good fat cheque out of him when I have done the work — or before, if possible. I am going to see him tomorrow. It means that I shall have to bring his jolly old book down to Winchelsea and that I shall have to read it there, but that won’t interfere much with anything else we have to do. From what I could gather he is just the man to swindle, and that Curtis Brown’s are quite willing to do so if they get the chance. I shall have my bit, too. My part of the business will be merely doing my work as well as I can and drawing my cheque for it. I shall have nothing to do with the arrangement for publishing,

51. CSF-K, 80, 10 August 1925
and I wouldn’t if I could, but I can’t help him much, as far as I can see, although I should like to. What will happen is that he won’t get anything out of his book at all. After paying my fee and (especially) Curtis Brown’s. But any other agent would do the same. You see, he has no future before him in the matter of books. This will be his only one, and they will be out to rob him every time. Fortunately, it won’t matter to him, as he is really rich. I hope some of his wealth will be in my pocket before very long. Curtis Brown’s say that [he] is very hospitable, and gives first rate dinners. So much the better.”

Cecil’s optimism, and his muddled motives about wishing to help if he could, came to naught. The next day Cecil met Condouris for the first time. “He is a terror, and as mad as a hatter. I had a dreadful time with him yesterday, which I will tell you about when I see you. But Curtis Brown’s (whom I have just got back from seeing.) thoroughly approve of all my actions, and I think I have settled the busi-

52. CSF-K, 81, 11 August 1925
ness. It is all quite honest now, and I make a fair bit. He can still back out (in which case I won’t be sorry) or he can start bothering again, in which case I many not be able to come with Bill, as I am going to see him with the agreement tomorrow morning. His manuscript is in terrible condition. What with him and it, my hair will all be grey by the time I have finished.”⁵³

After working on Condouris’s memoirs at Winchelsea, Cecil went back to Condouris. “I shall get some money out of him this week, I hope, but he is a shifty old blighter and I am not quite sure of him yet. There will be quite a fair amount of work to do for him, and the wrangling with him is so amazing that I really don’t think that I shall be able to do any other work while this business continues.”⁵⁴

This combination of literary and financial problems kept Cecil from returning to Kathleen at Winchelsea. “I have been seriously debating the

⁵³. CSF-K, 82, 13 August 1925
⁵⁴. CSF-K, 83, 24 August 1925
question as to whether I shall come down for the weekend ... Now this depends on old Condouris, partly on how the work is going and partly on whether the work is proceeding at all. For I now have my doubts of him, very serious doubts indeed. He is trying to wangle out of paying me. I don’t know whether he is going to succeed yet — I am going there again tonight. I sent in my formal application for payment on Monday, and if this doesn’t materialize today there will be a row. I shall also give up the work. That means that I won’t be able to afford to come down ... Condouris and his book have got on my nerves, too. The sooner I can get that done and go on quietly with my own work the better. Just at present it seems as though I would be in Heaven doing the new book — although I know by experience that as soon as I get well into it I shall be just as frantic to get it done and out of the way.

“I must be a very uncomfortable bloke to have letters from, dear — they always seem to me to [be] one long wail.”

Condouris, quite accidentally this time, gets
Cecil even more confused the day after. Cecil writes: “There may be a postcard accompanying this letter, also there may not. The postcard will tell you if or not I am coming down. But there is just a chance (a very faint one) that I may come down postcard or no postcard. I am very sorry, dear, to be so blighted indefinite, but I can’t help it. I couldn’t get hold of Condouris yesterday. He was at Wembley and was held up by a tube breakdown. I know that was true, but it doesn’t help me much. So this is what we had better arrange. If I can, I will come down on Friday, quite certain that if I do you will stay until Monday. Of if I can, I will come down on Saturday, but in that case (it isn’t very likely) you will hear to that effect on Saturday morning. Otherwise, you will come up at the time you say you will in the letter that you will write when you get my last. You see, I will go to Condouris tonight, and if I get away early enough I will post you a card saying what is happening.”

55. CSF-K, 84, 26 August 1925
“I am struggling along with his bally book, and have at least begun to get some order out of it. I am dallying with the idea of writing a wicked little preface telling the world just what I think of him, but so wrapped up that he himself won’t see the point, because firstly I don’t know whether I am going on with the work as far as that, and secondly he may be honest after all.”

Cecil still had more plans and hopes at this time, for his letter goes on immediately with: “Besides this, I am starting the haggling with Methuen’s. I can’t chuck them quite without notice, but I shall leave them as far as fiction is concerned unless something quite startling in the way of offers is made. Lucas is away again at present, though, so that at the moment we can only haggle by post, which is unsatisfactory but amusing. And I am having to go very cautiously because I have had a letter from John Lane indicating that he is nibbling at *Margaret*. Things are getting highly complicated —

56. CSF-K, 85, 27 August 1925
but it is the sort of complication that I thoroughly enjoy. If you were with me, and if old Condouris weren’t mad as a hatter and as wily as Beelzebub, and if the Midland bank would only grant unlimited credit I should be perfectly happy.”

Cecil apparently completed rewriting Condouris’s manuscript, but until Kathleen returned to Acton Renald we know nothing about it. She did so at the end of September, and Cecil writes: “And as I expected, I still haven’t got the money. But he promised me solemnly (and the solicitor gave his word for it) that I should have ten pounds on Saturday! Some hopes! I haven’t parted with any of the MS. though.”

What with Condouris and Payment Deferred’s failure to be accepted, Cecil was short of cash. He goes on in the same letter: “One trouble is that until I have raised a bit of cash to get the typewriter going again I won’t be able to get much work done.”

57. CSF-K, 85, 27 August 1925
58. CSF-K, 86, 23 Sept. 25
Money of course had been a worry since the end of *Payment Deferred*. “There is not much news for me to tell you today. My father went to the Derby this afternoon and lost a lot of money. I hope to goodness he isn’t going to start betting again on a large scale. We had enough of that ten years ago, and we really can’t afford it. But this may perhaps scare him off it in time.”

Methuen came through with Cecil’s royalty check — they had had an office fire which delayed all their office work — but it was not as large as Cecil had expected. “I have had my money, and it is a bit less than I had counted up would be just right to keep me going. It will leave me a bit pinched all this summer — more than a bit, really. So now you know about that. I am going down to fix up about opening an account, and when I have done that and the cheque is cleared I will send you yours. [He had borrowed from Kathleen’s first earnings.] The position as it stands at present is that I can just manage to get

59. CSF-K, 55, 27 May 1925

211
along by strict economy. I am going to try to stop smoking today — whether I shall succeed or not is quite another story.”\(^{60}\)

The strict economy was quite unusually amusing. Cecil did give up smoking for a short while. Also, for one reason or another, Kathleen had not been able to meet Cecil for a weekend in the middle of term, and he had an unused condom on hand. “But I have done one stroke of good business. I got my money back for the thing I bought a bit prematurely in anticipation of the middle of term. I managed to convince the man that it was unused (fortunately I hadn’t broken the seal) and he took it back. I told him that I would be calling there again in a few week’s time. That is half a sovereign saved, anyway. And I have given my order for *Ulysses*. They aren’t quite sure how much it will cost, not less than thirty bob, they say, but not much more.”\(^{61}\)

The picture of Cecil first haggling with the

\(^{60}\) CSF-K, 55, 27 May 1925

\(^{61}\) CSF-K, 69, 25 June 1925
pharmacist about a condom, and then going off to spend more than three times as much ordering a copy of the controversial *Ulysses*, brings another anecdote to mind. Cecil had at this time apparently kept a watchful eye on the girl next door, whose bedroom window was just across the narrow walkways between the houses. “Do you remember my telling you that the girl next door had just got married and that I was heart broken because I had known her by sight for such a long time? It is all well now, because she has come back with her husband, and things are more interesting than ever. Much more, in fact. I am learning a thing or two.”

The *Ulysses* and the money were connected in another way. Kathleen had offered to pay for it. “I should have to buy myself Ulysses, dear, and it was fine of you to think of it. But I don’t think it will cost as much as the £3 I owe you. By the way, I did not send that to you [when he received his check from Methuen, 12 letters before] because I knew you were

62. CSF-K, 54, 25 May 1925

213
in bed [Kathleen had been ill] and would have no chance of passing the cheque through the bank, and I don’t like having unpassed cheques hanging about.”\(^{63}\) Cecil could talk or write as if he were quite a financial expert, when it suited him to so pretend.

Kathleen had suggested that Cecil should give up his artistic ambitions in favor of a steady job. He replies: “Dear, there are times when you show a very low opinion of me. This is one of them. And yet, dear, you keep on showing at the same time a much higher opinion of me in some respects than I have for myself. You talk about my having to give up my artistic ambitions — I haven’t got any. So far I have always written my best, because in my opinion that is the surest way to make money, and it will take a lot to change that opinion. But if I found that by cheap writing I could make more, I would write cheaply, all right. And I wouldn’t fret about it, either. I would take it as inevitable. Mind, I wouldn’t do it if it didn’t concern you, because I would always

\(^{63}\) CSF-K, 67, 20 June 1925

214
manage to scrape along by myself without doing it, but it wouldn’t be my sacrifice to do it.”

This letter is the only one in the first 147 that mentions the literary world, and Cecil mentions artistic ambitions, *Ulysses*, and the literary world only in response to Kathleen’s questions. He was uninterested in these matters. This letter also contains a reference to Middleton Murry. Cecil comments: “Now I can answer the rest of your letter. Middleton Murry is the editor of a very highbrow magazine, the Adelphi. He is something to do with the firm of Constable (a good class publishers) too. The point that is most interesting about him is that it was he who discovered Katherine Mansfield, and in the end he married her, a few months before she died. His writing is right above my head, more even than Katherine Mansfield. As a matter of fact, I have a rather low opinion of his own stuff, although I think he is one of the best living critics.”

64. CSF-K, 67, 20 June 1925
65. CSF-K, 67, 20 June 1925
The next letter to discuss literary matters is number 148, written in the next year, 20 March, 1926, and it too discusses Middleton Murry in response to some comments by Kathleen. “And what part of Middleton Murry have you got hold of? He is miles over my head — he is much too high-brow for me ever to read him with enjoyment. In fact, I would sooner lose a meal than read a book of his. I always had my suspicions that you are a young highbrow, and I am sure of it now, dear. When you told me in your letter that Murry was influencing you, I thought of Middleton, but I simply couldn’t believe that it was he.”

Not only did Cecil dislike intensely anything that was above his head, he also knew very little about it. Most of what he has told Kathleen was wrong, as indeed was much of what he told everybody. To summarize the Encyclopedia Britannica, Katherine Mansfield was born in 1890, published In a German Pension in 1911, was associated with Murry

66. CSF-K, 148, 20 March 1926
in the magazine *Rhythm* and married him in 1913 at the age of twenty-three. Her critical work appeared in his magazine *The Atheneum*, “but a career of great promise, and small but perfect achievement was cut short by death ... on January 9, 1923.”
To return from this sidetrip into the artistic world to Cecil’s mundane world, Cecil managed to borrow some more money from his father to repair his typewriter. After some handwritten letters, number 88, 26 September, 1925, is typed. “As you can see from this, I have got the jolly old typewriter going again. I am frightfully glad to have it, but unfortunately it does not mean that I have obtained any money lately. Condouris had promised me faithfully to let me have ten pounds this morning. At 9:45 I was waiting on his doorstep. He had gone out — leaving a message that he had gone to Curtis Brown’s. I rang up Curtis
Brown’s later — they had seen no sign of him. But I made such a fuss that they got hold of his solicitors and raised a scene with them. They are very concerned about it, and practically admitted responsibility. I am going round there again this evening. I may get something out of him then. As it was, I had to borrow from my father (who is very hard up) to buy the things I wanted for the typewriter and to pay my library sub.”

Misfortune piled on misfortune. Cecil’s letter goes on to say: “Yesterday I had a comic interview with Methuen’s [about a history of Italy]. We agreed fairly well as to terms, except in what was the most important matter to me at the moment — the immediate advance. Lucas has resigned the managing directorship, finding that it gave him too much work, and is just a plain director now. The new managing director is dead against paying for work that has not been delivered (I gathered that they have just been badly stung that way) and practically

1. CSF-K, 88, 26 September 1925
refused my modest request.”

Cecil finally had one good piece of news. A man named Wiley, who had been the boss at a firm called T.B.R. where Cecil had once worked, had written to Cecil to ask him to come to work at the Imperial Advertising Agency. Cecil went from Methuen’s to IAA for an interview. He had the interview for a job as copy writer paying four to six pounds a week, but could not be offered it until another director approved, in the next week at the earliest. “If he wants me, and will give me five pounds a week and a reasonable assurance that all my time won’t be taken up I will do it. But I am afraid that I will have to spend all day there ... But I think it is very likely that something may come of it, for Wiley would hardly have gone to all this trouble for nothing ... Wiley is certainly very fond of me — and a friend at court is always useful.

“If anything does come of it, next week will be my last free one, and I shall put in a lot of time making a big effort [to] make a good start with either the novel or the Italian book — I don’t know which yet —
so that I will be able to work quietly at it in my spare time."\(^2\)

This was all written in the four days after Kathleen’s return to school, just one year after, and in the same circumstances, that the letters had started. Kathleen’s presence seems to have stirred Cecil to great endeavors, as indeed it would again next summer. The day after writing this, Cecil apologizes that “my other letters to you very hurried and scrappy; perhaps this will make up for that a bit, dear” and goes on to explain the difficulties of his situation.\(^3\)

“Yesterday I didn’t get anything out of Condouris, curse him. But Curtis Brown’s had an interview with his solicitors, and as far as I can make out they are satisfied that he is going to pay sometime or other — though that isn’t much help for me. Worse than that, last night I had Methuen’s final offer of terms. They are quite good, except for the fact that they absolutely refuse to hand over anything until

\(^2\) CSF-K, 88, 26 September 1925
\(^3\) CSF-K, 88, 26 September 1925

221
the book is done. And then they will only go to twelve pounds ten on acceptance, and the same on publication. I have simply got to accept them, and they know it, of course. No other publisher would give me anything for work not done, and if I went to another publisher there would be all sorts of delays and that sort of thing. So the only thing I can do is to put my pride in my pocket and sprint through the bally book as fast as I can and draw my twelve ten at the earliest possible moment. That merely means that I have got to take on the advertising job — if it is offered me. And now that it has got to that pitch, dear, I am beginning to be just a little bit afraid. I don’t know why, unless it is just that I am afraid of work, which is probably correct. Or it may be just that I am losing all the leisure I had once, so that I could sit down and write long letters to you and do my work in my own time and all that sort of thing. But I don’t expect it will be half as fast as [I] think it is going to be.

“Last Wednesday [the day Kathleen left for school] seems the devil of a long way away now,
dear, and last Sunday seems longer still. I am already beginning to feel the pinch of loneliness very badly. But perhaps the job will bring a cure for my loneliness in more ways than one. Let’s hope so. But I still haven’t heard a word from John Lane. You must pray, darling, that they sign all right, and then that it is a best seller. It’s the best seller that is going to settle matters in the best possible way for us, although the job and that sort of thing will of course do it in the long run.

“It is great and glorious news about your half term. Until I have settled up with the advertising agency I can’t of course see what ought to be done with it, but I shall in the course of the next week or so. You see, I don’t know what they will pay me if they take me on, and especially I don’t know what my hours will be. But I don’t think it very likely that I will be tied up to them exceedingly tightly, so that a long weekend will matter. [I think Cecil means that Kathleen’s long weekend will be important because he will be able to take one too. Little does he know about business routine.] If it is so, dear,
then don’t you think that you could come up here — with or without going home, as you like?

“I think I might make an arrangement with them that they pay me a retaining fee to be at the office handy when they want things done, and then pay me a penny a word or something for what I do for them; then there would be no question that I should not do my own work there while I am waiting for other work to turn up. That, I think, would give me all the time I want, and also it would not tie me so tightly to the office that I could not manage the odd days [off] that I want. But I will know all about that, I expect, by tomorrow. I have done all the stuff that Wiley gave me to do.

“This afternoon I am thinking of making a start on the Italian book. I am only thinking about it, because the start of a book is better not rushed. But it would be a sell for Methuen’s if I could deliver the thing by, say the end of November, although this time they are stipulating for a good big length — 80 to 90,000 words.

“Dearest, I want you very badly, and I am sim-
ply living until the post tomorrow. I wonder if anything will come.”

The prospect of a job with IAA sent Cecil round and round in circles. The next day he writes: “I saw the man I would have to work for, and he fell in with the scheme (they were rather afraid he wouldn’t, as he might think I am undermining him for his job ... I am very excited ... not quite so depressed ... as ... yesterday ... I will be too unsettled ... in the evenings ... to do much good work — although I started Italy yesterday I am too wrought up to do any more today — but I think that after a week or two I shall be more used to it and will be able to complete my contracts. If I can’t, then honestly, unless the job shows more prospects than it does at present, I shall have to leave it ... I can see, though, that if I get the job I am going to have a naty time for the next month, as it will cost me money to get up to town and that sort of thing and if I can’t screw my fifty out of Condouris I am going to be stumped rather badly, especially as father and Geoff and Hugh are all as broke as they can possibly be.
Hugh’s new house has left him without a bean. I shall want the devil of a lot of new clothes, too ... But I may not get the job at all, anyway.”

The next day he knew. “I have got the job. I am just back from the city after a long discussion all about nothing. It is not anything so common as copywriting, but I shall have to be general literary advisor supervisor and must superintend anything in print that goes out of the office.” But it was not a job in the ordinary sense, only a probationary position, for “I start on Monday for a month trial at my expenses — i.e., at four pounds a week, and if then all is well I shall have some sort of contract and a good deal more money. I may, that is. I really now don’t know whether to be pleased or sorry. By the time I find out whether or not I like the job I shan’t have made much to compensate me for a lost month. And that is that. And of course all my plans to do a hell of a lot of work this week fell to the ground. I am going to make the most of my freedom

4. CSF-K, 89, 28 September 1925
while I have got it. For the rest of my life I shall be tied down to 9:30 til God-knows-when. So tomorrow I am going to stay in bed all day, I think, and on Thursday I am going to play golf with Beach. On Friday I expect I shall have to stay in bed, as Beach expects us to get round thirty-six holes on Thursday. Then tennis on Saturday and Sunday.”

Whatever Cecil might imagine working life to be, he was on notice that it required work. “I shall have to earn my bally screw [English slang for pay], and [in] this office apparently the motto is get on or get out. They had a man doing more or less this sort of work last summer, and they sacked him in a fortnight!” A few paragraphs further down Cecil writes of another business success.

“I have got my contract from Methuen’s. There is no advance, but the other terms are splendid. The funniest one is that they agree to publish the book—they make no stipulation about what it shall contain; they only say its length. I could swindle them beautifully if I wanted to. But of course I won’t.”

The next day Cecil had splendid news. “John
Lane have taken *Payment Deferred* definitely, I had their letter this morning making a definite offer. They have quite fallen in with all the terms I wanted. For *Payment Deferred* itself they are not improving much on what I used to get from Methuen, but the terms for subsequent books and the other conditions are simply excellent ... I am very proud of the results of my negotiation with John Lane. From the time they took to make up their minds I must have pressed them very hard indeed — I must have got the very last cent out of them that could be got. In fact, I am sure that no agent could have got more for me. That in itself might be a good thing for me one of these days, if ever I want to work for a literary agent — or if ever I want to work for a publisher — or if ever (this is an idea that has been appealing to me a lot lately) I want to set myself up as an agent. Of course, now that I can look back and see how very near they must have been to giving up the whole show I am

5. CSF-K, 89, 29 September, 1925

228
frightened, but it worked all right.”

After a bit more melodrama Cecil gets to work. He writes about wandering down to the library and the teashop “for the last time before my slavery,” going to the Park to see his last of green trees, and comments that his “typewriting is all shaken up. ‘Before’ looks rather queer, doesn’t it?” The job was terribly unsuccessful. At the end of the month Cecil was fired. On his way through the office, so to speak, he acquired a view of office life that shows up in Plain Murder. Here is his description of the advertising business, as seen on his first day there:

“In the room there is an unhappy boy who is the firm’s tame artist. He sits at his table and draws & draws & draws, at every subject given him, in the middle of all the racket and din. There are always two telephones going, two buzzers as well. But he is used to it, and goes on quite calmly, without models

6. CSF-K, 90, 30 September, 1925
7. CSF-K, 91, 3 October, 1925
8. CSF-K, 92, 5 October, 1925
or anything. Perhaps I shall get like that, and in that case the Union of Italy will progress famously.

“It is quite a comic business. It is the periods of not having anything which are so very funny. I can’t very well read or anything — that would be too pointed — so it is just as well I have someone to write to. The trouble with the Italian book is that I shall have to have reference books and that sort of thing on the go at the same time.“

“Pow-wow with the 3 bosses about a new toothpaste. Nothing settled — I don’t think there is anything settled in this office ... I can’t say definitely yet, but I think I hate office work. There is no doubt about this being a weird business. Honestly, as far as I can see no one ever does anything right — even allowing that they do anything at all. We all talk and talk, and plan, but we don’t do anything. And yet they say they are as busy as hell. I can’t understand it. I do more work in an hour at the typewriter at home than all the five men in this room do in a day ... But the things I’ve tinkered with already (Mincemeat, compressed cork, toothpaste, tyres,
cold storage — it is a good thing I am an encyclopedia. That is what I am employed for, of course ... the man who does all the work is the printer downstairs. They ring up at least once in five minutes and shout things at him, but I don’t think he takes any notice. I believe he does everything on his own initiative, and the blokes up here get the credit.”

He continues a few days later: “The office is very weird — they are all as jealous as hell of course, and they do all they can to make me feel the fifth wheel in the coach ... It has been a bad day today for various reasons. I haven’t had enough work to do, and yet I haven’t been feeling at all like doing any more ... In a quarter of an hours there may be a lot of work, or there may not ... Back here [home] again, quite fagged out. I simply can’t go on with this letter. Goodbye dear. All my love.”

“The trouble will be if I get the sack on Oct. 30th. I simply can’t decide whether I will or not. I have the uneasy feeling that I am not doing all

9. CSF-K, 93, 8 October 1925

231
the work I ought to be, in exchange for the money, but now I am reassured by the fact that I apparently do as much as the other men. I never realized before how little people do in offices ... I like the office all right — I would much rather not go, of course, but I can put up with it ... The one thing that I am sure of is that I want money, lots and lots of money, and I won’t be happy till I get it — even if I am happy then ... there is a chance it will spoil my literary style. In that case I shall have to choose ... The office is a horribly jealous place. There are two ‘big noises’ as far as I am concerned, and I am trying to be one too, but the man I have most to do with, who is one of the two, does his best to stop me.”10

“I am gradually realizing, dear, that it is quite impossible for me to try to go on doing two books even a year and continue with the office. I can do it this time, all right, though, and that means I won’t have to worry about things for a year. Then I shall have to choose between them (unless something else

10. CSF-K, 94, 10 October 1925

232
has turned up in the meanwhile) and that will depend on what my chances at the office are like and what has happened about and Payment Deferred. ... If they expand the staff I shall be in clover, with a first rate job.”\textsuperscript{11}

“I have to go to a toothpaste firm in Oxford St., to work out some copy for them ... the letter that announced my arrival at this toothpaste firms calls me the chief of staff and I know that the letters the firm have sent out drumming up business have made great play with the fact that ‘C. S. Forester, the famous author’ is on the staff.”\textsuperscript{12} However, inside the office Cecil used the name of Smith.\textsuperscript{13}

Cecil continued with \textit{Victor Emmanuel and the Union of Italy}. On some business days he managed 1,500 words and did 2,000 on some Saturdays and Sundays. The effort it took to do both jobs rather

\textsuperscript{11} CSF-K, 95, 12 October 1925
\textsuperscript{12} CSF-K, 96, 15 October 1925
\textsuperscript{13} CSF-K, 100, 23 October 1925
surprised him. On Sunday he writes: "Today I have got my two thousand done by two o’clock, and I am just going to rattle off this letter to you, dear, and then I am going to lie down, and, please God, I am going to sleep. I am absolutely worn out. It was quite a hard week as the office. It is a lovely fine day, and I should like to go to tennis, but I don’t think I had better. I simply haven’t got the energy." But he was still uncertain about the job. "Today, I did a bit of good work. I was asked to find out what the prospects of selling marmalade were in South America — we have the most extraordinary things to do sometime — and it was suggested that I should go to the different consulates and places and find out. I knew something worth two of that, and went off to Hugh’s bank [the South American Bank], and they told me inside of ten minutes. It was so funny to see the boss when I walked in with all sorts of stuff about it. It is rather a good coup for me. I am getting drawn more and more into BIG BUSINESS — which I like a

14. CSF-K, 97, 18 October 1925

234
dashed sight better than the minor details of advertising. I will be a stout old City bloke with a tummy and spats yet. Honestly, though, if this office expands at this rate and I don’t make a howling ass of myself I may find myself in quite a different (and better) position than ever I expected.”

In the next letter his optimism has vanished. “I simply can’t say one way or another. At the moment I shouldn’t be surprised if I got the sack — I didn’t realize before how horribly keen the firm was in cutting down expenses, and I am honestly a bit of a luxury for them. And the lady director has ceased to smile at me. All the rest of the office — except for the head boss, whom I don’t know about — like me quite well ... I have done my Italy ration, and am trying to think of something witty to say about Macintosh tyres. I can’t — absolutely can’t. Thinking out things in a hurry to order is the very devil; in time — if time is allowed me — I will be able to accumulate a stock of things thought of casually. But there has been

15. CSF-K, 98, 19 October 1925

235
such a rush that I have to deal with everything on the spot ... Tomorrow I will know about staying on almost for sure. Tomorrow; next week, and a month from today are the crucial dates. I wonder. Even now I don’t know either way. My friend Wiley is not definitely on my side — that’s the trouble — but I have won a smile from the lady director this morning.”

“I didn’t get the sack today, and so almost for dead certain I shall be there for another fortnight at least ... But for all that I am going to keep my eyes skinned for another job in case of emergencies — I have just finished a very guarded letter this evening applying for one which looks the very thing.”

Kathleen was coming up to London in three week’s time for a long weekend, so Cecil gave her directions. “My office name is Mr. Smith, the Imperial Advertising Agency [he had written International Advertising Agency in his first letter], 52 Bedford St. ... I am very tired this week, dear, but

16. CSF-K, 99, 22 October 1925
17. CSF-K, 100, 23 October 1925
Italy is still going strong — I am near the thirty thousand mark now.”\(^{18}\)

“I am afraid that I have a bit of bad news — or may have in the course of the next day or two. I rather think the job is coming to an end. I am not dead sure, but it seems likely. The boss is talking to me about jobs, and he seems to think that in this office I am a round peg in a square hole — as I am, in fact ... There are two things quite certain. I am sure of a job until Friday week — the day you come home, dear, so that’s all right. The other is that I won’t be sorry to see the last of the office if ever I have to go. I didn’t realize that until I found that there was a chance that I might go. It doesn’t suit me at all — and it is most horrid bad for my work. And I know now that my work is by far the most important thing in my life except one. Dear, if I have to leave, don’t be sorry. It will come out all right in the end. I shouldn’t be surprised if my next letter contained some good news.”\(^{19}\)

18. CSF-K, 100, 23 October 1925

237
“As a matter of fact, advertising is a very bastard sort of profession — a sort of mongrel. I would rather be in real literature, even monthly magazine literature, I think. Even the Daily Mail ... lots of jobs going in advertising. Most of them are very hit or miss jobs, with the sack always hanging over you, but it is the same in journalism. The reason is that in creative work (even advertising is creative to some extent) you soon get to hate the sight of the folk you work with. You have to work with people, and in creative work you should work by yourself. So you sack yourself or the man above you sacks you just for the sake of change. As far as I can make out, advertising is like general post [the adolescents’ game of post office].”

“Friday. No news at present — except that I am nearly sure I am leaving next Friday. Good thing too. I will write fully tomorrow.”^20

“Just after I sent off that hurried addition to

19. CSF-K, 101, Monday, 26 October 1925
20. CSF-K, 102, 29 October 1925

238
my last letter I got a better insight into affairs at the office. I have a very strong suspicion now that I have nearly been made a victim of a rather clever wangle on the part of some of the folk at the office. I think that the man who occupies a corresponding position to me at the office has been telling the boss that I want to leave and telling me that the boss wants me to leave. I tried to get hold of the boss yesterday, but he was too busy all the time — and whenever I got a chance the other fellow always made an excuse for coming into the room too. Anyway, after the boss had gone he made one more effort for me to assume that it was my last day there, but I told him to be damned. On Monday there is going to be a hell of a row. I expect that either he or I must go after this — and I am going to do my damnedest to see that it is him. You see, I knew the boss expected me to be at the office on Monday, so I don’t see any other explanation except that he has been wangling. It just shows the quaint fashion this office has been run in. The man in question is horribly jealous of everyone in the office, and is always afraid that he will lose his
job — he is not too efficient.”

“So I am afraid that you won’t be able to do the shopping you were hoping to do, I can’t make any promises about money until I have had the row on Monday.”

“And I wonder if you will find that five weeks at an office has changed me much? I feel years older, as a matter of fact, although I don’t think I have got a ‘city manner’ yet. This is a very unofficey office, though. Everyone does more or less as they like, so long as they do their work, and it is quite done to sing or whistle while you are working. And a lot of the time we spend swapping lies of all sorts — you can’t keep men on to creative work steadily all the time, they must have breaks at intervals.”

On Monday morning Cecil was reporting his defeat as if it were a victory. “The expected row came off this morning, but it rather fizzled out because of two or three other factors which came into play. I came out of it all right — although I am

21. CSF-K, 103, 31 October 1925

240
afraid that I have lost a good deal of ground, and I shouldn’t be a bit surprised if I had to leave at the end of this week. The important factor was a bit of good news that I had this morning — just after I had thought it wasn’t going to happen. The job I wrote for last week has got as far as the interview point — the interview is next Thursday. I had to be sure of getting the boss to back me up there, so I couldn’t be too obstreperous, and old Dobbs wangled an wangled out of the trouble in his usual smooth style.

“The possible job is that of ass. advt. manager to Coleman’s mustard, and the general opinion is that I ought to get it ... I am anxiously waiting for a letter about the weekend arrangements. Your last (although I liked it) was all about the jolly old circus — just as this one is about my work. I am getting nervouser and nervouser about it. I shan’t be happy until I have you with me at Paddington Station.”

Cecil and Kathleen had planned on spending the weekend quietly at the Bedford Hotel in Lon-

22. CSF-K, 104, Monday, 2 November 1925

241
don. Cecil’s family spoiled this plan, or his debts to Geoff spoiled it, depending on how you view the situation. On Wednesday Cecil explains the situation.

“I am afraid that this letter is going to be a disappointment to you, dear. There is some bad news. As far as I can see, the Bedford will have to be off this weekend. I had a letter from Geoff this morning. He wants money very badly — he can’t pay his bills even, he wants even a pound of two for pocket money. So of course I must send him some — my father can’t at all. There isn’t a bean in the family except the miserable £5 I have saved up for the Bedford. So I will have to send him that — you wouldn’t have me do otherwise, would you dear? It is most important for him and we can live without it. I will tell you what I am doing.

“I am sending Geoff £2 today. That is all I can spare until payday (Friday). Then I am going to write to Flo saying that I have heard from you that there is just a chance that you may be in London this weekend. I shall say that if you are, I shall expect to be invited to 34 for the weekend as well —
of course I will be. Then I will meet you at Paddington Station with my luggage just as I would have done — unless you write at once and say you can’t come. Then if you really want the Bedford we will go (it will mean a little economy unless you can raise a bit of money) and no harm will be done and Geoff will have to wait a bit longer. Otherwise we will go to 34.

“At 34, dear, things ought to be all right — you know what I mean. We will be together all day long, and Flo won’t get on your nerves in that short time. I think that will be the best thing to do, dear — it would be better than 58, anyway. Curse my family! And Methuen’s are hellish obstreperous and won’t advance a half-penny before the time. There is one chance left — Condouris. I have had nothing from him yet. But this evening I will go there and I will make a big fuss, refusing to go until I have got some money, a pound or two anyway. That would save the situation comfortably.

“I am wickedly fed up with everything. Please, dear, don’t be too disappointed. Come to 34 if you
feel like or, as I say, we may be able to fix something at the Bedford if you really want to. I should like you to come to 34 — but do just what you like. All I ask is for you to write directly you get this, so that I hear from you for certain on Friday morning. All my love, dear — more now than ever.”

They met for the weekend, but Cecil had more news to add when he saw Kathleen. Good or bad, I cannot understand which way he took it, Cecil had been dismissed from the Imperial Advertising Agency. He immediately obtained, however, a part-time job tutoring in composition the son of friends of the Belchers who was in his last year of school.

Despite having been fired, the Imperial was not completely out of Cecil’s mind. On the Wednesday, 11 November, 1925, Cecil writes: “In about ten minutes time, dear, I am going up to the Imperial to have my confab with Macgloin. I wonder what will come of it? I really can’t guess either way. He may or he may not — but I am fairly sure that if he doesn’t

23. CSF-K, 105, 4 November 1925
he will do something else for me. He as good as promised me so last week. As a matter of fact, I think that what I should like best would be to go back to the Imperial, although the money I got there would probably be less than I would get on the Daily Mail or anywhere like that. But I won’t be able to tell you the results until my next letter, as I had better post this before I go out. It is armistice day, dear, and I hate being in town when eleven o’clock comes, so I am staying in until after that.”

Despite the delay to accommodate his feelings concerning Armistice Day, Cecil saw Macgloin before lunch. “I am afraid that the Imperial has come to an end. My encounter with Macgloin yesterday was most unsatisfactory. I took young Brady out to lunch afterwards, and it was money well invested. I got much fuller details out of him about the whole bally wangle. It was an effort to get him to talk, but when he did he opened my eyes ... Brady is out for blood, and he and I more or less allied together over

24. CSF-K, 106, 11 November 1925
the coffee yesterday. What Brady wants is Dobbs’ job, of course, and now we are going to do a little intriguing on our own account. We both have our suspicions about one or two things which will settle the matter in our favour absolutely for sure if we can prove them. Proving them will be a job, though.”

As you would expect, this alliance between Cecil and Brady came to naught, as far as the Imperial went. However, it developed in three months into the big advertising space gamble, in which these two attempted to corner the market for newspaper advertising, but that is a later story.

Besides this business adventure at Imperial, Cecil’s literary life was also progressing. First in importance, John Lane returned the typescript of Payment Deferred marked with suggested editorial changes. This was the first time that Cecil had seen careful editorial work, which makes one wonder what Methuen’s practices were. “John Lane has

25. CSF-K, 107, 12 November 1925
done something I haven’t heard of before. They have got someone to go frightfully carefully through the book looking for small errors. Things like calling the evening meal ‘tea’ at one end of the book and ‘dinner’ at the other. They sent me the thing for my approval. I was simply amazed at it — it was done so frightfully well.”

Secondly, Cecil wrote a large chunk of *Victor Emmanuel and the Union of Italy* for Methuen. He was “sprinting through it” in order to draw his twelve pound ten shilling advance, though he had hopes of getting money out of them before completion. This was more difficult because he couldn’t bring himself to admit to them that he was penniless. “And there is still a bare chance that I may get something out of Methuen’s after all. But I have sworn to myself that I won’t draw on my November money, especially as since they will know that I have this job they will guess that I have no reserve at all if I draw on them.”

26. CSF-K, 96, 15 October, 1925
Cecil was worried as always about the length of his book; in all of his writing about this book that is his sole concern. Having started on September 27, he had done twenty thousand words by October 19. “I am past the twenty thousand mark now in the book. I am a little tiny bit afraid that I won’t be able to get it the required length — I have done a quarter of the length and have used a good third of my material, but that is what always happens. I shall have to pad it a bit.” 28 “*Itali*y is going on. I haven’t missed a day for more than a fortnight. If it were all typed (half of it is in writing) I would be over the hundred page mark by now — the whole thing ought to be three hundred. I am more doubtful every minute, though, about my filling all that space. I have used a good half of my material already. It is going to be a bit awkward. There is just a faint chance that I may have underestimated what I have done — or overestimated it. I had a horrible argument over the phone

27. CSF-K, 89, 28 September 1925
28. CSF-K, 92, 19 October 1925
with Methuen’s today about the maps for it. I am not going to pay to have the ones I want copied — which is what they want me to do.”

“I had quite a pleasant surprise yesterday, when I found out that I had, after all, miscalculated the amount of work I had done on Italy, and was able to add another thousand — it might easily be more, but it doesn’t do to be too optimistic — to my total. I am past forty thousand now, past half way, and still going strong. My material’s running out, though. I believe that every word I do after about sixty thousand will be just padding. I have just put in a whole padding chapter, but as it happens (it often does with history books) it is quite one of the best so far.”

Cecil’s inspiration flagged. As late as November 17 he writes: “I have got hung up once more over Italy. I simply can’t understand it. I am sure that it isn’t laziness at all. I am simply run dry for the time. It has happened before, but never for so long at a

29. CSF-K, 99, 22 October 1925
30. CSF-K, 102, 27 October 1925
Two days later he had restarted. “Italy has at last got a move on again. I did a fair bit yesterday, and a bit more today. It isn’t going as fast as I should like, quite, but I think I shall soon get into my stride again and polish off the remaining chunk in no time. I hope so, anyway. Books don’t write themselves, especially when you have to eke out your material so as to make sure that you have something to write about all the way through. Even now I can see that I will have to go to the British Museum sometime and collect a few naughty stories and things to bulk out a new chapter somewhere or other. There are another hundred odd pages to be done now — a hundred and twenty at the outside. As you know, dear, ten is a very good day’s work, and I can’t do that for any length of time at a stretch.”

“I have done a little bit of Italy today, up to page 152, but for some reason my heart isn’t in it at present. As I am just on the edge of the end of my

31. CSF-K, 109, 17 November 1925
32. CSF-K, 110, 20 November 1925

250
material, I shall have to go to the Museum tomorrow and do a little reading up. I have two more chapters in my mind, but they will have to be very long even to cover all the rest of the space, and I simply can’t think of another to put in. It will have to be those two — and one of them must be about modern Italy, which is a subject about which there is a devil of a lot of controversy (Mussolini, for instance) and about which I must be dead sure of my facts and walk very carefully to avoid hurting people’s feelings. Fortunately I don’t care two straws about the present position one way or the other, so I am quite free.”

The worry continued until the last. “I have finished Italy, just two minutes ago. It is a blessed relief, for the bally book was horribly on my nerves. All my efforts did not avail to prolong the agony very much ... It only remains to run through it now — and I am so worn out that I am finking even that little job. And I am simply tormented with fear in

33. CSF-K, 114, 30 November 1925
Cecil thought that perhaps Cuthbert Wilkins-on, the father of the boy he was tutoring, would lead him to a job. “I am wondering if there is anything to expect from Cuthbert Wilkinson in the way of job and things. I shall see how the land lies tomorrow when I go there — but as a matter of fact I am not too keen on his doing anything for me. If there is one thing I hate it is having to be grateful.” Obviously, he was playing the role of Great Man to the Wilkinsons, and hated to do anything to detract from it, for he continued, “You ought to have seen me making a favour of teaching Garth to Mrs. Wilkinson.” A day later he had changed his mind again, if you could say that he had made it up before. “I am rapidly reconciling myself to putting my pride in my pocket and seeing what chance there is of a job through or by the Wilkinsons. There

34. CSF-K, 118, 11 December 1925
35. CSF-K, 106, 11 November 1925
ought to be, you know, unless Mr. Wilkinson is prejudiced against me by his wife’s enthusiasm — and that is not at all unlikely.”  

This thought bore fruit later, but before it did Cecil approached the Daily News and the London Times. Of the Daily News he wrote: “I hope so intensely, as it is the best paper for me except one thing — it is Liberal, and I fear that Liberalism is dying. I want to go into politics one of these days, and this might easily be the end of that idea. But I don’t mind at all risking my vague political ambitions for the sake of a jolly good job.”

The Daily News refused him, so he tried the Times. “After the News, the Times is the paper I would prefer — although it will make the political business even more complicated.”  

(About 1937 Cecil told me he was a Liberal; his words in this letter do not explain his views in 1925.) He was not in earnest about these jobs, for he writes: “The trouble

36. CSF-K, 107, 12 November 1925
37. CSF-K, 108, 14 November 1925
38. CSF-K, 110, 20 November 1925

253
about a newspaper job may be the hours. I may have to work (provided I get the chance) on the three till one stunt and that will mean that I never have an evening to spare. I don’t know how that would work out — there is always the chance that I would find I liked it — but at present the prospect appalls me. In fact, the only things I am sure about are that I don’t want a job at all and that I wish someone would leave me five hundred a year.”

“Christmas is coming and the geese are getting fat/So please put a penny in the old man’s ‘at,” as Cecil’s father taught him, and me, to say. Cecil didn’t get his penny, but Christmas, at least, brought Kathleen to him, under circumstances where mundane matters could be ignored. They planned to stop at the Bedford before Kathleen returned home, and Cecil wrote one of his rare love letters in anticipation.

“Dearest,

__________________________________

39. CSF-K, 108, 14 November 1925
“I am only writing this letter to tell you how much I love you, dear. I sat down at my typewriter and settled myself comfortably, and put in the address and the day and all that in most supreme and wonderful content, feeling most perfectly near to you. It is still two days before I see you again, and I dare say that during those two days some of the hours will seem very long and endless, but for all that you are close to me, so close now that you might almost be beside me reading these words as I click them off. It seems as though this room is haunted by the scent of your sweet body, dear, and I have only to close my eyes to imagine myself resting my head very gently on your breast.

“Perhaps all this is very wearisome and silly to you, dear, who are probably reading it under pressure, but to me it is very real and very true. There will never come a time when you are more to me than you are at this instant. It almost seems as though we have been all we have to each other just to prepare me for this moment. And when we are together again, and when I am watching your train
come in, or when you have come to me and you are mine again, I will be able to look back to this little time and know for sure and certain that it was all meant for us long and long ago.

“Because the hateful uncertainty that sometimes oppresses us — and must, sometimes, is just a nothing, something impossible to consider. It is not even a shadow on the great light that we know of sometimes.

“And your white throat and breast, dear, lie before me in my imagination like white roads leading to some placid quiet valley where there is no trouble left at all. All the passion and fever which I know a touch of your hands could call up within me is only like the weariness which I might feel as I go along those white roads to where the last and enduring happiness awaits me. Because I love you, dear, and now, even if I were never to see you again, I know things and have seen things which only you could have revealed to me, so that I am like a saint with all his mission afire within him. And the revelation and the inspiration are so perfect that I can
even endure your laughing at this letter without their being shaken in the least. I have faith, now.

“I can kiss your hands very gently in thought now. The bitterness and self-seeking and scheming have all gone out of my love and out of my life. You are all my love and all my life. My passion is yours, and the caresses of your hands come to me as you would give your child milk from your breasts. Goodbye, dearest. You are coming to me soon, in a very, very, few hours, and you are always my sweetheart.”

Kathleen returned home (to 34 Hawarden Grove, Herne Hill), where Cecil also spent most of the holidays. Early mornings that Christmas were livened by an odd occurrence. Kathleen’s youngest brother, Binks, was made to get up and go round with the milkman every morning starting at five-thirty, in an effort to show him what life would be like as a school dropout. He wasn’t a dropout, but he had been promised substantial financial rewards each week if he got good grades, and he had taken to keeping a duplicate false gradebook, although in fact he was never out of the top half of his class. He
was detected just before the holidays started. Cecil’s opinions about the event show something about his own character. He wrote to Kathleen, just before her return, saying that after all Binks was just a child. “He isn’t anything like mature yet. He ought to have started puberty yet, but he hasn’t. He is backward in that, like all the rest of your family ... the way he likes fairy stories still shows that he is only a child, and what with the fairy stories and his own childishness he hasn’t the least notion of reality. Being a lonely child he makes his own life, and of course that means unreality too.” Although both Cecil and Binks were the last children in their family, both felt somewhat alienated from their families, and both fantasized, Cecil recommended harsh treatment for Binks that he would not have accepted for himself. Cecil recommended to Flo, and so wrote to Kathleen, “that the best thing to do with him was to send him on a training ship and pack him into the merchant [marine] service. He would be up against discipline there that he absolutely couldn’t buck against, which is what he wants. He doesn’t realize
yet that the world wasn’t made exclusively for Binks. And if he were at sea he would be free from a whole lot of temptations that will be up against him on land.” Cecil’s description of this as a correct treatment for a childish boy, and his notion of the purity of the seaman’s life, strikes me as being completely unreal. I have the feeling that in some way he felt Binks deserved punishment for being so like he himself had been as a child. (Binks was of small stature. Cecil told me that because of his size, when Britain required enormous numbers of bomber aircrew in World War II, he was trained as a turret gunner. However, one of the photographs in Kathleen’s album shows him in RAF uniform and described as a bombardier-navigator. His Lancaster was shot down; he parachuted to land but was lynched by angry German civilians.)

Immediately after the holidays, Cecil discusses what he will do now that Kathleen is away again. “I shall go to bed about nine, and I shall arise, I hope, a new man and thank God that I am free for the time of all responsibilities under which I have been
labouring for the last month — to say nothing of the need to trot off down to 34 every minute. I shall be able to call my soul my own again. A gay young bachelor, I shall do just what I like once more, and I shall be able to go to the library when I think fit, and booze coffee when I feel like it, and eat all the cream meringues I want.”

There is no mistaking this. Despite his attempt at levity, Cecil is telling Kathleen that having her nearby was a responsibility that he resented as reducing his freedom. He continued in the same letter: “Also, I find, I shall go back to the good old condition of wondering what the postman is bringing me, and of looking hurriedly on the mantelpiece as soon as I come in in case anything has arrived. And I have nearly forgotten how to typewrite. It doesn’t come easily. There are lot[s] of things I want to do. I want to go the Museum and look up a few books. I want to go to the Imperial and see Brady. I must lunch with Bill some time and I have promised to lunch with Eve. I must go and look up Dorothy Beale, and also Pally. If nothing comes of my inter-
view with Brady [Brady was not in a position to offer him work. This interview would be a conference about their big project.] I want to get in some golf lessons. And some time or other I suppose I had better do some work. And of course, I shall have a few letters to write now and again. I suppose that by now I had better give up hope of going on with Garth Wilkinson’s lessons.” 40 All in all, Cecil’s proposed program sounds as if it would be much easier and more fun than carrying the responsibilities that had worn him down over the holidays.

Most of Cecil’s program came to pass. He almost renewed his friendship with Pally, who had the month before invited him to a houseparty over Christmas weekend. “This morning I had a surprising letter from Pally. She invites me to go and stay there for any period I like during the Christmas weekend, as she is having lots of people staying there. Where on earth she proposes to put them all I can’t guess — it would be something like camp, I

40. CSF-K, 121, 13 January 1926
should think. Of course I am not going to accept, but I shall write and say that I will blow in and call one of the days in the afternoon. It is extraordinary. Dear Arthur must be coming round, for him to tolerate the idea of my staying in his home over Christmas.”41 She invited him again in January, but in the end Cecil didn’t go. When in October he tried to see her, she and her husband had moved to Cheltenham.

Cecil renewed his habit of visiting Dorothy Beale, who is no longer ‘Miss’ but ‘Dorothy.’ And, apparently a surprise to him, the Wilkinson’s came through with not only more tutoring for Garth but commissions for reading for Smith’s [a chain of bookstores], where Cuthbert Wilkinson worked, and for writing the Pullman Company advertising brochures. The Pullman Company proposed, and nearly arranged, for Cecil to go to Philadelphia to help in a trade fair. Cecil’s opinions of these people are interestingly indeterminate. He compared Doro-

41. CSF-K, 117, 8 December 1925
thy Beale and Ethel Wilkinson. “Tomorrow night I am going to dine with Dorothy Beale again. That will be after my lesson with Garth, and I expect the terrific flow of conversation (in which I would hardly get the chance to join even if I wanted to) will be a blessed relief to me. Although I have horrid doubts that one of these days she will get just like Mrs. Wilkinson, she is very charming in her talkativeness just at present. And she manage[s] all the talking herself, too, which is what I look for in a woman — except for one woman. And she hasn’t got any ideas about writing books which she wants to impress on me.”

Later on he writes: “People are very queer. It came out in the course of conversation with Phyllis Callaghan a day or two ago that I had been to see Dorothy Beale on one or two occasions when there was no one else there, and Dorothy has just told me over the phone that she had an indignant postcard from Phyllis asking why on earth she hadn’t gone

42. CSF-K, 109, 18 November 1925
and found a chaperone if there wasn’t one handy. P. is like that. Once when she heard that Dorothy was working on H. G. Wells’ election committee she sent her a wild telegram and followed it by a visit just to warn her that Wells has an evil reputation with women. Imagine anyone (especially one with Wells’ freedom of choice) although I mean nothing against the lady, trying to seduce Dorothy! I think it is one of P’s complexes.”

“On Wednesday I went to see Miss Beale, and took my supper — biscuits and cheese and olives — with me. It was just as well that I did, I think, for from all appearances she is as hard up as she can be, and when she is hard up the only thing she can economize on is food.” As I read it, Cecil was not taking food for Dorothy, but says that if he hadn’t taken his own supper he wouldn’t have had any himself.

Cecil describes Mrs. Wilkinson as equally talkative. “But of course Mrs. W. clutched hold of Pay-

43. CSF-K, 141, 6 March 1926
44. CSF-K, 129, 5 February 1926

264
ment Deferred as soon as Garth told her about it, and declared that she was going to read it too. I nearly asked her to wait for a week or two, as then she could buy a copy and read it as much as she liked. She really is the most unbearable woman I know, and I suppose the next time I go there she will tell me her opinion of it. I am not interested.”  

“Yesterday I went to the Wilkinson’s, and after doing Garth’s lesson with him I found that [I] was let in the same as last week for a tete-a-tete lunch with Mrs. W. She had read Payment Deferred, as I said she would, and she babbled about it for two hours. She had liked it and she praised it rather neatly, but when she got on to telling about art and the artistic temperament and the lack of idealism I displayed in not wanting to be artistic and all that sort of tripe I got fed up. But I have just realized that Cuthbert, by just passing a word at Smith’s, could put about twenty-five pounds in my pocket by the sale of the bally thing. So I bore patiently with her until Cuth-

45. CSF-K, 128, 7 February 1926

265
bert returned, and put in a good word with him and then shoved off.”

Visiting ladies for tea was something Cecil did all his life, and one wonders just why he did it. Of course Mrs. Wilkinson was dispensing money as a minor patroness of the arts, but neither Phyllis Callaghan nor Dorothy Beale nor Olive Matthews were. Kathleen later believed that Cecil used his literary position and conversational talents to make love to almost all of them, often achieving seduction, but it is at least possible that he only basked in their adoration.

Cecil certainly liked admiration, as much as most of us, and, on the other side of the coin, probably was upset by criticism even more than most of us. He got some of each that spring. The criticism was both personal and professional. “Yesterday afternoon I went up to Westminster to prowl round St. James’s Park to see about the new plot — I have some idea of making my heroine a nursemaid who

46. CSF-K, 129, 8 February 1926

266
takes the kids that way every day, and as I went off afterwards to get myself some tea I ran into L. [A providential accident among all the office workers in London?] out very early from her office. So I didn’t have my tea, but instead she walked me off quite in the good old style at seven miles an hour, through Victoria and Vauxhall all the way to Camberwell Green.\textsuperscript{47} It was very warm and I had a heavy overcoat, and by the time we got there I was simply a limp rag. I clamored for tea, and we had some at Lyons. She was looking very fit and well — bouncier than I have ever seen her and I was very relieved. But she simply turned me inside out. She had read \textit{Josephine}, very carefully, apparently, and told me that it wasn’t half as good as my others, and told me why, and so on. Then she went on to criticize my actions of the August before last. By this time, of course, she knows all about things, and she

\footnote{47. Cecil exaggerates. Normal walking is 3.3 - 4.3 m.p.h. Aerobic walking is 5 m.p.h. Championship race walking is 8 m.p.h.}
made me feel a more miserable worm than I have ever felt. But she was quite nice about it really, and apparently bears no ill will. But she is not engaged — at any rate she hadn’t got a ring on — and I didn’t have the neck to ask her if there is any chance of that happening soon. From Camberwell she went off to her hairdresser’s — she has had her hair shingled, but I didn’t see her with her hat off — and I tottered home. What with physical fatigue and nervous strain and severe criticism I was a perfect wreck, honestly, and I haven’t properly recovered yet. But at any rate, I have the satisfaction of knowing that it had to happen some time or other, and that I have got it over. But this last eighteen months have put me out of training all the way round. Not only am I unused to walking at seven miles an hour, but I can’t argue the way I used to, to keep my end up, and you have spoilt me thoroughly, too, for she is much more exacting than you are even at your most aggravating moments, and I noticed it like anything last night. Perhaps you remember my remarking on that a long time ago, but last night rubbed it in. But she has
developed splendidly in lots of ways, and was quite charming last night, and positively goodlooking, too. She said that I was oldmaidish and fussy nowadays (that was because I said that I liked my tea weak) and that I wasn’t turning out the way she had expected. But she asked very nicely after you.”

Later Cecil sent her a copy of his latest work. “I have sent Lillian a copy of Payment Deferred, as I said I would. I don’t know what she thinks of it. I am absolutely dead sure that she will hate it, nevertheless, I will let you know if I hear from her.”

Methuen’s also asked Cecil to correct some errors in Victor Emmanuel and the Unification of Italy. “Methuen’s wrote to me yesterday about Italy. They have found (so they say) a couple of historical errors in the thing, and they want me to agree to correct them. I have said that I would if they really were errors, and on that condition they are sending me

48. CSF-K, 128, 7 February 1926
49. CSF-K, 160, 8 June 1926
my advance. It is damned cheek for them to make conditions, but I am not worrying much about that. They won’t be able to make conditions much longer.”

Cecil may have made the corrections, but they did not satisfy the publisher’s reader, for Methuen’s sent another letter six months later. “Waiting for me at home there were: (1) a very impertinent letter from Methuen’s asking for my authorities for the benefit of their reader with my Italian book. I shall tick them off about it.” Cecil wrote such a reply: “I wrote the devil of a letter to Methuen’s in answer to their’s asking me for my authorities on Italy, but they have just placidly written back saying that Rieu is away and acknowledging the receipt of my note in his absence. I think it would take dynamite to wake that firm up.”

This shows Cecil’s typical arrogance and his disrespect for both publisher and the

50. CSF-K, 126, 26 January 1926
51. CSF-K, 159, 5 June 1926
52. CSF-K, 160, 8 June 1926
reader; authors of historical works always provide source notes. What was his motive? I learned the answer in 1956, although I didn’t know until after his death that the question had also been asked in 1926. His motive was to cover up his failure to make notes in a professional manner so that he could refer to them later. He did his historical work just as he did his fictional work, by using his extremely good memory and holding most of the story in his mind at one time.

Cecil’s pride was hurt by one more shock, this time from Kathleen. As he wrote to her: “By the way, sweetheart, try to be careful while you are addressing your letters to me. I am not being nasty about it — of course I don’t really mind — but sometimes you make a silly little slip that puzzles the other folk in this house who see the envelope most enormously. And it wouldn’t be very nice if they were to guess the solution. But it’s nothing to worry about, dear.”53 Important enough not to be very nice if discovered, but still nothing to worry about. Kathleen
couldn’t guess what it was, and in any case she had another letter in the mail, which Cecil received on Saturday, and complained of on Tuesday. “Of course your letter which I received on Saturday hurt my vanity like blazes, dear, but that was all it did hurt, so that no damage was done, and I was very anxious to hear from you about it.”  

Kathleen obviously didn’t understand what she had done wrong. Their letters were received one or two days after posting, but it was not until six letters (almost two weeks) later that Cecil screwed up the courage to tell Kathleen what her error was. “What you put on the envelopes, dear, is hardly anything, I suppose I had better tell you, but remember I said that I didn’t mind. [Then why all the fuss?] All you do sometimes is to put A. G. Smith. It really doesn’t matter, dear.”  

Instead of addressing her letter to C. L. T. Smith, Esq., Kathleen had sometimes

53. CSF-K, 124, 5 February 1926
54. CSF-K, 131, 9 February 1926
55. CSF-K, 137, 21 February 1926

272
addressed them to A. G. Smith, Esq., using the initials of her dead first love, A. G. West. Who of us has not heard, at one time or another, another’s name inadvertently murmured by our current love? It is disconcerting, and I suppose in written form it would be worse, but the importance of this incident is not in itself, but in what it tells about Kathleen and Cecil, and in what it portends.
The big adventure of the winter of 1926 was the attempt to corner the market in advertising space. It was to pursue this admittedly desperate plan that Cecil kept up his friendship with young Brady of the Imperial Advertising Agency.

Cecil and Brady attempted to corner the market in choice advertising space, so that they would be bought out at a profit. They took options on certain choice bits of advertising space in the middle of large spaces which they thought would be required for forthcoming major advertisements. Any advertising firm that wanted to use the large space would have to
buy out their option on the small space near its center. Because they had taken only options at a low cost on their small amount of space, they could make a high rate of return on their investment while the firm who really needed the entire large space would not find the total cost greatly increased, and might well pay their price. To be effective, they had to control so many choice full pages that there weren’t enough left to meet demands. Their capital, not more than a few thousand dollars in present money, was completely insufficient. They made it go ten times farther by obtaining options on the space at ten per cent of the final price. Even so, the total amount of space they could control was about one page in one newspaper for one day, some few percent of the day’s business and completely insufficient to accomplish their objectives.

In addition, the normal practices of the trade defended it against such raiding. The newspaper managements protect themselves by selling only options that lapse in plenty of time for them to find an alternative purchaser. They also lay out the paper
with some pages for small advertisements, others for full or double pages, and they will not sell their full page space in small increments except right before press time. The newspapers, then, although they would not be the primary losers if Cecil and Brady won, would be the primary line of defence. The advertising trade had even more effective weapons. First, they could shift their advertisements a day or so earlier or later, getting out of the timespan when Brady & Smith had options. Second, they could persuade the newspapers to put in extra pages. Thirdly, they could change their full page advertisements to two or more partial pages, although this would both lessen the effect and increase the costs. Finally, once all sides realized that Brady & Smith had only the capital to hold one set of options and had no advertising business by which to earn money by running advertisements in the spaces they had optioned, they had only to delay negotiating with the newspaper managements until the options expired. The word of their failure would naturally circulate once Brady & Smith let the first option lapse and the
newspaper tried to sell the space to the agencies that had asked for it. Then the scheme would be all through, and the newspapers would have earned Brady & Smith’s option money.

Cecil’s letters run on and on in boring repetitions of the same sophomoric troubles; they are not worth quoting at length. They reflect Cecil’s lifelong indecisiveness; he knew the speculation was a wild gamble, yet he will be satisfied with a safe return; he had no confidence in his conspirator, yet he trusted him; he was short of money, yet he bet all he had on this speculation; he writes as if this speculation was a forlorn hope, yet he expects to clear a thousand pounds from an investment of twenty-five. Above all, the correspondence shows Cecil’s refusal to do ordinary work to obtain the normal necessities of life.

These themes start with Cecil’s first description of the scheme to Kathleen. “And I have got through to Brady on the phone, and had a guarded discussion about things. He says that the chance is coming along ... but it is deadly trying to gamble on
a steady market. ... I haven’t got an enormous amount of confidence of Brady’s good sense. But he is very enthusiastic about things ... If he turns out just an ordinary gambler and I lose my money I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that was what I expected. If not, then I shall think that it was all me and none of him and feel twice as pleased with myself. Anyway, it is the quickest way of laying hold of a bit of capital that I can employ just at present, and capital is what I want.”

As short of cash as Cecil was, and with his debts as well, he was going to make a desperate gamble with Methuen’s advance payment for the acceptance of the manuscript of *Victor Emmanuel and the Unification of Italy*. That was one reason he was so incensed that Methuen’s had the temerity to hold up payment until he promised to correct his “historical errors,” for that letter goes on with: “The advance is going to be really necessary, if I do that stunt with Brady. As far as I can work it out, it will take just

1. CSF-K, 123, 17 January 1926

278
about every bean I can raise. What I shall live on before I start getting my return is more than I can imagine. I shall have my shoes mended and see that I have enough razor blades ... just in case. I don’t mind being without money for coffee, but I simply won’t be able to bear having holes in my shoes or shaving with difficulty. And I think I shall buy a hundred cigarettes and keep them for the inevitable time when I have nothing to smoke.”

It is wonderful how carefree one can be when one’s best girl has a steady job and one’s father pays one’s room and board, isn’t it?

“Twenty-five pounds is absolutely all my available capital ... But if I make five hundred out of it it will be worth it, won’t it? And as a matter of fact if I lose my cash the lesson will be worth it, too. I am going to keep my eye on Brady’s little plans — he is a reckless blighter and although he knows a good deal more about his side of the business than I do I don’t think I will do any harm by acting as a restraining

2. CSF-K, 126, 26 January 1926
influence on him occasionally. It may sound silly to try and gamble by halves, but I am going to try. I would rather make twenty pounds than nearly make five hundred. I am going in quick and I am going to get out quick if possible.”³

“We have put through a couple of deals so far, just where we wanted them, and have only had one check, that was the Daily News, who didn’t want to sell an option to the unknown firm of Brady & Smith. Of course, we know no better now than when we started as to whether we are going to make anything; we won’t know that until we start haggling with the firms; that will be my job. We must wait in patience for about a fortnight, until their other contracts expire and they have to deal with us.”⁴

“Brady has been able to look after all the preliminary steps. I seized a moment this morning when folk were out of earshot [meaning his own family in Underhill Road] to get through on the

3. CSF-K, 127, 29 January 1926
4. CSF-K, 129, 5 February 1926

280
phone to him and find out what is happening. Everything has gone very well so far, and we have been able to get in as deeply as we wanted. We are fully committed, in fact; it is death or glory now, more or less.”

“I am sure that we shall have our work cut out to dispose of all our investment as it is. It would be heartbreaking to have a good bargain on hand and not be able to use it simply through not having time to haggle; you see, our business is with the very busy blokes who have very little spare time, and the fitting in of appointments will be a horribly ticklish business as it is. We will be sellers, not buyers, and although we will be in a strong position we shall have to consult the buyer’s convenience. I hope you appreciate the joyful business lecture.”

The joyful business came to the predictable crash. “I am sorry dear, but there is some bad news today. I went up to see Brady yesterday, and the

5. CSF-K, 131, 9 February 1926
6. CSF-K, 131, 9 February 1926

281
young ass has got us into a bit of a mess. Like a pur-
ple idiot, he has been trying to trade on the name of
the Imperial — it was quite easy as he used the office
notepaper; the answers came back to him there, too.
I didn’t know anything about it, as he had been
attending to the business so far, and anyway I have
been out of touch with him for nearly a fortnight
[He saw Brady on February 4th., spoke to him over
the telephone on the 9th., and the discovery was on
the 14th. or 15th., somewhat less than a fortnight.] …
There only remains to find out how much we can
recover from the wreck — of course no one will take
up their options from us when they know they have
only to wait for them to lapse to get them cheaper. ...
[Did discovery come because someone contacted
the Imperial about selling an option that the firm
did not know it held? That is the most logical way
for discovery to occur.] … Mac [manager of I.A.A.]
told [Brady] he was lucky not be in quod [in jail], but
I don’t think he had done anything that the police
could touch him for — he was too clever for that; a
damned sight too clever. If I had heard about it in
the street or somewhere I would have given him a good kicking, but of course I couldn’t let on how cross I was in the office. ... I am still rather annoyed at the prospect of having to live for the next fifteen weeks on rather less than fifteen bob. How I am going to do it I don’t know. Especially as there is the typewriter question to complicate matters. [Geoff had asked for the return of the typewriter that Cecil had borrowed for the last year and a half.] I am sorry, dear, that this more or less puts the tin hat on the prospect of my coming to Shrewsbury this term; it was a possibility that I faced all the time, but I didn’t really realize all that it meant to me.”

When considering the sacrifices that his investment would require, Cecil faced the prospect of having holes in his shoes and shaving with blunt blades. Having holes in his shoes was one of his favorite, oft-repeated stories that he used to warn me of my future. “When I was a young man I had to line my shoes with cardboard to keep my socks off the

7. CSF-K, 135, 16 February 1926

283
ground. You will have to do the same before you earn enough money.” These letters contain the only reference to this situation, and it was merely one of his fears rather than an actual condition. The gamble jeopardized all Cecil’s arrangements, from his comforts to the typewriter on which his career rested and to the possibility of meeting his best girl, yet he had taken it without considering the consequences.

The essence of the plan was secrecy and deception. As long as there was no general realization of what was afoot, one or two agencies might be faint-hearted enough, or so hard pressed by schedule, that they would pay as much as twice the normal price for the space that Brady & Smith had optioned. However, Brady & Smith could get no takers unless it was generally known that they had the options and were prepared to sell them, and once it was known that the options were held by a clerk and a penniless author who had worked one month in advertising the game would be up amid hoots of jeering laughter. Realization of that could have led Brady to use the Imperial’s name to support the
game.

Using the Imperial’s name could have been a legal offense. “Every agent impliedly warrants to third parties that he possesses power to affect the contractual relation of his principal ... In addition, an agent who intentionally misrepresents his authority may be liable in an action of deceit. In such a case all the elements of fraud are present.” Any of the firms who were adversely affected, including the Imperial, could have taken action.

There is the further absurdity that Cecil was to be the salesman, persuading commercial buyers that they really needed to pay his price for each piece of space. Cecil was quite successful at selling himself to women who were susceptible to literary blandishments. However, that was the extent of his accomplishments in the sales field. He was never able to get a good price when he sold personal property such as houses or used cars. Imagining him trying to

8. Dillavon & Howard: Principles of Business Law; Prentice-Hall; 1960

285
convince hard-boiled purchasing agents to buy business properties, such as his options on newspaper spaces, at prices that would bring him a profit, strikes me as ludicrous. As Cecil told me years later, “Purchasing agents were the last men God made and by then he had run out of admirable characteristics to give them.”
The consequences of the loss of his money would put Cecil into difficulties later, but at the moment he was full of his new novel. During the genesis of the advertising space adventure he had also been constructing a plot, and the same letter that described the denouement of one announced the beginning of the other. The plot, as usual, developed out of several ideas which he had been considering. On 15 January, 1926, he wrote to Kathleen: “I have a fine idea for a plot, which I expect I shall work on as soon as I get going. It is about a retired civil servant or general or someone who has something wrong with him so that
he is not a ‘good life’ [is unacceptable for life insurance and likely to die at any time], and who has a little girl left to him by an old friend. He has to make some provision for her, and as he has no money and may die at any minute he marries her (when she is thirteen, I think — it is legal at that age) so that she can draw a widow’s pension if he dies. Of course she has to go to school — a school rather like Westlands [Where Kathleen then taught] and if he is Lieut.-General Sir Perceval Bling-Blang K.C.B., K.C.M.G., and she is Lady Bling-Blang, things will be rather exciting. Of course, the marriage is merely nominal, and in the end another man turns up when she is about twenty, and the General, who is a decent sort, dies off quietly so they can marry. I am going down to Frank’s [Kathleen’s brother, who was in the civil service] this evening to get some information from him about pensions and things. What do you think of the idea? I shouldn’t be at all surprised if I didn’t work on it.”

1. CSF-K, 122, 15 January 1926
“When I finished my last letter to you I was just off to Frank’s. I didn’t get much satisfaction out of him about the pension story — he raised a whole lot of difficulties which I shall have to get over if I do it, I am not sure now that I shall. [A year or so later Cecil wrote a very different version of this novel using a retired guerrilla instead of a general, naming it *The Shadow of the Hawk*.] I still haven’t decided what work I am going to do this term [the period during which Kathleen would be away]. There is the riverside story, and the one about the girl who told her husband she had been there before, and the one about the pension, and the historical one, and I simply can’t make up my mind which. I am not burningly keen on any of them, as a matter of fact, which is sometimes a good sign.”

Cecil spent a good deal of time in bed “thinking about things” and trying to make up his mind. The letter I have just quoted contains descriptions of lying in bed all morning reading Kathleen’s latest

2. CSF-K, 123, 17 January 1926

289
letter, musing on its consequences, and cancelling a lunch with Eve. Cecil cancelled the lunch because he had just found out that since his mother was not going to do the washing that day he would not find his home uncomfortable. Another letter came from Kathleen. “Your letter came this morning, and I lay in bed and thought things for hours and hours in consequence. The address confused my mother, she couldn’t tell who sent it, but I could, of course. Sweetheart, there is only one ‘R’ in my name.” In honor of Cecil’s newfound stature as the author of Payent Deferred, Kathleen had addressed her letter to “C. S. Forrester, Esq.,” committing for the first time the misspelling universal among those who don’t really know the author.

Cecil started to anticipate his work on the novel he hadn’t yet decided upon, scheduling his work to be done while Kathleen was away. “I think I have quite got back to normal again now — after all, the last time (as perhaps you remember) was last

3. A reference to sexual intercourse.
Monday week, nearly a fortnight ago. Soon I will be supercharged again. So that needn’t influence our plans for my coming down; but it might be as well to bear in mind the arrival of your cousin about the 12th. Dearest, even writing like this makes me dither. But I may have a job. I suppose I shall take it if it ever comes along — but I shall come to Shrewsbury first.”

“I have been working things out. If I were to do three pages of a novel every day of term I should just have the thing finished by the last day. So now I measure your absence by pages. I have just got to page 33, I imagine, and I have got to get to up to page 250 or thereabouts. By that means I can gauge the length of time I have to wait much more accurately. I wish I were beginning the last chapter now, sweetheart.”

The musings in bed bore fruit. “I have got a real plot coming to me at last. I have been wanting

4. City convenient to school where Kathleen worked
5. CSF-K, 125, 23 January 1926
something as good as the plot of *Payment Deferred*, and I think I will have it soon. I don’t really know yet what it is about, except that it is about a girl rather after the style of Dorothy Beale. But she will like men as well as babies, which is more than she does ... I can’t help thinking every time I see Miss Beale what a pity it is that a girl with her figure and her love of children shouldn’t have a husband and lots and lots of babies to spoil and bring up in the way they should go. Her life work obviously is smacking little bottoms and wiping little noses ... I may have to make her a gym. mistress; do you think you could let me know just how one sets out to be a gym. mistress — I was rather out of touch while you were at Dartford, if you remember, dear — and also if you could think of some other profession in which a woman without a lot of brains could make a fair living and yet come into contact with babies and also with men I would be awfully pleased if you could tell me.”

6. CSF-K, 126, 27 January 1926
Telling one’s best girl that she has chosen a career that doesn’t require much intelligence is not the most tactful of acts; one would think that had Cecil cared, his experience would have led him to do better. For much of his life he belittled the intelligence of many others.

“I am once more uncomfortable and irritable. You see, dear, I think I have at last got the plot for which I have been worrying. The information I wrote to you for in my last letter has got a lot to do with it, but I won’t tell you the plot because I want to try it on you when I have got the book done. The trouble is that now that I think such a lot of *Payment Deferred* — and think that other people will think a lot of it too — I am beginning to take myself seriously, and want really effective plots, each one quite different from the one before. The one that is bothering me is a good one, I know, and a man who could really write about such things would make a good thing of it. The trouble is that I don’t know whether I can. I can only try. I shall have to go very carefully. If I do it well I shall be very fagged out
and exasperated, and if I do it badly I shall be annoyed as well, so that this is going to be some term for me. I shall go slow — if I ever get started on it, which is of course doubtful — but with luck I shall have it finished, or very nearly, by the time you come back. But I am bothered about it at present.”

“The new plot shows no signs of improving. I think I shall have to drop it after all and go off on some new tack. I shall start getting worried soon, for I shall be too late for Autumn publication if I leave it very much longer. But I have got jolly particular lately, and only the very best plots will satisfy me; my old happy go lucky method of starting the thing and letting the plot work itself out as I go along isn’t good enough now. I have the germs of another idea already starting inside me.

“Your letter came this morning dear. It was very good of you to go to all that trouble, especially as I could see that you were rushed for time. The gym. mistress idea is a good one, and I think it has

7. CSF-K, 127, 29 January 1926
supplied me with an idea, too. The only trouble is that if I do it folk who know us will be looking all through the book for signs and traces of you and me. What I say is let ‘em. 8

“I have got back to my old form again, and have started dreaming. I suppose that will be a regular turn for the next month or two; I have a theory now that I can’t produce creative work, at any rate start it, until I am really overcharged. That means in the future that whenever I have fresh work on my hands you have to go away for a holiday or something. Who would be an author for choice?” 9

Cecil had another theory about his creative powers that he quoted a month later. “The book is called The Personal Equation by L. Berman, and it is good stuff although badly written. If I were you, I

8. Two and Twenty, published in 1931, had as main characters a gym teacher and a failed medical student; naturally, people who knew Cecil and Kitty would wonder.
9. CSF-K, 128, 7 February 1926
should see if the Ling have got it, as it is very inter-
esting and well worth reading. As a matter of fact, 
only a few paragraphs are about what I am writing 
about, but they are most illuminating. As far as I 
can see, it has been definitely proved that if I were to 
take codliver oil regularly I would lose the faculty of 
visualizing things by which I earn my living. If I had 
been given it when I was a kid it could have changed 
my whole life, and by now I would be a respectable 
country doctor instead of a disreputable author. But 
all the same, I am glad that I had the strength of 
character to refuse to take anything like that.”

“Dearest, I have some good news at last, so 
good that I have to sit down and write to you about 
it on the spot. The new plot has come at last, and it 
is a real bull’s eye this time. I won’t tell you what it 
is dear, because I want you for once to read a book 
of mine without knowing anything about it at the 
start. But I can tell you that it is a real happy plot 
without a breath of horror or cynicism — I have
found about a dozen quite good ones of the other kind during the last few weeks — and it is the thing I have been waiting for for a year. It is made up of chunks of all the other plots, plus a few things I have learned from you, dear, and as I warned you, there will be things in it that will make people think that it is about you and me. But it won’t really be, dear, and I swear that it will be so good a book that it will only make people envious of us and of our love.

“It was most extraordinary in the way it came. It was real inspiration, and I take back a whole lot of what I have said about inspiration in consequence. Last night I was short of cigarettes, for they forgot to get me any when I asked them. [Cecil had stayed inside with the flu.] I went to bed, and as I was fed up about it it started me off thinking instead of going to sleep. A bit of the plot came into my mind, and made me more restless still. It wanted a whole bit of fitting in, and besides that there were at least ten more bits like it wanted before it could be of any use at all. Another bit or two came like blazes, because by this time I couldn’t help working really hard on

297
it, and then I gave up thinking about going to sleep and smoked one of my three cigarettes and worked on it again, and bits kept coming and fitting in, and it was growing so exact and complicated that I had to light the gas and write the stuff down. By the time that my three cigarettes were finished I had got the thing as near perfect as I think is wise before criticizing it to myself, and so at last I managed to drop the subject. But I had to read, and the only thing I could find was one of my own books, so I sat up for a good while reading it until I had calmed down. It was well after four by the time I went to sleep. I had doubts that this morning when I had my senses (especially as I would be a bit pessimistic after a bad night like that) I would find that it was all tripe (that happens quite often) but this time it isn’t. I shall start on it as soon as I am fit again.”

“Tomorrow I will start the new book; I think I have got it well worked out now, and I hope it will turn up trumps. You can’t tell until you start,

11. CSF-K, 133, 10 February 1926

298
though, I am hesitating as to whether to make my hero a plain clerk, or an advertising copywriter, or an instructor in a school of journalism — he is an author as well in his spare time. What I do know is what whatever I make him I will wish it had been something else by the time I am halfway though the thing.

"With luck, dearest, I will have it done by the end of term — and that will be time for Autumn publication too, if Lane's like it. I hope it doesn't turn out too sentimental; that is what I am afraid of. But I think the naughtiness will balance the sentiment — it will be positively indecent in places."¹²

Cecil started the book next day, then went up to London to hear the denouement of the advertising space gamble. "And yesterday I started the novel, getting a few pages done. It is all right, but it is going to be very sentimental, I think. The only possible title that I can see for it is "Love Lies Dreaming," which is significant, anyway. I have

¹². CSF-K, 134, 15 February 1926
heard that any book with the word “Love” in the title is a certain best seller. It is going to exasperate me in the writing of it, I think, and I shouldn’t be surprised if I didn’t run off the rails and make it indecent out of sheer reaction. That won’t be a bad thing in a way, though.”\textsuperscript{13}

“\textit{Love Lies Dreaming} is progressing steadily. It is a most curious experience writing it; I am keeping rigorously away from every temptation towards ‘cleverness,’ and yet so far I am almost satisfied with it. It is an experiment, of course, and I won’t know even when I have finished it whether it has come off; I won’t know for years. I find I shall have to work very hard to get the thing done in reasonable time, and half the time I am bored with it and the other half I am burningly interested; I am simply itching to have your opinion of it, sweetheart. I think that some time next week when I have got a fair chunk done I shall go across to Dorothy Beale’s and try it on her; she hasn’t got bad taste as she is cynical as

\textsuperscript{13} CSF-K, 135, 17 February 1926
well as sentimental she ought to see if I have overdone it at all. And as usual I am tormented by the idea that I shall never be able to stretch it out to the length I have guaranteed. But it is a stretchable kind of book.”

The two women whose characters were written into the book later expressed their opinions of it. Dorothy Beale\textsuperscript{15} told Cecil, when it was almost finished, “she was quite sure I hadn’t missed the ‘bus [contraction of omnibus] with \textit{Love Lies Dreaming}. She said that some of it hit her below the belt, and that while she was crying over Baby John’s funeral at her office she was suddenly interrupted and everyone else wanted to know what was the matter with her.”\textsuperscript{16} Kathleen, however, laughed about it. “Aren’t Cecil’s women unbelievably awful? And he can’t write a love scene for anything. I don’t think he

\textsuperscript{14} CSF-K, 136, 19 February 1926
\textsuperscript{15} Described by Kathleen as Cecil’s mistress. “She was nice, too.”
\textsuperscript{16} CSF-K, 166, 20 June 1926
knows what it is all about!"

“Love Lies Dreaming is still crawling along. I expect I shall do a bit more to it when I have done this letter — I haven’t got to the point where I start missing days yet. It is very curious, for every time it is a fearful effort to get going, and then I don’t want to stop. Generally it is the other way. I still am not quite sure whether I like it or not; and I don’t know even if it is worth finishing. But I will see if it has any effect on Dorothy Beale. It is calling for enormous inventiveness, somehow — that is of course the fault of the multiplicity of plots. Six pages leave me absolutely limp, but six is the barest minimum. You will see that, when I tell you that is has got to go to about 240, with a margin for accidents.”¹⁷

Not only were invention and the labor of writing on Cecil’s mind, but so was the tool of his trade. Geoff repeated his request that Cecil return his typewriter. He had told Cecil so when Cecil visited him at Southend the week before he started Love Lies

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¹⁷. CSF-K, 137, 21 February 1926

302
Dreaming. Cecil wouldn’t return it “until someone takes it down there. When that happens, I think I shall hire one. It is fairly cheap, I believe — under five bob a week, and I shall only want it for about five weeks with any luck. Your offer was splendid dear, but ... it would be the best way to postpone buying one until things are better. Don’t you agree?”

“We played a bit of bridge [at the tennis club] and all three of us made half a crown each. And I made half a crown on Thursday night at 34, and last night (Hugh and Dolly spent the weekend with us) I made two bob, so it wasn’t a bad week.

“But finances are going to be hellish tight. Geoff must have this typewriter back [‘this’, not ‘his;’ Cecil can never bring himself to call the typewriter ‘Geoff’s typewriter’ or in any way to admit that it does not belong to himself] and it will go back to him this week. I have been arranging to hire one, and I can get one for five bob a week, but there is a two quid deposit which I can raise at the moment

18. CSF-K, 137 21 February 1926

303
but which I shall need again before I finish the book, I expect. But that will be an additional inducement to finish the book quick. I hope my luck at bridge holds good.”

Then there are two handwritten letters, the second of which runs “Dearest. This will be only a few words, dear, of a begging letter. I have come a bit unstuck financially and the typewriter question is the last straw. Could you let me have two pounds for a bit; I will send it back to you in a day or two. I don’t pressingly need it, but I might want it very badly soon. Goodbye, dear. I enclose the cutting I forgot to put in yesterday’s letter. All my love, dear. Cecil.”

He got the typewriter. “Dearest, you will see by this that I have got my new typewriter. It isn’t a bad one for five bob a week, but it takes the hell of a lot of getting used to, as all the gadgets are different from those of the other.

19. CSF-K, 139, 1 March 1926
20. CSF-K, 143, 9 March 1926
“One thing I am glad about. I have got going again on Love Lies Dreaming, and I have done a jolly good day’s work this morning. In fact, I have worked up to nearly one third by now — page 77 in fact. That sounds good; it is only when I realize that there are still another hundred and sixty to do that I feel that I will never get the thing finished. But even now if I put my back into it and don’t get held up again by technical difficulties I ought to finish it before you come home. Twenty-three working days at seven pages a day! As a matter of fact, I can see at least two more periods of difficulty before me before I can get into the swing of the finish that I have planned. Though why I should fret because I find it difficult to do in two months what most men would take six over is more than I can say ...

“And I have the beginnings of the plot for the novel after this one; it would be a good plot, I think, if I ever come to work it out, but the trouble is that it is sombre and depressing, and I don’t like the idea of going back to sombre books. I have come to the conclusion that I can write light stuff just as well,
and of course light stuff, though harder to write, pays better and does more good in the world than any tragedy ever written. But the fact that it is harder to write is proved by the fact that there isn’t a single book ever written which is called a masterpiece which isn’t as gloomy as they make them.”

Cecil shows his own opinion by confusing realism with pessimism, and he ignores the great comic novels such as Don Quixote and Tristram Shandy.

In his next week’s letter he describes a mechanical adventure. “This morning, because I did not feel particularly like work, in a wild moment I thought I would investigate the workings of this typewriter. I did it a bit rashly, with the result that something went zzzzzzip and the whole thing caved in. It took me about threequarters of an hour to find out what was wrong, and another threequarters of an hour to put things straight. The job called for the use of three hands, all of them in difficult situations.

21. CSF-K, 144, 10 March 1926
If I had been in a hurry, I would have got somebody to help me, but as it was I decided to do it myself. What I had to do was to hold two loops over two screws, and then wind up the powerful tension spring of the machine. It was rather like those infernal puzzles where you have to get three balls into three pockets, and that sort of thing. At the end of half an hour or so I was nearly crazy, but I did it in the end, and now I have a very satisfied feeling in my inside. I was one mass of typewriter ink by the time it was done, though. And I know a whole more about typewriters now than when I started. Especially about this one. This one has bits of bent hairpin instead of the loops which are very important and which ought to be of steel. They work though—and I have the satisfaction of knowing that if I do anything serious to it they can’t possibly charge me much for it …

“Tinkering with this typewriter must have upset my nervous balance to some extent, because I am typing simply abominably and I have put this paper in crooked and am generally misbehaving
myself. I am sorry that the work is going so slowly, but I am simply not going to kill myself over it, dear. I am so afraid it will suffer if I rush through it without enough consideration, as it is delicate work. If I were to work steadily at it for the rest of the term I should just get it done before you come back. Every day I miss makes one more day of work during the holidays— but you will let me off with a caution, won’t you, dear?”

Cecil liked to pose as someone with mechanical knowledge and a grasp of the sciences. It is probably easy to disconnect the carriage-return spring and it requires a bit of ingenuity to reconnect it. The bent hairpins that Cecil criticizes as not being made of steel are the links that connect the keys to the typebars. These are made of hardened steel because they receive much wear; Cecil did not understand that they were blued by the heat treatment that hardened them and thus did not appear to be of plain steel.

Cecil kept the typewriter for the month until

22. CSF-K, 146, 16 March 1926

308
Kathleen returned, then returned it and never did any more serious writing on one. *Love Lies Dreaming* was not finished until nearly before Kathleen’s summer holidays in June, 1926. His letters describing its progress are not different from those for *Payment Deferred* – how hard it is to do, how much must be done, and the fear that he will not have sufficient material to reach what he considers the required length.

Despite Cecil’s careful planning, *Love Lies Dreaming* appears to have little organization. As he had remarked to Kitty, he had had to pad it to the required length with stories that had little connection with the rest of the plot. Cecil thought that the naughtiness of the plot would shock his parents and some of his friends, but today’s readers would find it utterly innocuous. The essence of the plot, for those with sufficient knowledge and the skill to read between the lines, is delayed sexual gratification. The main character, surnamed Trevor, is employed full-time in a comfortable office job that pays better
than any in Cecil’s circle, but is a part-time novelist and has been married to Constance for four years. The delayed sexual gratification occurs in two incidents, first with the newly-married couple’s slow start, then with a later slow renewal after a petty disaffection.

The tale opens during the petty disaffection, although Trevor is obviously still in love with Constance, as is shown by the domestic details. Then it returns, through Trevor’s memory, first to their honeymoon and the early years of their marriage. It took them about half a week after their wedding before they first slept together, which is all that is written about that particular subject, although Constance had remarked that she was an experienced woman. Then Trevor’s memory goes to the still-birth and funeral procession, lovingly described, of the hoped-for child they called Baby John.\(^{23}\) In the first happy rush of their early marriage, the novelist

\(^{23}\) Having written that Trevor thinks that John is a vulgar name, Cecil then gave that name to me.
had finished *Lost Victory*, which he thinks is his best work to date.

Now, back in the present, Constance is praying for God to send her husband a new plot, but they are sleeping apart in the two bedrooms of their apartment. At the bridge tables of the Tennis Club, Trevor and Constance play against a Mrs. Cookson, nicknamed Messalina by those who know her habits, and her latest lover. Trevor, some ten years younger than Messalina, had been another of her lovers before he met Constance. Only the reader who already knows that Messalina was a wildly promiscuous, insatiable, Roman empress understands what went on then, because her nickname is all that is written about that subject. Constance plays marvellously well against their opponents and they make a large win, say $25 in present money. After the evening, she twits Trevor about his affair with Mrs. Cookson, not mentioning her nickname Messalina. Trevor tries to make things up with Constance by writing her a very loving letter that asks her for a date, naturally a date to sleep together, but
she does not reply.

Later, at a dance at the Tennis Club, Trevor is disconcerted to find Constance’s former suitor, Dewey, now living some distance away, playing up to her, and her not minding that at all. Constance con-nives to have Dewey invited to dinner a week later, the talk gets animated, and somehow Dewey remains so late that he misses the last train home-ward and has to stay the night. That both arouses Trevor’s mild jealousy and forces him to sleep in Constance’s room, which is the result that she had planned and had arranged by resetting the living-room clock so that Dewey had missed his train. Nothing more is written about what follows. In the last lines of the novel we learn, from Constance’s conversation, that Trevor’s christian name is Cecil.

That is the pretty thin plot of this novel. To fear that it would distress anyone is astonishing. The only people who might be distressed would be those who had learned of sexual activity only through marriage and who considered it indecent to men- tion whether a married couple used one or two bed-
rooms. There is one other slightly risky bit. Trevor, musing as a novelist on the characters of the people he sees in everyday life, questions the aesthetic judgement of the forty-ish lady who has chosen a brassiere that squashes her charms so they bulge behind her instead of in front “where they might have done some good.” However, when Constance instructs Trevor on the garment that she wears over the same area, she calls it a bust bodice instead of a brassiere.

The plot is padded out with other stories, some of which fit and others of which don’t. The most flagrant intrusion is a dream sequence, ostensibly aroused by the ladies’ underwear advertisements in the newspaper. Trevor, Constance, and a group of women, each named only by the style of underwear which is her only clothing, are shipwrecked on a coral atoll. The women are a simpering, helpless lot and Trevor and Constance, having shown them how to fish for their suppers, retreat to the adjacent atoll. Some months later, the women come for them. Far from the simpering women who escaped the ship,
they have now organized themselves into an efficient company of amazons whose leader wears a necklace of the teeth of the formerly most proper of the women. They haven’t come for Constance; they want their share of Trevor and are prepared to take it. Trevor is saved, if that is the appropriate word, by the sighting of a rescuing ship.

The bridge game that is an integral part of the plot is described in minute detail. There is a story about letters sent to the wrong person. There are two literary stories, appropriate to Trevor the novelist. In one, the plodding but successful novelist Bisgood advises his wife, the former Dorothy Hardcastle, about the novel that she wants to write. At first she follows his advice, but then he is disappointed as she upsets the plot with wild characters and ruins the book with an improbable ending. When Dorothy Hardcastle is lecturing at the meeting of a literary society in celebration of this best-seller with an O. Henry ending, the chairwoman unknowingly introduces Bisgood to Dorothy. She looks at him and says, rather haughtily, “Haven’t I
met you before, Mr. Bisgood?” The second literary story is just an account of Trevor writing his novel, which emphasizes the hard work, the three pages a day, and describes him counting the fraction completed, just as Cecil did.

The characters live the type of life lived by Cecil’s circle, except that those in the Trevor’s circle are financially comfortable rather than financially uncomfortable as in Cecil’s circle. Their outlook and range of activities are no different; they are just as narrow as those of Cecil’s own circle. What is remarkable is the extent to which the women control the men. In every encounter between the sexes, whether fictionally real or fictionally fiction, women control men and events. Because *Love Lies Dreaming* is Forester’s most social work, with more sexual relationships than any other, it best exemplifies this aspect of Forester’s attitude.

All this time the arrangements at John Lane’s [The Bodley Head was other name that this publisher used.] for publication of *Payment Deferred* were
progressing (and at Methuen’s for publication of Victor Emmanuel and the Unification of Italy.) The success of Payment Deferred, even though only anticipated at this time, imperiled the facade which Cecil had so carefully built up and at such cost maintained. He enjoyed, among those who knew him as Cecil Smith, being lauded as “the novelist who writes under the name of C. S. Forester;” but to have the admirers of C. S. Forester discover that he was only Cecil Smith, and thereby discover his family and background, was an unthinkable eventuality. The possibility that publicity might be focused upon him before he became a success in his new character, or in order to produce that success, had not before occurred to him. To take the easy way of saying publicly that C. S. Forester was a nom de plume, and the identity of the real author did not matter, would forever prevent him from shedding Cecil Smith in favor of C. S. Forester. Handling the preliminary publicity for Payment Deferred presented him with the problem of how to accomplish the transfer in the glow of publicity. Cecil’s first reaction was to pre-
serve his secrecy, with the excuse that publicity was horribly vulgar, but the prospect of greater sales and more money caused him to think about how to use the publicity to assist the transfer.

"I had a most extraordinary letter from a Press representative agency employed by the Bodley Head imploring me to go and see them and help them out of their difficulty as they had been given the job of writing up *Payment Deferred*. About a fortnight ago the Bodley Head wrote and asked me for details of my life, and I wrote back and said that the only details of my life which would interest anyone were those which I would not have published at any price. That was exactly what I said, but apparently they are not to be put off. I don’t know what the devil to do as *Payment Deferred* is just the sort of book that might sell a lot if it were properly pushed. When they wrote to me first I was determined that I didn’t want that sort of publicity — it is horribly vulgar — but now of course I am going back the other way and thinking about the bally old money. John Lane must be keen on it to go to an agency to get the
pushing done. I wish to God I had a private income so that I could afford to have a soul above such things. The sort of article they want to put in the papers about me always remind me horribly of Mrs. Wilkinson, and they drive me crazy. But I suppose I will, now curse it. Would you like to see me boomed in the Press as the Boy Phenomenon or something? It makes me feel like cutting throats.”

Cecil managed to decide which of his stories he could safely tell the publicity people, material that may well have been the initial germ for the writing of *Long Before Forty*. “Just at the moment I am full of my visit to the publicity people that I went to see this morning. I told you about them in my last letter. They showed me all they could do for me, and they were so convincing that in the end I thought it would be best to make the most of the chance and damn the consequences. I can keep a pretty close

24. Cecil is using the British collective plural sense of sort, when Americans would use the singular.
25. CSF-K, 148, 20 March 1926
eye on them and see that they don’t go too far. It is an amazing stunt. As far as I can see this is the first time that John Lane have employed these folk (it is a very young firm) and I think that they are going to do their best for me just to show what they can do. John Lane chose me for the subject of the test because they realized that Payment Deferred is the sort of book which might repay a bit of pushing — just what I have said all along. When I had gone through what the firm could do in the matter they sat me down and put me through it like one o’clock. They got out of me all about my early life and that sort of thing, and my early struggles. They simply loved the story about our being wrecked in the river and having to come home in our socks, and about the rat in the cider and so on. That, in their mind, is news. The only expense I shall be put to is to have my photograph taken. That will cost a couple of guineas, curse it, which I haven’t got, but I shall have to have it done. They say that in a few days there will be paragraphs about in the gossip pages of all the papers and my photograph in John O’Lon-
don and most likely in the Sketch and Tatler as well and so on and the book is going to be boomed like billy-o. So they say. I take it with a grain of salt. There is a faint chance that it may come off, but there is a hell of a big chance even if they are sincere that it won’t. Anyway, I am not overkeen that people should start reading Payment Deferred just because I once got wrecked in the river. They themselves are very enthusiastic about it (of course they are) and they buttered me up no end about the book, and noted down all my views about life in the suburbs and that sort of thing. The date of publication has been postponed for a bit to give them a chance to get down to it. It won’t appear now until April 16th. What the devil all this is going to cost John Lane’s I haven’t the least idea, but anyway it shows that they are willing to spend a great deal more money than Methuen’s ever were on this sort of stunt. I was horribly embarrassed, too, when they started calmly discussing my face in my presence and working out whether it would pay to publish my photograph. They decided that it would, as if it were done the
right way it ought to show a personality which would attract readers. It is the last time I shall ever have to pay to have it taken, if it comes off. But this first one at least won’t be like real life, it will be a purely publicity photograph. The whole business is simply maddening in a lot of ways, but I have reconciled myself to the fact that I shall have to put up with vulgarity if I am going to get the dibs, and I am going to throw my whole weight into the scheme now; I am going to drop in there once a week or so and let them have any news about myself that has either happened or that I can think of. My God! ... I have just rung up the publicity people and told them that I am not going to waste two guineas on photographs. I shall get them done cheap locally. But I shall have to have some.”

In the end, after *Payment Deferred* became a known success, the publishers capitulated and sent Cecil to a Bond Street photographer to have his portrait taken at their expense.

26. CSF-K, 149, 23 March 1926
Later in the year Cecil complained again about possible exposure. His father had attempted to obtain a contract to write a history of Egypt, but was unsuccessful. Cecil worried that he might be expected to introduce his father to his own publishers, thereby imperilling his secrets. “Father’s commission for his book on Egypt has failed, after all, and now he doesn’t know what to do. I rather think he would be glad of an excuse not to do it, after all, as he has found that writing books isn’t as easy as it looks; but he is going to talk to Longman’s about it. Perhaps after that he might like me to put in a word for him at Methuen’s, and in that case I don’t know what the devil to do; I don’t want him to know any more about Methuen’s or Methuen’s to know any more about me than I can help, and he is such a terrible old gossip that he is sure to give things away right and left.”

Something else about his father’s gossipy con-

27. CSF-K, 160, 161 Date unknown
28. CSF-K, 204, 27 November 1926
versation excited Cecil’s recriminations, for he writes, describing their evening at the tennis club’s amateur theatrical: “My father as usual made himself as pleasant as possible to Winnie and Gladys Wright and Peter and so on. I wish he wouldn’t, it annoys me most intensely. They all know him by now, and I expect they talk about him behind my back — you know what that lot is like. I wouldn’t have had him come if it hadn’t been for the need of getting everybody possible there for the last night.”

While the arrangements for Payment Deferred progressed, the Wilkinsonsons produced three more pieces of good news. It had been fortunate for Cecil that George and Flo Belcher had introduced him to Cuthbert and Ethel Wilkinson. “Some good news. Cuthbert Wilkinson has given me some more work, and better paid. I have to do some pamphlet for Smith’s in connection with the Pullman car people,

29. CSF-K, 207, 3 December 1926
and I am being paid more per thousand for them than I have ever been paid before. And he said that he knew that these odd jobs must be troublesome, and they were trying to see it they could not make a more permanent arrangement. So that’s that. Fifteen quid or more for this job — and about the same every month, for something like three days’ work, is what I have been waiting for. This one ought to work out at nearer twenty than fifteen. What is your opinion of the business, madam?

“Today I extorted from Mrs. W. payment for ten lessons — I have only given nine; the tenth is next Wednesday. They don’t want me to leave off the lessons at all, and would like me to go with them until summer. I expect I will — I want to stick like a leech to Cuthbert Wilkinson for the next few weeks. But I haven’t yet been paid for the other work I did for Smith’s, and won’t be until they have gone through it … Today I wanted to get hold of Mrs. Wilkinson and ask her about the bungalow.”

30. CSF-K, 150, 26 March 1926
Ethel Wilkinson’s bungalow, a holiday cabin, was at Shoreham. She had suggested that Cecil might like to borrow it for a holiday, possibly with Kathleen.

Help came from Kathleen, too, in answer to his cry for money. She enclosed some pound notes in her letter, which Cecil typically acknowledged only indirectly. “And I must thank you for your letter of Saturday. The enclosures all arrived safely, and I am very grateful to you, dear. It relieves my mind of any sort of trouble of that sort.”

Kathleen was also about to relieve his mind of another sort of trouble, for she was preparing to return home for her spring holiday. The first part of it she had to spend on a training camp-out, one of those extra requirements laden on teachers, but after that she was free.

“The most exciting moment is when I am walking down the platform at Paddington. I always wait at the very front of the train and walk down to the

31. CSF-K, 151, 29 March 1926

325
other end, and it always happens that you are towards the tail end, and by the time I have got half-way down I always begin to wonder whether you have missed it or something, or if I have passed you higher up. And just when the feeling gets worst I see you, and realize with no end of shock that I am not meeting this small child I was expecting (the small child I used to help with her homework ten years ago) but a grown up woman with no end of a lot of dignity and a figure which is not that of a child. I get straight again at once — it is only during those few minutes that I look for the fifteen year old. Although as a matter of fact I can always remember that was how it used to be — on those occasions when you were working at Charing Cross and used to meet me for lunch it was the same. I look for impudence and find dignity. I shall be looking for it again on Wednesday. And until then, and afterwards, dearest, you know you have all my love.”

During the second part of Kathleen’s holiday,

32. CSF-K, 154, April 1926
she and Cecil planned a walking tour from Winchester to Arundel. “The train we were discussing leaves Waterloo at 9:30 and arrives at Winchester at 11:14 ... It has been a strenuous weekend — tennis all day yesterday, and bridge last night and the night before — I have lost eighteenpence — and more tennis this afternoon and bridge tonight and golf tomorrow ... There was quite a nice paragraph about me in John O’London’s, but there was no review — I haven’t seen one yet ... I have been trying to find out something about the country we are going to walk through. Apparently it is far and away the best part of Sussex there is — we have hit on a jolly good idea, as far as I can see. It is the famous part that Hilaire Belloc and all those other highbrow friends of yours rave about.

“I shall go down to 34 the first wet evening there is, and then I shall doubtless find out for certain about their idea of what is happening — it will be queer if they haven’t realized it yet, won’t it, but in that case I shall enlighten them and blow the consequences ... It will be the longest holiday we have
had together and I am quite certain it will be the nicest.”

Were this fiction instead of history, you would have detected that its unskillful author was building up to a climax: romantic love, fame, and fortune all blessing the hero ten pages before the finish.

As Cecil told me twenty years after, when discussing the moral necessity for punctuality: “Your mother learned better than to be late for me. She used to be as late for me as for anybody else, until I taught her better. We were planning to go on a holiday together, and were to meet at London at the train. She didn’t arrive on time, so I boarded the train alone and went by myself. Never since then has she been late for me. That learned her.” His use of the riverman’s form of the verb ‘to teach’ was deliberate emphasis. I do not know whether his story applies to this holiday, but it certainly applies to this period before Kathleen’s family recognized that she spent much of her holiday time with Cecil.

33. CSF-K, 155, 156, Easter 1926
Whatever happened at the start, Kathleen joined Cecil later and they completed the tour together. When they returned on May 1 or 2, Payment Deferred had been published and reviewed, but labor troubles were already filling the headlines and people’s minds. On May 3 one and a half million men went on strike; all public transportation and most other services came to a halt. For one week enthusiastic middle and upper class volunteers manned the trucks and trains, while Royal Navy engineering staffs kept the electrical generators running. Such newspapers as were printed were reduced in size to only the most important news. Payment Deferred was seriously wounded but not quite killed. Its sales struggled along at a low level, then began to rise as people turned their minds away from the strike and its effects.

This summer of 1926 saw further development of the affair between Cecil and Kathleen, at least in their families’ consideration. When the family realization of their walking tour was added to Cecil’s
publicly recognized status as a novelist, and to the reasonable expectation that the current sales of *Payment Deferred* would lead in the next six or nine months to substantial royalty payments, the feeling grew among their families that marriage was no longer unlikely and socially impossible.

By this time George Smith had retired and was living at home. He enjoyed going to the races and one day when the rest of his family were busy he asked Kitty if she would like to go. He took her to Newmarket. Kitty enjoyed the outing, lunch in the member’s restaurant, and they won most of their small bets. Kitty liked George very much; an interesting old man.

Six months later he asked her again to go to the races, this time somewhere else. This was not so happy a day; George’s mind was burdened. He introduced the subject rather diffidently, but he said that he did not want Kitty to marry Cecil. He knew what Cecil was like and he feared that Cecil would make Kitty very unhappy. Kitty says on the tape: “But of course I thought that I knew everything. I thought
that I could handle it. Well, it took me twenty years to discover that I couldn’t.” Kitty told George that she would probably marry Cecil. Following this, Molly, Marjorie, and Hugh all warned Kitty about Cecil’s character to persuade her not to marry him. So did some others. A few mentioned prospective financial hardship, but only a few, because, whatever the prospects for a novelist, all these people suffered from financial hardship anyway. All of them placed primary emphasis on Cecil’s disregard for truthfulness and honesty, and predicted that she would undoubtedly be made acutely unhappy.

These well-meant attempts unavoidably criticized Cecil, and aroused in Kathleen the one response to be expected after her ordeal with West. This Cecil she loved was in danger and she responded with loyalty. Also, as perhaps should also have been expected of a young woman in love, she minimized his faults, believing that what was told her referred to those things she had obviously recog-

34. Kitty tape, 10 Nov 1984

331
nized herself, and not the greater deficiencies she had not recognized. Many of these lies that Kathleen recognized were those she had had a part in, because they were those that covered up the pre-marital sex she was enjoying with Cecil, and of any lie that is the one that is most likely to be self-forgiven by its participants. Too close to Cecil’s affair with Lillian, she could not analyze it to see the cowardly deceit it was. That cliche is used not because it is easily available, but because it is the literal truth. Cecil was too afraid to tell Lillian that he no longer loved her, so he deceived her instead, like a husband deceiving his wife. Kathleen answered her informers with confidence. “I know all about his little lies, and I know why he tells them. Don’t worry, I can handle him.”

In her preface to the letters written to her in the summer term of 1926, Kathleen later wrote, about 1968: “Read between the lines and the intrigues begin to show up. All his life he had been a ‘fantastic liar’ but everyone seemed to excuse him and although they knew he was a liar they believed what
he was saying at the moment. It was always interesting and usually lots of fun and anyway ‘why worry — Cecil was Cecil and different from the rest of us.’”

As a sequel to the walking tour, two weeks after Kathleen returned to Westlands, Cecil planned to come up and camp nearby, where Kathleen could visit him in her free time. Kathleen later wrote, “The old sister of the headmistress, who was a widow and a nurse, knew about [us] and sort of acted as a chaperone in case of trouble.”

“Dearest. That letter was the Smith’s cheque, for fifteen quid — more than I had asked for. But to make up for that a bit I have remembered that I owe Miss Roberts ten bob for typing — I told her I would pay her when I got paid. ... This afternoon I am due to meet L., and will tell you all about it in my next letter. I wonder what on earth is the reason for it.”

Cecil then discusses his clothing purchases with the money: sports coat, flannel trousers, a suit. These had to be done quietly as he should have

35. CSF-K, 157, 28 May 1926

333
repaid a debt to his father first. His father is going to dinner and the theater with a Canadian publisher, Hugh Eayrs. Cecil’s next letter describes another meeting with Lillian, contains more complaints about lack of money, and discloses more of Cecil’s shilly-shallying.

“On Thursday I met L., at North Dulwich station. We walked up beyond the Crystal Palace; then we had tea. ... She had nothing important to say to me — she just felt like it when she wrote, I suppose. We have made no arrangements for the future.

“I have bought the new suit. I junked the gorgeous one I wrote about, but I bought one made to the same order — grey, with lots of brown and a hint of green in it. It fits me like a miracle and looks splendid. Also I paid £5 into your account.

“I think that anyway I shall ask Mrs. Wilkinson for payment in advance for Garth ... And even with that I may only just have enough if I have to pay much of a railway fare. [Because Dorothy Beale was away, Cecil would not have to pay golf fees, but] in fact, as far as I can see, I may be borrowing off you
again to get home [from his projected trip to near Kathleen’s school]. I haven’t had an opportunity of looking up trains at all, and I don’t know anything about them. If there’s a train about 4 o/c from Hereford or Ludlow I shall catch that with luck. I shall have to leave everything to you to arrange. Sorry to be helpless like this, dear, but it is largely the fault of circumstances.”

Cecil had spent that week playing golf and tennis, having tea with Lillian, buying clothes for himself, and having lunch with Mrs. Wilkinson, “circumstances” through whose “fault” (and despite his forethought and determination) he had not been able to make any rational plans about either getting to see his best girl or about the ability to get home again afterwards. He had to leave everything up to her to arrange, which she, as on most other occasions, did very competently.

Whatever their families thought about the

36. CSF-K, 158, 31 May 1926
improvement in Cecil’s financial situation and his public recognition, Cecil developed in the second half of 1926 a sense of urgency and an attitude of desperation. Life could not go on in the way his was; something had to be done to put it on a different footing. If matters could not be made to improve through the efforts of other people, then Cecil himself might even be put in the position of having to do it himself. This summer and autumn would see the development of all of Cecil’s enterprises to their fullest, as if he felt that extreme conditions required extreme measures.

Perhaps reinforcing this attitude was the conviction that his work in any case offended his friends and family. It was not being an author that offended them, but what he wrote. He thought Josephine would scandalize his family because of the political opinions he expressed in it, he feared that Payment Deferred would upset them with its horror, and that Love Lies Dreaming would offend with what he thought were its “indecent sexual scenes.” Lillian had naturally asked to read Payment Deferred, and
Cecil gave her a copy. “I don’t know whether she will acknowledge it or tell what she thinks of it. I am absolutely dead sure she will hate it, nevertheless.”

“On Sunday just before lunch I went for a walk with Sylvia; we passed L. on the other side of the road. She nodded to us, but that was all. You know that when I got back from Acton Renald I sent her a copy of Payment Deferred. She hasn’t acknowledged it or anything, although she practically asked for it the last time I saw her. I expect as a matter of fact it upset her or something.”

In a month, Lillian replied with two pages of notes, “quite good stuff and fairly interesting.”

Before she did, Cecil reluctantly lent another copy to another girl for whom he had a momentary heart flutter. “After the [tennis tournament] finals there was a concert and dance, and I have a dreadful confession to make. I lost all of my heart which I can dispose of to Dorothy Foster. I expect, as a matter of fact it upset her or something.”

37. CSF-K, 160, 8 June 1926
38. CSF-K, 168, 28 June 1926
fact, that you know her a lot better than I do, as I have hardly spoken to her before — she is always ‘Miss Foster’ to me. By accident we drifted together at supper time and started talking, and we danced together a bit and so on. Norman Foster [Dorothy’s brother] turned up unexpectedly (he has been away a month) and she went to talk to him, but of course Grace Mitchell took him away at once and she came back to talk to me. She was a very pathetic child altogether — not just because of that, but because for all her brilliant tennis and that sort of thing she hasn’t spoken to a man all her life, as far as I can make out. She is a lonely infant, apparently, and I was feeling lonely, and we drifted about together and made each other more miserable than ever while enjoying the process. In fact, I was so nearly lost that I was just going to ask if I could see her home when Brown and Effie Brown turned up and stuck to us like glue, and in the end I came to my senses and pushed off. But I find I am most intensely interested in her. She is an unusual type (rather the L. type, somehow) and she would be a
fine character, to work out in a novel. I wish, dear, that the next time you write you would tell me what you know of her.”

Cecil met Dorothy the next week. “Then from I went to the club, and there I met Dorothy Foster — by accident. There is nothing in it now, dear — as soon as we met I knew that; in fact of course there wasn’t anything in it last Saturday at all. In fact I don’t know now how I ever thought anything. She is a new girl and as a matter of fact she has given me the germ of a plot for a novel which I shouldn’t be surprised if I wrote — provided I can hide the fact that it was she who did it. And I had my copy of Payment Deferred with me which I am taking back from 34, and I lent it to her at her request. I didn’t want to; it will shock and offend her to blazes (I don’t know whether a highbrow like you can appreciate that, but it will) and I don’t expect she will ever

39. CSF-K, 173, 4 July 1926
40. Much of their social life was at the Alleyn’s Old Boys Club.
want to speak to me again afterwards, so that’s that. She is rather like L., as I said before, and since L. read *Payment Deferred* I haven’t heard a word from her.”41 As with Lillian, Cecil’s fears were unfounded. Dorothy was not offended; Cecil had another passing heart flutter with her in the autumn, and in 1947, after divorcing Kathleen, he married her.

Cecil detested the Wilkinsons, although he stuck to them “like a leech.” Mrs. Wilkinson was “the most unbearable woman I know,” and he eyed her constant show of upper thigh and underdrawers with revulsion. (He remarks on that in half a dozen letters.) Of Garth he wrote: “Garth is beginning to get on my nerves. He is such a self-satisfied priggish bloke when you get to the bottom of him (I don’t mean what you mean) and I don’t think he could commit a good healthy crime if he tried; and I am quite sure that he has never been drunk and he has

41. CSF-K, 174, 7 July 1926
taken art as he found it without trying to evolve any original ideas on the matter. I have always wanted to ask him whether he noticed anything on that historic occasion when you and I were there — but he is such a nice-minded bloke that I am sure that if he did he set out to forget it as soon as possible. And nicemindedness irritates me abominably. I expect it is because I have the wrong sort of mind — it always strikes me as a sort of unhealthy prurience. I think people ought to take pleasure in anything that comes their way, whatever it is.”

“He is the laziest blighter on earth, and I shall tell him so. But I don’t care; I know that he is going away at the same time as I am, and so he can’t have all his lessons now, and as I have been paid it doesn’t matter.” For all that, or because of it, forty years later Cecil left Ethel Wilkinson a legacy.

Cecil insisted on maintaining one other rela-

42. CSF-K, 147, 19 March 1926
43. CSF-K, 165, 20 June 1926
tionship — Dorothy Beale. Whatever he thought about her, he was adamant that she come to Florence Belcher’s Winchelsea camp at the same time as he did, whether or not that suited Kathleen and regardless of the fact that Dorothy had no money to pay for her stay. Dorothy had contacts: she knew of an editorial job that was opening up at Duckworth’s, and she had other influential friends as well. “Oh, and by the way, dear, I am very anxious that Dorothy Beale should come to Winchelsea this summer. She will be broke, and at the same time she will have no home to go to at all during August. She wants to come, and is free from about August 11th to 20th, and on my own responsibility I have invited her. You will back me up if there is any trouble, won’t you dear. Dash it all, Frank is bringing Nancy [Frank, married to ‘Peter,’ was having an affair with Nancy. Cecil equates Nancy with Dorothy.] I want her to come, and I want her to have a good time, although I am sure she will be able to amuse herself without making any incursions on our time. Besides, she has got into the Markbreiter’s act somehow and
knows lots of people whose influence would be invaluable to me — witness this editorship which is possible.”

Winchelsea might not have been the ideal place to take a person as “nice” as Cecil made Dorothy Beale out to be. Certainly, Cecil recognized some deficiencies, as when he wrote to Kathleen criticizing her plan to permit one of the girls from school to visit the camp. “About Eve. I am sorry dear, but I certainly do not think she ought to be at Winchelsea at her age. I don’t want to say anything spiteful, but — some of the folk there haven’t any too good accents or manners. Lewdness pure and simple would only upset her a little, but combined with other things and the general messiness and that sort of thing I think it would shock her too much. I mean that Eve would probably look upon most of the people there as her social inferiors (she would only feel it subconsciously, but you know what girls of that age are like) and consequently she would have no

44. CSF-K, 162, 13 June 1926
toleration for anything.”45

Perhaps he was right. As one further shock, Kathleen at that time was given notice that her employment would terminate with the school year, ostensibly because of her accent, an offense which Cecil four days later tried to minimize. “What an unexpected and rather unpleasant event! These things will happen, you know, dear. ... Of course, dear, there are one or two funny things, about your accent (I’ve told you about them often enough) but I don’t see why Miss Wood should get so worked up about it. I honestly think that it is not so much the accent as her damned shiftiness and desire for change. I think that is by far the most likely reason. But we will make a big effort and try to wipe out a lot of the accent this summer. I expect I will be a trial to you about it. There is no trace about your voice, dear, if only you will talk slowly.”46

The concern with accent reflects the British

45. CSF-K, 164, 18 June 1926
46. CSF-K, 167, 22 June 1926

344
class structure. Cecil and Kathleen had grown up about two miles apart, and Kathleen’s neighborhood had been the nicer. However, Cecil had developed an accent that would pass as educated while Kathleen always had a trace of South London in her voice. An American would not notice it, and her voice had only a trace of the cockney accent that is used to depict Londoners in films, but an Englishman would notice it and place the source. The school at which Kathleen taught catered to the upper classes; the school headmistress thought that Kathleen’s accent did not fit that class structure and, possibly, that some students might acquire some of it. I was once married to an educated woman who was born near Newcastle. Her brothers knew enough of the Geordie accent from the Newcastle docks to imitate it when they wanted to irritate, even anger, their mother.

In addition to his long-felt desires, Cecil had acquired a new one — or rather made a new and different extension of an old one. The idea of traveling the rivers extensively by motorboat, writing as he
did so, caught his fancy. Over the summer his thoughts developed from a prospective motorboat when he has the money to buy one to an attempt to promote a full-sized motor cruiser on the basis of the publicity he could provide by sailing it round the rivers of Europe.

These attempts to do far too much with his negligible resources brought Cecil to the edge of failure. In several querulous letters he as good as tells Kathleen that she must make her arrangements match his. “I shall come back to London [from a holiday in St. Leonards with the Matthews followed by a holiday at Winchelsea] about the Tuesday before you come home — the Tuesday before Bank Holiday. And as far as I can see the best thing I can do is not to go back there until about the Wednesday following B. H. You see, there are difficulties. I have to bother about laundry — a fortnight from home is about as long as I can manage, from that point of view. Then anyway I am not too keen on being at Winchelsea on B. H. And then comes the point that Winchelsea costs me money. If D. Beale’s going
there I had better be there when she arrives, at least, and that will be a good long time after B. H., won’t it?”

Bank holidays are public holidays when businesses close. The one that Cecil discusses is comparable to the American Fourth of July that starts the summer vacation time. Cecil hated the crowds in holiday places on holidays. Since he was not limited by the demands of a job, he scheduled his holidays to avoid those of other people, regardless of the inconvenience that placed on people who did have jobs.

“There isn’t much left for me to say about the Winchelsea camp, after all your eight pages, is there, dear? The whole point is that I will do anything you want me to do — as long as I can afford it, dear. The money I owe my father is quite independent of how long I am in the house — I don’t want to make a matter of bread and butter of it, old thing. If he can count on that it helps out his regular payment of the

47. CSF-K, 169, 25 June 1926
mortgage, which falls due on the same dates, dear. I owe him quite a lot, you know, and I will not allow my attempt at repayment to be wangled about with. For the matter of that, my six-monthly payments might be in arrears instead of in advance — you can’t tell.”

A week later Cecil writes from St. Leonards, where he is staying with the Matthews. “I sounded Bill about motoring me to Hastings and he didn’t seem too keen. [A. W. ‘Bill’ Clarke, another Alleyn’s old boy, was a government engineer. He was the first of the group to acquire a motor vehicle, in the form of a motorcycle. He may have had a car by this time.] But now I think the Wilkinsons will. I hope so. I have the gravest doubts about my endurance if I cycle with you to camp. If we do, we shall have to start about 6 and rest for an hour for every hour we ride.” This fear sounds somewhat strange for a man who plays tennis and golf for days at a time. It

48. CSF-K, 171, 29 June 1926
49. CSF-K, 172, 2 July 1926
may have been unjustified, but it was a real fear that influenced his life. After he became partially crippled he told me that he then, about 1947, thought of this fatigue as a warning sign. However, on the basis of my extensive cycling experience and knowledge, I have concluded otherwise. Cecil had not been cycling much, and when he did go with others he was out of cycling condition and therefore he tired before the others. This experience is typical. Cycling is an endurance sport in which the conditioning required for tennis has little relevance.

“And now we are going to have a disagreement. Why is it that you are insisting on going to Winchelsea for the Bank Holiday weekend? [Kathleen wanted to be there when her other friends were.] Don’t you think, dear, that if you are going to spend any time in London you had better break it up as much as you can? A week in London wouldn’t hurt anyone — I don’t honestly think that it would make the least difference to you, after ten weeks in the country. Then there is my point of view to be considered. I really can’t afford to spend a long time at
Winchelsea, really, dear, not even if I raise a few pounds (as I hope to do) next week. Three weeks is the absolute limit. If you are going to spend all your time at camp I won’t be seeing very much of you, and we might try to spread that out on the same system. Then definitely, I would much rather spend my time at camp not during the B. H. weekend. Also Dorothy Beale arrives at Winchelsea on August 14th, and I must be there if I can when she arrives and for the day or two after.

“Now what I should like to do (provided business permits) or rather what I should like you to do, would be” and then follows a schedule for Kathleen.

During his stay at St. Leonards Cecil was given the same bedroom as the summer before, and the presence of the same two chamber pots decorated with Greek key pattern sent him into the same raptures of excitement at the thought of him using one while Kathleen used the other. He feared that that

50. CSF-K, 180, 21 July 1926
was no longer a likely prospect, because of the book that he had just finished. When he sent Olive Matthews one of his free copies he enclosed a “delicate letter ... It wasn’t an easy letter to write, because I was breaking Love Lies Dreaming to her gently. I don’t expect you appreciate the fact, dear, but that book will shock the Matthews inexpressibly. In fact, I begin to doubt whether I shall ever stay there again — and of course that would be a pity.”

Later in the year, when Olive’s letters had reassured him that Love Lies Dreaming had not destroyed his welcome there, he wrote “I am awfully glad about it. It means that it won’t spoil my prospects at Hastings — I can see us both staying there next summer, as I have always wanted. [Hastings and St. Leonards are practically the same place.] And do you remember what I said about the Greek key pattern china? My ambition will be fulfilled.”

Also at Olive’s house Cecil first met full-length mirrors in bedrooms and bathrooms. “I am not used

51. CSF-K, 199, 9 November 1926
to seeing myself naked. I have been very interested in studying my development — my pectoral and abdominal muscles are coming on now, and all the muscles of my back and buttocks and thighs are quite attractive nowadays. I am really surprised at them — if I had a straighter spine I would be a quite well-developed individual. I like to tauten up and see big chunks of muscle suddenly stand out. I would be positively homosexual if it wasn’t for the fact that I am always thinking about you.”

And then with Kathleen’s imminent return there was that other important matter to be taken care of. “And you didn’t say in your last letter as to whether you thought I ought to go to Clapham Junction or not, so that I am going to act on my own discretion and go there tomorrow.” These words conceal his intention to go to Clapham Junction to buy condoms.

Kathleen arrived on Wednesday, 28 July. She

52. CSF-K, 178, 16 July 1926
53. CSF-K, 181, 25 July 1926
stayed with Cecil’s family over the weekend, and on Tuesday, 3 August, 1926, Cecil and she went up to London and were married in a civil ceremony without informing either of their families. There is no hint in any of the previous letters that they had planned to do this before Kathleen’s return. It is likely that they decided to get married while lovemaking among the bushes of the park that surrounded the Crystal Palace.\textsuperscript{54} On 6 August they went down to Winchelsea, where they spent most of August ostensibly unmarried but in the somewhat permissive atmosphere of Flo’s camp. Following this in early September they took a punt for a camping trip on the Thames with another couple, Harold and Ethel Allen, “a very sporting young couple.”\textsuperscript{55} The upper Thames is a quiet river, its level controlled by dams with locks for passage of small boats and small passenger steamers. A camping

\textsuperscript{54} Many years later Cecil remembered this to Kathleen in letter CSF-K, 572, 5 September 1955

\textsuperscript{55} Kathleen’s notes
punt is the ideal holiday vessel for this river. This is a substantial hand-propelled boat, four feet in beam and twenty feet long, flat bottomed with decked-over upswept ends, which carries on a series of hoops a canvas camping cover which is furled during the day but forms a complete cover at night. The punt is poled along wherever the water is shallow enough, the punter standing on the small rear deck, but it is paddled like a Canadian canoe in the rare places where the water is too deep for poling. With its flat bottom lined with cushions the punt is economical and secluded luxury for two.

After this holiday they had to face the question of what to do. Despite the earlier cancellation, Kathleen was asked to return to Westlands School for the next year. She did so, while Cecil looked for a job in order to support her. They did not announce their marriage for two reasons. First, Miss Wood would at least look with disfavor upon Mrs. Smith [or had she been married under the name of Mrs. Forester?], separated from her husband, teaching at Westlands. Secondly, Cecil would be expected to leave his par-
ents’ home, a move for which he had no money, and Kathleen would be expected to share this non-existent home during her holidays.

The first thing Cecil did was to apply for a position on the literature faculty of the University College of Nottingham. It seems inconceivable that he should have had any hope of acceptance; without any university training in literature, despising the intellectual, with no advantages except a penchant for reading everything that came his way and an ability to visualize and describe interesting stories, he had no qualifications for the position which would interest the faculty committee. [As an example of his critical thinking at this time, Cecil wrote to Kathleen that “Mr. Polly is very nearly the best novel that ever was written.”56 Not many writers or teachers of English would agree with this assessment of H. G. Wells’s novel. Presumably Cecil had at least tried the Ulysses that Kathleen had bought for him, and he had tried and disliked Dickens but

56. CSF-K, 208, 6 December 1926

355
liked Thackeray’s novels.]

Cecil thought that he had a good chance at the position, for he took his application seriously enough to suggest to Kathleen “especially if at Christmas you transfer to Nottingham.” 57 In the same letter he wrote that his editor, Rieu of Methuen’s, tells him “that U. C. Notts is another Bolshie sort of place which employs all kinds of lunatics, so that I have a sporting chance.”

Cecil was not accepted by Nottingham. His contact with Dorothy Beale over the editorship at Duckworth’s had not developed. The only remaining possibility was the answer to his reply to a newspaper advertisement for editor of a trade paper. The advertiser was a printer named Tremayne who desired to start a magazine for the jewelry trade. Tremayne wanted a man experienced in magazine production and editorial work with an extensive knowledge of jewelry. He probably did not find one, but he did not accept Cecil as second-best. He did,

57. CSF-K, 184, 25 September 1926
however, commission a series of articles on historically significant pieces of jewelry. Reading up on detail history was just down Cecil’s alley. The hardest part of the job was locating suitable illustrations for copying, for without illustrations the article would be worthless. Cecil did one article a month over the autumn for £3 each.
Dorothy Beale now wanted to use Cecil as Cecil wanted to use her. He thought her contacts in the literary world were useful; she thought that both Cecil and his father had useful contacts in the literary world. Dorothy, however, did not want the contacts for herself, but for a friend of hers, Mary Lawson. Cecil just learned of Mary that summer, for on 22 June, 1926, in the same letter that records his indigitation that Kathleen would not be rehired at Wheatlands for next year, he writes “I think I have got my claws into this Lawson woman about the editorship, and if I can’t get that she will give me something else,
when I see her next.” When he had seen her last, and when next, he doesn’t tell Kathleen, but pretends in the autumn that he had just met her through Dorothy Beale. “A friend of Dorothy’s wanted introductions from me to publishers to give her a chance of doing jackets and things for books; I rang up both Methuen’s and John Lane’s, and they both asked me to send her along, so that it seems as if my introduction is of some value. So this morning I am going to the studio of her firm to have a look at the work, and if it is all right I shall give her letters to Pierce and Boswell — I have to take that precaution, as it wouldn’t do to recommend an absolute dud to anyone, although Dorothy assures me that her work is first rate. I was there last night, as I wrote I was going. She is killing herself with work again (just like another poor creature I know) and I ticked her off for it. But somehow or other I got very bored, although I was only there a couple of hours. A week like that would put me in an asylum.”

1. CSF-K, 188, 8 October 1926
“When I wrote last I was just off to talk to Miss Lawson about introductions for her to Methuen’s and John Lane. It was absolutely a case of love at first sight — we simply recognized each other as kindred souls and fell upon each other’s necks. She scrapses a living out of all sorts of stunts put together — runs a little studio where she (or rather people she employs) design book covers and posters and that sort of thing, and she does a little reading for John Murray and a little advertisement agency and all that sort of thing, including literary agencing. As far as I can make out she is not very rich (she pays her chief artist £15 a week, and she says that is more than she makes herself) and not a little tiny bit scrupulous. We met each other’s eye and agreed on every point. She is not really ‘Miss’ Lawson; God knows what her real name is, as she had a husband once and ran away from him, and is now living with Hastain, her business partner. I took her out to lunch (I thought it would be a good investment) and I simply killed myself impressing her. You know the sort of stunt, dear (you’ve seen me do it often
enough) and at last we swore blood brotherhood and parted with tears. I expect something very likely will happen — but unless there is a lot of money in it I won’t do anything criminal. But she told me that John Murray wants another reader; and I still have it in my power to do her some more favours — I can get her introductions from my father to Phillips and to Longmans. [Cecil here shows that he recognized his father’s connections with publishers, a connection he denied in Long Before Forty.] So I wouldn’t be at all surprised if we didn’t come to some sort of agreement soon. And, most important of all, she has got some financial backing and is thinking of starting out into publishing. And in that case ——!”

Intelligent and unscrupulous Mary Lawson may have been, but not more so than Cecil. She wanted to use him — if she succeeded her success was not noticeable. He determined to use her — and she attempted for a while to do what he wanted. Simultaneously Cecil was working Dorothy Beale’s

2. CSF-K, 189, 10 October 1926
other contacts, and the two stories twist together for several months.

Each season, roughly corresponding to the terms of Kathleen’s school schedule, Cecil has had one scheme after another to carry his hopes. In the Spring of ‘25 it was *Payment Deferred*. In the Autumn it was the Imperial Advertising Agency. The sequel to that, the Great Advertising Space Gamble, occupied the Spring of ‘26. Now in the Autumn of ‘26 came the Game of Social Success for Money.

“I am doing one or two short stories instead, and I am getting Miss Lawson to sell them for me if she can — she thinks she will, and if so the money question will be solved for the time being.

“I was alarmed by what you said about envying me my invitations and things, dear. I am not invited because I am a young bachelor — I am invited because I am the author of ‘Payment Deferred,’ and I am going to ride that to death. And if at some future date they are not anxious to invite the author’s wife, they won’t have the author either. But from what I know of Mrs. Forester, they will be glad
to have her as well — especially when she and her husband work out little plans of campaign together as to how to nobble the moneyed classes. Don’t you bother, old thing — you and I can always be social successes if we choose to.

“My own stunt is developing. I am dining at Miss Lawson’s on the 27th to meet John Murray and various other influential birds, and I am probably dining at the Markbreiters on the 24th. I did not tell you that Miss Lawson, when I lunched with her ten days ago, asked politely if I were married and I said ‘very nearly.’ I told her all about you, and she promptly said that when you were home we must both come and see you. [Who is ‘we’ and who is ‘you’? I don’t know.] I am going to plunge really vigorously now, and get my claws into something or somebody, and I’m not going to take them out until I have secured a double living wage somehow.

“I have switched right over to short stories, I think, dear. I shall persevere at them for a few weeks and see what can be done with them. It is a very paying game if you can find your market; and if you can
maintain the flow. One a week would keep us in something like luxury — we could live on one a month. I must see what I can do. It won’t do any harm for a few weeks, anyway, especially as it is a choice between that and being idle.

“Tonight I am off to my first entry into society — this bally musical studio which D.B. goes to. I am to meet the Markbreiters there, and I shall work out one or two points in my plan of campaign there. I expect we shall have a hectic time at Christmas, dear — are you coming to the Alleyn’s dance on December 22nd?”

“On Sunday I went to the studio — an eminently respectable place with most marvellous music — really marvellous. Everyone was all over me and very nice about things, and I felt greasy with all the oiling I received. Miss Markbreiter was very nice to me, and I did my best to be attractive. I may have succeeded. I met the Hambourgs and various other eminent musicians, but I was the star literary

3. CSF-K, 191, 16 October 1926

364
man — they are a bit short of authors. And I got a few free cigarettes, and had to run like mad to Baker Street to catch the last tube train.”

Of course to be a social success in intellectual literary circles, even if the intellectualism is merely pretense, one must have a working knowledge of intellectual literature. So Cecil admonished Kathleen: “Of course you like Tolstoi, dear, don’t you? There’s no need to cook [i.e., lie]. He is one of the highbrows whom I nearly like – not quite. But he is full of very sound common sense except when he gets on one of his eternal hobbies.”

He continues in the next letter. “A cousin of the Markbreiters is Schnitzler, who is a German author of real eminence — rather of Dickens’ standard,

4. CSF-K, 192, 19 October 1926
5. CSF-K, 191, 16 October 1926
6. Arthur Schnitzler wrote plays and short stories analyzing the psychology of the Austrian upper-middle class before World War I. The French film La Ronde is from one of his plays.
and of course they are proud of him, but they seemed just as proud of me, somehow. I have got a stunt well mapped out in my mind now, and when I get a chance I will bring it off. There is one thing which I am thankful for — that I have a highbrow wife to whom I can safely leave the highbrows. You had better pass on to Tchekov when you have done with Tolstoi. Tchekov is the real highbrow ideal, and I can’t bear him at any price. If Miss Lawson sells my film rights and short stories — she swears she will, and so does D.B. — things will be much straighter and decently comfortable, but I doubt whether she will. She seems to have done wonders in that sort of way in one or two connections, but somehow it seems impossible now that I should even sell short stories. It is too easy money. And for film rights! That’s buckshee money, of course. I can’t make out whether Miss Lawson’s business is a big one or not. There are certainly plenty of people working for it — artists and typists and things — but she and Hastain don’t seem to make much out of it, and I know that Miss Lawson is a fearful liar — at
present I can’t tell which of her fairy tales are lies and which aren’t. I want to know, because I see coming up in front of me an invitation to join the firm, and I shall be badly let down if it doesn’t work out right. On the other hand, it may work out well, and we shall be over our troubles — but that seems at present much too good to be true. I must have myself all braced up and fit for action on Friday, so that I can impress the lady with my strength of character and tractability and initiative and imagination, don’t you know. I have a tiny idea that I might more easily get what I want by making love to her — I told you before that she’s living with Hastain, but is not apparently married — but I won’t.

“There are other reasons, dear, but the one depending on commonsense is that that sort of thing doesn’t last, and as soon as she got over the first enthusiasm I would either lose my job or slave to keep things going, and it would be a dog’s life. It is far better to make her think that I am the most wonderful man on earth (it wouldn’t take much to make her think that, as she is well away that way
already) and then never give her any chance to see me as I am. That is what I am going to set out to do — picking my way with the last word in caution. I have got to be wonderful yet unapproachable. Do you think I can manage it?"  

“I have just got back from lunching with Miss Lawson at her club. My God, what a place! It is a semicharity affair run largely for actors and people, and the food would have disgraced a workhouse. But of course you don’t expect good food at a women’s club. However, we had a long conversation, which is what is important. We went straight to the point, and got down to brass tacks without any beating about the bush. I said that all I wanted was money and I wasn’t too particular how I got it, but that some slight permanent job was my ideal. She agreed with me implicitly, and in a coldblooded fashion we debated my advantages and disadvantages. She pointed out to me that I was tall and goodlooking (!) and distinguished (hide that hump)

7. CSF-K, 192, 20 October 1926
and that I was famous. Clearly the best way is via the women, and I agreed. On Wednesday when I dine there I am to meet all sorts of folk with money and folk with influence, and she will give me the tip as to which line to take with each. Also she knows a whole lot of influential women, and will guide me in the way I should go. Then we started talking about you, and we worked out how you could come in. We agreed that there was lots of room and opportunity for you, especially with me behind you. Very probably (in fact for certain) we could wangle massage and health supervision sort of things for you; besides, if we get together we can work out how you can be your best. You know, dear, that it will be perfectly easy for you to captivate a gang of brainless women just as easily as a gang of clever ones and I have in mind what seems to me just the right pose and that sort of thing to adopt. Because it will be all pose, of course, dear. Two years of it would be more than anyone could stand, but at the end of two years I ought to be all right. So that next Christmas you are going to plunge in along with me into the shemozzle
and see what is doing. We ought to be a howling success. Miss Lawson is sure of it, too. I am perfectly coldblooded about it; I am sick of being poor and I’m not going to bear it any longer. I shall play bridge, and accept free meals, and make googoo eyes at all the women until they pull every string they can for me. Unless anything turns up better for you, dear, I can see us setting up house together at Easter — which will be the best time to start. Write and tell me if you are willing to plunge in this way too. I am utterly reckless now.

“Miss Lawson has already done something for me — she is after a big advertising deal with the G W. R. [Great Western Railway] and has put my name forward as the man to handle the business best from the other end. It might be a splendid thing for me and obviate all these other things. One never knows. Miss Lawson broke the news to me about her living with Hastain. She thought it wasn’t right that I should remain in ignorance. Of course I swore that I hadn’t heard anything about it, and at the same time I told her that it didn’t matter either way to me
— neither does it. She told me that she wasn’t mad keen on Hastain, but at the same time she assured me that she had no designs on me at all. It doesn’t matter if she has — but I didn’t tell her so … I don’t think I told you that the Markbreiters brother is the permanent undersecretary to the Home Office — one of the most important permanent government officials there is. But I don’t see how he can be much help to me, somehow. But one never knows. And Mrs. Dollibar-John, who is the fearfully wealthy American woman who finances the studio (and upon whom all the musical people sponge like billio) is just losing her secretary; also she tries to write books and is in need of collaboration. What ho! That is my first chance. I am to meet her on Sunday week, eight days from now. She is paying £250 to get her first book published — for that amount I would have written the whole thing for her and saved her money.

“Blood and scalps and hard cash. They may come my way yet.

“All my love, darling, “8
“And yesterday I dined at Miss Lawson’s. Not too bad — quite a good dinner (including fried brains, which I love) and a hell of a lot of talk. I was quite a lion, and I put in a lot of good work with the legal advisor of Carl Laemmle films — the biggest firm outside Hollywood. It is the firm that did the Nibelung film which I raved about more than two years ago. Then there was a fat and opulent woman who Miss Lawson wanted to get me off on — but she was not quite the sort of thing I wanted. I talked to the film man and the Home Office bloke most of the evening.

“It is the weirdest household — they are quite openly Miss Lawson and Mr. Hastain, even to the servants; as a matter of fact it is six dozen of Miss Lawson and one millionth Mr. Hastain — he is a very retiring bloke with not too much brains or personality. She was putting in some red hot work with the railway manager (about the advertising stunt I told you about) and I was tactful and said

8. CSF-K, 193, 22 October 1926

372
only a few words to them, but then I chose those words very carefully indeed. Miss Markbreiter and a whole lot of thirty-ish Jewesses with too much money were there, and I made myself attractive to them. Quite a well spent evening, on the whole ...

"On Sunday I am going to the studio expressly to meet Mrs. Dollibar-John, the millionairess I told you about; something ought to develop out of it. I hope so, anyway, dear — I shall try to be my very best and brightest and impress her. She writes ghastly books and pays to have them published — and she said when she heard about me — ‘Oh, I should love to meet another author!’ And don’t you worry, dear; you will settle down allright at the studio and you will have all the success necessary there. You don’t realize what damned fools they all are, and they are self consciously artistic, and that sort of thing. Any breath of decent naturalness simply enchants them. The idea they can’t resist is of the hardheaded bloke with artistic ideas who makes art out of his hardheadedness — that’s me, and it’s also you; you will have to exploit your work at the
same time as you point out gracefully the art that lies in a straight spine and good foot arches. That sort of thing, dear; and don’t you worry about the conversation. Everyone there is only too anxious to make discoveries and show people off, and they do it quite well; and you will have three staunch allies at your back, and anyway you can talk much better than those folk — I know you can, dear, especially if you don’t bother. Believe me, dear, when I tell you that you will come off all right. You’ve got to, anyway, for at present, at least, you form an essential part of my plan of campaign.”

“I went to the studio. The music was simply marvellous — really firstclass music, of the sort you would love. [Never, anywhere, does Cecil name the works and only once does he name a performer, but only in connection with her underwear.] Then Mrs. Dollibar-John. She is insane. I mean that — not eccentric, or dotty, or balmy, or anything, but simply insane. However, I seem to have made quite a good

9. CSF-K, 195, 28 October 1926
impression on her, as far as I can tell, and things are still moving steadily forward. For the actual proposing of me and my schemes to her, though, I have to rely on Mary Lawson, who is not as reliable as I like. But she is clever and mercenary and (I think) fond enough of me to put it through. But I am quite scared about Mrs. D-J’s insanity. It is delusional and religious; the two worst kinds. I shall have to keep on the hop if I am in close touch with her.

“And there are possibilities working out with Mary Lawson. She is dallying with the idea of expanding her literary agency and putting me in charge, especially if the extra capital she is wangling for comes in. I am doubtful whether I should make much out of it; I might make a lot and I might not, and I haven’t yet decided whether if the offer is made to me I shall accept it. Again, I might or I might not. But there is a distinct and real possibility that I may get a distinct contract for a long period on definite terms, and in that case it will certainly be all right. But I am walking very warily.

“Of course I want you to come to the studio
when you can, dear. It is all hot air and cold tea, and at the studio you won’t mix intimately with the big noises, but it will lead forward, even if I don’t arrange anything else as well. And the music is really good – Queen’s Hall stuff, and with the advantage that the chamber music which they can’t do in big places is quite possible there. And the people are quite amusing to meet once or twice. You will want the nicest frock possible, but not too evening-y. We will discuss it again later.”

“And I am going to Mary Lawson’s office to continue the bally session about the literary agency. There is nothing certain about it; she must have further capital before she launches out into it, and that’s not definite. Further she thinks that at a pinch she might run it herself. She might (she is a clever woman) but I doubt it greatly. For one thing, although she has good taste, I don’t think it would be as effective as mine commercially; for another, although she knows a lot of people she doesn’t know

10. CSF-K, 196, 1 November 1926
publishers as well as I do; and lastly, I do know something about copyright and contracts and things. Also I might be more effective at haggling than she is. What it works out to is that the capitalist is wavering, and she is wavering, and I am wavering.”

As rapidly as the other wonderful schemes, this one ran its course. The end is already apparent, but it clung to life for a few more weeks. “I am still dangling with the Mary Lawson idea. Frankly, I don’t like it. If their business were as good as they make out they could get all the capital they wanted from their bank, and retain the whole business in their hands, instead of becoming the paid servants of a company which would demand dividends. And they hinted more strongly than ever that they would like me to put up a bit. So I went to Tremayne and talked about it to him, and took a bit of a risk in making the scheme as attractive as I could. He certainly nibbled, and offered, if the thing really starts,

11. CSF-K, 197, 4 November 1926
to give the firm long credit on the lithography work and plate printing and so on — work on which we should spend a great deal of money, so that long credit would be as good as two or three hundred of capital. But he saw the same flaws as I did; however, if he gives credit for that much he will have to know a lot more about the firm, so that if he is satisfied I shall be. So I have carried out my side, and it only remains for Mary Lawson to make me a hard and firm offer on paper; if she does I will accept it practically for certain. If not, it won’t be my fault.”¹²

Even the promise of money and social success at the studio has palled for Cecil. “At the studio on Sunday the music was still going on at 11 o’clock, and so I had to break away without saying anything to anybody or having supper or anything, so that I haven’t anything to tell you about it much. As it was I only just got home; it is a deadly journey. The last 2 bus to Herne Hill passes the studio at about 11.5 on Sundays, which is worth our remembering, isn’t

¹² CSF-K, 201, 17 November 1926
it, dear?”

“And I told [Mrs. Wilkinson] about the studio, and she fell over herself asking if she could join. I suppose she could, and I suppose I shall speak to Miss Markbreiter about her. I don’t care either way.”

“Last night I went to the studio after some grand tennis at the club. There was one amusing incident. The Pirani trio were playing. Mme. Pirani, the violin (sitting down, of course) was wearing a short silk frock, and she got worked up by the music her frock got worked up too. She [had] on some simply hideous grey flannel bloomers — I will swear they were flannelette, and what with the effort of turning her pages over and keeping her frock down and some awfully difficult music to play she got all hot and bothered. And the bloomers reappeared regularly five seconds after she pulled her frock down! She ended up by playing standing up instead

13. CSF-K, 203, 23 November 1926
14. CSF-K, 205, 30 November 1926
— everyone was tickled. Mary Lawson was there and in trouble as usual, because Hastain’s wife has found out that Hastain is living with her, and is out for a divorce, and they are terrified about alimony and costs and things. All her business is upsidedown in consequence — I’m glad I’m clear of them at the moment. She is living with the Markbreiters in consequence — trying to give no more evidence away.”¹⁵

“And on Saturday is the big do at the studio — Mrs. John’s reception, and music, and dancing, and gossip, and so on. It is sickening that you won’t be home in time for it. I shall be going — it is what I have been waiting for all this winter, but I’m not going for pleasure. It will be strictly business on Saturday for me. Incidentally, I am going to push off the minute my business is completed — I am growing fed up with that last train home from Baker Street.”¹⁶

Cecil’s business did not prosper, or perhaps he

¹⁵. CSF-K, 208, 6 December 1926
¹⁶. CSF-K, 211, 15 December 1926
left too soon, for he never mentions the Studio, Mrs. Dollibar-John, the Markbreiters, or Mary Lawson again. There may also have been a connection in Cecil’s mind between this musical and artistic group and Pally Summers, for having ignored her invitations of the Christmas before, Cecil attempted to look her up just as this “stunt” was starting, on October 12, 1926, and was dismayed to be informed that she had moved to Cheltenham. He had known Pally Summers long before, when he met her through the Belchers (So many of his friends and acquaintances he met through someone, rather than meeting them himself; it was a rare occasion when he himself struck up a friendship. Jerry Wagner, whom he met on the Super Chief to Hollywood in 1935, is almost the only one I can name, against the dozens I know whom other people brought to him.) There is no previous hint in his letters about associations with artistic or pseudo artistic circles. I estimate, therefore, that it is highly likely that Cecil’s comments in *Long Before Forty* on the Chelsea Set were based on this, his sole experience of such soci-
etry.

Professionally, this autumn was almost dry. Cecil thought about, slithered over, started, and abandoned a novel called, variously, *Tension* or *The One Chick*. His short stories for Mary Lawson were unsalable. The only work he wrote and sold were the jewelry articles for Tremayne’s *Goldsmiths’ Journal*. 
In this autumn of 1926 Kathleen probably did more for Cecil than he did for her. Before she left for school she gave him a second-hand bicycle, and while at school she was accepted for the county women’s field hockey team.

First things first. Geoffrey Foster Smith mentioned bicycles in the family during their school years. Cecil had gone on a cycle-camping weekend with Kitty and her brother and friends about 1916. Cecil wrote that during his Dulwich College years his had been a lightweight bicycle. However, these seem to have disappeared by 1926, and the little
cycling that Cecil had been doing in these years probably was on bicycles owned by the Belcher family. The bicycle speeded Cecil’s suburban travels on which he used to walk, it enabled him to visit friends like Connie and Bundle who had just moved to Dorking, and it made it possible for him to visit Kathleen without paying railroad fare. “You have converted me into a really enthusiastic cyclist by giving me that bike, dear. Yesterday was so fine and sunny that I rushed off to Dorking, instead of waiting till tomorrow as arranged. I purposely sprinted as hard as I could, to see if I could stay the course. I did the 24 miles there in 2 hrs., 5 min., and I came back the longer way, by Merton, 26 miles, in 2 hrs. 15 mins. and when I got home, although I was tired, I was nothing like dead tired; Geoff [Belcher] rang me up and asked me to bridge at 34. I cycled there and back, too. The ride to Dorking was grand — bright sunshine, and all the chestnut trees were golden, and there was lots of scarlet creepers, too. I

1. LBF p 67
had lunch with Connie and Derrick [her baby son] (John was at school) but I only stayed just over an hour. Connie sends you her love expressly, and we are going to stay there at Christmas.”

Connie and Bundle were another pair of friends whom Cecil had appropriated from others. “Bundle,” a chemist and later the managing director of Waterlow’s, manufacturers of inks and dyes, was a school friend and contemporary of Geoffrey Foster Smith, and hence ten years older than Cecil. Geoffrey and Bundle had been good friends, for Bundle’s father was the man who lent Geoff the money to start medical school and later the money to complete his registration as a physician. Cecil, here in writing and years later in conversation, always referred to “My great friend Bundle, the chemist who became the managing director of Waterlow’s ... “This morning I have taken the bike to have a brake and a lamp bracket put on it, and as it won’t be done till tomorrow I feel quite lost without it. When that is done I shall be all ready to go off anywhere on it. I think that now I can rely on myself to
do 60 miles, and may be even 70 or 80 if necessary. So if ever I am wanted by the police I can dodge them for a day or two, I think.”² Considering that Cecil had just done 50 miles without really needing to or feeling it, his estimate of his possible daily mileage is conservative. His average speed of 11.5 miles per hour for each section of the trip was reasonable for a cyclist without recent practice, considering the probable type of bicycle. There is no indication of atherosclerosis, the disease that crippled him later in life, although he told me years later that his fatigue in his early cycling experience foreshadowed that disease.

Then Cecil had to send Kathleen’s bicycle to her school, the one that he had been using on occasion, despite the disparity in sizes. That would enable them to cycle to a rendezvous, say Oxford. “I haven’t sent your bike off, dear, for the very simple reason that I haven’t dared to spend the money — I have been living from hand to mouth (as you may

2. CSF-K, 188, 7 October 1926

386
have guessed) for the last fortnight. I will get it off next week, though, and will let you know when. You see, I haven’t the least idea of how much it will cost.

“I do want to manage Oxford if we can. If we do, I shall spend the night before at the Raines, and cycle to Oxford next day — only a little more than 50 miles, and I ought to arrive about 4 or soon after; that would be just right for meeting you, I should think, dear. And afterward I can cycle home via Staines — 60 miles, but of course it won’t matter what time I get home. That will save a bit on fares, and this cheap place you spoke about will make it just possible, I should think.”

Cecil always told me in later years that he had extensive cycling experience, cycle camping with his brothers and friends all over southern England. He remarks in *Long Before Forty* that at Dulwich College he was the only one of eight hundred boys who used a lightweight bicycle; “convention decreed that [bicycles] must be tall, heavy, inefficient machines

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3. CSF-K, 191, 17 October 1926
with raised handlebars.” \(^4\) Yet his troubles with the bicycle that Kathleen gave him disclose his almost total ignorance of lightweight bicycles and elementary mechanical principles. The bicycle had caliper brakes. Cecil blamed these for the first of his troubles. The rear wheel pulled over and jammed against the left chainstay. The cause is simple: axle nuts not properly tight. Then the tension in the chain pulls the right side of the hub forward, jamming the tire against the left chainstay, often also causing the chain to come off. Cecil was wearing good clothes when the wheel jammed, and his efforts to fix it got them dirty. So he writes that he will have ordinary brakes put on instead. \(^5\) (By ordinary brakes Cecil means the rod brakes used on heavyweight bicycles. The conversion is practically impossible.) Here is Cecil, without two pennies to rub together, exasperatedly thinking of spending money to correct deficiencies which didn’t exist in

\(^4\) LBF p 67
\(^5\) CSF-K, 198, 7 November 1926
the form he guessed, and which would never have occurred had he kept his axle nuts tight. Cecil also did not know how to loosen the handlebars, another elementary operation which has a little trick to it.\textsuperscript{6} You must loosen the bolt about three turns, but not remove it, then hit it smartly with a light hammer. That drives out the wedge that locks the handlebar stem. Until you do this, nothing else works.

Cecil attempted to cover up his mechanical ineptitude, just as he did his other faults, by a flow of words to his friends and family. Geoff had written that the family suffered from the prejudice that trade [in the British sense of commercial work] was inferior to professions such as teaching;\textsuperscript{7} that prejudice lessened their inclination to get their hands dirty in mechanical tasks. Cecil wrote that Alleyn’s had provided a superior scientific education, but he failed to realize that the elementary principles of science are insufficient when considering the mechani-
cal complexities of modern life. Some of Cecil’s later best-known work involves machinery in one form or another, and his readers often praise his accuracy in that subject. That praise is unjustified; despite his claim to understand mechanics and machinery he was mechanically inept, as shown both by his actions, observed by Kathleen and by me, and his writings. These letters are the first documentation of that deficiency; the later accounts about the motor of the *Annie Marble* and the brakes of the Jaguar car confirm it.

The proposed weekend at Oxford did not occur, because Kathleen’s second contribution to Cecil’s welfare interfered with that plan. She was selected for the county amateur field hockey team, and her playing schedule interfered with weekend plans. Besides his pride in her success, Cecil had other reasons to be pleased with her. “I was fearfully glad to hear about the hockey trials, I hope to goodness you get into the team — it will be a decided commercial asset if nothing else, and anyway I shall be proud to be able to have a county player for a
wife. (Later, Kathleen played wherever she lived, first Surrey, then Kent, and was still playing goalkeeper in Northern California competition in the 1970s, and umpiring into the 1980s.) However, at half-term Kathleen played at Salop, where Cecil, after many “ponderous arrangements” and the usual shilly-shallying was able to join her for the weekend. Cecil went by train and not bicycle; without any particular reason for doing so, he started too late, arrived too late to see the game, but in time for staying at the Shakespeare hotel in Worcester. As Kathleen notes: “Wonder of wonders! the half term came off!”

During that autumn, Kathleen bought herself a motorcycle, anticipating the ability to move more freely than train and bus schedules permitted. Although its engine was a two-stroke, the machine was large and heavy. Kathleen is small and light. If

8. CSF-K, 194, 25 October 1926
9. Kathleen’s notes
she once let it fall over in an inconvenient spot like a roadside ditch, she hadn’t the strength and traction to heave it upright again. Cecil was greatly concerned on two counts. “But remember what I said before, dear. You mustn’t ride – you mustn’t even get on the bally machine without insuring against third party risks. It’s not expensive. If you don’t insure like that you may find yourself saddled with hundreds of damages to pay, or even 30/- [30 shillings, £1.5] a week for life or something … Don’t forget – third party risks.”

“And I am very glad you have decided not to try to get all the way home in one day, dear. It would be a wicked strain. But from Worcester home or from somewhere like that it will be fairly comfortable. If I can give a word of advice I would make it Worcester if I were you; there is a terrible hill outside Evesham, the next town, which it would be better not to risk in the dark. Then you can spend the

10. CSF-K, 194, 25 October 1926. This is insurance for the injuries you may cause to others.
night at the Shakespeare — give them all my love if you do. And of course you will put on all the clothes you have got, won’t you? Motorcyling is easily the coldest job there is, as of course you know.…

“And now to go back once more to the motorbike — just a few more words, dear, and I won’t mention the subject again. I don’t want you under any circumstances to try to do the whole trip in a day. It would knock you up too much. I would sooner stop smoking for a month if it is a question of money. And anyway you must not let yourself get too cold or too tired. Spend two nights on the road if necessary — I will find the money somehow on your arrival. I know the one day trip would be something to be proud of, and I know I would try it myself, but I don’t want you to. It would really be unwise.”

The Rand-McNally 1967 British roadmap gives the mileage from London to Shrewsbury as 153. I believe that Kathleen’s actual mileage was 168, but I can’t verify that. On a bicycle, Geoffrey Foster Smith had made the 104 miles of Brighton-and-back in one day, a common enough mark of a better-than-aver-
age cyclist. On her return trip to Shrewsbury through snow and fog, Kathleen was prevented from making the journey in one day only because her muffler broke off and she could not get it welded on that Sunday.

One of Cecil’s motives in expressing such solicitude about Kathleen not getting tired on the road, is that he wanted to take Dorothy Foster to the Alleyn’s Old Boys Christmas Dance. Expecting Kathleen to be too late to go, Cecil had asked: “But it is rather awkward about your not being able to come to the Alleyn dance on the 22nd; the last one wasn’t at all well attended, and I have practically promised to go to this. Would you mind if I asked Dorothy Foster to come with me? Peter says she [meaning Dorothy] won’t come unless she has a man with her, and she doesn’t have one at the present. If I did that she would pay for herself, so that it would be cheap, and it would be a kindly action. But I won’t ask her if you would rather I did not — I don’t mind either way, sweetheart, and will do just what you say. But please mention it next time you write to

394
me, dear.”

In the next letter he continued, “Sometime this weekend I shall write to Dorothy Foster about the dance — as a matter of fact I have quite grave doubts as to whether she will come; I shouldn’t be at all surprised is she doesn’t. It won’t be an easy letter for me to write.”

Even when he apparently expected Kathleen home before the dance, Cecil persisted in taking Dorothy. “A letter from Dorothy Foster this morning, acknowledging the dance ticket I sent her. A five line letter only — and in it she thanks me 3 times for asking her! Peter was quite right that she would be fearfully pleased at having someone to go with — but all the same I wish and wish that after all I wasn’t going. It would be a bit different if it weren’t your first night at home — but I didn’t know that when I asked her.”

11. CSF-K, 208, 5 December 1926
12. CSF-K, 210, 11 December 1926
13. CSF-K, 212, 17 December 1926
Kathleen was known to be at least Cecil’s best girl, although their marriage had not been announced. There would have been no difficulty in cancelling the date with Dorothy because Kathleen was now expected to arrive in time, the kind of thing that Cecil had no compunction in doing when it suited him. That talk about kindness to Dorothy, if it meant no more than the kindness Cecil ordinarily exercised toward people, was nothing but propaganda.

Cecil and Kathleen enjoyed the Christmas holidays as they had before, visiting each other’s houses, families and other friends. As usual, by the time Kathleen had to return to school Cecil was full of a new book and a new scheme. This tendency of Cecil’s to start work when Kathleen leaves cannot merely be the result of having striven to finish the previous task in time for her homecoming, for at Christmas, 1926, he had no recently completed work. Somehow or another, Kathleen’s presence must have given Cecil either ideas or motivation. Cecil probably did not notice this, for it was his the-
ory that he could write only when properly “charged up,” his phrase for being sexually unsatisfied. The contrast between his theory and the fact, so regularly occurring, that Kathleen’s departure initiated a burst of work is suggestive. Perhaps Cecil’s puritanical view of his early life and milieu had created a deep-seated belief in the current schoolboy superstition that creative work could not take place when all the “creative energy” of several billion sperm had been dispersed. Perhaps Cecil recognized the fact that Kathleen’s presence helped him at the start (though whether this was the start of creation or the creation of a mood conducive to starting work, I do not know), but, having recognized it, insisted upon concealing this because it detracted from his own stature. At least these hypotheses occur to me, without sufficient evidence to prefer one over another.

The first eight months of 1927 may be divided into two periods. The first period was one of relative emotional quiet after the turmoil of 1926. Cecil was planning his new scheme and writing his new novel,
The Wonderful Week, which Kathleen recalls as a “very jolly, readable book.” Almost the only emotional strain was Cecil’s habitual worry about whether he had enough material to fill out the novel. The second period, after Cecil had been forced to defer carrying out his new scheme, and was writing another book of history, contained a series of emotional crises and entanglements in which Cecil burst out against Kathleen, Lillian, and the memory of Kathleen’s love for A. G. West.

But first Cecil had a bit of unfinished business. Two weeks after Kathleen left he again took Dorothy Foster dancing, writing to Kathleen that this was the Alleyn’s dance.14 A month later he took Dorothy again15 and he must have felt sufficiently close to her to be sensitive about her opinions. “Everyone who has read it is most enthusiastic about Love Lies Dreaming — Dolly Pinks [later Mrs. Fitter] is simply potty, and so is Fitter. Dorothy Foster has not read it

14. CSF-K, 218, 27 January 1927
15. CSF-K, 232, 25 February 1927
— I don’t know what she will say about it if she does, either, but I am not going to lend it to her. But it would be amusing to hear her comments, for all that.”

Cecil’s spring scheme was to promote a 30-foot motor cruiser by arguing that he could write favorable publicity during a trip across France by canal. He had the idea that a Mr. Johnston-Noad could be persuaded to supply, or influence the supply of, such a boat. He also attempted to persuade Hughes Massie to agree to help by buying the proposed letters from France for publication in a yachting magazine, and as a final kicker he wrote a four thousand word article describing how he and Kathleen took the motorboat Vanitie across France. “How did I do that? Guess.”

In order to get the article typed safely he had to swear his typist to secrecy, because the article described the wife and the voyage as accomplished.

16. CSF-K, 233, 27 February 1927
17. CSF-K, 222, 4 February 1927
fact to a typist who knew enough of Cecil’s life to be puzzled about both.\footnote{18} He even thought “we might be able to rush a lot of the cruise through at Easter time, even though the weather would be a bit rough.”\footnote{19} However, the scheme died — hadn’t every one of Cecil’s major schemes, except writing, died unsuccessful?

The book Cecil started he called \textit{All At Once}, but it was published as \textit{The Wonderful Week}. Contrary again to his published statements about how carefully he planned his work, Cecil started writing before he had the plot worked out. “The new novel is started. Actually I have only a vague idea of how it is going to end (most of my previous ideas are in a state of transition) but I am enormously keen on the bit I have done. It seems very good stuff to me. It was a frightful effort getting started, but I was really beginning to be a bit frightened about slacking so long, and thought I would make myself work. So

\begin{flushright}
18. CSF-K, 224, 8 February 1927
19. CSF-K, 217, 25 January 1927
\end{flushright}
now it is a case of ‘give us this day our thousand words’ all over again. I am going to try after a thousand words a day, whether I know what I am writing about or not — it will make a rather interesting book at that rate. I am not going to wait on the plot, as I did with LLD, as this is quite a different kind of thing; I think it will turn out well — but I don’t know how long I shall stick to my good resolution.”

He stuck pretty well, for he finished The Wonderful Week in 55 days, but not without serious alarm. In a month he had reached beyond the halfway mark. “Today I got up to page 100 in my manuscript, which I always like doing, although it doesn’t mean very much — except that the maximum length needed is 200 pages. I do something over 3 pages a day, and if I go on at this rate I will finish the thing in 3 or 4 weeks. But I am seriously alarmed about things, as usual; I have a very uneasy feeling that it is going to be short again. There are lots of things I can do, but I can’t ever plan a novel which runs to

20. CSF-K, 217, 25 January 1927
over 70,000 words. It is queer, but not really awkward.”\textsuperscript{21} To his new typist he had given instructions to count the words in each week’s work and to telephone the result to him. “At the moment I am waiting palpitating for my typist to ring me up to give me her weekly report — I always like to know how far the typescript has got. She is due to ring up in about 4 minutes — she has never been late yet.”\textsuperscript{22}

“The book if I go on at this rate will be finished in 3 weeks, and anyway I have lots of time to spare now ... I can be sure that I have done 2/3 of the maximum length — and the book is stretching out quite nicely.”\textsuperscript{23}

“And now I am in my first serious mess in the new book. The main incident, which I expected would run to about 15,000 words, has petered out at 5,000. I thought the book would go to 70,000, and it mustn’t be below 65,000, so this has torn it pretty

\textsuperscript{21. CSF-K, 232, 25 February 1927}
\textsuperscript{22. CSF-K, 233, 27 February 1927}
\textsuperscript{23. CSF-K, 234, 1 March 1927}
badly. I can struggle along for a few days and see if there is any hope of stretching the rest of the plot to make up for it, but if it doesn’t I don’t know quite what I can do — I shall have to lie low and see if I can’t think of another development. There is quite 45,000 done now, thank Heaven. But I don’t want to stop — goodness knows when I shall start again if I do ... Also I am very worried, too, with an idea for a short story. It would be a very good story, but miles too indecent to be able to sell. I want to write it most awfully, but it would be a sheer waste of time and would put me off the present book. I must save it up till later.”

Whatever Cecil did to remedy the short-fall of *The Wonderful Week*, he completed it on March 19. “Such lots to write to you about today. First, the book is finished. This morning it came to a sudden, abrupt end; it is well over the minimum length although it is not quite as long as I would have liked or as I expected. But I am very satisfied with it. Last night I gave father to read all that I had in type —

24. CSF-K, 235, 3 March 1927
about 7/8ths — and he couldn't leave it. I was killing myself, because he sat there puffing over it and looking at the clock — it was very late and he wanted a bath — but he couldn’t tear himself away anyhow until he had finished it. That’s something.”

Harold Atridge, the protagonist of *The Wonderful Week*, is a friendless bank clerk who was so used to loneliness that he didn’t notice it. His character was formed by being raised by a maiden aunt who was a schoolteacher and headmistress, trained before a college education was required, full “of exemplary but limited ideas,” and who was filled with “fear of infection from books from the Public Library.” She forbad Harold to play in the street with the other boys, an activity that to him seemed “more joyful than harp-playing in heaven.” Born just too late to serve in WWI, Atridge had a spell of employment in the postwar boom, then ten months of homelessness in the postwar slump, and then five

25. CSF-K, 242, 19 March 1927
years as a bank clerk. “A completely friendless childhood had left Harold self-contained and self-sufficient.”

He imagines himself as a historical hero. “He could name every Marshal of Napoleon, although he would have been hard put to it to name more than one member of the Cabinet of the moment.” He lives in a boarding house, sharing a room with an oaf named Owen,\(^ {26} \) whose character he does not mind because he pays no attention to it. He has not been late for work for years and is a completely reliable but uninspired employee.

The wonderful week starts on a Thursday when Harold, as a member of the local Tennis Club, is sent to tell Marjorie Clarence that she is needed to fill out the team for a match. He arrives at Marjorie’s home to find her trying to restrain her father, who is in a fit of wild delirium tremens.

As a result, on Friday Harold is late to work, bruised and battered and the subject of gossip and

\(^ {26} \) The name of one of Cecil’s schoolboy buddies.
the disapproval of his landlady. Marjorie’s father is in the hospital and she has had to move to the house of her narrow-minded Aunt Mabel. This move is absurd, because we learn later that Marjorie had inherited the house and a small income from her mother, and she had been running the household for her father. She could have stayed at home until her father had been released, as she presumably had done before. This move is a clumsy way of providing the opportunities to heap more social disapproval upon Harold and for Harold to have a walk through a lonely common on his way home from Mabel’s new residence.

Having been thrown into socially intimate contact with Marjorie that arouses love in his friendless soul, on Saturday Harold takes her, by train, to walk in rural Dorking. They become immersed in passionate kissing and miss the last train home. Harold has to spend most of his weekly pay for a taxi ride back to Marjorie’s Aunt Mabel’s house, where they are received, very late, with strong disapproval. As Harold is walking homeward in the dark of the
small hours through the common that now separates their residences, he interrupts a gunfight between two gangs. Before realizing that he should flee, he is handed a packet by a wounded man lying on the ground. After fleeing homeward, he opens the packet and finds very graphic love letters written in French by Raphael, King of Lesser Avaria, one of the Balkan nations created after World War I.

Over the next week, intruders invade Harold’s rooming house, rooms are trashed, partly by the intruders and partly by the residents, Harold is kidnapped and then escapes, returning more battered and disheveled than ever. He is given notice by his landlady and, almost, by his employer the bank manager. He has had the sense to place the packet of letters in the bank’s vault, to be released only by his application in person. The letters are the object of a war between two foreign oil companies, each of whom expects to be able to use them to blackmail King Raphael into granting exclusive oil concessions. Harold decides to post the letters to the British Foreign Secretary. There is a very funny scene
when the chief of the better-behaved oil company, smartly dressed and arriving by Rolls Royce, tries to bargain with Harold, offering astronomical amounts, while Harold is lunching at his local fish-and-chip shop. But Harold has already posted the letters, and the chief knows a lost cause.

The result, by the end of this extraordinary week, is that events are in motion for Britain to get a favorable oil concession, Harold to get an early promotion at the bank (through a word from high up), and Marjorie to marry Harold. However, Marjorie never believes Harold’s tales of how this all came about.

The autobiographical aspects of the story are obvious. Harold’s aunt is very like Cecil’s own Auntie Lily, and her prohibition against playing in the street with the other boys is the same as his mother’s, and is expressed in very similar terms in *The Wonderful Week* as in *Long Before Forty*. “I was not allowed to play in the streets as every other child did. I used to beg my mother to allow me to do so. I was firmly convinced that a course of top spinning
in the gutters, or of kicking a tennis ball about in a quiet, side street, or of cricket against a lamp-post was a sure route to the paradise of the ordinary. But my mother would not see my point of view, and I soon came to realize that even if I could persuade her that playing in the streets would not stop my becoming a doctor she would never agree to my playing in the streets.”

Harold, like Cecil, has an enthusiastic interest in the Napoleonic wars. Despite these similarities used to create local color, Harold Atridge is not a self-portrait of Cecil. In all other respects he is the complete opposite of Cecil: conforming, ill-informed, hard working, and respectable.

Immediately after Cecil completed *The Wonderful Week* he went back to Methuen’s, his old publisher, in an attempt to sell them on a proposed book on “How to Write.” They declined, and in the end Cecil and they agreed upon a biography of

27. LBF p14

409
Louis XIV as his next work. He started research reading by April 1, and at the same time thought much about the plot of *Plain Murder*, based on his experiences at the Imperial a year and a half before.

“Today I am in a perfect turmoil of different kinds of thought. I have been bothering about that Louis XIV book for Methuen, to start with, and I am quite interested in it. Then I have two separate thirds of a plot of a novel in my mind, and I can’t get the middle third which joins them up. It is a wicked, bloody plot — a horrible business which ought to work out splendidly if only I can get it straight; and all the ghastly details are turning over and over in my mind as well. For two pins I would start the blasted thing but I daren’t because it would mean simply killing myself this summer over it. And on top of all this I am bothered with the short story I mentioned to you before — an awfully good story but much too intimate and slightly dirty to be worth writing. I couldn’t sell it if I wrote it. That is rather a grim story, too, and the effect of everything altogether, with the thought of you, dear, coming home, as well,
is simply driving me crazy today. My mind is a sort of mixup of tortures and wounds and blackmail and treasure and lust, all combined with quite different thoughts about you and your hands and breasts so that altogether I am in the devil of a state — and writing to you is the only thing that will steady me. And now I have upset the blasted flower vase all over the blasted table.”

With *Louis XIV*, the length was a contractual matter. Cecil wrote on and on, until: “I would like you to be home when I have finished *Louis* at the end of next week. “I am writing this in haste because I was a blinking idiot yesterday. Miss Brumly came last night with her last batch of work and I found it had spread like anything this time, and I had overcalculated the length necessary. I have got up to page 207, and I find that page 237 will be quite long enough. So I shall do a big spurt this weekend and I shall try to come to Winchelsea

28. CSF-K, 249, 5 April 1927
29. CSF-K, 261, 31 August 1927
by the 6:30 bus on Monday!”30 Evidently what Cecil had to say did not matter at all; only the number of words he could work in was important.

The non-professional side of Cecil’s life was not nearly so dull and businesslike. In his own mind the affair of Lillian had not been finished. In early February she had written him simply to ask for some information. “Also there was one other funny thing happened. I had a letter from L — just two lines — ‘Dear Cecil. What is the Latin for ‘abandon hope all ye who enter here?’ I thought she was in trouble, too, so I rang her up at her office in the morning. But she seemed perfectly jolly and happy. She really wanted to know, so I spelt out the Italian sentence from Dante that she meant when she asked for the Latin, and then we just said goodbye. I asked her if she would like tea with me or anything, but she said no. I still can’t think, though, that that was all she wanted. I have a horribly guilty conscience

30. CSF-K, 262, 1 September 1927
about that girl; but she sounded all right.”

A month later, Cecil’s anxiety was quieted by the ‘final’ resolution of the problem of Lillian. “On Thursday I met L. — we walked (1) from Westons to Victoria, and had tea. (2) from Victoria to the Strand to collect a parcel. Then we took a bus to the Green and walked (3) over Denmark Hill to Dulwich Village, from there to the Palace, and so home. I was sweating rivers at the end of it, and yesterday I was quite stiff — I don’t walk much nowadays. But it was well worth it, dear, as all the trouble is quite finished and done with now, I think. Everything is settled now, and I don’t think we will be worried again. It was a pretty fierce emotional struggle while it lasted, and I was absolutely weary by the time I got home, but of course it was worth it.”

31. CSF-K, 226, 12 February 1927 [misdated 1926, but the reference to publication of *Love Lies Dreaming* places it in 1927, where it fits the date sequence.]
32. CSF-K, 236, 5 March 1927
obscured by his characteristic qualification “I think.” Obviously also he believed Kathleen required reassurance, indicating that he believed Kathleen had cause to be worried by the aftermath of his affair with Lillian. Kathleen wasn’t worried – one wonders what Cecil worried about at this time, over two and a half years after he had parted from Lillian and over a year after he had married Kathleen. This still is not the end of her story, for she reappears twice more.

Cecil made some other odd statements at this time. He may have been trying to be sarcastic, but if so was inept and maladroit at something he normally performed straightforwardly. He was straightforwardly critical about the manners and morals of various of the people in his circle, expressing particular criticism of Grace Mitchell, who ironically twenty years later became his sister-in-law when he married Dorothy Foster. He said her Cockney accent when she appeared on the stage was entirely unsuitable for the part she had to play, and later, after she had married Norman Foster, “and as for
Grace Mitchell! She is twice as thick and coarse as she was before she married.”

In contrast to that approach, he describes how he answered Winnie Dubruq, whom at one time he believed he could have seduced in her drawing room, when she described her wedding plans. “I said what I always say under those circumstances — I said ‘I must ask Mellor (the bridegroom) how much he’ll take to swap with me for the first fortnight.” One wonders what goal this remark was so consistently effective in obtaining for Cecil — the pleasure of being laughed at, or sneered at, of observing a shocked retreat, or the welcoming smile of a complimented beauty? Somehow Cecil, unless he could gain by it, could not bring himself to give the simple compliment, “You are a beautiful girl; he is a lucky man.”

This self-cynicism was also apparent in his treatment of Dorothy Foster. He was told some gos-

33. CSF-K, 254, 24 July 1927
34. CSF-K, 242, 19 March 1927
Dolly Pinks told me that Dorothy Foster is giving a dance at her house on Friday — and although I have taken her to tea, and we are going again next Saturday, I haven’t been invited. I am cut right to the quick. Shedding tears in fact.”

When he took her next to tea, “the Hough twins fell over themselves to dance with Dorothy, and I had an easy time ... but I have achieved my object in taking Dorothy — they are having a hard court tournament next month and she has promised to be my partner. We stand quite a fair chance of winning, in consequence.”

“The Alleyn dance on Friday [the next month] was the same as usual, except that both the twins had girls and so there wasn’t much competition for Dorothy ... I annoyed Dorothy because I called Leslie Brown ‘the most eligible bachelor in Dulwich’ (so he is) after she had danced with him two or three times. It appears that she is really anxious to get married, which I didn’t believe before. I

35. CSF-K, 231, 23 February 1927
36. CSF-K, 233, 27 February 1927

416
have promised to give her a copy of LLD if we win this afternoon, and of course I suppose I shall give it to her anyway. But I shall have to tell her somehow not to let those straightlaced parents of hers get hold of it.”

Dorothy did not marry until much later. Cecil later told me that she, like some other Victorian daughters, was raised to look after her parents’ old age, and that he and she did not announce their marriage until her parents were sufficiently senile to remain ignorant of it.

Cecil achieved all his objectives with Dorothy. She and he played against Grace and Norman Foster for the finals and won just before Kathleen came home for the spring holidays. “And Dorothy Foster will come with us for our first day up the river, meeting us at Waterloo for the 10:0 train. She will help us shop and come on with us to Tilehurst, where we will be in the evening, and go home from there. I am glad.”

37. CSF-K, 247, 3 April 1927
Cecil’s emotional ambivalence may have been exacerbated by his difficulty with Kathleen. During the winter term he had to wait far too long between her letters. He had to write a critical letter to her.

“Dearest, This is going to be a scolding letter, so that if you don’t want the scolding you had better burn it now. And of course you know what I am scolding you about — your not writing to me.

“Of course you are busy, but there is no day at all when you don’t have ten minutes to write — you can stay up ten minutes later if necessary. You must write to me twice a week. I don’t want you to start being slack in your duty, and that is your duty and pretty nearly all your duty at present. If you say you are not going to write, I can’t do anything, of course, but you are much too sensible to say that, aren’t you, dear?

“If I hear from you on Monday, say, I must hear from you by the next Friday at the latest, and again on Monday and don’t put it off to the last pos-

38. CSF-K, 256, 26 July 1927

418
sible minute just because it is something you have got to do. That always means trouble.

“I don’t want you to neglect your duty, and so I would rather that you wrote because it is your duty rather than you did not write at all. Please, dear, don’t let us have further bother of this kind.

“All my love,” 39

Kathleen’s return that summer was permanent. She had left Westlands on the promise of a position not far from home. During her stay in London she and Cecil had some discussions about love, with Cecil looking back to their first lovemaking in the gorse bushes below Camber Castle. To him it was very important that he was Kathleen’s first love. “After all,” he said, “You couldn’t have loved Alec West as you love me, for he was barely dead before you came to me in the gorse bushes.” That was asking for it. Kathleen replied, “At that time I only pitied you — I didn’t love you.” Cecil was crestfallen at this deflation of his self-conceived image as irresist-

39. CSF-K, 240, 15 March 1927
The discussion about love and fidelity continued when Kathleen took a holiday in the Lake country at Eve Ashcroft’s. This was the girl who Kathleen had proposed bringing to Winchelsea the summer before, whose proposed visit Cecil had so severely criticized. In one letter Kathleen tried to explain matters to which Cecil angrily replied: “Dearest, It is very difficult for me to write to you about the things you speak about in your letter, especially when you are away on your holiday and probably trying now to forget what you wrote about yesterday. You certainly punctured my self-esteem very thoroughly that evening, and of course it is that which I find so hard to forgive; it still rankles whenever I think about it, although of course I am doing my level best to forget it. It was such a shock to my pride.

“But besides that you have somehow injured my faith in things, I had almost come to believe when you destroyed it. You know I was always doubtful, don’t you dear? That is why I always was asking you that question. I would have taken you
and gloried in it even it you did not love me, but it is
taking a bit of time now to get that sort of mental
attitude about the past at this distance. I don’t want
to think about it and I would much rather put the
whole thing aside and start a new life and love from
our wedding day a year ago, sweetheart.

“You see, dear, when I am with you you seem
to take the sting and spring out of the sort of con-
tempt I have for everything and I find it very diffi-
cult to be as arrogant and careless as I was made to
be. If you were anyone else I would not care at all,
but as it is there are some things which made a dent
which I can’t mend and have to notice all the time.
You ask me about forgiveness. Of course there is
nothing I could not forgive you, dearest, absolutely
nothing, but forgiving and forgetting don’t go
together, because I can only forget injuries to my
pride when I had revenge or when I don’t care a bit
about the person who was responsible. Sweetheart,
it is possible that you will never find me quite the
same again as long as I live — I believe that you have
thought that already — but I love you just as dearly
and truly and tenderly as ever, and more dearly if anything than before; it is only my memory which has changed, a bit. There is a sort of hole there as if a child of mine had died. I simply can’t go on writing about it, dearest. I shall just give you all my love, Your husband.”\(^{40}\)

Kathleen’s thoughts about receiving this were written in a never-posted letter and five pages of a notebook. Here is the letter: “Dearest. A thunder storm is going strong. This morning Eve and I walked up into the hills for 2-1/2 hrs. in a pelting rain — the preliminary of this. I needed to go too. The hills, the streams, the wildness are all such tender mothers when you’re in distress. The rill we followed was most beautiful; full and roaring. Every path was a stream and we walked ankle deep a lot of the time. It was all so grand and wonderful that it hurt — it hurt like hell; beauty has that effect often, don’t you think? If the weather is like this tomorrow I shall not be able to start for home — it’s awful.

\(^{40}\) CSF-K, 255, 26 July 1927
[Kathleen would be motorcycling home.]

“I can’t think of anything to write about and I know you, you are just longing for a long kind letter. I can’t write but I shall be home soon and then I’ll tell you everything. Don’t write any more letters here to me because I shall be leaving. I’ll send you postcards on the way home.

“Always your wife, Kitty”

Here are the words in the notebook: “To begin with, dearest, you’ve got your revenge — on me. I’m no longer happy in that trustful way. I believed in you and fate and everything seemed to be working out all for the best.

“I’m full of bitter thoughts and I had better write them all before they germinate into something too big to hold. You say I’ve broken your faith in me and yet you still love me. You can’t love without faith and trust because faith and trust is partly love. If you cannot believe in me any more — how can you love?

“Another thing — we both seem to have got into

41. CSF-K, 257, 27 July 1927
deep waters but are both thinking different things. When, that evening, I said that I didn’t love you three years ago in the gorse patch I meant it implicitly. I can’t even remember saying I did love you then. I began to love you almost directly afterwards — but not when I decided to let you carry on in your own way. Do you imagine that I could have left off loving Alec to order? In my heart I was faithful to him — I still am in my own way. I thought I could bring you happiness and I began to try; at the same time I knew that you would bring me happiness. It wasn’t all selfish thoughts I can assure you. I needed something to do — something that was worth doing. Making you happy was the first thing that turned up and I went in knowing what I was doing. It wasn’t long before I was in the midst of feelings far too strong for me to manage — love for you. A far better, stronger, loving love than I had had for Alec. A love nearer God than the other had been.

“Knowing all this, when you said that I hadn’t loved Alec at the end (when I was just learning what it all meant) I revolted and said what I did to make
you believe that I did. You may not understand but you were ‘jeering’ at my innermost beliefs and the base of all my life — that God is love. The moment I had said it I realized that it wasn’t living up to my ideals to hurt you wilfully and so rottenly.

“I have hurt your pride, your self-esteem and broken your faith in your wife. You have made me realize that you do not believe your wife. I am as good as a liar; I play act all the time. You won’t believe all this. Don’t you think you’ve got a good revenge?

“You talk about beginning a new life from our wedding day. How can I begin a new life knowing that you don’t believe me?

“How I’ve got to give you back your faith. I shall die without it. I am so tired and I can’t think. My eyes are misty with tears and I can’t write. It is all so hopeless — so sudden — like a thunderstorm. The storm has passed over and all is at peace. Will our storm pass and shall we find peace? God please make it so. I cannot live with him unless I have his full love and understanding.
"If he only knew how much I loved him — and I cannot tell him or show him. If I only understood what all the trouble was about and he says he must forget and yet if he is changed how can he forget? It will always be there. I must try and find out or it may spoil all my love.

“Does Cecil know that God is love? I don’t think so or he would understand how to forgive — to forget. When he says he forgives me — he means he doesn’t blame me — that isn’t forgiveness.”

The quarrel was covered over, but not forgotten. Kathleen returned to London for a month, then went to Winchelsea where Cecil planned to join her in a week. [He had almost finished *Louis XIV.*] “So I shall come down with just my toilet things and leave you to have every thing else I may need. Can I have George’s air bed? Oh, and dearest, can you lend me some money? I wonder, if you can, if you could send it off as soon as you get this ... Without some money I won’t be able to afford Clapham Junction [where

42. CSF-K, 258, 27 July 1927

426
Cecil went to buy condoms} before I come down — and I had better, hadn’t I?”

In September Kathleen started teaching in Wimbledon, not far away. She returned to live in her parents’ house while Cecil remained with his parents. Kathleen rode to and from school on her motorcycle, often visiting 58 Underhill Road on the return journey to pick up Cecil. This freedom of movement does not seem unusual to us today, but for a woman in the England of the time and of their class, it was most unusual. Cecil believed that Kathleen was not a good teacher, because, as he told me years later, she would return in the evening exhausted by the nervous and physical demands upon her. I don’t wonder, but I doubt whether it was the teaching that produced the exhaustion. Her load of financial and marriage worries was substantial. She paid for her room and board, Cecil managed to sporadically pay for his, and gradually their eco-

43. CSF-K, 262, 1 September 1927
conomic situation improved.

It was not long before the Belchers discovered that Cecil and Kathleen had married — perhaps it is natural that the girl’s parents are more likely to find out than the boy’s — but no particular pressure was applied. By wintertime, when Kathleen had picked up some extra money as a masseuse, Cecil and Kathleen felt they could let others know they were married. His parents still did not know of the marriage, so Kathleen and Cecil arranged to “go up to London to be married at a registry office,” taking Flo and George Belcher along as ostensible witnesses. The four of them went up to London, had coffee at Lyons, and returned with Cecil and Kathleen ostensibly newly married. Ethel Wilkinson lent them her bungalow at Shoreham for their honey-moon, and then they returned to Dulwich.
In the next seven years Cecil wrote: three more novels which he later did not put on his official list of works, *The Shadow of the Hawk, Two and Twenty,* and *The Peacemaker,* four which he did, *Brown on Resolution, Plain Murder, The Gun,* and *Death to the French,* two books of travels with his motorboat the *Annie Marble,* and one more biography, *Lord Nelson.* He also wrote his two plays, *Nurse Cavell* and *U 97,* in association with other authors.

*Lord Nelson* is like Forester’s other works in that it tells only that which needs to be told to further the
plot. Other biographies of Nelson give a plethora of details and quote extensively from letters, with footnotes. Commenting on Southey’s words about the young Nelson, Forester remarks, “They tell us almost nothing which is worth knowing.” Forester will have none of this. His plot is the formation and the acts of a great admiral and their influence on history, and he sticks to it, with only the necessary sidetrip to discuss how the relationship with Emma Hamilton influenced that subject.

In the more than 65 years since Forester wrote *Lord Nelson*, more has been made known, both in documents and in location. Forester worked largely from Nelson’s letters and his own knowledge of Napoleon. Of the letters he remarks, “they are still a very satisfactory source. Study of them calls up instant pictures of the writer, of his momentary state of mind and of the permanent trend of his thoughts. ... The personal Nelson is always observable; that may be the reason why he is so delightful a subject to read about or to write about ... This may, perhaps, stand as the excuse for the publication of a biogra-
phy of a seaman by a professional novelist whose work consists in the study much more of human beings than of maritime affairs."

Forester therefore wrote about the factors that formed Nelson’s character, but rather differently than has Tom Pocock, a recent biographer.¹ Nelson’s first sea service was in the merchant marine. This occurred after he had been introduced, as midshipman, to the naval service aboard two line-of-battleships *Raisonnable* and *Triumph*, commanded by his uncle Maurice Suckling, neither of which had had sea duty as the temporary rumor of war with France had evaporated. Nelson was then sent off on a voyage to the West Indies in a merchant ship commanded by a friend of the family’s. On his return to his uncle’s ship, still not on sea duty, Nelson is given responsibility for much small boat work among the shoals of the coast. Forester simply remarks that the voyage was done to provide training in seamanship,

¹. Pocock, Tom; *Horatio Nelson*; Knopf, New York, 1988
and the later command of small boats “was the best method possible in the circumstances of habituating him to command and responsibility ... Constant work amid the shoals and currents of the Thames estuary did something more: it instilled that self-confidence amid this kind of peril which was to find its expression at moments of vital importance in English history at the Nile and at Copenhagen.” Instead, Pocock describes the difference that Nelson saw (quoting Nelson’s own words) between the easy and cooperative but professional discipline of the merchant service and the harsh, by-the-rules discipline of the navy, and describes the shallow-water sailing as not “wholly strange and daunting because often he, as a child, had watched boats working up the estuary of the little river Burne a mile or so from his home at Burnham Thorpe.” Forester has got to the heart of the formation of a naval officer, while Pocock’s words only hint.

After the American Revolution, Nelson is sent to the West Indies station, under the command of Admiral Hughes, in command of the frigate *Boreas,*
not the first frigate he had commanded. Nelson thinks Hughes is a ninny, and two altercations occur. Hughes orders his captains to obey the orders of a local official who was a half-pay (unemployed) naval captain. Nelson denies that Hughes has this authority and says so to the other captains. The Admiralty agrees (the local official was not in the legitimate chain of command), but tells Nelson that he should have consulted Hughes before taking control himself.

Because of the American Revolution, the ships that formerly carried the very profitable trade between the West Indies and the new United States are now American, and hence are prohibited by British law (the Navigation Acts) from trading with the West Indian islands, where only British ships are allowed. Top society in the islands is outraged, and Admiral Hughes orders his captains to obey the orders of the local governors, who are to decide whether or not to enforce the Navigation Acts with respect to trade with their islands. Nelson declares that it is his duty to enforce the Navigation Acts, and
does so, sending ships and cargoes into ports to be condemned as smugglers. Nelson was sued in civil court for damages “sufficient to leave him for life in a debtor’s prison.” Amid the turmoil, Nelson wrote to the King. “Back came dispatches: Hughes was highly commended for his zeal in suppressing the trade, and instructions were given for the defense of Nelson at the government’s expense.” Of course, Hughes had applied no zeal at all, rather the contrary, but he who is in command takes the credit. Of these incidents Forester remarks: Nelson’s “reward was nothing except the knowledge of having done his duty. He received no official statement of approval of his actions. His further employment in peace-time was rendered unlikely. He had antagonized powerful interests outside the service, and within it he had infuriated Hughes and gained himself a reputation as a restless customer, the sort of captain no admiral who valued his peace of mind (and most admirals do) would willingly see under

2. CSF- Lord Nelson

434
his command – as long as peace endured.”

Forester then discusses duty as Nelson’s motive, adding a significant interpretation. “Nelson’s independence of mind was such that a course of action which he thought right was more attractive still if acted upon without orders, and much more attractive if acted upon against orders. Let it be repeated that Nelson had to be sure that the course of action was right before he entered upon it against orders. But once he was sure, that course of action attained additional attractiveness if to act upon it meant disobeying someone of whom he did not hold too high an opinion. The same trait is not unusual in the character of most people, but generally it avoids notice in consequence of being overlain by fear of responsibility or dislike of attracting attention. Nelson offered more than one example of it later in his career.” Pocock tells the stories in greater detail without offering the thoughts.

In 1796, when Napoleon had crossed the Alps into northern Italy and Nelson was blockading the adjoining corner of the Mediterranean, Pocock
writes that Nelson “captur[ed] a convoy of five French ships laden with the siege-train of heavy weapons bound for the Armée d’Italie, which was now commanded by General Napoleon Bonaparte.” In contrast, Forester gets to the heart of the matter. “Nelson had proved the continued need of the presence of his force by the capture, under the guns of the battery at Oneglia, of the siege train destined for Bonaparte’s use at Mantua. It was a capture that was destined to cost France dear in blood and money and time – just as the destruction of the Japanese howitzers by the Vladivostock squadron mean the loss of thousands of Japanese lives at Port Arthur.”\(^3\) Forester tells the reader the result of commanding the seas.

Nelson’s victory at Trafalgar was the consummation of long-standing British strategy. In only thirty-eight lines, Forester explains that strategy in terms that anyone can understand. He concludes with, “To maintain these fleets at sea called for mag-

nificent seamanship and much self-denial on the part of officers and men; it also meant considerable expense and a certain amount of loss. But if the expense could be borne and the loss made good, if the crews could endure the monotony and hardship of blockade, the reward lay not only in the continual certainty of the whereabouts of the French fleet, but in the training of a magnificent school of seamen on the very place where their battles were to be fought, a training which the blockaded fleet could never provide for its officers and men, who had perforce to learn the elements of their business in the unnatural and unreal surroundings of a sheltered harbour.”

Forester describes Napoleon’s schemes to outwit the British strategy. “But Napoleon was a tyro in the matter of naval warfare. He was pitting his inexperienced brains against those of men, not as great mentally, perhaps, who had spent their lives on the sea and who could estimate chances far more accurately than he. All Napoleon’s plans in the end were landsman’s plans.” Forester correctly places Nelson, the man in whom he is interested, at the heart of a
great tradition.

While Nelson’s victory at Trafalgar was the consummation of long-standing British strategy, it was its tactical innovation that made it a great victory. Some point to a few predecessors as leading up to it, others to the improved signalling system that they hold made it possible. Forester holds that it was Nelson that did it. As for signals, Forester writes, “for the most important naval battle of the war the signals were curiously few.” Forester also says that Nelson’s written orders were not sufficiently clear, even though excerpts have been quoted ever since: “The order of sailing is to be the order of battle,” and the rest.

It was Nelson’s personal leadership that brought the victory, holds Forester. In frequent conferences aboard his flagship while waiting for the enemy to come out, he taught his captains what he wanted them to do. Forester explains why admirals, from the days of the first cannon-armed warships, chose to keep their fleets in line ahead, and how this had been enshrined in the British fighting instruc-
tions. There had been minor victories in which the course of the battle had caused the instructions to be disobeyed; that was the clue from the past. There was also a theoretical pamphlet describing the advantages of doing so, which Nelson had read. However, Nelson’s was the first instance in which an admiral deliberately planned to attack in a way contrary to the standard instructions. Nelson planned to divide his fleet into separate lines and send them to break through the center and rear thirds of the enemy’s line, accomplishing two objectives. The first was to produce an overwhelming superiority of force at the place where the battle would be fought. The second was to prevent the enemy from running away downwind. (In the days of fighting sail, one could not run away upwind.) By the time the enemy’s leading ships were able to return to the battle, if indeed they did, the British would have finished with those ships that they had been fighting.

“There is proof sufficient of Nelson’s clearness of mind, of his originality of thought, and of his greatness of heart, in this memorandum; he realizes,
almost alone among his contemporaries, the evil of over-centralized command; he devises a plan to make use of a decentralized command; and, by decentralization, he is prepared to entrust some part of his reputation and achievement to a subordinate....”

“If his officers did not grasp his designs, and if they did not execute them with skill, there was a chance that the English fleet might come down in a muddled, disorderly fashion and be exposed to serious loss or a damaging repulse. Nelson bore the whole responsibility and must receive the whole credit that this did not occur ... But Nelson knew the officers under his command. He knew of their professional skill, he knew their unreserved loyalty to himself and to one another, and he knew that they were so imbued with his ideas that they would instantly appreciate his intentions. For this knowledge he must receive credit; for the fact that his captains so understood him he must receive more still. The old arrogant days of Byng – or even of Jervis, for that matter – were over. Nelson’s genius had
changed the ponderous but unwieldy bludgeon which once typified an English fleet into a flexible and far more deadly rapier, whose blade carried out instantly every thought of the mind that wielded it.”

In his first chapter, Forester excused himself as “a professional novelist whose work consists in the study much more of human beings than of maritime affairs.” In his biography of Nelson, he has demonstrated why and how one original personal character changed the course of history.

Forester considers whether that change was properly understood. “The battle orders when Jutland was fought [in 1916] ... still actually enforced a formation in line, seven miles of ships, rigid and difficult to handle, which failed (there is no gainsaying it) in its primary objective of compelling the enemy to fight. The Germans got away without much hurt. The question of burning importance is whether a Nelson in command of the British fleet would have been able to force a battle advantageously, and every one is allowed his own individual opinion as to what the answer should be.”
Jellicoe at Jutland got his fleet into line at precisely the right time and place to devastate the Germans, who twice turned away. Later critics, such as Macintire and Keegan, comment that had junior admirals, and even junior captains, exercised more initiative in informing Jellicoe, or even by taking action on their own initiative, Britain might have achieved a crushing victory. Conceiving of a different method of warfare and then training one’s juniors so the whole fleet operates properly is precisely the point that Forester emphasized in Nelson’s achievement.

These are the better aspects of *Lord Nelson*. Forester later thought of his early histories as very bad books, applying that exact description to *Lord Nelson* in a letter of 1950. Some of the description is not clear. Forester’s description of the tangled chain-of-command in the West Indies is so bungled that I had to read Pocock’s account to learn what had occurred. Forester has to consider the naval and

4. CSF-Wilfred Granville, 27 July 1950

442
political effects of Nelson’s affair with Emma Hamilton, but in doing so he left out the rest. Emma has been described as both coarse and charming, crude and clever, she gambled and drank, and Nelson’s passion for her controlled his actions. Forester omits her good qualities and emphasizes her bad, partly because her bad qualities caused political effects but, probably, equally because those, and the effect of Nelson’s passion in affecting his judgement, are just the qualities that horrified Forester. Emma bore a daughter to Nelson, which Forester introduces by the words “the event seems incredible.” Forester’s attitude appears to be both cynical and moralistic.

Forester’s belief that Nelson was strongly attracted to disobeying the orders of incompetent superiors neglects the role of duty. To one who has an idealistic and perfectionist view of duty, even a romantic one, which Nelson undoubtedly had, one must do one’s duty as one sees it regardless of the difficulties, and the greater the difficulties the greater the honor. If the difficulties have been produced by one’s superior officer rather than by the
enemy or the elements, so be it.

At the beginning of the book, Forester sought an excuse for being only a student of human nature rather than a professional naval officer or historian. He has it back to front. While *Lord Nelson* is a dispassionate account of the formation and acts of the naval aspects of a great admiral, it is a shallow portrait of a man.

The *Annie Marble* books are different from Cecil’s other works. They are records of what Cecil and Kathleen actually did. Kathleen had returned to London in the autumn of 1927 and obtained teaching assignments and massage work. To repeat what has been said earlier, she paid her ‘room and board’ to her parents, while Cecil paid his parents only in spasms. Then Cecil’s book sales improved, and the two of them decided that they would pretend to get married to conceal the fact that they had been married for a year. The Belchers knew they had been married, but the Smiths, with their prudery and conformity, had not been told. During the
winter of 1928, the Belchers accompanied Cecil and Kathleen up to London, where they were supposedly married in a registry office. However, the party actually went and had coffee at a Lyons restaurant instead, before returning to tell the Smiths of the supposed wedding ceremony.\textsuperscript{5}

When Cecil’s and Kathleen’s marriage was announced to his family and to society at large, Cecil moved into her parents’ home. The first thing on which they spent their money, beyond bare expenses, was a fifteen-foot, slabsided, flat-bottomed outboard motor boat, equipped with a camping cover just like that on a camping punt. Cecil’s grandiose dreams of getting someone else to provide him with a full-sized motor cruiser predictably had come to naught. \textit{Payment Deferred’s} royalties paid for the simplest, cheapest power boat in which two people could camp out, which they named \textit{Annie Marble} in honor of the character whose death completed the novel. Cecil and Kathleen planned to spend the

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5. Kathleen’s notes and story to me
summer of 1928 on the French canals and rivers, making these lengthier passages under power just as they had made the shorter English trips by punt pole and paddle. Cecil had persuaded *Motor Boat* to commission a series of articles about the trip, payment to be made, not in advance, but upon accep-
tance, so he had to write each article in order to be sure of having money for the food and fuel required to complete the trip. Passports were required; here, for the first time, Cecil and Kathleen officially used the name of Forester.

Annie Marble was too unseaworthy to cross the Channel herself, so she had to be shipped by steamer and railway to their start at Rouen. Cecil was, as usual, suffering so much from overwork that he could take little part in the arrangements which were in any case started too late. Kathleen just managed to accept Annie Marble from her builders, bundle all their equipment into her, and have her shipped to France without even a trial run. At Rouen it was the same. Cecil and Kathleen arrived before Annie Marble, hung about until she arrived and were desperate to leave as soon as possible. They left their gear piled roughly in the bottom, Cecil fueled the engine, adjusted and started it, Kathleen pushed off, and they swung out upstream. And the engine quit. They hurriedly grasped the pier, pulled back in, and repeated the performance.
And again, and again. Finally Kathleen, exasperated, demanded control of the engine, started it, adjusted it to run properly, and took *Annie Marble* successfully up the river. Her experience of running a two-stroke motorcycle stood her in good stead with the very similar outboard powerhead, and the proper carburetor adjustments were by then almost instinctive. Cecil made a big song and dance about being excused because the motor instructions were all wrong — he even bothered to print his argument in *The Voyage of the Annie Marble* — but it doesn’t hold water. Like all instructions of the type, these said to unscrew the jet adjustment some fixed amount, say one and three-quarter turns, and in the event that the motor did not run properly to adjust from that starting point until it did. Cecil argued that a motor that stops dead is not one which is running improperly, a sophistry whose absurdity only demonstrates his determination to be right regardless of truth.

They enjoyed that voyage very much. You can read about it in *The Voyage of the Annie Marble*. What with the articles and the book, Cecil managed to
more than cover their expenses. At the time, he used the material as an important part of his current novel, *The Shadow of the Hawk*. Ten years later, he used the material to describe Hornblower’s escape, in *Flying Colours*, by rowingboat down the Loire.

Cecil wrote at least the last part of *The Shadow of the Hawk*, which was published in 1928, during or after the voyage across France. *Hawk* is remarkable for being the most personal of Cecil’s works, more personal in many ways than his autobiographical ones. Not that he was open about the connection, but to anyone who knew him then the connection would have been obvious. To those of us who knew him since and have speculated upon the information that became available after his death the connection is even more obvious, but also puzzling and disconcerting. The reason is that *Hawk* is a story of parental love with romantic overtones, a subject that Cecil never otherwise touched and seems entirely out of character until one knows about his personal life.

The original concept of the story, in 1926, was
that a retired general with a government pension but a short life expectancy, and therefore denied life insurance, was compelled to marry at the earliest possible age the girl who was his ward, so that she could assume his pension when he died. This nominal marriage with a child-bride still in school would lead to social comedy, until the natural processes of death, maturation, and courtship would produce a conventional marriage for her.

The story developed along a different line. The first part is an adventure that sets the stage and provides the characters and the money that makes the rest possible; the second part is one of growing parental love with romantic overtones, while the possible outcomes in an unwritten third part are only hinted at.

Dawkins, formerly a shady pawnbroker and later an enlisted soldier who would have earned a commission in the British Army had World War I lasted a month longer, is the survivor of a Latin American revolutionary guerrilla army that lost against a tyrant. Dawkins had been both the lieu-
tenant-general of the shoeless army and the vice-admiral of the dugout canoe navy. His adored English-born leader, known as The Hawk, had died of wounds in Dawkins’s arms during the final debacle, leaving Dawkins the name and address of his daughter in London. After being enslaved on the tyrant’s prison island, Dawkins escapes, carrying a pocketful of diamonds stolen from the tyrant. That is the adventure part.

On his return to England, Dawkins takes great pains to become respectable, because of or despite the problem of slowly disposing of his stolen diamonds. He looks up The Hawk’s daughter, to discover a ten-year-old girl in the neglectful care of her slovenly step-grandmother. Nina is indeed the shadow of The Hawk, displaying his vivacity and his expressions, and possessing his tenacity. Dawkins is enthralled, takes over her guardianship and brings her up as a young lady.

Dawkins’s relationship with Nina discloses details of Cecil’s character and activities. Dawkins becomes enthralled by the young Nina, aided only
partly by the excuse that she so reminds him of his
adored, but dead, leader. Dawkins engages a respect-
able governess cum housekeeper and buys a small
country house with a small river running through
its garden. Dawkins sees that Nina is enrolled in the
appropriate private girl’s day school. He decides to
take up golf as a way to improve his social standing,
so that Nina will grow up into the appropriate social
circle. While he practices golf intensely, he does not
love it. Had he been asked to describe the activity,
he would have said that golf is easier than picking at
phosphate rock but harder than shovelling up the
broken pieces, the activities of his enslavement. This
passionless attitude toward an activity at which he
works so hard and does reasonably well is detected
and remarked upon by a visiting golfer, a clergyman
cum social worker. In the conversation that Cecil
gives them I can hear my father telling me that
when he was young he had become passionate about
golf but had given it up because he couldn’t let that
passion rule his life.

Dawkins and Nina get wet and muddy building
dams across the little river in their garden. One Saturday, Dawkins surprises Nina by showing her a folding kayak in which he proposes that they explore to find the source of that stream. They paddle upstream, struggling through rushes and portaging over fences across the stream, and, without planning it in advance, they camp out using supplies from the nearest village store. In it all, Dawkins displays the skills of navigation, survival, and leadership that he had learned in warfare. As he thinks, there is considerable similarity between leading children and leading guerrillas. They end, the next day, in the small lake at the head of the river, under the gaze of the Very Eminent Person who owns it all, to be returned home in a car bearing a coat of arms on its side after a tour of the gardens and a very satisfying tea.

These are just the activities that my parents did. I can remember camping beside the Thames on Canoe Club weekends, and I have photographs of them and their friends paddling up miniature rivers, through the reeds.
This passion about rivers and boating builds into cruising by motorboat. Dawkins buys a cabin cruiser large enough for Nina and the governess to sleep inside while he sleeps in the cockpit, and sea-worthy enough to cross the Channel on a calm day. After exploring several English rivers, they spend the next summer cruising the French rivers and canals.

We know that this is exactly what Cecil and Kitty had done, although with a smaller boat. There are bits of the descriptions of French rivers and canals that surely came from Cecil and Kitty’s voyage of 1928.6 Dawkins’s boat is the type that Cecil

6. The year before, Cecil had written (see CSF-K 222, 4 February 1927) a fake account of a voyage across France in the imaginary Vanitie, for which he had obviously acquired some background knowledge. It is possible that the descriptions in The Shadow of the Hawk reflect this second-hand knowledge rather than actual experience. Cecil was capable of such verisimilitude.
had tried to promote, before he had to settle for the *Annie Marble*. Dawkins and Nina plan another trip, this time through Germany, up the Rhine, across to the Danube by canal, down the Danube to the Black Sea, through the Hellespont and among the Greek Islands. I remember many times Cecil using that recurrent dream, or story, or propaganda item to impress people.

At the end of the voyage, Nina and the governess have to hurry home by train and steamship, to be in time for the start of school, while Dawkins waits for good weather and to hire a seaman to help him cross the Channel again. When Dawkins next sees Nina, several weeks later, he realizes with a shock that she is growing into beautiful womanhood. There the story stops. As Cecil remarks in the guise of omniscient narrator, Nina is now in the Fifth Form (junior in high school) and the rest of the story lies in the future. Dawkins will probably step aside as the young men start calling, but he may foolishly marry Nina himself.

The relationship between Dawkins and Nina
parallels in some respect the relationship between Cecil and Kitty. Cecil described first knowing Kitty when she was a tiny girl child who sat upon his lap and in whom he later took a grandfatherly interest. In a letter, Cecil describes his sight of Kitty descending from a train and recognizing how adult, mature, and womanly she had become. Although Cecil was only three years older than she, she was small (never reached five feet in height) and matured rather late, and with his experience he felt immensely older than she.

The only part of *The Shadow of the Hawk* that doesn’t ring true to the sense of Cecil’s character is his description of Dawkins as a first-rate camp and boating cook. The only cooking that I ever saw my father do was on a camping punt overnight with me.

7. This is in the expurgated final section of *Long Before Forty*, part of the typescript at the University of Texas at Austin and quoted in its entirety in the chapter Death and Discovery.
8. Not identified now
For dinner, he heated a can of beans by immersing it in a saucepan of boiling water. A later household servant who became a longtime family friend remarked, “Cecil, cook? He couldn’t even boil an egg!” I suspect that his account of Dawkins’s skill at camp cooking was based on the food that Cecil had been served, not the food that he had ever cooked.

The *Shadow of the Hawk* is the most personal of Forester’s works, more personal than the supposedly autobiographical *Long Before Forty* and *The Hornblower Companion*. I say so because *The Shadow of the Hawk* contains more of Cecil’s real life experiences inadvertently revealed in the form of fiction than does *Long Before Forty*, with its studied concealment of so much that should have been written.

This story shows that Cecil knew how to be a good father in ways that would be particularly suitable for the father of sons. It also could be interpreted as showing that he had a particular feeling for girls. The future would show how, and in what way, these characteristics bore fruit.
When Cecil and Kathleen returned from France in the autumn of 1928, they moved in with Cecil’s parents, into the cold attic. As Kathleen says, “It wasn’t too bad. I got on well with the old lady, though it took some doing. In fact, I was the only outsider who could stand her for more than two weeks at a time, and for a daughter-in-law living with mother-in-law that’s a pretty good achievement.”

The novel written after the return from Germany was *Brown on Resolution*; – how, as a small boy, that title deterred me! Why on earth should we want to read for pleasure what I assumed to be Mr. Brown’s *Essay Upon the Ethical Aspects of Resolute Behavior*? Only long after I had sampled Hornblower, had read *The African Queen*, *The General*, and *The Gun*, did I on one desperately lonely, rainy afternoon, with everything else in sight read and reread, pull that off the shelf. *Brown on Resolution* was Cecil’s first step towards his later stories. This story of the strategic effect of Leading Seaman Brown’s resolute behavior combined many of Cecil’s long-established
interests into a story of the type that was easiest for him to handle. The interests were not only the obvious ones of naval strategy and tactics and the program of warship design immediately before World War I. There was also the interest in the results of the motivations and actions of “The Man Alone.” Interpersonal relationships are reduced to the barest minimum necessary to set the stage, which is a very bare minimum indeed because the essence of the story is that Brown has, at the time of the action, only one personal relationship, that with his father, which under the conditions of the story is a relationship unknown to them both. Even Brown’s relationship with his mother had been easily dissolved by death, leaving little behind.

The one strong relationship which Brown held, and which in turn held him, was his loyalty to the Royal Navy and to the duty which it placed upon him. In order to make the point of the story, Brown had to be more than an unthinking reed bending before the wind of duty. Unlike Harold Atbridge of The Wonderful Week, he had to act because he under-
stood the meaning of his actions. That, and the necessity that he be the unknown bastard son of a future admiral, required an origin rather above that typical of the lower deck of the period. In fact, his origin is somewhere about the level of Cecil’s own, with a subsequent fall to a level where enlisting in the Royal Navy in peacetime would be only a moderately exceptional event. Aside from the loyalty and the social descent, much of Brown’s childhood could have been Cecil’s own as he saw it: Brown’s bastardy, his loneliness, his sense of alienation, the early coaching in naval strategy and tactics, and in warship design, the council school in a southern suburb of London, the absence of his father and the practical absence of his mother. His mother’s interest in naval affairs, as a consequence of her affair with the naval officer, served to inculcate in Brown admiration for the unknown similar to that which filled Cecil’s imagination when he considered the man who might have been his father. If you consider that Brown’s mother played a part that was the combination of Geoff’s and Hugh’s coaching in naval
affairs and Grace’s and Marjorie’s sisterly attempts to raise Cecil, the analogy is almost complete.

While Dawkins in *The Shadow of the Hawk* revealed much of what Cecil thought an ideal father ought to be, I believe that Leading Seaman Albert Brown was Cecil’s first attempt to write about Cecil as Cecil might have been. Quite likely he didn’t realize it at the start, but as he came to invent the causative incidents in Brown’s early life he put in much that was a development of his own experience. For instance, when Brown was a prisoner aboard the *Ziethen*, “helplessness and despair and loneliness combined to force him into the frightful despondency — the utter black misery of the twenty-year old,”\(^9\) words that almost describe the mood from which Cecil recovered while camping by the Wey Canal in 1918, and words very like those Cecil later used to describe his contemplation of his crippling disease.

The ironical ending, too, was Cecil’s predilec-

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461
tion. Victorious, Brown was dead, as also were the losers. No European party won in World War I — only America came out ahead, but I don’t think Cecil is saying that. Brown acted at the risk of death, and death he had to pay, inflicted though it was by a stray bullet, fired by an incompetent who shouldn’t have been there, after the battle was officially over. His death was similar, in some ways, to the death of Cecil’s uncle Geoffrey John Senior in the Boer War. Brown’s death kept the story a secret, unknown to all except the reader, and that, too, suited Cecil’s temperament.

*Brown on Resolution* is really a story of secret atonement, the atonement by a bastard for the shame of his bastardy, an atonement rendered, illogically but with emotional clarity, to the famous and successful man who was his father. In this, the starting point for Cecil’s typical novels, he wrote more explicitly of his own emotional situation than ever before or since. Cecil felt the shame of bastardy, he could have attributed his childhood London poverty to it, and his exaggeration of George Smith’s Egyp-
tian fame (making him the Egyptian Minister of Education and exaggerating his military rank and medals) shows that he fancied his real father as a famous Egyptian. It is sufficient to note, also, that the only fact which Cecil always stated about himself was that he was born in Egypt, a statement he never modified to ‘of English parents.’ Of course being a bastard is not shameful; a bastard neither needs nor is able to atone for his state. But the psychologically tempting belief that all of his family had suffered because Cecil was a bastard formed an emotion that Cecil neither developed the courage to overcome nor the maturity to accept.

Later on, Brown on Resolution was adapted for a film, with Brown’s conception set in the first World War as the result of a wartime romance, and his actions set in the second. In that version of the story, Brown survived, as did his mother, and their relationship to his father was discovered and renewed. When I saw this film, knowing the novel, I thought it a very clever adaptation that, unlike most of its kind, improved rather than degraded the story. Of
course, what would happen afterwards is another matter and another story, one which this screenwriter sensibly cut off. The film’s success suggests that Brown’s death was not a necessary part of the story but an optional part that Cecil chose to insert because it suited his taste.

Brown on Resolution is Cecil’s first successful description of a scene far from his own life. The prison island in The Shadow of the Hawk, not far from Resolution either geographically or topographically, did not require much description. Resolution Island, fictional though it is, has all the air of being real. There are two real Resolution Islands, one off Buffin Island in Canada, one off South Island in New Zealand, but the relevant real name in the Galapagos Islands is Indefatigable Island. Could the first thought of this title have been Indefatigable Brown? By throwing in a little local color about the names of the islands, the behaviors of the iguanas too little known to have a common name, and the sharpness of the rocks, Cecil is able to give the impression that he really knows this volcanic island
and is describing it from recent memory. Actually, he had never been near a volcano in his life, and the description shows it. A volcanic caldera, such as forms the harbor in which Ziethen hides while making repairs, occurs when the center of a volcano collapses after the molten core has flowed out. The surrounding rocks are typically volcanic tuff, granular and abrasive, with many holes from the gases that were dissolved in it, but not sharp and crystalline as Cecil describes. “But on the outer face the blocks of lava resulting from the sudden cooling are just as razor-edged and difficult of negotiation” Razor-like edges are produced by very slow cooling, while the sudden cooling typical of volcanic eruptions produces small crystals that are too small to have razor-like edges.

As an example of technical inaccuracies that are more obvious to the non-technical reader, the German agent Schmidt drove hurriedly along a rutted jungle track to his radio transmitter. “Uphill he

10. B on R p 126

465
went, his foot steady on the accelerator.”

Cecil’s description of the correct method of driving a rough road shows simply that he knew nothing about that skill, for constant full throttle would be the surest way to crash. Cecil did not own a car for another four years, and then had to learn the skill of driving.

This discussion is not to find fault with the novel, for the novel does not in any way stand or fall on these minor points. Correct descriptions would have served the story just as well, perhaps better. Volcanic ground is difficult to traverse, crossed by fissures and honeycombed with bubble-shaped caves, both of which make ideal hiding places for riflemen. Schmidt would have reached his radio transmitter just as quickly had he driven with correct technique. The story would have been a little improved had Cecil given these technically correct descriptions, but the improvement would have been unnoticeable to the casual reader and to the literary critic.

11. B on R p 141
There is one obvious technical fault. Brown’s first eyrie on Resolution was opposite Ziethen’s starboard side, for he shot the men hanging over the side in bosun’s chairs. In the night, before the shore party reached him, he swam across the lagoon to the other side, from which he still had a good view of Ziethen “starboard side, square to his front.” (P. 131) Only after he recommenced firing did Ziethen swing round to put her damaged side away from him and, presumably, facing the place from which he had originally fired. It looks as though this was another case where the book was not long enough, and Cecil had to hurriedly add another incident — that of Brown changing his position.

The purpose of this discussion is to demonstrate that Cecil had the gift of conveying a fraudulent verisimilitude, the gift of so describing his world that you believe in it unless you had particular reason for checking up on it in a detailed and scientific way.

That year, 1929, Cecil and Kitty arranged for
both a child and another boating voyage, this time through Germany. This time Evinrude provided a light twin engine for him, about which Cecil made the appropriate complimentary comments as he went along, and *Motor Boat* provided an advance commission for Cecil to be their reporter at the international motor-boat races at Potsdam. As a press representative, one who moreover had arrived in his own yacht (which despite its miniature size was indubitably and legitimately flying the Red Ensign) Cecil was treated royally. Sir Henry Segrave won the world title, and Cecil first interviewed him, then talked to him socially. This was, I believe, Cecil’s first contact with the world of successful doers, into which he would later ingratiate himself and still later join.

However, Cecil took some liberties with the truth about himself and Kathleen. Cecil and Kathleen presented a rare contrast in their attitudes abroad. With the advantage of his education and his natural linguistic abilities, Cecil knew the languages
very well. Kathleen, on the other hand, had really no knowledge whatever of foreign tongues. However, with what was probably execrable pronunciation and worse grammar, she did the shopping, asked the way, and gossiped with the river folk. Cecil, on the contrary, was tongue-tied, ashamed of being discovered in a mistake, and had his most enjoyable conversation while abroad talking Latin to a German pharmacist.

These were not what he wrote in *The Annie Marble in Germany*. There, he emphasized his skill at languages, sufficient to be taken as a native speaker. He also emphasized, with a lengthy description of a typical day, his early-morning activity of being the first up, clearing up the boat and making breakfast while Kathleen remained snugly in her blankets until he wakened her with a cup of tea. Considering his known level of veracity and the fact that at no other time in his life did he ever exhibit those activities or skills, while Kathleen always did, it is reasonable to conclude that he was lying about himself.
As I introduced this German voyage I remarked that they had arranged for both a child and a voyage. Here is Cecil’s own description of this event, written when he was thirty as part of Long Before Forty but deleted from the published version.

Referring to Kathleen, Cecil wrote: “The most efficient piece of work she has done to date perhaps is her arrangement regarding the arrival of John Forester. The ideal future which we visualized at the time under discussion comprised the following — one last winter of county hockey for her; then a summer motor boat voyage through Germany; then a winter on the Mediterranean with our newly born son; and then another very modest motorboat trip through the English canals as long as the boy was not in need of artificial feeding. Working out the dates, it was clear that to fit these in nicely John had to be born between the 1st and the 20th of October following the German voyage (if you plot out the sequence of dates you will come to agree with us). And John was born on October 7th, with the result that we passed two years of our lives exactly as we
had planned at the beginning. She even got John’s sex right.”

This part of his account is substantially accurate. I was born about three weeks after they returned from the German voyage and my birth certificate lists my address as 58 Underhill Road, East Dulwich, which was of course my grandfather’s house. Strange — I never thought of looking for that address until I just now copied the words from *Long Before Forty*. I always believed that I was born in the flat at the corner of Mount Adon Park and Lordship Lane, and in consequence have just had to rewrite several pages.

In order to announce my birth, Cecil walked over to the Foster’s house, where Dorothy lived with her parents. As he was leaving their house after making the announcement, Mr. Foster walked out into his front garden with Cecil, closing the front door as he left the house.

“Cecil, do you have enough money to see this through?” he asked. My father replied somewhat sharply. “Of course I do. You don’t believe that I
would have started this unless I had enough money, do you?” This reasonable answer quieted Mr. Foster, who, had he known more of the truth, should have considered his own question far more reasonable than Cecil’s reply.

Cecil and Kathleen, with son John, spent the following winter in Corsica. The Corsican winter left my parents with pleasant memories and a few photographs. They told me of the pension [French boarding house] in which they stayed, the Mediterranean climate, and the wild, rocky mountains overhead. We flew back to France in a primitive plane, covered with a fabric skin that did nothing to keep out the noise of the engine. I disliked it immensely, and obviously cried out in complaint, for Mother could see my mouth opening and closing without being able to distinguish a sound above the noise of flight.

Upon our return from Corsica, we moved in with Jack Ballard and his wife in Folkestone. Jack, a long-term friend, taught art in a school there. His wife died shortly after, for in the period that I recall
Jack and his two maiden sisters Charlotte and Nancy were all of the Ballards who remained, centered around the family home in Ledbury, Herefordshire.

The little flat that was my parent’s first home together was the lower front of a brick building of several floors whose white stone trim gave it a vaguely gothic air and its name, Gothic Lodge. Behind its tiny walled garden it fronted on Lordship Lane at the corner of Mount Adon Park. Lordship Lane was not a lane at all, but the main road through Dulwich to London. Double-decked London trams ran along it and much other traffic as well. Half a mile towards London the road to Alleyn’s School crossed Lordship Lane; about half a mile farther from London the electric trains from London to the Crystal Palace crossed over Lordship Lane on a bridge, making a stop at the station there. Between Mount Adon Park and the station, Underhill Road intersected Lordship Lane, and several hundred yards down it was No. 58, where Cecil’s parents lived.
The flat had a single bedroom, a kitchen, dining room, and a sitting room. Although the building fronted on Lordship Lane, it was entered from Mount Adon Park. The end of what had once been a hallway, lighted by a window where it reached the front wall, was blocked off into a tiny room, just big enough for Kathleen to stand beside my cot. As children will, I became able to scramble out of that window before my mother expected, and was found after a worried search up and down the street gabbling to the occasional gardener who was wearily attempting to straighten out that jungle of a garden. Cecil, Kathleen, and I lived there from the summer of 1930 until the birth of their second son, George, on February 25, 1933.

The English motorboat trip in the next spring was as quiet as Cecil wrote. The boat had a tiny Turner-Bray motor, about the size of a coffee can from what I was told, which propelled it as fast as was allowed. For the canal bargees, the greatest excitement and hardest work occurs at locks, where the powered barge and its towed butty boat must be
separated and maneuvered one at a time into the lock, whose paddles and gates are operated by hand. At the start, cranking paddles and pushing gates made Father’s hands quite raw, but in two weeks he had calloused palms. On the trip they traversed several tunnels, though not by the old timer’s method of lying on the side of the boat, putting feet against the tunnel walls and “legging” her though. Cecil sailed his boat as far west as the canal system ever went, over the mighty Pontcycyllte Aqueduct where the canal is carried over the River Dee for more than 1,000 feet on 18 stone piers, the tallest 120 feet high.

For me, as I was told the story in later years, the greatest excitement was seeing the horse-drawn barges. Obsolete, really, there was still about one a day along the main line. In the early evening, when I was in my perambulator on the canal bank while my parents were cooking dinner, I could hear the clop of horse’s hooves for a quarter of a mile. I looked down the canal as long as the barge approached, gazed open-mouthed at the big draft horse draped with his gypsy ornaments, then to the barge with the
bargee at the tiller, and turned to watch them disappear in the distant dusk. Just as I did, so did Hornblower cross England by canal. (Indefinite tense — both past and future contradict the facts. As yet unborn, Horatio had made the passage in 1805.)

The novel written in that year was *Plain Murder*, the “wicked, bloody plot” which Cecil had first thought of in the month after he completed *The Wonderful Week*. It requires three murders, and Cecil had the first and the third worked out at that time. The first was by gunfire, the noise concealed amid the fireworks of Guy Fawke’s Day. The last was a supposedly accidental drowning, on a stretch of the Thames that Cecil knew well. But the central murder had also to be concealed as an accident, and accidental deaths are not so easy for amateur murderers to arrange, nor for novelists to tell in realistic fashion.

Only after experience with Kathleen’s motorcycle did Cecil invent the method. The motorcycle served as the first murderer’s transportation to and
from the crime plausibly enough, and then its deliberate sabotage provided the means for the second, undetected murder.

The similarities between *Payment Deferred* and *Plain Murder* are many. In both, a man murders for financial gain and is undetected. Retribution comes only as a later development of the results of the murder, without the benefit of police or detectives. There are three deaths in each, the middle ones both by motorcycle. No element in either plot goes beyond what Cecil could observe in the suburban life around him. William Marble, of *Payment Deferred*, is a bank clerk, like Cecil’s brother Hugh, whom Cecil consulted on several points of the plot. His hobby, which provided the poison, is photography, and Cecil developed and printed his own photographs, particularly those of Kathleen he didn’t want in public knowledge.¹²

Motorcycles were just entering Cecil’s set. Bill Clarke was the first to own one, and Cecil had his

¹². L
first ride behind one or another of his friends shortly before he started *Payment Deferred*. The mur-

Bill Clarke’s first motorcycle.

Bill & Gladys Clarke,
Kitty Belcher in front,
in rear at right is Frank Belcher

ders and victims of *Plain Murder* were advertising
copywriters, just as Cecil had been for a month, and the initial murder is performed to conceal commercial peccadilloes of the type Cecil had heard about at that time. There is even a similarity in names; the supervisors in both the Imperial and in _Plain Murder_ were known as ‘Mac.’ Even the scene of the accident to the sabotaged motorcycle is just like the intersection where the road down from Sydenham Hill crosses Lordship Lane, two blocks from Cecil’s home. I often cycled down there, without considering there was anything unusual in the similarity between where we lived and what we did and the setting of Father’s books. The grimmer sides of poor suburban life Cecil well knew, from which he could easily create lifelike pictures in his mind. Reporting these pictures, and discussing them as from the outside, was his method of writing.

Perhaps the weakness of his happier stories was that they required what he had rarely seen: scenes of happiness, scenes drawn from a freer society outside his own, scenes available only to those with money to spend, and scenes of happy love and lengthy, inti-
mate contact with respectable women.

*Two and Twenty*, published in 1931, is the story of the twenty-second year in the life of a failed medical student cum poet. The other major character is a young woman, a physical education instructress, medical masseuse and hockey player, and the story is full of other autobiographical details. As Cecil had written to Kathleen when first considering this story, those people who knew them would wonder how much of it reflected their own experiences.\(^\text{13}\)

The story opens when Cyril Meryon Leigh, a soon-to-be-acclaimed poet, wins a low-level professional boxing competition, injuring his hand while doing so. Why is he in the ring? Well, even poets have to eat. Of course, he didn’t have to be in this situation. He could have been studying medicine with an adequate allowance and a supportive family. His father, an English general, had been killed in World War I, but one uncle was a successful busi-

\(^\text{13}\) CSF-K, 128, 7 February 1926
nessman and the other was a famous surgeon. Cyril was an eccentric. He had been bullied at school for refusing to accept the punishment administered by a senior boy. He had fought back with a cricket stump in his hands, and then “had learned the trick of losing his self-control just sufficiently to double his strength without blunting his cunning.” Graduating from school younger than normal, he had spent the year before entering Guy’s medical school in reading poetry.

Once at Guy’s he still didn’t fit. He failed the anatomy examination because he would not work at the tedious memorization that is required to learn all the parts of the human body and their multifarious connections. Cecil tells the same story for Leigh that he told about himself. The student in anatomy is presented with a bone and asked to identify it and explain it. He fails with this, and with the next, and with the next. When asked why, he replied that he thought that the examination was tomorrow.

Cecil described anatomy as disorganized knowledge. “The human body is a botched, tangled,
make-shift piece of work. Evolved from an aquatic vertebrate, it has been amended with hurried additions to adapt it first to motion on dry land, and then to air breathing, and finally to the erect posture. It is as if some ingenious but careless mechanic had taken a sewing-machine, made a vacuum cleaner of it, then adapted it for typewriting, and had finally decided to try his hand at altering it into a model aeroplane.” In Long Before Forty he described human anatomy rather more seriously as a book whose pages and paragraphs had been mixed up in the composing room, but in which you had to know not its meaning but the location of every word, and the sentence before it, and the one after it.

The students in the dissecting room discover that one of the newly-arrived cadavers is of a virgin female, something that hadn’t been seen around there in decades, if ever. Cyril and several others decide to use the virgin to raise the Devil through the Black Mass. As they remark, the virginity is probably more important than life in this process. Locked into a small room they set about the process,
illuminated by eerie coloured lighting and smoke produced by appropriate salts in bunsen flames. As Cyril is reciting the commanding phrases in his best poetic voice there comes a commanding knocking at the door. One student is too frightened to open the door, but Cyril flings it open to disclose only the dean, naturally furious. Cyril thinks of his time in medical school as “depression and weariness and hopelessness, two whole years of them.” He quits medicine to take up poetry.

To separate himself from his medical-student friends and to reduce expenses he moved to a rooming house in “Camberwell ... [and] the drab surroundings of that drabbest of suburbs.” He discovers that the glossy illustrated magazines often need short rhymes to fill the ends of pages, and that he can fill that need. Those magazines carried “serial stories by the best-known authors of England and America who always seemed to get rid of their very worst work on these periodicals without injuring either their own reputations or the circulation of the magazines.” Even so, his money runs out, he is
sometimes homeless. Hence his need to win a small amount as a beginning prizefighter.

The exhilaration of winning the competition, coupled with the pain of his injured hand, starts him composing a ballad about the British naval disaster of the battle of Coronel (which Cecil had also used as source material for *Brown on Resolution*.) Having composed its 250 lines (Cecil gives us about six), knowing that it is far too long for the glossy magazines to whom he has been submitting short rhymes, he sends it off to one of the major reviews.

His injured hand requires medical treatment. “Leigh ... had been profoundly moved by Dr. Ford’s casual mention of ‘deformity.’ He did not want his hand to be permanently bent, or twisted, or dented. He hated the idea with extreme intensity; it reminded him of things he had seen at the hospital.” To reshape his hand after the fracture has healed, he is sent to the charity clinic where masseuses in training provide the treatments. He is assigned to a masseuse in training who is also a well-known hockey player. Just as Cyril is from a higher level of society
than Cecil, so Lucia is from a higher level of society than is Kathleen, and Lucia is tall and blonde as well. Lucia recognizes Leigh’s social level, and he is able to impress her with the letter agreeing to publish *The Ballad of Coronel*.

Cyril confesses to Lucia his failure in anatomy. However, “Leigh, the self-confessed failure was a figure just as attractive, though in a different way, as Leigh the half-starved poet, or as Leigh the successful man of letters.” Lucia “wanted to put some fat on his ribs, to plump out a little the hollows of his cheeks. She wanted to replace the haunted, lonely look in his eyes with something more assured.”

*Coronel* becomes a popular success, Leigh supplies more poems for publication in a book: love poems, short rhymes of the type that had been accepted before, and finally another long ballad. This is *The Ballad of the Falklands*, commemorating the battle of the Falklands at which the British Navy took revenge for the disaster of Coronel. (Cecil had used this also as source material for the second naval action in *Brown on Resolution.* )
Lucia proposes and they get married secretly. She manages the honeymoon and furnishing an apartment. Before their marriage is revealed, there are amusing scenes when Cyril is invited to a literary weekend at the country home of a literary patron while Lucia gets herself invited as a friend of the daughter of the patron, who is a fellow student and hockey player.

Cyril’s family become somewhat reconciled to his profession, Lucia’s become somewhat reconciled to Cyril, upon discovering his success and, more important, the social level of his family. Then Cyril decides to return to the study of medicine and buckles down to learning anatomy the way that medical students have always done it, by hard memorization of disconnected facts, aided by jingles and slang. He is aided in this decision by recognizing Lucia’s knowledge of the considerable parts of human anatomy that she had been required to learn as a medical masseuse.

That is the end of the story of Cyril’s twenty-second year. The point that is significant today is
that Cyril returns to studying medicine because he recognizes the poor quality of his poetry – Cecil remarks that “he was beginning to realize (and he was the first of his generation to do so, be it noted) how very bad his verse was.” How Cecil tells of Cyril’s initiation into the literary world and how Cyril’s verse should be evaluated tells much about Cecil’s experience and opinions on these subjects.

The literary patron introduces himself to Cyril by a letter inviting Cyril to lunch at the Savage Club. The Savage is the club for men of literary and artistic interests, which Cecil had recently been asked to join. At this lunch Cyril meets a literary agent who subsequently ensures that Cyril receives proper payment. Cecil notes that by this time the subject of World War I was no longer taboo, had indeed become of public interest, as evinced by the literary works he lists. At the Savage there is considerable

14. For example, Benno Moseivitch, the famous pianist, was another member with whom Cecil became friends.
discussion of *The Ballad of Coronel*, at which a well-informed man points out that Cyril had avoided the typical technical blunders in works of this sort. Cyril had indeed referred to H. W. Wilson’s *Battleships in Action*, of which Cecil owned a copy. There is a scorching criticism of Kipling’s *Ballad of the Clampherdown*, in which that poem is shown to depict a technically absurd and practically impossible naval action. Another man, again quoting Kipling, points out that the “old Moulmein pagoda” is thirty miles from the sea, which can’t even be seen from it.

When Cyril follows *The Ballad of Coronel* with *The Ballad of the Falklands*, the latter lacked the inspiration of the first, “but the base alloy was skillfully enough composed to present a deceitful likeness.” Cecil describes Cyril’s verse as that which “a single rapid reading was sufficient to give a complete insight into what he was trying to say. That is the measure of the badness of his poetry. At the same time a single rapid reading called up all the emotion the verse could rouse, which was quite a good deal. That is the measure of the goodness of his poetry –
tricky stuff, good second-class stuff, meretricious stuff, which even sensitive judges felt compelled to praise at first sight, and which people of untrained or blunted taste continue to think marvellous.” Leigh recognizes these faults, and concludes that the reviewers who thought *Coronel* good must have bad taste, and therefore *Coronel* must be particularly bad poetry and the reviewers must be even worse, in a descending spiral of dark thoughts. These thoughts which Cecil ascribed to Cyril are exactly those with which Cecil tortured himself when the black mood was upon him.

*U97*, also published in 1931, continues the naval themes of *Brown on Resolution* and of Cyril’s ballads in *Two and Twenty*. The scene is the German submarine force in November, 1918, the last month of WW I. Having been strategically beaten at the battle of Jutland in May, 1916, the German surface fleet thereafter skulked in port, recognizing that it could not win the command of the sea that defeating Britain required. However, the German submarine force very nearly produced the blockade that the
surface force could not, although with considerable losses. Amid the growing recognition of the failure of the last Army offensive, intended to win the war before American strength had arrived, the battle fleet was ordered out to try for a final winning battle against the British fleet, and the sailors mutinied, refusing to sail to slaughter for a cause that was lost.

The first act, of three, each of one scene, occurs in the officers’ club room at the submarine base. The mutiny has prevented the officers from manning their boats to put to sea again, and the Admiral enters to pass the word that the navy will be required to surrender its ships to the British. The officers respond in different ways. One, with verbal brilliance, comments on the absurdity of the war. Another, who may well hang for torpedoing a properly-marked hospital ship, is half drunk. But most discuss the dishonor of surrender, wondering what they could do to show that they would not surrender. They realize that one boat, loaded for war, is outside the harbor piers and could be stealthily sailed out if crewed only by themselves. They decide
to sail that night to attempt to penetrate Scapa Flow, the anchorage of the British fleet. The Admiral, who has been kept doing shore duty for all of the war, says that he will join them, not as commander (he bows to the experienced men before him) but as a guest. The officers know that their plan must be kept secret, or the mutinous sailors will prevent it. Therefore, at the Admiral’s regular reception for officers and their wives, to be held that afternoon, they all had to appear, while saying nothing of their plan.

The second-act reception contrasts the relief of the women, who know that the war is about to end and who look forward to peace and family life again, against the necessity of the officers who know that, for them, it has one more deadly account to render. There is the outburst from the wife who has just been told that, most probably, she is now a widow. There is the patience of the Admiral with his optimistic wife, while the cynically brilliant officer is presented with the return of his estranged fiancee, now telling him that she will marry him. The offi-
cers leave to return to the base, leaving the women strongly suspecting the nature of the plan, but divided about whether or not to try to prevent it.

The third act occurs in the control room of the submarine U97 as the officer crew attempts to penetrate Scapa Flow, to put a few torpedoes into British battleships. They manage to get partway up the channel, surviving getting caught in barrage nets and a depth-charge attack, until a nearby mine explodes. The forward torpedo room is flooded and they sink to the bottom of the channel. There is discussion of dying or surrendering. The Admiral gives them his permission to try to survive by surrendering, if they can get the boat to the surface, but they cannot get enough buoyancy to lift the boat. They have cracked battery cells, from which the incoming seawater produces chlorine gas, and the lights get dimmer and dimmer, as the thunder of the seaward-bound propellers of the unbeaten dreadnaughts of the British fleet resounds overhead.

What a contrast between honour and patriotism, on the one hand, and absurdity, cynicism, and
death on the other. War is both nasty and terrible, and while it is far better to be on the winning side, sometimes men commit themselves to even losing gestures to support their faith in themselves and their causes.

However, and I must remark on this, the underwater scene suffers from considerable technical inaccuracy. The motor room is shown directly abaft the control room, so that the audience can see the adjustments being made to control the speed of the electric motors. (In a real submarine, the diesel engine room intervenes, and maybe an after battery room.) However, this can be faked in the stage set with little loss of verisimilitude. More than that, Forester does not make the captain raise the periscope so its eyepiece comes to his eye level and its hidden top extends above the surface; Forester gets the periscope up above the surface by changing the depth of the boat, a very significant error that surely would not be missed by the audience. Forester signals the change in depth, up to periscope depth and down from it, by hissing of the compressed air in the bal-
last tanks. Again wrong. Once the boat is trimmed for dive, it displaces the same amount of water as its weight, and floats with zero buoyancy at any depth. All it has to do is to swim up or down, steered by the diving planes while being driven by the motors. Finally, when on the bottom, but trying to rise, the crew doesn’t blow all ballast tanks, which would be the appropriate action, but Forester has them start the pumps instead, and the laboring noise of the pumps signals that they can’t pump out enough water to make the boat rise. These errors are merely another example of the technical ineptitude that dogged Forester’s career despite his reputation for scientific and technical knowledge. Of course, any stage designer with a bit of naval advice would set these things right and get the script corrected. There’s no record of U97 on the British stage, but, as translated and presented by Lerbs in Germany in 1931, it was quite popular for several years, and had a special presentation to the leaders of the Nazi party.  

For the summer of 1933 Cecil and Kathleen rented the Malt House, a cottage beside the public house from whose well the Winchelsea campers drew their water. My earliest memory is being bounced up Winchelsea’s shingle beach by a wave. My left shoulder and cheek bounded over, dug into, and bounced again over the flat pebbles as the surge of the wave pushed me, floated me, tumbled me up the beach. I could see through the white foam the brown and grey pebbles flashing past my face, while their clicking clatter as they too tumbled up the beach was a roar as loud as a train. My mother had tied a rope around my waist and pulled me back to safety whenever I got out too far.

Then in late 1933 we returned to London, renting the third floor and garret of No. 36 Longton Avenue, Upper Sydenham. Upper Sydenham was about half way between Dulwich and the Crystal Palace, eastward along the crest of the hill from the

15. Reflections 18, March 2011, of the C. S. Forester Society
Palace. The electric trains from the Lordship Lane station near George Smith’s house at 58 Underhill Road stopped once at Upper Sydenham before reaching the Crystal Palace Station. Longton Avenue started a hundred yards below the station, branching off Sydenham Wells Road and circling around Sydenham Wells Park. No. 36, near the upper end of the avenue, was inset into the park, its back fence concealed by the bushes of the park. The upper apartment was entered up a long enclosed stairway from the ground floor; it started from the front and entered the apartment nearly at the back. Across the back was the kitchen and laundry, the bathroom with a geyser over the tub, and the dining room. Across the front, up a very short flight of stairs, were the sitting room and the master bedroom. Further up the stairs, at the top of the house, were three small garret bedrooms.

My second earliest memory is of Mother sitting inside the dining room window. A brilliant sunbeam haloed her hair as she suckled George, whose tiny hands beat upon her breast to ask for more.
At the time of the move to No. 36, Cecil was just completing his pair of novels about the Peninsular War, *Death to the French* (published in the U.S.A as *Rifleman Dodd*) and *The Gun*. At least the first of these had first been thought of in 1927, when Cecil had decided to write *The Wonderful Week* instead. *Death to the French* has many similarities to *Brown on Resolution*, for it is again the story of the effect on history of the actions of “the man alone” in carrying out his duty. Yet in many respects it is exactly the opposite story. Leading Seaman Albert Brown had been coached from birth to do great things for England in the Royal Navy. His social descent to the lower deck provided a protagonist more able to understand his part in history and to act on it than one would normally expect of a seaman. Brown was solitary in birth, upbringing, and survival from his sinking ship. Alone, he did his part, for which he died, but because he did his part the *Ziethen* was intercepted and sunk. Rifleman Matthew Dodd, raised a farmhand, had come up in the world by
entering the Rifle Regiment. The Rifles were his life, not in an idealistic sense, but because the ranks were all the society he knew or wanted. Illiterate, his only knowledge the training and experience the Rifles had given him, he too did his part by following the tactical precepts that had been drilled into him. *Death to the French*, while far more ghastly with its starvation, burning at the stake, and the sequential deaths of the French infantry squad, than was *Brown on Resolution*, is the happier book, almost mellow in some respects. Rifleman Dodd recognized his need for his society, his only wish to be able to return to his fellow soldiers, and this sustained him through his terrible winter. His duty aided him in that, except for the possibility of being killed, whatever he did to carry out his duty brought, in his opinion, reunion that much closer. Yet Dodd’s accomplishment of his duty had no effect. He killed one squad of French soldiers, shot twenty or so draft animals, sparked a villageful of peasants into a guerilla unit whose activity called down the deadly vengeance of Marshal Ney upon themselves. His
climacteric triumph was the destruction of the French bridging material, three hours only before the arrival of the French orders to destroy and abandon it. Had Dodd been a coward or a laggard, he might well not have survived his winter, but the French would have retreated just the same. But in the end, “As for Dodd, he might as well have been in heaven. He was back in the regiment, in the old atmosphere of comradeship and good fellowship … He had borrowed an extra lot of salt from Eccles. He dipped his bread in it luxuriously, and munched and munched and munched.”¹⁶

This is almost the first evidence in Cecil’s work of a feeling of belonging. True, it was necessary for the story, but it is difficult for even an accomplished author to describe emotions completely foreign to him, and less likely for him to first decide that such an emotion is necessary to the plot. Perhaps the successful events of Cecil’s recent years, with their complete change in position, family, and surroundings,

¹⁶. DttF p 199, 200
had mellowed him somewhat and made him feel less alienated.

About this time Cecil started to meet other literary people. He was nominated to the Savage Club, a men’s club associated with the arts, and joined. Kitty says that before this time there wasn’t enough money for social affairs such as this.17

The Gun is a different kind of story. Its unthinking, non-verbal, initiativeless protagonist (though hardly weak or silent) forces the subsidiary characters to carry the story. The destination, use, and eventual destruction of the gun draw the reader’s mind along the plot, but it is the character and interplay of the men about it which give the story its life and meaning. A series of men control the gun. El Bilbanito, the brothers O’Neill, Brother Barnard, Jorge, play their parts in supporting the gun; Major Jonquier and Colonel Baron Laferriere play theirs as they are destroyed by it. The action occurs in 1810 and 1811, when the French are trying to subdue

17. Kitty tape, 10 Nov 1984
Spain while Wellington’s small British army, supplied by sea, is keeping resistance alive. Wellington’s presence requires the French armies to remain concentrated at the farthest reaches of Spain and Portugal, while the Spanish guerrillas, descending from the mountains, keep interrupting the French supply routes. At one time, the French have to protect a simple letter from one marshal to another with a regiment of cavalry. The combination of Wellington and the guerrillas stretches the French effort as thin as it can be.

Into this scene comes the gun, an eighteen-pounder siege cannon, far larger than the four- and six-pounder field guns, that had been abandoned in the mountains by a beaten Spanish army. The gun, of cast bronze, does not decay, and a band of guerrillas rebuilds its carriage with the intent of breaching the walls of the little fortresses with which the French are holding the fertile plains. The gun brings death not only to the French it fires against but also to those who wish to control it. The control of the gun passes from guerrilla chieftain to guerrilla
chieftain, sometimes by the accidents of war but more often by murders, until, inevitably, the guerrillas attempt to take a properly prepared French fortress and the gun is destroyed by the big guns mounted in the fortress.

The man who knew where the gun had been hidden was hung by the guerrilla chief who wanted the gun. That chief was killed in a knife duel with a former army officer, Hugh O’Neill (there are many Irish names in Spain) who, with his brother, knew how cannon should be used. The gun kills Major Jonquier and his garrison of a tiny fortress, but before it succeeds the chieftain is horribly wounded. Control of the gun and the band passes to his younger brother, Carlos, a former artillery officer, who has been in actual charge of the gun because he has the technical knowledge to operate it. Under this chieftain, the gun batters in the gates of the provincial city of Leon, while the French garrison in the citadel dies of the arsenic that Spanish resistors had introduced into the flour that they had been forced to contribute to the French emergency supplies. The
gun then, speaking from ambush, breaks up a regiment of the Guard, under Colonel Baron Laferriere, that is marching to disperse the guerrillas and relieve Leon. Only one man of that regiment escapes the guerrilla horsemen who follow up the gun’s initial massacre. Overburdened by the numerous responsibilities placed on him by his control of the gun, O’Neill turns to execution as the quickest, most convenient, and most personally satisfying method of retaining control of his turbulent little army. The guerrilla band becomes a military autocracy. “In three weeks the government of Carlos O’Neill had reached the pitch which it took Imperial Rome a century to attain.” O’Neill, in his turn, is killed by his brother chieftains in self-protection as the leader of his “palace guard” hesitates to defend him, just before the gun itself is destroyed by the big guns of the fortress they are attacking. The guerrillas disperse, leaving the gun with its smashed muzzle pointed skyward. The final sentence of the novel is: “But still, the gun had played its part in history.”

History had not changed, except for the minor
point of the temporary liberation of Leon, but the
gun had done its part in preventing the French from
concentrating more units against Wellington.
Thereby, the gun had made more certain the results
of the battles by which, in that year and the next,
Wellington fought across Spain and carried the war
into France. Cecil’s explicit parallel between
O’Neill’s rule of the small part of Spain that he had
reconquered and that of the worst Roman emperors
goes back to his childhood reading of the horrors
described by Suetonius, and foreshadows his
description of El Supremo and his fascination with
the horrors of Nazi Germany.

Forester’s next novel, *The Peacemaker* is a sci-
ence fiction novel about a minor physicist, a school-
teacher, who makes modern war impossible by
radiating an electromagnetic beam that destroys
magnetism. This prevents the effective use of any
weapons that depend on magnetism. Ignition sys-
tems fail, hence aircraft, tanks and motor trucks
stop. As a novel, like many pieces of science fiction,
it is deplorably weak in characterization. In an account of Cecil’s literary development it is a temporary regression, no more. Typical of Cecil’s deeper opinion, the man who is the Peacemaker fails in his effort to set up a peaceful world.

The scientific part of *The Peacemaker* displays the limits of Cecil’s scientific and engineering understanding. Science fiction had at this time an honorable history under H. G. Wells, whose works Cecil had read (and recommended to me), and was developing in new form under John Campbell, editor of *Astounding Magazine*, works that Cecil did not read. Cecil’s description of the effects produced by a beam that destroys magnetism reads as though it were scientifically accurate. Everything that depended on magnetism for its operation would cease to operate, and the effect would be either permanent, in that permanent magnets were rendered no longer magnetic, or temporary, in that electro-magnets would regain their ability to be magnets when the beam was turned off and the electricity was turned on. Cecil gives an impressive list of the
items that would no longer operate in the path of the beam: electric generators, electric motors, telephones, radios, transformers. However, the list shows the difference between having studied physics in school and understanding it. In all transformers and electric motors, the primary opposition to the flow of electricity is the moving or changing magnetic field that is generated. Without that opposition (called inductance and reverse electromotive force by electrical engineers) the machine becomes a low-resistance short between the power connections, resulting in blown fuses or opened circuit breakers if one is lucky, or explosive bursts of brilliant flame if one is unlucky. Any circuit breakers within the reach of the beam also would not work, because they use magnetic force to pull open the switches. As a result, any transformers or electric motors that were powered from lines outside the effect of the beam would immediately burst into flame the moment the beam was turned on, while those powered by chemical batteries, such as car starter motors, would immediately burn out whenever the operator switched on
the battery power. Had Cecil realized these effects, the Peacemaker would have had a much more spectacular and damaging effect. As it was, the only permanent effect that Cecil described was the need to remagnetize compasses and the magnetos of such cars as used magnetos instead of ignition coils. Cecil did not realize that car generators also would not work once the beam was turned off; they depend for initial action on the small amount of magnetism remaining in the iron cores after being shut down. If this is lost, it must be replaced by ‘sparking,’ making a very momentary contact between the field terminal and the battery.

It is possible, depending on how this effect worked, that the interrelationship of electricity and magnetism, known since 1840 or so by Faraday and Henry, and mathematically described by Maxwell in 1873, would have been affected. This could have affected electromagnetic radiation, killing not only radio waves but also, perhaps, light itself.

That Cecil, who after all had been a science student, did not perceive these physical interrela-

507
tionships shows a shallow appreciation for scientific knowledge. Had he appreciated these interrelationships, he could have hardly resisted the opportunity to flesh out or pad his thin story with the additional details. Want of subject matter to fill his books was in those years always a problem for him, as his letters show.

Furthermore, the Peacemaker chose to demonstrate the effects of his beam by installing its emitter in a small office near the Bank of England\textsuperscript{18} and rotating the beam, over several days, to stop traffic in each of the streets that radiate from that place: King William, Cornhill, Threadneedle, Cheapside, and Queen Victoria. With the public outcry and the scientists that were alerted, somebody would have rapidly determined that the cause must have been very close to the intersection of those streets and flooded the place with investigators.

So much for the scientific weaknesses of the

\textsuperscript{18}Cecil places this in Hammond Court, just behind Threadneedle Street.
plot. The protagonist, Edward Pethwick, is a well-regarded mathematician or mathematical physicist who earned his Ph.D. at the age of twenty four and is now thirty one, teaching mathematics and physics at a school rather like Dulwich College but in a country town. He has noticed that a mathematical function describing magnetism, whose value is conventionally taken to be zero, does not calculate to zero but to some small value. The consequence of this is that it is possible to generate a field that might have interesting magnetic effects. He builds a transmitter using common radio parts and something that he builds himself, the whole powered by household electricity. When he turns it on in his school laboratory, he destroys the magnetism of all the magnets that the boys use in the laboratory.

The conventional next step would be to publish the theory and the experimental results. He has already had several papers published, so given his entirely new experimental results acceptance would be no problem. However, before he does this he is diverted by other considerations. He comes from
the working class, is the first in his family to achieve professional status, but has been trapped into marriage with a cousin who turns out to be uninteresting, ignorant, mean, and alcoholic.

The headmaster of the school had been a high officer during World War I and the school has an ROTC unit whose current student leader is his son, who thinks no more than the typical military man. The headmaster also has a daughter, Dorothy, who is an honors graduate from Oxford in history and is a pacifist. Pethwick admires her from a distance, thinking of her as one of the “Lordly ones,” while she admires him because he does not have the militaristic and Tory opinions of her family. She thinks of him as the White Knight in Through The Looking Glass, the world’s most bumbling gadgeteer. As she explains pacifism to him, he tells her that his discovery would make modern warfare impossible.

Their Platonic romance rouses the jealousy of Mrs. Pethwick, who lies to Dorothy that she is newly pregnant. This upsets Dorothy because it means that Pethwick has lied to her, that he has recently made
love to this slovenly, dirty, drunken hag. She tells him that he is a coward and a liar, without telling him of his wife’s words that led to her conclusion, and goes off to Norway, accompanying her father on his annual summer fishing vacation. Therefore, distraught over what he does not understand, Pethwick’s first move with his new discovery is to demonstrate its power to affect world policy toward arms control, to show Dorothy that he has made a great discovery that will assist her aims.

Pacifism was in the air at this time. As Forester had remarked in *Two and Twenty*, and as he privately remarked at the same time in what would be published as *Long Before Forty*, World War I, the Great War as it was then called, had returned to public discourse with the revelations of the horrors of trench warfare, horrors that had been concealed by blind patriotism. In February, 1933, the Oxford Union (University) Debating Society voted overwhelmingly “that this House will in no circumstances fight for King and Country.” William Manchester wrote much later “in the 1980s it is difficult to grasp the
public innocence of that earlier generation, and how it recoiled when confronted at last by the monstrous crimes which had been committed in the name of patriotism.” The world has also since seen an even greater surge of pacifism as the combined result of the nuclear bomb and the Cold War.

While *The Peacemaker* is a science fiction novel about pacifism, it is not a pacifist book. Forester provides a clear-eyed account of the social responses to pacifism and of the defects in its theory. Pacifism at that time was a response to World War I, which was an unnecessary war, initiated on an absurd pretext, started because the generals could not stop their armies, fought at horrible cost, and ultimately settling little. Just as Forester disbelieved the moralistic fervor and jingoism with which Britons faced World War I, so he disbelieved the pacifist arguments in response. In none of his four novels set in World War I (*Brown on Resolution, The African Queen, The General, Randall and the River of Time*) does he depict Ger-

mans as morally bad. His characters participate in the war because their nations are at war; the purpose of the war is morally neutral. However, his life-long study of Napoleonic history had developed, as his two novels of the Peninsular War showed, his understanding that while war is often horrible, armed resistance to Napoleonic hegemony is moral and justified. Furthermore, his study of military history had shown that each new weapon produces its counter.

Therefore, when Pethwick starts on his arms control demonstration, he commits the blunders and reaps the responses to be expected. Having placed his equipment in a shabby rented office in the strategic location in London, he sends a letter to The Times, signed Peacemaker, saying what he will do and why he will do it, a letter that naturally is considered to be absurd and is not published. He says he will continue “until a sincere effort has been made to reduce the armaments maintained by the world to be the lowest point consistent with the policing of the countries concerned.” Then he stops.
traffic for the first time, in King William Street, and writes another letter referring to the first. The initial stoppage elicits interviews with experts who talk “an amazing amount of balderdash.”

The second letter gives The Times the scoop of the decade in printing both letters and bringing arms control to the focus of public debate. Forester does not present Pethwick as a pacifist, but only as an arms controller. He remarks of Pethwick that “what he knows of war seems to prove to him that any attempt to make war more humane is based on unsound data, and that such attempts lead only to hypocrisy.” He thinks that his reasoned letters in academic style are sufficient to make his point, “but The Times leader (editorial) disillusioned him” by describing his conduct as “undoubtedly criminal” and weakening Britain’s position in international negotiations. Pethwick overhears conversations at his luncheon restaurant between transmissions of his beam. The other lunchers think that he has other motives, that he isn’t serious about disarmament “and hasn’t a hope if he were.” Forester
remarks that “what Pethwick needed was someone to play Huxley to his Darwin,” referring to the formidable academic debater who was described as ‘Darwin’s bulldog’ in the controversy over evolution and natural selection. Pethwick feels that Dorothy will see only his fiasco, and determines to escalate the confrontation (to use modern terminology).

His desperation is magnified by a confrontation with his wife. Going to London to run his demonstrations has taken time during summer vacation and requires false excuses, time that his wife grudges because it interferes with her making his life miserable. She complains, “Just because you want to be like your grand friends, your Dorothy Laxton and so on, I suppose.”

“Mary meant that shaft to hurt, and it did ... Mary looked at his face again, and for a moment she was afraid. ... It seemed as if the endeavours of ten years were about to bear fruit, and Mary was to succeed in making her husband lose his temper. She thought he was going to strike her, and she felt a mad pleasure mingle with her fear.”
Pethwick decides that he needs to make his equipment portable so he can transmit from anywhere. This requires a source of electrical power; he needs half an ampere at one hundred volts. He gets this, not from car batteries, which would be the normal thought today, but from ‘accumulators,’ the small (30 ampere-hour) storage batteries that were used to heat the vacuum-tube filaments of the typical radio receiver of the day.\(^\text{20}\) He needs perhaps twenty-four of these, acquired one at a time to preserve secrecy, and that requires a car in which to carry them. That source would give him about sixty hours of operation between recharges. So he buys an old Morris car and learns how to drive it, both actions without letting his wife know.

The car seller and driving instructor is one of his former pupils, Lenham, who is working in his

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20. The plate power was supplied by 90-volt batteries of dry cells, 60 cells wired together in one block. When one of these was exhausted, I would rip it open and puzzle and fantasize over its intricate wiring.
father’s garage. Pethwick keeps the car in one of Lenham’s row of rental garages. Naturally, there is some confidence between the two, and in the course of instruction, which Lenham knows is to be kept secret from Mrs. Pethwick, Lenham brings up the Peacemaker’s activities. Lenham remarks that disarmament won’t work, it just makes nations start from scratch; something more drastic might work, such as killing the commanders-in-chief, say one every day.

Having learned how to drive inexpertly, Pethwick plans his next demonstration. On August Bank Holiday (like American Labor Day) he drives up to London and parks the car lined up with the line of generators in the Battersea Power Station. When he turns on his transmitter, the power for the London Underground stops, and remains stopped for hours. Unfortunately, in the underground panic there are four deaths and over one hundred injuries, many of them among schoolchildren.

Pethwick arrives back at his rented garage thoroughly tired, and gets his car stuck across the opening while trying to reverse in. Lenham sees him and
frees the car with skilled movements, but sees the equipment which fills the car.

Dorothy, isolated in her father’s Norwegian fishing camp, receives in one day the newspapers reporting the first four traffic stoppages and the resulting political turmoil and enraged press. She realizes that Pethwick has done this. Dorothy “knew the day had come when the label ‘Pacifist’ could be applied to a man as a term of reproach, just as in other days it was usual to style one’s opponents as Papists, or Radicals, or Methodists, or Atheists, or Mormons, or Communists, or Bolshevists, or Pro-Germans, signifying that in that case all their opinions must be unsound, their sanity suspect, their probity doubtful, their parentage tainted, and their persons unclean.” She realizes his danger, and rushes madly by motorboat and steamship back to England.

Meanwhile Mary Pethwick, drunk in the local pub, angry at not being able to wrangle with Pethwick, tells her suspicions that Pethwick is always away when the traffic stops. Forester remarks, “it is
ironic that a woman like Mary Pethwick should twice divert the course of the history of the world; that by one betrayal she should have brought the Peacemaker into being, and by another have annihilated him. Even Judas had only one opportunity.”

The word spreads. Young Laxton, the student leader of the OTC, organizes a group of vigilantes to take and destroy Pethwick’s equipment and calculations and teach him a lesson. Lenham organizes another group to rescue Pethwick, and in the resulting turmoil Pethwick is trampled underfoot just as Dorothy arrives.

The history of popular pacifistic and anti-nuclear controversy in our times shows that Forester had, when he wrote this, a pretty accurate assessment of the situation. The book is overwritten in places, such as when Forester refers to Dorothy observing Pethwick’s beautiful hands. Some may hold that the parts that I have quoted are also overwritten. Some may also hold that the characters are as thin as cardboard. This is typical of Forester’s work; he tells only as much about each character as
is necessary for the plot. Dorothy is drawn as an idealist who doesn’t take or cause actions, but whose ideals cause Pethwick’s actions. Pethwick’s character is drawn so that we understand his actions; he appears to act for himself rather than being a puppet having his strings pulled by the theories of the author. Mary’s combination of class-conscious social inferiority, ignorance, laziness, alcoholism and mean cunning is drawn so the reader understands her, even if he doesn’t see her in his mind’s eye.

However, we see again Cecil’s view of good men controlled by women and by their admiration of women.

With the income from the novels Cecil bought his first car, a medium-sized secondhand Morris. The apartment had no garage, so Cecil kept it at a public garage at the top of Sydenham Wells Road. The episodes of Pethwick buying his old Morris, learning to drive it, parking his car away from his home, and difficulty in handling it in close quarters, all smack of Cecil’s recent experience in these mat-
I well remember the walk with Father up to fetch the car. The garage stood on a wedge-shaped piece of land where Sydenham Wells Road intersected Sydenham Hill Road that ran along the crest of the hill. The garage had twin petrol pumps in front, a galvanized steel workshop building, and an open storage area at the back, all surfaced with oiled earth. Often the car had stood so long that the best method of persuading it to start was to reach under the bonnet (hood) to depress the carburetor float until petrol, from the tank just in front of the dashboard, spilled over the top of the bowl. The carburetor had a little brass pin sticking out of the top of the float bowl to facilitate this operation. Once I was shown, this was my regular duty.

After we finished with the car we left it at the garage and walked back past the station. The station had a large semicircular drive, and while Father walked straight down the road, he instructed me to run round the semicircle to see if by running I could beat him to the other gate. As boys will, I would
rather run a hundred yards against a challenge than walk sixty sedately, and in the dusk of a winter’s afternoon it was hard to see who would win until I almost reached the gate.

Mother took up her hockey again, being selected for the county of Kent now that she lived in it. She also played, as is the English custom, on whichever of the local club teams she cared to join, among them the Alleyn’s Old Boy Women’s Hockey Team, on which Dorothy Foster and Marian Sefang played. Dorothy was older by a few years while Marian was among the youngest. These two, Dorothy because she was an old friend as well, Marian because she thought Kathleen was marvelous, visited Kathleen more than occasionally, staying for tea after matches and similar occasions. Marian also on occasion looked after George and me when Mother was busy with something else. She was a pretty girl, somewhat short, with a laughing smile but a very correctly made-up face of which she took great care.

Cecil had by this time given up golf (for which
he had never owned a set of clubs) but kept up his tennis in summer, and badminton in winter in an enclosed court up by the Crystal Palace. “Golf,” he told me, “is a game you can become as passionately addicted to as you can to drink. I found that the passion of attempting to hit that ball exactly right every stroke had become my master, so I immediately stopped it and haven’t played since.”

Also about this time Cecil adopted the style of Esquire, having his mail addressed to C. S. Forester, Esq. He always said that he abhorred social pretentiousness, but regardless of what he said he was not above this peculiarly British bit of social pretentiousness. Even by the 1930s, this style had been long without meaning.

Kathleen’s brother Geoff and his wife Eve stayed with us in 1933 or ’4 while waiting for a house they had bought to be vacated. During their stay, Cecil suggested that the four of them go to a marionette performance given, I believe, by Charles Laughton’s brother-in-law. Cecil, you remember, had
written of his interest in marionettes in his first letter of 1925 to Kathleen. The four went, and saw a performance that was apallingly bad. It was in revue or music-hall format, the acts (turns are the British word) were uninspired, there were long delays between them, the bad lines were given unprofessionally slowly — in short, it was a dull evening whose only respite was an intermission tea at Lyons next door. During this tea, with Cecil leading the way, all four decided they could make a much better production without half trying. They returned for the second half determined to analyze the performance in order to do better, and actually stole the idea that beautiful glittering butterflies made an easy but effective act. So began the Forester Marionettes, which before they were complete occupied almost a year of Cecil’s time to the exclusion of his writing. Marian Sefang became the wardrobe mistress, dressing all the marionettes as they were completed, and doubling as a female voice during performance.

The details of most of the marionettes and the
show you can find in *Marionettes at Home*. I will add only a few thoughts. One of the essences of a successful performance is to select actions which are best suited to marionettes. Anything which is best done by strings from overhead can, with a little ingenuity, be worked up into a bafflingly professional stunt. Bertie balanced marvellous handstands on the horizontal bars because his feet were pulled up from above, and he never missed his grip because one set of his handstrings went through screweyes attached to the bar where he was supposed to grip it. The fountain operated magically with no supply of fluid because its bubbles were pulled up out of it by strings.

Bingo balanced on his nose a billiard cue surmounted by a ball, dashing madly about to keep his nose underneath the ball. He couldn’t help himself, for his main support was the string from his nose up inside the cue and the ball to his operator above. Like a bull with a ring in his nose, he had to go wherever it led, and the fact that it always led him towards and under the ball simply made the act
more convincing.

Of course, the simple mechanisms had to be concealed from the audience, who also had to have their thoughts diverted from them. Bertie had two sets of strings, one of which moved him normally before his stunts started, convincing the audience that he was just a puppet on strings, which is what they were expecting. When he then jumped for the horizontal bar, gripped it with his hands, and swung into a handstand above the bar, the effect was mystifyingly spectacular. Bingo started moving about like any other marionette, without either cue or ball. A stagehand then threw him first the cue and then the ball. When Bingo caught the cue on his nose and then the ball on the top end of the cue the effect again was mystifyingly spectacular. Naturally, since the cue and the ball were threaded onto the string to his nose, he never missed a catch, but the action was extremely effective. As an additional piece of verisimilitude, at the end he made a mistake and dropped both ball and cue — his operator just let the string fall upon the stage, ball and cue with it. The stage
master then suddenly dropped the curtain, just as if the stage master was trying to conceal a mistake.

Not all were variety turns. The show was introduced and closed by Compere, the master of ceremonies, wearing a formal evening dress of a rather Dumas air and green makeup. He spoke in heroic couplets, first on the idea that marionettes were but a satiric imitation of humanity, then upon their advantages. “A puppet’s wooden heart may break, it’s true/But you can mend it quick enough with glue ... And at the ending of our days/We too, are laid in a box.” He also had an intellectually sentimental monologue with the little Dutch girl who sat, silent and motionless, in a rocking chair. She would not answer his romantic lines, showing neither pleasure nor disdain, puzzling him until he passed his arm above her head and found no strings. He pounded on the backdrop: “Hey you up there, you’ve cut her strings. Cut my strings too!”

Then there was Cecil’s idea of a funny story, a shaggy dog story that skirted the bounds of propriety without either overstepping them or being funny.
The Victorian couple argued endlessly about telling their son the facts of life, ending, after much hemming and hawing, as the wife listened in shocked fashion, with the father saying, “Now, Albert, it is not Father Christmas who leaves presents in your stocking.” But the best turn of all was the ballerina, Mademoiselle Kickova, who was a really superb marionette made by a friend, Stanley Mail, who later made a big success of making puppets for television. Even her wrist and ankle joints worked properly, and to operate her took almost as much training as being a ballerina. She was the only marionette that Kathleen took with her to America in 1940, and she lies in a box in my workshop today.

All of this required almost a year of intensive effort before they achieved satisfactory performances. Marian started coming late to rehearsals, making everybody wait while they saw her losing her ready laugh. After the rest of the cast had twice waited for Marian, Kathleen asked Cecil to speak to her if she was late again. He responded with a burst of his unpunctuality syndrome as soon as Marian
again entered the apartment.

“We here, Marian, have been impatiently await-
ing your arrival. If you really wanted the show to go
on, you would not keep it waiting. I know you had
something important to do, but whatever it was it
should not be as important as the show. Will you be
on time for the next rehearsal?”

Marian almost cried at the rebuke, resigned
after that evening, and did not return even for social
affairs. Kathleen asked Cecil to make up to her for
his outburst, which he said he did. Kathleen then
gave a party, ostensibly for some other purpose but
really to give Marian a chance to reenter the circle.
Marian came, but kept to the wall and wouldn’t
meet Kathleen’s eye. As far as Kathleen knew, this
was the last either she or Cecil saw of Marian.

Marian married a man named Pridham, had a
son and a daughter, and later was divorced. Cecil
warned Kathleen to stay clear of the Pridhams
because Pridham had tendencies toward insanity.
That was much the same story he used about Lillian
and her husband Donald Artezani.
Lillian remained a friend. She had married a man named Artesani, whose name suggested some foreign blood but he was as English as anybody could be. I remember her visiting our house, and us visiting hers. Cecil told Kathleen that Lillian’s husband, because of his blood, was one of those jealous, emotional Latin types, and moreover suffered from suicidal tendencies. He had already, so Cecil said, been kept from suicide only by chance discovery and resolute action. Kathleen was therefore to be extremely circumspect in her relationships with both Lillian and her husband, and never discuss Lillian’s long-past affair with Cecil under any circumstances. Naturally, Kathleen did as Cecil suggested, though her restraint put a rather frigid air upon their conversations.

Cecil, however, met Marian at least at the house of his friend Jack Ballard, which may have been Jack’s own house in Folkestone but I always thought was Jack’s family’s house, the Abbey House in Ledbury. Marian was very careful of her makeup. Cecil and Jack stole her makeup kit, then held her
down and scrubbed her face clean, so she had to spend the rest of the day with a bright and shining face, a condition that rendered her completely disconsolate.

The marionettes went on without Marian. They were presented at benefit performances and things like that, and always for my birthday parties. I naturally learned the basics of operating and untangling marionettes. You couldn’t learn the one without much exposure to the other. I remember the feeling of mingled pride and embarrassment as I was called from the audience to come backstage when it was my puppet’s turn to perform. As well as the adult version there was a children’s one, in which the Victorian couple did not discuss which of them would tell their son the facts of life, and in which Compere’s elegant comparisons were watered down to a child’s level.

Cecil also continued his interest in boats and boating. He purchased a Klepper folding kayak, and he and Kathleen went canoeing on the rivers Wye,
Severn, and Thames. One summer in the early thirties he and his brother Geoff ran the Loire again, much as he and Kathleen had in *Annie Marble*. On some of these trips Bill and Gladys Clarke went too. The Clarkes were old school friends, often mentioned in Cecil’s letters of the twenties, and Bill was now a technical official in one of the government departments concerned with navigational aids, radio beacons and the like. On another occasion George and I stayed with the Clarkes in Welwyn Garden City while Father and Mother were away, then the two Clarke girls came to stay with us while their parents went away, typically taking trips on their tandem bicycle.

At this time Cecil made new friends, for the first time going outside the small circles of Smiths, Belchers, and Alleyn’s Old Boys. His previous friends had been the people he grew up with. Many of his later friends were people who had first been friends of Kathleen or of mine. It is natural that, for most people, the people with whom they develop friendship are those to whom they have been intro-
duced by other friends or associates. However, Cecil typically did not develop close friendships on his own; at the end of his life I wondered at the proportion of those he considered his friends who had been introduced to him as my college friends. Cecil’s attitude toward others at this time in his life might therefore have been somewhat different than at other times, although there is little sign that he developed what most people would consider close friendships. He joined the Savage Club, a London club consisting mainly of men in the artistic professions — writers, journalists, musicians, and the like, with some hangers-on. There he met Benno Moseivitch, the Polish pianist who lived in London, and Gordon Williams, who worked for a firm that printed bank notes and stamps for half the smaller nations of the world.

Gordon was a bachelor who did nothing of note. He was one of those duped by an imposter playing the part of a financial officer of the Portuguese government, who gave Gordon’s firm an order to print another batch of Portuguese bank
notes. The firm complied, boxed them up for shipment to Lisbon, and only after the imposter and his money were at sea did they discover that they had insufficiently checked his credentials. He was arrested when the ship reached Lisbon, and just as well, for once those notes were in circulation the government could never disavow them, for they were completely genuine. Cecil and Gordon remained friends for years, Gordon undertaking to teach Kathleen bridge when Cecil was away, and performing other small favors for Cecil. His principal enthusiasm was bridge, which suited Cecil quite well.

Benno Moseivitch became “my great friend, Benno Moseivitch, the famous pianist,” to quote Cecil’s own words, but the true extent of their friendship I have been unable to discover. Later events make me doubt it to have been more than an acquaintanceship derived from common membership in the Savage Club.

In these years it was a big treat for me to be
able to go to Grandpa’s house at 58 Underhill Road in Dulwich. I was often there. Grandpa took great pride in his garden, had apple and pear trees, raspberry canes, radishes and lettuce, sweet peas and roses, and in the back his garden gate entered a community tennis lawn which he looked after. He showed me how to sow, thin, and weed his vegetables, and for a reward I was allowed to pick the one I wanted, pull it up, wash it in the depths of the rainwater butt (barrel), and eat it all crunchy and fresh. He also showed me how to sharpen a knife, a process which exhausted my childish patience, and how to play dominoes and chess, which delighted me.

If we all went to Dulwich we usually took the car, but the other way was by train. I knew both ways. When we went by car I used to say “Right turn next, Father” and “Straight on across” as he drove up Sydenham Wells Road, turned along Sydenham Hill Road, down the other side to Lordship Lane, and turned off at Underhill Road. It was a great adventure to learn to go by train, as I did. Father walked with me up to Upper Sydenham station,
showed me how to buy a ticket, and we waited at the end of the platform for the train. When it arrived, we went not to a passenger compartment but to the guard’s compartment in the end coach. Father told the guard that I was going to Dulwich, Lordship Lane station, and told me very carefully that it was the next station down the line. I climbed past the guard, who pulled the communication cord to tell the driver it was time to go. The guard’s compartment had a cupola protruding from each side with windows through which he could watch the length of the train. I sat in one as we roared through the tunnel under Sydenham Hill, looking for the light ahead that would show the opening. It wasn’t long before we cleared the tunnel and ran along the bank of the hill down to Lordship Lane. Once stopped, the guard put me out upon the platform and Grandpa was there to meet me. After this, I often did the whole trip alone. Then came the time I wasn’t allowed to go.

“Father, I want to go to Grandpa’s today.”
“No, John, you may not go.”

536
“But I want to.” Father was sitting at his desk, and a little disturbed at my unwarranted intrusion.

“Did you hear me? I said ‘No.’ Now go away and don’t bother me in the morning.”

At dinner time (the midday meal) I could not be found. Mother ran round looking for me, but I was not around the home, in the garden, or playing with the landlord’s son, Eric Lamb, who was a favorite of mine. Father ran round the park, even asked the park keeper, but nobody had seen me.

Father remembered my request, and knowing his parents were not at home, which is why I was not allowed to go, he ran up to the garage, got out his car and drove over the hill. Number 58 was closed, naturally, and I was not in sight. He called the police, gave my description, and they asked, “Has your son taken anything with him?” Father and Mother looked.

“Yes he has. He has taken his little tricycle. It’s not a real tricycle, just the smallest kind of child’s toy, a little red wooden three-wheeled platform with pedals on the front wheel.”

537
“Yessir, we’ll look for him.”

Father then remembered he hadn’t looked into the back garden of Number 58, and drove madly back again. There I was, with my tricycle, placidly playing in Grandpa’s garden while waiting for Grandpa to come home, completely unaware that a three-mile trip across the hill and a main road was quite an achievement for a four-year-old alone. I was brought home, given the bath I sorely needed, and packed off to bed.

George and I often bathed together under Father’s supervision, in the bath that was filled from the geyser mounted on the wall over the end of the tub. A geyser is an instantaneous gas-fired water heater that was common in houses without a central hot water supply. First the water was turned on, and it came out cold, then the gas furnace inside was lit and the water came out hot.

“You must never try to work the geyser without a grown-up. And in any case, you must have the water running all the time the gas is on or the geyser will explode.” After we had washed, Father would
come in to inspect us for cleanliness, pointing out the remaining dirty patches until we were clean. I remember his fingers digging painfully into the hollow behind and below my ear to demonstrate where dirt remained. Then when the tub was draining he filled a milkcan with cold water from the turned-off geyser.

“Up you get,” he said, and George and I would stand up in the bath out of the remnants of warm water. Then he slowly poured the can of cold water over first one head and then the other, while we spluttered and gasped and danced in place to keep the cold water from running down only one course— we didn’t then have the imperturbability of Hornblower under the washdeck pump. Naturally, Father never did that to himself, as I later had numerous occasions to observe.

What with marionettes and associated distractions, Cecil published only one novel, *The Peacemaker*, in the interval of more than a year after the two Peninsula War novels of 1933. He attempted two
other novels and dropped both. The next completed novel was *The African Queen* in 1935. In this Cecil combined his avid reading of history, his experience running quiet rivers in the *Annie Marble* and much fiercer rivers in the kayak, and his developing skill as a portraitist. The historical setting is true enough, for the Germans controlled Lake Tanganyika and no other lake in Africa for the first year of World War I. Their naval superiority on the lake, exercised by steam gunboats, was destroyed by British motor gunboats brought up overland from Capetown in December, 1915. The Britannica Atlas, 14th edition published in the 1930s, shows the Ugalla River (Cecil used ‘Ulanga’ as the name of his river) running westward through Tanganyika (in 1914 German East Africa), disappearing into a dotted line of uncertain location, and emerging under a different name to flow into Lake Tanganyika, just the route and condition that Cecil described.

Cecil had heard at the time, or read later, of the exploits of the motor gunboats. As he put the plot together, it developed as a logical progression of the
plots of *Brown on Resolution* and *Death to the French*. Allnutt and Rose, like Brown and Dodd, played their hidden part in history; like Dodd, but not Brown, they felt they belonged to their society, and though at first outcast by circumstances they returned to it, a satisfaction compensating for the negligible historical effects of their actions; beyond both Brown and Dodd, their unexpected companionship developed into an equally unexpected bond of intimacy. Rose had been raised in conditions and with morals like those of Cecil’s youth with the addition of evangelical religion. The intimacy growing between Rose and Allnutt reflected that of Cecil and Kathleen on their happy boating voyages. By this time Cecil had probably lost his former concern for what his family might think when he wrote about Rose and Allnut’s immoral union, 21 which he described in terms that, for him and probably for his market, were explicit.

In *The African Queen* Cecil first combined a

21. We have no letters of this time.
devotion to historical forces, a sense of social milieu, and the bond of personal love. It was not entirely his own intent. The original version of the novel ended with the sinking of the *African Queen*. So Rose’s and Allnutt’s love and devotion disappeared into Lake Tanganyika, whatever personal fulfillment they had achieved cancelled by their failure to affect history.

In the American version, Rose and Allnutt manage to swim ashore, the *Konigin Luise* is sunk by British gunboats brought in overland, and there is some prospect of a future life together for the pair of them.

As Father told me in 1939, when I commented on the difference between the English ending and the American, “You know what those Americans are like — they always want a happy ending. My American publisher demanded a happier ending, so I had to write one for him. I produced one that fits the story without too much destruction of its feeling, but it does not suit my taste. I feel that success is too much of a burden to ask the story to carry.” There may also have been the question of length, for even
with the longer American ending *The African Queen* is one of Cecil’s shortest novels.

Cecil had his usual trouble with technical matters. He repeatedly mentioned the *African Queen’s* boiler with its leaky water tubes. All boats of that class had fire-tube boilers, not water-tube boilers. One of the items of stores she carried, destined for the mine’s workshops, was a pair of cylinders of compressed gases for welding — oxygen and hydrogen. Compressed hydrogen would have been a most unlikely commodity in German East Africa. General welding was and is done with oxygen and acetylene. Acetylene is dissolved in acetone at low pressure in cylinders that look more like tin cans than torpedoes. Also, under these conditions of transportation, acetylene would probably have been generated at point of use by dropping pellets of calcium carbide into water, the same process as used in the acetylene bicycle lamps used by the male cyclists of Cecil’s and Kathleen’s families. If two torpedoes were required, the story could have told of two cylinders of oxygen aboard the *African Queen* — one cylin-
order doesn’t last very long in use and the mine might well have ordered two. In addition, with oxygen and either acetylene or hydrogen aboard, Allnutt would certainly have improvised a burner to supply the high temperature necessary in repairing the propeller and its shaft (instead of attempting to make charcoal and finally using wood) even if the proper equipment wasn’t available. Cecil listed “gas pressure gauges” as part of the *African Queen’s* cargo, items which don’t normally go with the gas cylinders but are the pressure regulators of the welding equipment. Possession of that equipment would have simplified the repair of the propeller and shaft, but Cecil did not have Allnutt use it. If Cecil preferred that Allnutt work with charcoal and wood like an old-fashioned blacksmith, then he should have written the appropriate cargo list. Lastly, Cecil has Allnutt remove the propeller shaft without taking care to plug the hole that its absence left in the hull, a hole that would have sunk the *African Queen* in an hour or less.

Cecil followed *The African Queen* with *The Gen-
eral, an anomaly among his other works. Of all of Cecil’s fiction, except the wartime propaganda stories, only *The General* is written with a message beyond the interest of the story. This novel did not sell well and is comparatively unknown today. A very large proportion of the Forester fans tell me, most inaccurately, “I enjoyed your father’s work so much, I’ve read everything he’s written.” I don’t ask them about *The Wonderful Week* or other books that Cecil didn’t list on the fly sheets of his later novels. Instead I ask, “And what did you think of *The General*?” Perhaps nine out of ten have never heard of it, to say nothing of reading it, although it is always listed on the later flysheets. They have missed a significant read; *The General*, in many ways, is Forester’s finest work.

Certainly, *The General* is dated, dated in ways that even *Brown on Resolution* and *The African Queen* are not. They are set in World War I, which provides the historical background in front of which the characters act their interesting tales. *The General*, in contrast, is about the art of war as practiced in that war,
then called the Great War, and by implication considers the question of the kind of general best suited to practice it in the next war, the World War II whose coming was predicted and feared. Lieutenant-General Sir Herbert Curzon, K.C.M.G, C.B., D.S.O., is an admirably lucky soldier with very great virtues, fully equipped with just those defects that you would expect to accompany those virtues. The Allies (at least the British and the French) won the war with generals just like Curzon; the Germans lost it with generals of somewhat better quality. Therein lies the irony — typical in history — of the victor mis-assessing the basic reasons for his success and resting on his laurels, while the conquered, painfully aware of those techniques which hurt him most, strives to bring the average quality of his forces up to the standard of those portions of the victor’s forces which really did win the war.

Britain developed the first tank forces in the world during World War I, forces deliberately conceived to break through the combination of barbed wire, trench, and machine gun that dominated the
battlefield, killing so many of the attacking soldiers whenever a breakthrough was attempted that victory became impossible. The British tank forces broke through on several occasions, but this success was so unexpected and unplanned-for that the breakthrough stalled each time. However, when resisting the most successful tank offensive, the German high command knew that they had nearly lost the war on the battlefield right then, even though the tanks got only a few miles into their lines.

After the war but before the wartime impetus had dissipated, a few British soldiers foresaw the mobile armored field force, developed the test vehicles (the tanks of World War I were really only crawling pillboxes), and, more in theory than in practice, developed the strategy for its use to win wars. It is significant that the early history of tanks is intertwined with that of naval affairs. H. G. Wells invented the idea, calling them land battleships in his story *The Land Ironclads*, written about 1904 and describing conditions similar to those of the Boer War. In that story an army of urban clerks and tech-
nicians recovers from near defeat at the hands of fierce, rural horse-riding riflemen by developing mobile, armoured vehicles. The initial development of real tanks was championed by Winston Churchill in his capacity as First Lord of the Admiralty, and the theory of their use had many similarities with naval strategy and tactics.

Then all was forgotten by everyone except the Germans and two or three mavericks in each of the other armies, such as de Gaulle in France. In England, the champions of the mobile armoured field force were General J. F. C. Fuller and one who was no longer a soldier but a journalist and historian, Captain B. H. Liddell Hart.

Cecil told me, ten years later, that Liddell Hart had helped him with the military theory and military details of *The General*, describing how Liddell Hart visited us when Cecil was writing *The General*. That would have been at the flat at 36 Longton Avenue. I saw no reason to disbelieve, I had been too young to remember. When I was five I still did not understand that my father wrote novels, and Liddell
Hart would have visited in the evening after I was in bed. However, Cecil had other sources. His brother Hugh had been a machine-gun officer and later machine-gun instructor in World War I, and many books had been published about that war. Furthermore, while Cecil wrote about General Curzon’s military weaknesses, he did not advocate the new method of making war that Liddell Hart advocated.

Perhaps *The General* started out quite differently. It would be quite in keeping with Cecil’s psychological twists for him to have decided to reverse the ironies of *Death to the French* and *The African Queen*. As their main characters did the correct things, but achieved nothing of historical importance, so General Curzon did all the wrong things but became professionally successful and historically significant. Perhaps so — but if so the novel turned out much better than that bare outline suggests. *The General* is not satiric. On the contrary, it is a genuinely sympathetic portrait of a man trained to do one thing but expected to perform under great pressure when the situation is greatly different from
the conditions for which he had been trained. The military situation from 1898 to 1935 (and for some years later, also) was just such as would permit the ironies to be brought out clearly without satire.

The story of Liddell Hart’s involvement is rather different than Cecil told me. During the writing of *The General*, Cecil changed publishers, this time to the new firm of Michael Joseph. When the novel was in proof, Michael Joseph asked Liddell Hart, as a military expert who did not know Cecil, to check it for accuracy. Liddell Hart provided “a couple of pages of comments, chiefly technical military stuff.” Cecil did not meet Liddell Hart until January, 1937. “After only one meeting and a few letters, Cecil wrote to Liddell Hart: ‘If I ever had the least hope of surviving you, I should ask if I might be your biographer (a ghoulish but necessary subject of discussion) and I think I should do it competently—but there is no chance of it.’”

Liddell Hart was only four years older than Cecil, but Cecil already had the feeling that his life would be short, possibly because of his medical
rejection for the army seventeen years before.

I have grouped Cecil’s novels into two groups, the first group being written about his personal experiences, about his own past. *The General* is the last of these. Cecil’s thoughts about the management of World War I, and his perception of the Public School character which enabled his slightly older contemporaries to become “good officers,” as he records them in *Long Before Forty*, show clearly that the subject of *The General* had been very close to him in those years. It is therefore all the more surprising, and a mark of literary skill, that *The General* is so sympathetic towards its general. In it, Cecil manages to transcend his own past, which may well be one of the reasons why, in his own opinion, *The General* was his best novel.

22. The quotation is from a personal communication from Professor Alex Danchev, biographer of BLH, and the letter quoted from is CSF-BLH, 14 March 1937, Liddell Hart Archives 292/26
The General was successful in other ways as well. Newspapermen read it; they offered Cecil some war reporting work in the Spanish Civil War. Soldiers read it; so he became known in military circles, and was asked to make unofficial representations to the Czech military staff during the Munich crises in addition to his newspaper work. Dictators read it; Hitler sent copies round to his generals as instructions in how not to fight the next war. Propagandists read it; H. R. Knickerbocker, the enterprising American journalist, circulated copies round the headquarters of the Duke of Windsor when the Duke commanded the liaison with the French army before the fall of France.

As mentioned above, Cecil had left John Lane at The Bodley Head and transferred to Michael Joseph. Cecil always referred to Michael Joseph personally as one of his great friends, and this may have had something to do with the transfer. I do not know what the circumstances were. Also, at some time in this period, Cecil became a client of
A. D. Peters’s literary agency. He remained with both of them until his death, although two other publishers commissioned specific historical books from him.
14 Hollywood and the Genesis of Hornblower

At about the same time Cecil was finishing *Mariolettes at Home*,¹ he received an offer from Hollywood to go there to write. At that time the film industry was expanding and, in any case, in the six or so years of talking pictures it had worn out screen writers and required new ones. England presented almost the only other source for trained and able writers in the English language, so naturally the film studio personnel departments sought some new employees among established English writers. On Hugh Wal-

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¹. Published in 1936
pole’s\(^2\) recommendation, Paramount Productions made Cecil an offer, by telephone no less, and he accepted. Obviously money was a determining factor; Cecil had so little that he had to borrow the travel expenses from his agent.

This trip to Hollywood is significant in several ways. Cecil himself reports in *Some Personal Notes*, published first in *The Hornblower Companion* and reprinted in *Long Before Forty*, how this trip provided the genesis of Hornblower. However, every word Cecil published about his activities in Hollywood is directly contradicted by his contemporary letters. Of equal significance is the fact that Cecil used this two months in Hollywood as the basis for many personal tales which he told to influence those about him. By and large, there is little evidence in the letters for any of those tales. However, the events in Hollywood were exciting in themselves, and the best way to introduce the subject is to print it in Cecil’s own words. These letters are a great advance over those

2. British novelist (1884-1941) well-known at the time.
of the twenties. Then Cecil was a slangy, suburban clerk. Now, he is an accomplished writer. Although these letters run on day after day (in two months he wrote 60 pages) just like the earlier ones, the organization, sentence structure and vocabulary are what you would expect of C. S. Forester.

Neither Cecil nor Kathleen knew anything about the United States, let alone Hollywood, and he writes at least in part to describe these new places and customs to Kathleen. Of all of his letters, these are the only ones worth reading for themselves.

“On board ‘Aquitania,’ Dec 1935

“Dearest,

“I hope everything is well when you get this letter — I have discovered a letter box on the ship, so I suppose it ought to get to you before the letter (if any) which I shall post in New York. Please give my love to John and George and say that [I] hope they are looking after you properly and do look after yourself, dear, don’t push things too much.

“Is Gordon Williams looking after you, too? I hope your dinner with him on Friday night was a
success. Bear up for the pride of the Foresters.

“You needn’t worry about the exercise problem on board here. There are ten decks to walk on and you can walk about 3 miles without repeating yourself — that is not an exaggeration. There is a little shelter on the boat deck — it seems tiny when you see it, but it is about as large as the whole deck of a cross-channel steamer. To get anywhere you have to walk miles, even though there is a lift (I can’t get over a lift in a ship).

The public rooms are a good deal bigger than the Savage Club and they are kept very warm — in fact the ventilation and heating work very well indeed. It is unbelievable how well aired and yet warm they keep enormous rooms the size of the Cafe Royal, especially at sea and with half the walls glass.

My own cabin is about the size of your bedroom, with berths (the other is empty) and a bathroom adjoining. The beds are first rate, too. So is the food. It is very funny to be able to have anything one wants without paying for it — you have only to
wish for a cup of coffee or a pork chop to have it turn up in about two minutes beautifully served. You can have anything you like, except liquor, for nothing — I can’t get used to it. Similarly at meals you have a menu like that at the Savage, except that there are no prices, and if you don’t like what is on it they will cook you something extra and be glad to. It is a bit fantastic — if the voyage lasted more than five days it would be demoralizing.

“Having evaded the artistic table (?) I have been put at a table for 7 — 5 Americans, the staff captain (whoever he may be) and me. We talk American all the time and I am learning the language fast. They are all charming.

So far I have managed to do some work, but it isn’t absolutely easy because although there are lots of writing places there are people passing to and fro all the time. There is no furniture I can write on in my cabin. But I must get the infernal book\(^3\) done somehow.

\(^3\) This was *Marionettes at Home*
“And I have been to the pictures and I have had a swim — this ship has a theatre (1,000 seats, and a swimming bath, not just adapted ones, but real ones not used for anything else). I have danced once, and I have played bridge once, but each day still seems like a week. Still I am nearly at New York now. (By the way, all the things are free once you have paid your fare.)

“From the boat deck we are as far above the sea as John’s bedroom window is above the ground — the dining saloon portholes are 24 feet up and then there are 4 decks above that. But all the same she rolls and pitches just like any other ship. I haven’t been sick, but I almost wanted to once — we were in a hell of a swell without much wind.

“I will try and post a letter off to you somewhere between New York and Hollywood, but I can’t guarantee it. Write to me — to await arrival, % Bank of America, Hollywood, California, U.S.A. If I can get along without cashing Peters’ cheque in New York I will go in and open an account there with it.

I hope so much you are happy and contented,
and the kids all right. By the way, I left home the photos of John and George, which I should like to have. I should like one of you, too. And I left a list of addresses — if you haven’t found it it is no use looking for it as it must have gone in the W.P.B. It isn’t too important.

“My steward here valets me as I like it — puts everything away, cleans up after me, lays out my clothes, does everything for me in fact. That is the only part I like about this voyage.

“I shall enclose this letter with a photo which was taken on gala night. L. to R. Mrs. James, who sells gowns in N.Y.; Captain Rogers; Mr. McGuiness (American manager of Lombard and Holt ship); Miss Mackenzie from Toronto; C.S.F.; Miss Dunn of Palo Alto, California. I have promised to go and stay at her home if I can — it is only 450 miles from Hollywood! Note the coffee pot on the table. All the pots are like this (tea, water, milk, etc.) are square and really do pour out — I should like to steal one. This trip I have eaten: 1. Oysters in dozens. 2. Snails. 2. Snipe. 4. Woodcock. 5. 6 sorts of ice cream. 6.
Sucking pig! 7. Boar’s head. But I am walking very fiercely indeed.

“Thursday night. I have just heard we arrive in N.Y. tomorrow at nine A.M. so that I will send this letter off — I am afraid it will be a month before you get a long one from me again. I am sending 2 envelopes of ms to Gladys⁴, she is to report their arrival to you. And I have written several other letters and forgotten to say Merry Christmas — will you do it for me?

“A Merry Christmas to you, dear, and to all the kids. Please try to be as happy as you can and make the most of your husband’s absence. I am longing to hear from you, dear, but I expect it will be at least a fortnight before I do. Lots and lots of love, and look after yourself, darling.”⁵

“New York Central, En Route, Saturday morning, 14 Dec. 1935

⁴. Gladys Waring, secretary
⁵. CSF-K, 264, 10 December 1935

561
“Dearest,
   I reached N.Y. at 2:15 P.M. Friday — left it at 4.5 P.M., so I didn’t see much of it. This is being written in the train to Chicago. I arrive there 10.5 and leave at 11 — so I won’t see much of that either. I am due to arrive at Los Angeles at noon on Monday — I will try to write again before then, but it is always doubtful. Anyway, as you can see, it isn’t easy to write in trains.

   “Lots of love, dear, and take care of yourself.”

“The Chief, En Route
   Sunday 15 Dec. 35

Dearest,
   “I posted you a bit of a note from Chicago — I don’t know where this one will be posted. Somewhere in the state of Colorado.

   “The trains are very comfortable (except that

6. CSF-K, 265, 14 December 1935

562
you can’t write in them, as you see) but I am getting tired of them by now. But we will be in Los Angeles 3 P.M. tomorrow and I shall try to write you a long letter then.

“Take ever so much care of yourself, dear, and give my love to the boys and lots for yourself.”

“Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel
Monday Dec. 16, 1935

Dearest,

“So here I am — nothing of importance to tell you yet. Having said that I had better begin where I left off at N.Y. I arrived on the quay, and was met by three typically charming American lads — aged apparently something between 20 and 50 like most Americans. They saw my stuff through the customs. Then one of them said very longingly “They seem very anxious for you in Hollywood. When would you like to start? I thought of unpacking that trunk

7. CSF-K, 266, 15 December 1935
(I had a fearful time with it) and I said “Either I go now or I stay three or four days.” And they said “Go now” most heartfully. So I had an hour, and was taken up to the top (and all over as well) of the Chrysler building by Mr. Chrysler himself, and I went to the office and was shown to one or two people, and then escorted and put into one of the most famous trains in the world — the ‘Commodore Vanderbilt.’ This leaves at 4:15 (I didn’t set foot on shore until 2:30) and out I went. I had a very comfortable cabin — about as big as the small bedroom at Gothic Lodge, with a concealed W.C. and washbasin and a couch converted into a bed at night. I get rather mum in the train (there is a club and a restaurant) but I fell into conversation with several nice people in the end and everyone was very nice to me — all Americans talk as freely to strangers as an Englishman would after fifty years of intensive training. I went to bed and slept all night, and got to Chicago at 10. The next train left at 11, so I took a taxi and drove around Chicago — exciting place and perfectly horrible. Then I took my train — another famous
one called ‘The Chief,’ where I had an even nicer little room: it had also a huge car at the back with as much window as a London tramcar. The prairies are like the Beance only much more so — we went through them all day. I was adopted by a Doctor Jerome Wagner, who knows Bertie Mayer in London. He talked from Saturday morning to Monday afternoon. And he knew a film star on the train — a platinum blonde called Alice Faye: only a minor star. I had to play rummy with them each evening — her brain was just good enough for rummy but not for anything else.

“I managed to sleep all night in the train.— but you feel terribly cramped and prisoned. Fortunately the train stops for about 10 mins. three times a day, and then I got down and walked about as hard as I could. On Saturday we ran through the first blizzard of the year — bitterly cold and wild with driving snow. But I walked into the blizzard on the banks of the Mississippi at Fort Madison — it is as big as the Elbe, there, just above its junction with the Missouri. Then in the evening I took a hurried walk, all
in the snow, through Kansas City. Next morning we came in sight of the Rockies — perfectly marvellous. A series of colossal mountain ranges (we went up to 8000 feet) with most fantastic deserts in between. I shall enclose with this a page of the timetable showing you the contour of the line. We were all day in the Rockies and the desert, and this morning as well, and at last we dropped down from the mountains (my ears were buzzing all day) down to here. No one met me. I took a taxi to the Paramount and saw Wolfe to whom I had to report. I have to go on duty at 10.0 tomorrow. He was all right at first sight — a Jew, of course. Then I came here and I am scribbling this while waiting for my trunk from the station. Then I shall have a bath and unpack and feel comfortable. I am up on the 12th floor at 5 dollars a day (no meals, of course) and there are trams outside making a hell of a din, but I shall be all right. The weather here is like England in May at present, but I am told that the evenings are very cold — in fact it is a bit like Corsica. And it rains in January and February — rains like hell, they say, about three
days a week! I have seen a million orange trees, and vineyards, and palms. But the town is just like Winchelsea Beach— fifty miles each way! It is dreadful at first sight, but I suppose I shall come to like it. A place built by people with no taste in a hurry for people with worse taste in a bigger hurry.

“I sent you a letter and John a postcard from the Rockies. I hope they arrived all right.”

“Iollywood Roosevelt, 16 Dec 35
“Dearest
“The enclosed is the letter for you to show other people — this one is for yourself. I feel very lonely without you, dear, but what I feel more strongly than anything is in case you are not happy and in case you are doing too much. Look after yourself as carefully as you can, won’t you dear. I am longing for a letter from you, but of course I [have] been travelling here faster than any letter could come. Perhaps there will be one at the end of the

8. CSF-K, 267, 16 December 1935

567
week. I would be perfectly happy if you were here with me. As it is I have the pip a bit — but I shall get over it all right. I shall be much better when the letters start to arrive and I know that at any rate a fortnight ago you were all right.

“Trunk has just arrived, so I shall say goodbye to you, sweetheart. Lots of kisses as well as love in this letter.”

“I posted you a note last night but I shall send this by air mail and it will probably reach you quicker. I have settled at the Paramount office now and I have been given an office and a secretary and I am supposed to have started work on the BUCCANEER. You can imagine that I feel a little odd working in an office with telephones and everything done very efficiently but I suppose I shall get used to it.

“The climate here and the town remind me very much of Corsica. There are big rocky hills all round the back just like Ajaccio. There are the same

9. CSF-K, 268, 16 December 1935

568
palms growing in the streets. The air is very clear and Collier\textsuperscript{10} took me last night on to the hills at the top and I could see the whole town lit up — one of the most remarkable sights I’ve seen since I landed. At the same time, it gets very cold at every opportunity. As far as I can see, you have to put on your great coat on and off, according to whether you’re in the sun or in the shade and in the morning and in the evening, there is a wind that goes right through you.

“J. B. Priestley is here until tomorrow and I am ringing him up this evening, at his request.

“Of course, the town is full of people who want to get into the films and the studio gates are always besieged with people looking on and there are all sorts of formalities to go through before you can enter.

“The efficiency of this place rather frightens

\textsuperscript{10} John (?) Collier: Another screenwriter, also wrote short stories, later worked for Sloane Valve in Chicago

569
me. I had not been in my office for more than five minutes before I was receiving telephone calls, being put straight through to me.

“Give my love to the boys and tell them I shall send them picture postcards as soon as I can.”\textsuperscript{11}

“9 A.M. I posted a letter to you this morning. I don’t know when I shall post this as Collier says that no one ever writes letters here. They leave it too late and then send a telegram — it is that sort of place. I called him on the telephone last night and was enthusiastically welcomed. He is a funny little chap, just my age. He took me out to dinner along with someone apparently his mistress — a very charming American girl indeed, the first nice one I have seen. He lives in a pleasant little cottage in the hills, and tomorrow he is taking me around to find one for me, and a Philipino boy and a car.

“This is a horribly crude place. In the cheaper

\textsuperscript{11} CSF-K, 269, 17 December 1935, typed (Letters marked typed were typed by CSF’s secretary.)
of the two restaurants here (I have just had break-
fast) the girls (waitresses) wear frocks to above their
knees, and a foot above the hem they have a big
hoop, so that if they move an inch you can see all
the way up — pink lace drawers. I can’t stand pink
lace drawers — two dozen pairs — at breakfast time!
Now I am going off to the studio to do some work
(?). I shall call at the bank on my way.

“12:30. Back again. Received with open arms.
Given an office and a girl and told to write a film of
Buccaneer quick. I haven’t the least idea of how to
do it, but I shall have a start tomorrow at the latest. I
used my girl to work off a lot of letters, including
one to you with I shall send by airmail at their
expense. Address letters to me in future at that
address (Paramount) to me personally and I shall
get them. Write me a very long letter as soon as you
can, dear.

“I have settled my laundry — first time since
England — and am not too uncomfortable now. Just
off to lunch with Collie and settle about my house
and servant and car. I shall send you some money in
a fortnight’s time, not before. Please don’t struggle about money. Borrow up to the limit — you can get all you want that way, I am sure. I shall know more about money soon, as soon as I have had a week’s experience. It was a relief to find no letters at the bank — it means everything is not as bad for you as cabling would justify.

“Wed. morning. [Same letter as above.] I sent off an air mail letter yesterday morning by my new secretary. All the public letters I shall send that way as it doesn’t cost me anything. I have found a flat and a servant and a car, but I shall tell you all about that in my next public letter. [The apartment was recommended by Dr. Wagner, who lived in the same building, but Cecil doesn’t mention that.] For a wonder, Paramount are in a hurry about the Buccaneer. I have got to produce a working scheme of thirty pages by the end of the week. Ideas are a bit scarce owing to the rush I am living in, but I expect I shall manage something. If I don’t, I don’t know whether there will be trouble or not, but anyway I can’t be sacked for two months.
“About money. My flat will cost me 125 dols. a month. My car costs 150 dols. down and 40 dols. a month for a year. My Negro servant 25 dols. a week. These figures sound crazy, but everything is crazy here and I couldn’t, even with the best advice, cut them down at all — I hope to sell the car when I leave to get something back for that. At present I am spending about £2 a day on taxis! A meal here is in any one of the million restaurants costs about 2 dols. — everything is about 6 times as much as anywhere else in America, let alone England. Anyway, by the time I am out of this hotel I shall have to pay out about 60 dollars here, so that my first week’s advance salary will be pretty nearly used up. I shall send you some money out of my second week — i.e. in a fortnight from now. As far as I can see, I shall send you 80 or 100 dollars a week, and that will be for you to spend and will be our savings as well. Spend as much as you like. Anything we have left over when I reach home will be welcome, of course, but I can look after us all right.

“I shall try to send you a letter by my secretary
every other day, but I don’t know how often I shall write you privately. Life here is a terrible muddle, and my only quiet time is between breakfast and the office. I have to get up for breakfast, as here anything served in a room — even a cup of coffee — costs 25 cents (more than 1/-) — extra on top of the bill. But when I have my flat I shall breakfast in bed and be able to get some quiet thinking done. That will be tomorrow, I hope.

“I am missing you very much, dear, and I am often sorry you aren’t here. But at the same time you would hate it, as I am really busy during the day, and the other people are the bloodiest fools I ever met. The actual film people who matter aren’t nearly as mad as everyone else, thank God. But apart from that it is like living with a million Georges and half a million Johns.

“Now I have to go off to the office and write a film. Thank God I have a secretary.”

12. CSF-K, 270, 17 December 1935
“Villa Carlotta, 5959 Franklin Ave. Hollywood
Thursday, Dec. 19th 35

“Dearest,

“I will write to you about the new flat (apartment is its U.S. name) in my next public letter, but I will give you some details here — I enclose a plan. I found I had to choose between one room in a Winchelsea Beach bungalow, or renting a whole bungalow (with yelling kids all over the place) at about 75 dols. a month, ex. of water, gas, etc., and this place at 125 dols. a month, very well furnished, inclusive of gas, water, electricity, steam heat (which you want like hell in the evenings) telephone, etc., I chose this like a shot, if only because it is the one quiet place in all Hollywood — it is nearly as quiet, but not quite, as Longton Avenue. I moved in half an hour ago (4 P.M.) and my servant is due at 6 P.M. and so is my car. A man without a car here is worse than a deaf and dumb man with no legs or arms, honestly. The distances are incredible. Try to imagine London with the Strand twelve miles from Picca-
dilly Circus. I am giving a party here tomorrow — Doctor Wagner (who has adopted me for good) and his wife, Collier and his mistress, and Alice Faye the platinum blonde was to have come but has cried off at the last minute. I don’t know any other people here.

“Friday lunch time. I am installed now with my servant whose name is Oscar. He looks after me very well and I haven’t found his faults yet. But I had my coffee and toast in bed this morning and he is now working on a light lunch. He will pay for his keep in no time; especially as I have a lot of travelling to do this morning which would have cost me at least 5 dollars in fares in taxis. My car is a 1935 Chevrolet (a car of the Ford class) which I am buying on the installment system. If I come away at the end of 2 months I shall have paid about 250 dollars, and with luck I shall get some back by selling the car. Anyway it is cheaper and much more convenient than taxis.

“I am in the very best of health, surprisingly, now. My bowels have worked like clockwork
although I had to put my watch back for an hour everyday for nine days on my way here. But I am like a slug otherwise — I can spend all my spare time doing nothing at all quite happily, and my prick hasn’t been stiff once since I left England. I am in a state of suspended animation, so to speak.

“The marvellous thing about this country is the secretaries. They are really wonderful. Mine is expected to look after me like a mother — attending to all my household details, bills and so on, and washing and mending, as well as doing all my work for me. She answers all calls, tells all necessary lies, and has to know where to find me at any minute of day or night, so that you can’t hide any detail of your private life from her, and you would be silly if you did. Mine is a girl called Isabel Solomon (Isabel, I call her) who is half Irish and half Jew and is as plain as they make ‘em — Collier’s [is?] all Jew and even uglier, but they are marvellous, all the same. But as a perfect curse Isabel is ill today with a shocking bad cold (everyone here has colds) and I have had to get on with a new one who has to learn
English before she can understand me.

“I haven’t had any trouble with drinking. Wagner is T.T., and so are nearly all the women I have met; Collier is the same, almost, and although some of the men I work with are heavy drinkers I haven’t yet seen a drink drunk during working hours. I drink pure orange juice by the quart, literally. They give it away here (the only thing I know) and it is very good indeed. Its flavour is quite different from English orange juice — you wouldn’t think it was the same drink at all.

“I have just finished my lunch — peanut butter sandwiches and the first tea I have drunk since I left London. Heavenly! I haven’t any appetite out here — in fact I have a complete distaste for food and it is an effort to eat anything. As I say, I am leading a slug’s life and I can’t even manage to write loving messages to a wife I am very fond of. I love you very much, darling, all the same, and I am longing for the time when I shall see you again. Lots and lots of love, sweetheart.”¹³
“Dearest,

“You will have to grow accustomed to receiving all these letters from me as I have to find something to do with my time while I am in my office. Today I’d better try to describe a bit more of Hollywood to you.

“You will be surprised to hear that the main industry of Hollywood is not making pictures or even oil but it’s running restaurants. All the way down the miles of streets ninety percent of the ground floor frontage is taken up with restaurants of all sorts. The prices vary from six times London prices to twice and the menus are very varied. I have eaten barracuda and fried egg plant and persimmons but no matter which restaurant you go in or what you eat it all tastes just the same. It is the most uninteresting and insipid food I have come across

13. CSF-K, 271, 19 December 1935
and nearly all the good things are flavored with Heinz or Lee and Perrins. Moreover these restaurants look exactly alike and the streets are all completely characterless so that if you are dumped down suddenly anywhere along their thirty miles of length you haven’t the remotest idea of where you might be and might as well be one place as another.

“At the same time the streets are full of Christmas illuminations and are really lovely especially as the air is so clear that at night you can see a small lamp five miles away.

“They boast of this climate but ninety-nine percent of the people I have met so far have got horribly bad colds. The secretary I have just got has gone home today very ill with the worst cold I have seen so I’ve got to start in and get used to another.

“There isn’t very much news today except that the work is progressing more favorably than I had hoped. The next installment of this thrilling series of articles will contain a description of C.S.F.’s palatial apartment and his fleet of cars and his troop of servants. So far I have not received any letters from
England but I suppose from now on they will start catching me up.”  

“Villa Carlotta, Sat. Dec 20, 1935

“Now I have spent two nights in my own flat and am very happy (comparatively). I know I was precipitate in getting out of the hotel but that hotel was horribly on my nerves — it is an awful place — and last night Collier and I worked it out and agreed that we could have hardly done better than here. You see, this town is like Winchelsea beach with a population of a million, while scattered about it are about 10,000 brainless millionaires — the film people. You have absolutely no choice between being like a Winchelsea Beach dweller or like a millionaire, and the studio sees to it which way you choose. I had a dinner party last night — Dr. and Mrs. Wagner, Collier and his mistress, and me. Alice Faye the platinum blonde was supposed to come but didn’t, I never missed her. Mrs. Wagner is

14. CSF-K, 272, 19 December 1935, typed
solid bore from the neck up but was pretty at your age. She was a film star then (Norma Temiss) but fell out and now is beating her head to get back. But Collier’s mistress, Shirley Parker, is perfectly lovely. She is like what Dorothy Foster would be at 25 but much prettier and with a heap of brains. I like her enormously. My servant Oscar still seems very good; he bought a five bob electric iron yesterday and has saved its cost already by pressing all my suits! I don’t pay for electricity here. My little car seems all right — it looks awful among the cars waiting outside the studio at 5 P.M., but I can’t help that — and today Oscar is going to drive me when I get away — about noon, I hope, up into the hills. I haven’t seen a blade of grass since last Monday and I want to get out of this beastly town.

“You know, dear, that although I haven’t said so very much this trip I miss you dreadfully and you are in my thoughts all day long. In some ways you would like to be here, but in most ways you would hate it. And what you would do with yourself I can’t imagine.
Sunday morning. Yesterday was the first pleasant day I have spent since I left you. I got fed up with the office and told them to go to hell, rang up Oscar for my car and went out for the day. Oscar drove me along the shore of the Pacific for 50 miles. It was marvellously beautiful — the road runs at the water’s edge at the foot of big mountains; it is like a cross between Wales and Corsica, but in addition the air is so clear that you can see 50 miles easily — it was marvellous. We lunched by the sea in dazzling hot sunshine and then came back through the mountains. Like a large scale Wales, again, except for the clearness of the air. And down in the valleys the roads are bordered for miles with a double avenue of palms (full of dates, all (?) edible) and there are olive groves and walnut groves. You would have loved it. I found myself wishing you were with me all the time.

“This is a mad country. I lunched sitting in the car (lots of people do) at a ‘drive-in’ restaurant. Oscar came to me (black servants must never eat with white people) and said ‘Rest rooms round the
back, sir.’ What he meant was the lavatory. That is a word you mustn’t say, not ever, not even to your wife or mistress. You say ‘rest room’ or ‘comfort station,’ and in a house you say ‘bathroom.’ If the lavatory is separate you call it the ‘half bathroom!’ At the same time ‘bloody’ and ‘bugger’ are ordinary terms of speech, really and honestly. A woman I have never spoken to before, in a lift with me, said ‘Isn’t he a cute little bugger,’ referring to her Pekingese.

“Doctor Wagner (in the flat next to me) has adopted me for good. I had to dine with them last night and this afternoon I am due to go out motor-ing with them. He is a sterling good sort, but he never leaves off talking — mostly good advice. Today I have done a real day’s work — only my second since I reached Hollywood — and I have sent off to Gladys pages 74-83. [Obviously Cecil was finishing up his current book, *Marionettes at Home.*] Material is running a bit short now. I want to work it up to page 110, although page 100 will do at a pinch. I am up to page 89, so five more good days will finish it anyway. But it isn’t easy to work — I can’t do it at the office
with interruptions every 5 minutes and lots of other work to do, although I might when I get more used to the office.

“Now that I have this flat I can regulate my food better. It is easy to eat too much here, especially if (as is usual) you have to go out to a party both at lunch and at dinner. But now I can just have a bread and butter meal whenever I am at home and keep the amount I eat to a minimum. I am making it a rule from now on never to accept 2 engagements for meals the same day. I shall die quickly unless I do that. Tomorrow, by the way, I am lunching with Hugh Walpole who is over here with M.G.M. — so I shall dine on bread and butter. Today Oscar is making me a sandwich lunch because I dine at the Wagner’s.”

“Monday, Dec 23, 1935

“Mon. evening.

15. CSF-K, 273, 20 December 1935

585
I was going to dictate a long letter to you at the office today, but my blasted secretary is still ill and I had to muddle along with a temporary one so I didn’t get time — so I must write to you by hand instead. It is easy as I haven’t anything to do this evening except to go out and get a sandwich at the drugstore on the corner. I have let Oscar off for the evening. He is a very good boy, aged 34, nearly coal black, married with a family. I pay him £5 a week, which is colossal for England but ordinary here. He was Irene Dunne’s butler (I.D. is an ex film star) and drives a car splendidly. He is very willing and good, arrives at 7:30, gives me my breakfast at 7:45, gets all my things ready, drives me to the studio at 9, comes back and does the housework and the shopping (very well, and he is careful about pennies) meets me at lunch time and takes me where I have to go (I lunched with Hugh Walpole today at Metro-G.M.) brings me home at 5, makes tea (I have only to show him once) and cooks me a nice simple dinner if I want it, and he doesn’t expect ever to get away before 2 A.M. Actually he does as much work as you
would expect of 2 English servants, and much better, so that he earns his pay.

“You would love the flat. I don’t want to make you envious. It is on the 4th floor of a big building built in 3 sides of a square. Each side holds 2 flats in each story — one looking on the street, and one on the courtyard. Mine is on the courtyard side, and faces not only the courtyard but the open side of the square, so — [diagram]. The court is full of palms and poinsettias and hibiscus and so on, but I am too high up to see them comfortably — I am even over the top of the palms. My view runs straight out to the Santa Monica mountains (about 7000 ft.). The flat has a lovely kitchen in which it would be easy to cook an elaborate dinner for 10. A huge refrigerator, miles of cupboards and dressers [counters] — all wasted on me, I am sorry to say. The sitting room is much the same size as ours at 36 L.A. furnished comfortably enough though a bit Victorian, but with 20 lights in different places, and steam heaters which I have to turn on in the evenings. It also has 2 enormous cupboards, empty while I am here. There
is a lobby with a lot more cupboards, and opening out of it the bathroom and bedroom. The bathroom has a bath and a shower bath, a hand basin and w.c. The bedroom has a steam heater and 2 beds and 5 big cupboards — it is about the size of your room. All the windows have wire mesh to keep out flies, and open by gadgets inside which really work. The water is always very hot indeed. Doesn’t it sound like Paradise? Can you imagine me leading a highly respectable life — Oscar never lets me wear any trousers unless they have been pressed the night before. I get to the office at 9:30 at latest (it is 4 miles from home) and leave at 4:30 at the earliest. And so far I haven’t drunk more than one glass of wine in any day. I haven’t been to bed after 11:30. I am so tired still that I couldn’t anyway, and I haven’t kissed a woman (I have only seen one I would kiss without being paid, and she belongs to Collier).

"By the way, please send me at once your exact tailor made measurements. Lots of women here wear trouser suits, and Mrs. Wagner has a marvellous suit which only cost 10 dollars. Get Beatrice or
someone to take your measurements exactly, and I will have one made for you and bring it home with me. It will cause a sensation at Winchelsea. Mrs. Wagner’s suit is really beautiful, really lovely. I am looking forward to seeing you in one like it. You can’t get one made like it in England.

“The work is all right so far. I have had to make a complete new play out of the Buccaneer, and I am getting on all right. They haven’t given me a collaborator at all, but the secretaries I have each have all the techniques at their fingertips and I can manage without betraying my ignorance, although it calls for tact sometimes. My producer (that is the man who does the real work) is a fine bloke called Hornblow, who is giving me a free hand at present but will probably step in to hack my work up in the end — I shan’t mind. We have got to begin ‘shooting’ quite soon, and when we do I shall be very busy indeed and quite unable to call my soul my own — letters will get very irregular then, which is why I am writing so often now. The Wagners are good, but I am bloody well earning them even at present. I
haven’t read a word since reaching here. My office is in what is called the Directors’ building, and when called upon I have to go anywhere to give help — anything up to 20 miles away sometimes. That means telephoning Oscar and the car and dashing off at once. Oscar knows every hole and corner of Hollywood and Los Angeles, fortunately. I still get hopelessly lost sometimes. This town all looks alike. If the sun is out you can steer by that easily enough because of the chessboard pattern. But if it is cloudy (as it is for brief intervals sometimes) I am done, absolutely.

“An author is a much bigger noise here than I thought. Not socially, of course — no one thinks twice about them — but in the office. On top are the 4 or 5 directors. Each of them controls 2 or 3 producers, and each producer is engaged in making one picture, for which he is responsible to the director. A producer is a very big bird indeed — a sort of lieutenant-general at least, and an author of my standing ranks with him or just a little lower. I am a god in my office and my word is law. Paramount, I sup—
pose, employs 25,000 people (it seems mad, doesn’t it!) and there aren’t at most more than 100 people more important than me. There are about 20 studios the same size as Paramount. Of course the really big money goes to the stars (up to £1000 a day) and the most — producers (up to £800 a day). My salary is about what a small part man is paid, but a small part man has to jump when I speak, and I could have one fired whenever I liked. Actors are much more easily found than authors — I hadn’t realized this at all before I came — and the only reason I can find why they are so highly paid is that their jobs are much more precarious even than mine. Hugh Walpole says that if I do the job even moderately well I could stay on here at 600 dollars a week (£6000 a year) for as long as I cared to. But he may be wrong, and anyway I may muck the job up, and in any case I am coming home as soon as my 6 months are up at the latest.

“Tuesday morning (Christmas eve). The sun is shining very warmly indeed, and I have just drawn a weeks pay — 460 dols. (tax deducted) and I have
added up my debts — 125 for a months rent here, 140 for my car, 25 for Oscar 46 for Peters. I shall just get through without being in debt until next week, when I shall really start earning money I can send you some. I shall pay it direct into your account; you will hear about it, therefore, about 10 days after receiving this letter.

“No letters so far have caught me up. I hope some come soon.

“Lots and lots of love, darling. Look after yourself, and give my love to the boys.”

“(Christmas Day) I have been thinking about you such a lot lately and hoping you are having a happy Christmas — of course I don’t know yet where you are or if you were able to get to Ledbury. Anyway, I hope so much that you are happy and not too lonely, and that the boys are having a good time. Today I am all alone here in the flat, as I let Oscar off for the day after getting my breakfast, so that he

16. CSF-K, 274, 23 December 1935
could go to the races — there is a hell of a big meet-
ing here today. I shall have to go out and hunt up
my dinner somewhere in the town on foot, as I
haven’t got my driving license yet. No one (as was of
course to be expected) has invited me today until of
this evening, when Annette Gilford has asked me to
a party at the Knickerbocker Hotel. She is the prima
donna of the Metropolitan Opera House in N.Y. —
the greatest singer in America, with a voice just like
gold; I like her. Of course she is nothing to do with
Hollywood. She is here with her father who is dying
of cancer, poor thing, and hates the place. She goes
back to sing next week, and I suppose I shall never
see her again — just like Hollywood, that is. Last
night an entirely unknown woman telephoned and
asked me to dinner. I went because I had nothing
else to do, and found she is the wife of one of Holly-
wood’s leading agents. It was a good dinner — eight
people there. The main dish was steak, beautifully
cooked, but they have a disgusting habit of serving
fruit salad smothered in mayonnaise with beef!
What impressed me, though, was that eight people
drank a total of two bottles of beer in the evening — I haven’t yet come across any drinking in Hollywood. But I think I’d rather drink beer than eat oranges and figs in mayonnaise with beef and baked potatoes.

“I have 2 Christmas cards, one from the man who sold me my car and one from Mrs. Wagner. Dr. Wagner gave me my only present — two beautiful white silk handkerchiefs with ‘F’ embroidered on them. I gave Mrs. Wagner some ‘candy’ and the doctor some cigarettes, and Oscar 2 dollars, and my secretary some more ‘candy!’ That is the total of my Christmas doings this year.

“I ought to finish my present job of work in a day or two, and then I am going to try to get a day or two away and make a dash for the Grand Canyon. It is 500 miles away but it is supposed to be the most marvellous scenery in the world — look up the Colorado River in the Encyc. Britt. The ravine is a mile deep with vertical walls. With any luck I ought to get there. There’s nothing else in the U.S. that I want so much to see.
“Now I have completed one weeks work here — eight days to be exact (it was fine to get eight day’s pay yesterday) — and I am still alive. I shall get through the term here all right, although I can never imagine myself liking it. As a matter of fact, if Dr. Wagner was not so nice I should be having a thin time, but I can look after myself all right and soon we shall be making some money. I don’t know at all if they will extend my eight weeks to six months, but I am afraid it is very likely. If I send you £20 a week, as I think I can, we should have something on hand when I reach home, especially as even then I ought to bring about another hundred with me. That would make it worth while.


“I am actually glad to be back in the office today after getting through yesterday. I can’t remem-ber a day when I was lonelier. The party last night was pleasant but dull until about 11 p.m., when we all went to the Trocadero. This is the Hollywood-restaurant (I had never been before) with prices absolutely colossal. We had a few soft drinks — there
were twelve of us in the party — and there were 3 bills of which I paid one. It was 9 dollars — nearly two pounds! However, I can hardly complain as I don’t pay many bills out here. The Trocadero was dreadful, literally. All possible clothes (we were in evening dress) down to sports coats and flannels for the men and trousers for the women, and all sorts of people; a good many of them drunk and nearly all of them horribly ugly. There were one or two dazzlingly beautiful women, but not many. The place was utterly dull and stupid — dancing of course, with every one dancing cheek to cheek and so on — my first sight of actors’ Hollywood as opposed to writers’ Hollywood, and ordinary peoples’ (like Dr. Wagner’s) Hollywood. Miss Gilford was very charming indeed. I like her; but I haven’t the remotest idea how old she is. She looks 30, but my guess would be 50. She had a Roumanian husband who kicked her when she was pregnant to make her miscarry and nearly die (this must have been some years ago) and since then she hasn’t much use for men, but she is very nice to me, all the same. She
says it is because every one was so nice to her in London when she sang there — she knows a good many singers and musical people and actors whom I know slightly (by the way, don’t forget to send me your tailored measurements at once. I want very much to get you a suit like Mrs. Wagner’s.

“This is being written in the office while Miss Solomon does out the big batch of dictation I have just given her. It is a godsend to have her back at work again (I had a succession of fools while she was ill) and when she has finished I have to dash out with her over to the ‘lot’ for a ‘conference’ — which means not very much except argue. But my ‘producer,’ Hornblow, is all right up to now. I have heard terrible stories about his temper and his temperament, but I have seen no sign of them yet. I expect that will come when we start ‘shooting.’ I shall be hellish busy when that starts, and so will Miss S., so perhaps letters will be a bit more scarce then. They may start so quick that I won’t be able to get to Grand Canyon yet, which will annoy me. But if they pay £4000 a year I can’t object if they try to
get their money’s worth.

“You must be kept pretty busy all the time trying to read this writing of mine. It must make the letters last a good deal longer when you get them.

“Off now. Lots of love, dearest. Think of me sometimes.” 17

“Sunday morning, Dec. 29th 1935

“Dearest,

“The rain has started now. We have had one or two showers, but today it is simply streaming down in real tropical fashion and it is as cold as England in March. All I am doing today is to turn on the steamheat and stay at home alone. Oscar is out for the day — he has 1 day a week and every other Sunday, from 9:30 a.m. in each case. But I don’t mind now. I have found a circulating library, the only one in the U.S.A. I think, which is quite cheap — for 2 subs. it is 2 dollars down and 10 cents a day — and it is quite a good one. So now I am going to read two

17. CSF-K, 275, 25 December 1935

598
books a day once more and settle down to a sober life.

“As a matter of fact, it is a very sober life I am leading — I haven’t had more than 3 drinks since I landed, and my sex life has absolutely disappeared. It is curious that there is no trace of it at all. I don’t know whether it is just America, but if so I can understand why all American women are dissatisfied with their husbands. I am just like a eunuch. I haven’t had a sexual thought, let alone a sexual sensation. It might be different if you were here, of course.

“Yesterday Oscar drove me up to Lake Norconian, in a valley at the foot of the mountain. There is a marvellous hotel there. It was built as a club for millionaires in 1929, and was shut down immediately because of the slump, and someone has just bought it and opened it as a hotel. You can’t imagine the luxury of it — and it is almost pretty in places; mostly costly marbles and marvellous carpets and so on, ivory beds and a ballroom with a spring floor for 300 couples! It is about the size of the Crystal
Palace (honestly, not exaggerating) with 50 square miles of grounds, mostly mountain and lake. There were only about 50 guests there yesterday and I would have stayed until Monday except that it is Oscar’s day off today. Because it is the cheapest place I have struck here yet — full board is only £1 a day. My lunch cost me 4/- and nothing for Oscar! Of course those prices will go up quick when people start going there. The manager took me round the whole place, kitchen and all. He was most desperately anxious to interest me, because he guessed I was Hollywood and of course he wants the Hollywood crowd there. The lakes are beautiful although artificial — made by damning up the headwaters of two or three mountain rivers, and there are several 10,000 ft. peaks covered with snow in sight. I took a sailing dinghy (free) out and tore round the lake in a brisk wind — it was fine. If I should get Hollywood to go there I wouldn’t ever have to pay a bill there again — so the manager hinted. There are rooms for children as well. If we ever write out here that is where we should stay, I expect — unless the prices
have reached the usual Hollywood level by then.

“Oscar is the most perfect servant I have ever met. He does everything here, looks after me a lot more than George is looked after, drives magnificently, cooks quite well, and is very honest. I go through his accounts closely, of course, and I walk round the flat and inspect everything every day. Being a furnished flat, the kitchen has inventories of the contents of each cupboard and a diagram of where everything should go, so I can easily check up. I look into the saucepans and things, and I haven’t found a speck on anything, no dust, nothing. He presses a pair of trousers for me every day, and won’t let me wear an unpressed pair; darns my socks and sews on buttons; he has never been a minute late for any appointments yet. He is T.T., too, so that isn’t any bother either. If you had him at home you would love it. He is completely sensible and reliable — for instance, I have started to sleep better at last, and he creeps in each morning (his time is 7:45) and if I am asleep he leaves me, works out when it is the last possible minute, and then comes in, gets me out
of bed like lightning, into my bath and my clothes, and then to the office at the tick of 9:30. I suppose one of these days I shall bump into his faults, but I haven’t found them yet, and he is fond of me quite desperately already, and very proud of me — I have just heard that ‘Esquire’ has bought my story ‘Seconds’ and he is waiting most impatiently for it to come out. But of course I have to pay him £5 a week — although out here by law no man can be employed at any work at less than £4, so the difference is not too great. My marvellous secretary at the office only earns £5.10.0 — compared with me she is worth at least £60 or £70.

“On Tuesday 31st I shall transmit 100 dollars from my bank to your account. They ought to reach you not long after this letter, and after that I shall send 100 dollars a week by that route. So I hope you will be out of all money troubles a week or two after you receive this letter.

“By the way, I haven’t heard a single word from anyone since I left England. I can’t imagine what has happened to the letters — I have been stirring up
all Los Angeles to find them. So please tell everyone who is likely to have written that I fear their letters have gone astray and will they please repeat to the office.

“I think I may finish the marionette book today or tomorrow. Gladys will be wanting information from you — a copy of the play and the titles of some of the music. Please let her have them. As soon as I have recovered from the marionette book I have got an idea for a series of short stories about Hollywood, and I may do them, if I can manage it (the office is a bit exacting, and exhausting, you know). I am sure they will sell well. I ought to make 1,000 out of the series, with luck, so it will have been worth while my coming here.

“Give my love to everyone at home, dear, and I hope I shall hear from your soon — a letter written about 8 weeks before you receive this. Lots of love, dear.”

“New Years Day

“Dearest,

603
“I enclose a draft for £20. I am afraid you will have to take it to a bank before it is any use to you — there is no other way, apparently, in which I can send you money. I hope to send you (in fact I am sure I shall) £20 every week from now on, so that you will be getting straight, I hope, before long. Sorry I kept you waiting so long, dear, but to date I have earned about £140, after the U.S.A. have had their share, and out of that I have paid commission, and a month’s rent, and a hotel bill, and bought a car, and cleared myself of debts this side, so that I don’t think I have done too badly. I shall be able to raise the weekly money to £30 soon, but I don’t think you will find it necessary, and there is always the cursed income tax of G.B. & I. to remember. Any savings I have over here I will bring back with me as U.S. government bonds — negotiable stuff bearing interest.

“This is a public holiday here, and I have let Oscar go, so I am alone for the day as on Christmas; but I don’t care so much now, as I have settled down now and I have two fat books to read — there is no
censorship in California, and the shelves of my circulating library are full of books which have been utterly banned in England, like Havelock Ellis (which I am reading at present) for instance.

“Yesterday I had a long talk with Hornblow, my producer, and we are starting really hard work tomorrow — so he says. He likes my treatment of the play (I practically wrote a new one for him) and we shall probably start ‘shooting’ while we are actually writing the ‘continuity’ — the actual stage directions, that is. That means real work, but I believe it when I see it. Hollywood always boils with this sort of mad scheme, and they mostly fade away. But one result of the talk was that I had to go last night with his party to the Trocadero, which is *the* restaurant of Hollywood, to see the New Year in. I had to take a woman, so I asked Miss Guilford, and she very kindly broke a date she had with her aunts and her father (!!!) to come with me. You can’t believe what it cost. First of all, before anything else, I had to pay 15 dollars £3 each for the privilege of sitting down! Then I had to buy dinner for us two, and pay my share of the wine
— champagne, of course. Actually my total bill was £11, and then I had to tip. It is absolutely maddening. Everyone except me got drunk — Miss Guilford only slightly — and there wasn’t much to see or do (except that as a matter of fact it does me some slight good to be seen there) except a ‘floor show’ — at midnight a troop of quite beautiful and quite naked girls came on and danced — the police shut their eyes to what happens in the Trocadero, where all the stars go, and the girls were all shaved between their legs. I got home in the Ind. at 3:30 A.M., quite whacked. I got Miss Guilford back to her hotel with Oscar’s help and her coloured maid came and took care of her, thank God — she wasn’t objectionably drunk, but just completely vague and silly.

“By the way, remember you can pay money in at my Midland bank — you needn’t go to Rye Lane for that — so take the draft and your paying in book when you go out and you can just hand it in over the counter at any Midland Bank you see. And you can start drawing cheques against it at once; it is a
banker’s cheque and as good as money.

“I finished the marionette book, as I expect you know by now, and I am going to start those Hollywood short stories, and I have every hope of doing so, although this is the most pestilential place for sapping one’s energies and making one put things off. But I have told Miss Solomon to keep on prodding me, and I expect she will — she is a good girl.

“I find I shan’t know whether I am going to be sacked at the end of my eight weeks until the very end of those eight weeks — they don’t have to give me notice. So I won’t be able to let you have much notice of my intentions. But if I am sacked I shall cable the same day, so that if you don’t hear by cable from me on Feb. 12th or so you will know that I shall be stopping on temporarily at any rate. I shall cable to Forest Hill 3354 to save money. I just don’t care if they sack me or not. If they don’t, we shall really start to make money. If they do, I shall see you and I shall have those stories anyway. I would like to [see] you, sweetheart.”¹⁸
“Sunday, 5th January 1936

“I have just come back from a most enchanting week-end — I went with the Wagners and Miss Guilford to the Norconian Lake hotel which I told you about before. We went on Friday as soon as I could get away from the studio. Miss Guilford came in my car with me. I have never travelled with an opera star before. Believe me, it was funny. For our two night’s stay she had a trunk (a small cabin trunk — not as big as the one I bought) and a large suitcase and a dressing case. We had a lovely 3 room suit at the hotel — I smiled when the Wagners very tactfully took the middle room. On Saturday, we drove up into the mountains to Lake Arrowhead, about 8,500 ft. on a marvellous mountain road with beautiful views. Up there it was piercingly cold, with snow and ice everywhere — the road was kept clear. We left the pines behind at about 7,500 feet and at the lake there was only scrub Alpine vegetation — it
would have been dreary except for the snow. But the drive was marvellous. There was a dance at the hotel on Saturday night, and we spent this morning in a boat on Lake Norconian, and now I am back again and wishing I wasn’t. It was a lovely weekend — I wish you had been here with me to enjoy it. And they knocked 20% off my bill because they guessed I was responsible for the others coming! They seem to have stung Dr. Wagner pretty badly from what he said about his bill — he paid for Miss Guilford, too, I think.

“At the studio I have been desperately busy — I took a lot of work away with me this weekend. I don’t know if it will all be wasted, but it may be, and I don’t care. My continuity man is a very pleasant gay [jovial is an appropriate modern word] fellow of 30 called Bush. [Actually Niven Busch] He is due to be married on Wednesday, and he can’t have his honeymoon without me. I have given him Wednesday and Thursday off, which is more than I ought to do (he didn’t know he was going to have this job assigned to him when he arranged to get married)
but he wants to go to Palm Springs (about 299 miles south), where all the movie people spend their honeymoons and he can’t go there unless I go too and work there with him. He actually wants me to! I have told him to go to Hell, though. What would I do in Palm Springs with a honeymoon couple? I want to do this work well, as I am sure my job depends on it. It is silly to judge a man on one job, but there it is. If I don’t do it well — I mean well enough to satisfy Hornblow — I go out on my ear. I’ve got to hit it off exactly with him. I don’t want to be sacked, although I am aching to come home. Hornblow’s report on my articles decides whether I stop or not. I haven’t got to please the public, or do good work. I’ve just got to please him — that is, until in 6 months or so they know what the public says about my picture. But still, I have started that short story sequence — I dictate like mad to Miss Solomon for half an hour every morning and get nearly 1000 words done, so that is some benefit from this visit. I am sure they are good stuff, although I haven’t finished the first one yet.
“Miss Solomon has bought me a fine selection of local postcards for me to send 2 at a time to the boys — I left them at the office on Friday but I shall start sending them soon, and I have fought a battle (or rather she has) with the U.S.A. tax authorities and I have got a 25 dollar refund! So that my next cheque to you, which I shall post on the 8th, will be for £30. I hope that will go a long way toward getting things straight at home; £20 a week after that ought to be enough for you to be comfortable. I am paid £80; of that I pay £6.10.0 in tax, and £8 in commissions; £5 in wages to Oscar and £1 to Miss Solomon. £7 is rent (it is mad, I know, but it can’t be helped) and £3 as installment on my car. I pay for my petrol and most of my food by the month at this place, and I haven’t had a month’s bills yet, but I want to keep a big balance until it comes in so that I can settle it straight away — and of course I am a week behind with my wages, and I haven’t caught up yet. I have to watch the pennies, you see. It is this infernal rent question which worries me. I could live as cheaply as £3 a week for rent — that is what Miss Solomon pays
— but it means one room in a Winchelsea Beach bungalow in a crowded street, and I can’t bear it. Bush, whose salary is the same as mine (he has been here 5 years) pays the same amount for rent as I do. “But I can’t say any more about money when I want to say goodbye to you, dear.”

“January 8, 1936

“Dearest,

“I enclose the weekly draft and a batch of photographs which I thought you might like to see.

“I think I told you in one of my earlier letters that there was a chance of my going to Palm Springs with Bush in his honeymoon. That really is going to happen and I shall be starting on Saturday or Sunday and I shall be away from here for nearly a week, during which letters may be a bit scarce and I will not be able to send you the next draft until my return.

“As I expect you can guess from the fact that Bush has to work on his honeymoon, I am a bit
rushed and busy but I shall try and write to you at greater length tomorrow.”

“Wed. Jan. 8, 1936

“Dearest,

“I sent you off this morning a very short note with a draft for £30 and some photos. I said in it that I was off to Palm Springs. I am trying to arrange for Miss Sullivan to send in your next draft next Wednesday, as I shall be out of touch here. I have just tried and failed to get my expenses guaranteed at Palm Springs — by contract I must work anywhere in the U.S.A., so they are quite right, really. I don’t expect I shall like Palm Springs — it is 120 miles from here, south, and is a sort of movie suburb — the Brighton of Hollywood. And I shall have to try and get some sense out of Busch on his honeymoon. It is a funny prospect. [Notice that Cecil has just in this letter first spelled Miss Sullivan and Mr. Busch cor-

19. CSF-K, 279, 8 January 1936, typed
“I still haven’t had a single word from England yet. It is 5 weeks now and not even a postcard — I have kept my secretary hard at it telephoning every single branch of the Bank of America there is, with no result. But soon there ought to be a letter arriving at the studio address. I hope so, anyway. I am very worried about it indeed.

“When I go to Palm Springs I shall have to take Oscar with me. I can’t very well leave him here, but the hotel rates for chauffeurs are quite low here, thank God. He is most desperately fond of me, curiously; he snarls like a dog to anyone else, like the Wagners, whom I see at all. He thinks I am the most wonderful immigrant in the U.S.A., he has read ‘The African Queen’ and is now toiling through ‘The Gun.’

“The work had a nasty setback this week; Warner Bros. have just released ‘Captain Blood,’ which must have been based on Morgan’s life, because half of what we had written was reproduced (badly) in the film. So we have to rewrite a whole lot, and put
in a lot more original work. Busch is very excited. He thinks our work is good, and he hopes to get Gary Cooper and Norma Shearer for it — that means a two star picture, which is a terrific noise over here. Further, if we do, and if we get ‘credit’ (that means if our names appear) we are made for life. Any company here will take us on for a year at double our present salaries. I don’t think he’s right, but if he is I will make arrangements to return here next January and bring the whole family for the year. At double salary we should be well away. I could bear a year here if we were all together and I was earning £10,000 a year.

“Thursday morning. I have got a short story finished. It is a really good one, called ‘Hollywood Boulevard.’ I will send you a copy in a day or two, and I believe it is the first of at least a dozen. If I write one a week (as I have to do) it will add about £100 a week to my income! That will make my visit here worthwhile. By the way, let me know at once if your draft hasn’t reached you by the time this letter does. It is the same as the other one, drawn to Kath-
leen Forester by the Bank of America in London, and there are still no letters. It is unsettling. If I don’t hear by Feb 2nd, that is 3 weeks from today, when you ought to have received this, I am going to cable to you. I can’t bear this much longer. Cable to Forester, Paramount Studios, Hollywood, California, if I cable to you. I simply can’t understand this delay. If you didn’t write, surely Williams or Eve or L. or someone would have written. I suppose I have sent easily fifty letters since I left London. And if my option isn’t renewed, I shall be starting back for England in another 5 weeks or perhaps less. But that’ enough of that.

“Yesterday I had an example of Hollywood’s expensiveness — I had a haircut which cost 55 cents — two and six! And Oscar says that’s the ordinary sort of barber, not the expensive one film people mostly go to.

“I haven’t seen much of Collier lately, although we are always conversing by telephone. He is working hard, and so am I. He works by night and I work by day, so we can’t see each other at all. His trouble
is that he was given a job to do and then spent six seeks doing nothing at all while the studio thought he was working, and now he has to catch up. He is worried about it.

"I have started going to the pictures a lot — the studio runs two shows a week in their own little theater; one night Paramount stuff and another night other people’s. Either I shall get used to it or else I shall die. But I have got to keep myself au fait with pictures, you see — it is important.

"Sorry dear, but I can’t write you affectionate letters when I haven’t heard a word for five weeks. But lots of love, dear, all the same.”

“Casitas del Monte, Palm Springs, California
“Sunday, 12 Jan. 1936

“Dearest,
“I am here now with the honeymooners and shall stay here until Thursday — I have just put in a

20. CSF-K, 280, 8 January 1936

617
redhot evening’s work with Busch, because the new Mrs. Busch is not well — too much honeymoon, I fancy. This is a most interesting hotel; the name means ‘The Little Houses on the Hills.’ It is a series of small furnished bungalows in which you live, and you get all your meals in the central buildings — it never rains here, you see. It rained in 1901, and that is the only time it has ever happened. This is right in the middle of the desert — a terribly desolate stretch of country, a tangle of bare brown mountains. There is nothing green here at all, just some scrubby bushes here and there, and everything else is greys brown sand and rock. Someone bored an Artesian well here, and this place has sprung up — a dozen wildly exotic hotels, about six similar shops and nothing else except a gambling hall. All fashionable Hollywood comes here. It is roasting hot all day (it is in a cup in the mountains) and at night it is bitterly cold. I am writing this while crouching over a roaring wood fire (the first I have seen in the U.S.A.) in my overcoat in my bungalow before going to bed. But we have got to work like hell here — we have
wasted too much time on this infernal honeymoon already. I have to get a full treatment finished in the next ten days, somehow, and I can’t get on any further without Busch. As soon as I can’t stand this place any longer Busch will have to pack up and come back to Los Angeles. He got married last Thursday, so he can’t complain. That’s a longer honeymoon than we had. You would like these mountains, dear. Some of them have got a little snow on the tops of them, but I think they are ugly — they are all ramshackle looking. Of course, this is the region where all the cowboy films were made, so you can remember quite well what it is like. I was taken to a club last night. It is the most expensive place in the world (I did not pay the bill) and I will describe the dinner. Now remember, I am not exaggerating at all.

1. A large washbowl of crushed ice, heaped up 2 ft. high. Embedded in this were olives and celery, and spring onions sprouting out like narcissus. You ate these as hors d’oeuvre, picking them out of the ice with your fingers, as it stood in the center of the table. 2. A large washbowl each of crushed ice. In
the middle, like a ?? in a soup plate, a tumble of crabmeat with Heinz sauce over it. N.B. tinned crab. 3. Fried trout, delicious. 4. Steak. Horrible. Fried potatoes (good). Onions. 5. Lettuce and tinned pear salad, with French dressing. Horrible. All in a washbowl of ice. 6. A large washbowl of ice each again (this is No. 3 each) with a tumbler embedded in it. In this tumbler a dollop of icecream, and on the icecream a fresh peach, hot, cooked before our eyes in burning brandy. Not very nice. 7. A large washbowl of crushed ice in the middle of the table. Ice piled up 3 ft. 6 in. high, and covered with slabs of fresh pineapple embedded in it. You picked this out with your fingers and ate it like that. Delicious. But the ice made its room quite cold all around it.

“While we ate this there was a floorshow. Not very good. There was a good dancing couple; the girl was naked under her frock and unshaven; at the end her partner carried her off over his shoulder upside down, with her frock round her neck. The other 3 turns [acts] were feeble. Total bill for 4 people (no drinks at all) 27 dollars — £5.10.0. [This is
the first mention of a fourth at the party.] I think I prefer the Savage. N.B. to serve the dinner took from 8:30 to 12:30. Everyone smokes cigarettes between courses here.

“I shan’t be back in Hollywood until Thursday night, so I won’t know about letters until Friday morning — none so far. I do hope there are some when I get back. But I will write to you again from here. Short story No. 2 is well under weigh.”[sic]²¹

“Palm Springs, Monday Jan 13, 1936

“Dearest,

“Letters have come! It was miraculous — I had left a reference book behind in Hollywood, and had to send Oscar back for it today, and when he got in here he brought the letters back with him. I was delighted — it was fine not having to wait until Friday. And what a lovely long letter from you. It was very nice of you to write such a long one. I am very

²¹ CSF-K, 281, 12 January 1936

621
grateful to you, dear. What a time you have had. I am afraid you must have been very very worried about George’s collarbone. [George had fallen out of his high chair and broken his collarbone. I can remember pondering the X-ray photos, wondering at the structure that was inside us] And your going to Ledbury! It was pretty desperate. [The roads were icy and our car couldn’t climb a hill not far from Ledbury, and there was a bus stuck there also. We walked up the hill in the winter’s darkness to stop the bus coming the other way. The buses exchanged passengers, and took on the motorists who had been stranded, and returned without traversing the hill.]

“You got the notepaper at the post office at Sydenham, opposite Cobb’s. I shall enclose the book receipt thing, if I can remember it. I am glad Gordon is being so helpful to you—I have written to him once or twice, as I suppose he has told you. There was a letter from Eve and one from Olive, too, as well as your enclosures. But your letter was a perfect debauch. It has made me very happy, sweetheart. I shall sleep like a child tonight because of it
— it is 9:30 P.M. now. Today I have done a lot of work and had a lot of exercise (nearly my first since leaving England). Busch and I worked from 9:30 to 12:30 and then we played badminton! Open air, of course, in scorching sunshine. I got tired out. Then we bathed — there is a little swimming pool, not much bigger than our bath, filled with artesian well water at 40° — it was like ice. I could only just get in and out again, but it was lovely. Then we worked again for 2 hours after lunch, and then we walked until dinner when your letters came. I am nearly tired tonight in consequence.

“It is nice to hear about the way people have rallied round you; I was sure they would, but it is reassuring to be certain. I have discovered that there are lots of ships from Los Angeles to England via Panama, so that is how I shall come home when I do come. I shall 1. cable to you as soon as my contract ends. 2. write full particulars and send them by air mail. They should reach you about 10 days after the cable, and about 5 days before I arrive. Then you can make your arrangements. I don’t want you to go
to any special trouble about me — we shall be happy enough when we get together again anywhere.

“Busch has just read ‘The Gun’ and the ‘African Queen’, and he is a wild Forester fan now — it is hard for me to describe it so that you would believe it, but he really and truly thinks that I am the greatest writer in the world. He is devoted to me in the same way as Oscar is, and yet he is a young man of great ability and intelligence and taste, so that it is really embarrassing. He would leave his bride tomorrow if I asked him to — it is as bad as that. So now I can’t rely on what he says about my contract. He swears now that Paramount will never let me go, not ever, but I am not too sure. Until I have got this continuity finished and have gone over it with Hornblow I can’t say whether I am a success or not, and in consequence I don’t know about my movements. But I am learning a hell of a lot every minute — it may be valuable some time, but I don’t know. So far the most positive aspect is the short stories — I am afraid I won’t bring very much money home with me, sweetheart. Don’t be cross about that. I really
haven’t been extravagant except over necessary extravagances. And if I am a success here we shall all live a year here and go out whenever we wish and be very happy and comfortable. Otherwise we shall be just about all square (+ the short stories) when I reach home.

“Lots of love, darling, and thank you again for your beautiful letters.”

“Paramount Production Inc., January 17, 1936

“Dearest,

“I got back from Palm Springs last night and in the office this morning I found a second batch of letters including the one from you dated January 2 with the enclosures. Life here seems a much more reasonable proposition when I actually begin to receive answers to the letters I have sent.

“I am sorry that the Ledbury visit was not quite as successful as it might have been but I am

22. CSF-K, 282, 13 January 1936

“I enclose the income tax demand and a check on London to pay it. I mentioned the subject to Peters sometimes ago, so please find out if he has done anything about it and also ask Peters if there are enough funds in the bank to pay this check if you send it. If there are, and if Peters has not paid it already, send off the check and the demand.

“I am really very busy now and Bush [sic] and I did an enormous amount of work on the poor chap’s honeymoon.

“Lots of love,”23

“Paramount Productions Inc.,
“January 15, 1936

“My dear Mrs. Forester,
“Am enclosing a draft in the amount of $100.00. As you know, Mr. Forester is in Palm Springs collaborating on THE BUCCANEER with

23. CSF-K, 283, 17 January 1936, typed
Mr. Bush [sic], who, incidentally, is on his honey-moon. Therefore, Mr. Forester couldn’t send you the check, personally, so he asked me to do it.

“Palm Springs is a resort on the desert about one hundred and twenty-five miles from Hollywood. I don’t believe Mr. Forester will enjoy it very much as it is a place to which a great many Hollywood people go and, inasmuch as he doesn’t particularly care for these ‘Hollywoodites,’ it won’t be very pleasant for him.

“Mr. Forester seems to be very lonesome for you and the children. He misses you terribly and really doesn’t care whether Paramount takes up his option or not.

“Sincerely yours, Isabelle Sullivan”

“Hollywood,
“Sunday Jan 19, 1926

“Dearest,

24. CSF-K, 284, 15 January 1936, typed
“It is several days since I wrote to you personally — things have been hectic here because tomorrow Busch and I have to meet the directors in the final conference about the film. We spent all day yesterday hard at work and have finished it up at last as well as we could hope for. On what happens tomorrow probably my contract depends. I enclose a picture from the L.A. Times of Busch and his wife. She is very charming — but on the honeymoon she had food poisoning for the first 5 days and menstruation for the last 5, and I fancy that she is still a virgin in consequence.

“And on Friday night I went to my first ‘wild’ party. Six of us, we were the guests of a director of the Pioneer company, Colvin, who was one of the great aces in the U.S. Air Force during the war. We went to a restaurant after everyone had at least 6 drinks at his house first; drank like fishes all through dinner, and had more drinks at his house afterwards. I was a terrific social success with Mrs. Colvin and the other 2 girls (film actresses). They were all saying loudly how ‘sweet’ I was and
how handsome (!) and how generally marvellous — and meant it, temporarily. I had to take one of the girls home, Joan Straeter. She plays character parts; you may have seen her. Tall, dark, ugly, and a little muscular, black hair plastered flat on her forehead, looks like a Lesbian but I don’t know if she is. She was wild about me! In the car she simply fell on me. You know how a girl sometimes has to defend herself against a man, keeping his hand from going up her clothes and so on. I was just like that, stopping her from unbuttoning my trousers and so on. Of course Oscar was in the front seat driving us, and it was terribly embarrassing as she acted as if we were the only people in the world and shouted indelicate words at the top of her voice. I nearly made love to her to keep her quiet. I would have done so except that she stank of whiskey. As it was we had one wild battle for 10 miles through Hollywood. It may sound queer to you, virtuous me defending my virginity, and you may not believe it, but that is really what happened. I was sober, of course, and I simply hated her. You know American women don’t wear draw-
ers. They wear ‘foundation garments’ — a sort of undervest made of lastex, and nothing else at all under their frocks. Joan Straeter and the other actress (I didn’t hear her name) both stood on their heads at Colvin’s and revealed everything they had. I am not going to say I didn’t like it, but all the same it put me off anything else, because I was sober, I suppose. Yesterday while working with Busch I left orders for no telephone calls to be put through to me, and I heard afterwards she called me twice. So I have made a conquest which I didn’t want. Now if she had been a platinum blonde —! Colvin was mad drunk and shrieking like a hyena when we left, and Mrs. Colvin had passed out in an armchair. It was just like hell at the time, but I can laugh about it now. I am not going on with the affair, either — not just because I don’t like her (she is quite charming, sober) but because it would be too hellish dangerous. She is about eleven stone ten [164 pounds] of solid dynamite.

“But that is only the second case of drunken-ness I have come across in 5 weeks, so it isn’t too
bad. You see, I am just beginning to get reconciled to being here — what with getting interested in the work and having found a circulating library. The food is really vile and I am eating less and less every day, but that doesn’t matter. All the badminton and walking I had at Palm Springs has stimulated me, and I have walked home (about 4-1/2 miles) twice from the office since then, and feel better for it — although walking in Hollywood streets is a depressing business. I am going to play more badminton with Busch — there is a court (sand and open air, but all right otherwise) in Hollywood. I expect that when the time comes I shall be quite sorry to leave. I have got into a routine at last. Breakfast at 8. Get up. Leave at 9:15. Office 9:30. Dictate or talk with Busch until 11:30. Dash out in car with Oscar to library. Return at 12. Work til 1. Lunch (at home about 3 days a week; otherwise restaurants). Return at 2:30. Check up morning’s dictation. Putter about not very strenuously in the afternoon. Often I leave at 3:30, sometimes 4:30. Have tea. Read till 6:30. Dinner (at home about 3 days a week — parties other times).
Often a movie after dinner. Home to read in bed. You can guess from your experience of me that it suits me now that I am used to it.

“Lots of love, dear,”\textsuperscript{25}

“Hollywood,
“Tuesday Jan. 21st, 1936

“This is being written awkwardly, as I had a little accident (of no importance) on Sunday. The car started to run downhill and I stopped it, straining the muscles of my right forearm. Only the 3 outer fingers are affected, not the forefinger, and although my arm is as stiff as hell and very painful on occasions it will be all right soon. It makes dressing and one or two intimate toilet details a bit difficult, but it doesn’t matter. I am keeping the muscles steadily exercised. Also this is being written while I am waiting to be summoned into the dread presence of the directors, for the conference which I hope will settle

\textsuperscript{25} CSF-K, 285, 19 January 1936
a great many things, about the film (such as whether or not they will do it after all) and the cast and (incid-
entially) about my future here. I am quite excited about it all at the moment — I haven’t let myself be up to now. But you know that my contract expires in less than 3 weeks from today. I don’t want to be pushed out ignominiously, what I would like would be to walk out like a gentleman about 7 weeks from now.

“On Sunday, before the accident I had an interesting experience. I went up in an airship. They keep a small ‘blimp’ here for advertising, it cruises around at night with flashing neon signs, and in the day you can go up for 1/4 hour for 2 dollars. I liked it very much because of what it showed me of the geography of Los Angeles; of course it was noisy, and it went down and up at steep angles — it would be hateful for a long trip, I think.

“If I am not sacked soon I shall start going round trying to drum up a real big contract for a year which will let me bring you and the kids out here sometime next February (1937) or so. It would
do us all good, I think; it wouldn’t cost us all much more to live than I spend here, and we might save a bit of money. But I haven’t any idea whether I can bring it off. I should like to, and I think my best way is to tackle Hugh Walpole — he is very powerful here with M.G.M.

“By the way, Collier has married his lady friend, I told you earlier that she was a charming woman — quite the nicest woman I have met in Hollywood. He is very happy and jolly well ought to be although he is mad as a hatter like everyone else here (except me).

“I hope to be very busy indeed from today onward — most likely Miss Sullivan will send you your cheque tomorrow. I have a terrible job finding picture postcards for the boys — they are horrible. I think California is the worst picture postcard country I have ever come across. Poor Miss S. is run off her feet trying to find pretty ones.

“I shall soon have to make some return for hospitality received — I have given one dinner party and will have to give another when I can. Oscar does all
he can and I get the other things sent in. The trouble is that everyone eats so much. You can’t imagine it. but the last time 8 of us ate a whole 13 lb. turkey and there wasn’t enough food — people were filling up with cheese because they hadn’t had enough to eat. It is really difficult to cater for that sort of appetite.

“Dr. and Mrs. Wagner are out in the desert with W. C. Fields the comedian — he is killing himself with drink and they are trying to cure him (he is a Paramount star) but I don’t think they will succeed. It is quite lonely without them — I have seen them about twice a day ever since I arrived.

“Later. Conference over, and I am still no wiser. We told a very good tale, but this Captain Blood business has queered our pitch. There will be another conference next week! Until then I can’t tell at all. Our play has to be so good as to wash out the memory of Captain Blood altogether, and I don’t know if it is. It will be nearly a fortnight before I can get at Lubitsch again and get some sense out of him. Meanwhile Busch and I are trying to sell ‘The Gun,’ and we may do so, too. Busch is a gun-maniac in a
way which is positively embarrassing but which may be very useful to me.

“Lots and lots of love, dear.”

“Hollywood,
“Sat. Jan. 25, 1936

“Dearest,
“I have just received your letter of Jan 10th with the photographs; it is delightful to have them. I have been running round the studio showing them and John’s letter to everybody. And I am very glad to hear that you have been having such a lively time; I was afraid you would be too dull — but it seems that you are not nearly as dull as when I am with you. I hope the Asmot Robertson dinner was a success.

“In the studio I have been very busy all the week; mainly dealing with incompetents. Busch is first rate, but most of the rest are ditherers — I have

26. CSF-K, 286, 21 January 1936

636
tried very hard not to allow them to get on my nerves, and I think I have succeeded, but it has been a bit of a bother all the same. The greatest excitement at the moment is that I am trying to sell ‘The Gun’ — it may come off; in that case my journey here will have been worth while. And it seems possible that M.G.M. — the best studio at present — may offer me a job when this one is completed. I shall be able to get home before it begins, but it will almost for certain mean (if it happens at all) that I shall have to live in England in a state of suspended animation waiting for the usual frantic cable. I won’t do it if you don’t want me to; but if it is a real 6 month’s contract you and the kids would come too. I don’t think you would hate this place in the way I do.

“My strained hand is nearly well again; it hurts if I have to exert a lot of strength, but not otherwise.

“Now we come to the really serious part of this letter — not really serious, all the same. It is as mad as everything else here. Nanette Guilford has fallen in love with me!! She is much younger than she looks — I thought she was 45 or 50, but she is really
only 30. I was astonished to hear it. Well, she has made all sorts of ridiculous proposals to me, which I have virtuously declined. Please don’t worry about this — there is nothing to worry about. If it weren’t such a hell of a nuisance I should laugh at it. I have too much sense, anyway, to set up housekeeping at my age with a prima donna. That would be more trouble than what I am going through at present. But at the present time she is as mad as a hatter. I suspected all this a few days ago when she dragged her dying father and her old mother and her maid and so on out of their suite at the Knickerbocker and came over here to a suite at the Villa Carlotta — although it was reasonable because the V.C. is much quieter and of course Dr. Wagner is there. But she has started to plague the life out of me. She knocked half the night at my door. I had to give orders for no telephone calls to be passed up to me from the front desk. So she got over that by sending me a telegram at 3 A.M.! I got no sleep for 2 nights. Unless she gets tired of it and moves out again I shall have to, although I don’t want to as it will be a nuisance. You
may laugh, but this weekend I have gone out to a cheap hotel in Los Angeles so as to be sure of getting some sleep — I slept like a log from 9 til 9:30, and shall do the same tonight. Please don’t worry about this, dear, as it isn’t serious at all, but just silly. I wouldn’t have told you about it except that some rumour or other may come to you and upset you. It would be all quite impossible except in Hollywood. I can’t understand why, but I am a howling social success here. All the women are after me, honestly. It is incredible. But I shall love you all the same, dear. I think it is because I am English — I can’t explain it otherwise. I have learned the lesson, now, anyway, and I shall go carefully in future; but it is a beastly complication just at the climax of my work. Fancy having to go and stay in a hotel just to dodge a woman! I don’t want to go to the management of the V.C. and say that either the Guilfords move out or I shall, but I can see it coming. I think they would choose me in that case — once again, dear, please don’t worry. You know by now how capable I am of looking after myself. And Oscar’s fearfully amused
at it all and guards me very carefully, so does Miss Sullivan.

“I have been very rushed and bothered this week, what with studio work and a stream of letters and proofs from Joseph, who is beginning to dither too (God knows why). The new short story is held up halfway through (it is a good one, though) and I haven’t had time to write to any one except Joseph and a short note to Williams. I have to leave off now as Busch is waiting for me with a bit of continuity for my approval. 12:30 on Saturday and no prospect of lunch yet — this has been written in about 6 stages this morning in the intervals of dealing with other things.

“Lots of love, dearest.”

“The Biltmore Hotel, Los Angeles
“Sunday 26 Jan. 1936

“Dearest,

27. CSF-K, 287, 25 January 1936

640
“You must be used by now to receiving letters from me from unusual addresses, but I thought I had better write to you today after sending you yesterday’s letter with its remarkable news. There is nothing new about that affair. I haven’t been to the V.C. since Friday, but Oscar has and he has come back only with the information that Miss Guilford has been telephoning a good deal to me. I shall go back there tomorrow and do something decisive; either she or I shall go — this is quite absurd. But this hotel is very pleasant. It is the finest on the Pacific coast — the President often stays here (and John Masefield is here at the moment) and, more remarkable than anything else, it is only half the cost of the Roosevelt in Hollywood! That is the best example I can think of to show the trend of Hollywood prices. I could live here very comfortably (for a hotel) at less than I spend at the V.C., if only I

28. British poet laureate, born in Ledbury, where I remember him in Charlotte Ballard’s drawing room for tea.

641
could — but it is 17 miles from the studio and I am not allowed to, apart from the inconvenience of the distance. [Hollywood, objecting to a 17-mile commute? That doesn’t sound likely.] Yesterday I was at the studio (Saturday!) from 9:45 to 5:30, hard at work all the time. Tomorrow we have a conference at which I don’t think anything will be settled. The really vital moment will come next Wednesday or Thursday. It is that which will probably decide whether I am a success or a failure here. I deal with Lubitsch then — with luck, for he is completely erratic and unreliable. Busch assures me that it is quite likely he may keep us waiting about (on our large salaries) with nothing whatever to do for 4 or 5 weeks. They haven’t got to take up my option, you see. They can keep me when my 8 weeks are up (2 weeks from now) on notice from day to day for the rest of my time here, if they like — Busch is like that at present. He can be sacked at 1 day’s notice, and he has been like that for 3 weeks now. But if we manage to tackle Lubitsch properly and if he likes our work, we ought to be able to screw him up to the
pitch of definitely taking up our options — on the other hand, I may be out of the studio on my ear by the time this reaches you. If I am fired, I shall cable at once; the cable should arrive about 2 days after you receive this letter. If the option is taken up I shall cable similarly. So if I don’t cable, you will know that I am just being kept on here on a day to day arrangement. The other possibilities are that I may get another job (with M.G.M quite likely) or that I shall sell someone ‘The Gun’ and make a lot of money. That is what I should like best — these film rights might bring in 10 or 15 week’s salary in one day, but I should split with Busch, because if he hadn’t made his wonderful suggestion of how to treat it there would be no chance of selling it.

“Lots of love, dear.”

“I have just dictated a letter to you, dear, which will contain a draft for £25, but I am writing this letter to tell you the things that I couldn’t dictate —

29. CSF-K, 288, Saturday 26 January 1936
besides, I hope that by the end of today I shall know a lot more about my position here. The Guilford position is quite mad, absolutely fantastic. I had a letter from a lawyer about her yesterday and went straight up in the air with surprise about it. But I rang him up and he told me that he didn’t want to act for her and that he had nothing to say or suggest about it — he begged me, in fact, not to bother because all that he was doing was just to write that one letter to me because she wouldn’t leave him alone until he did. He is as frightened of her as I am. By the time we understood each other we were quite hysterical with laughing about it. Luckily all this town is used to insanity and no one thinks anything of it. Another joke is that Wagner (thank God he is back) is in it as deep as I am and more — he is lunching with me today. He has been more unlucky than me because she owed him nearly a thousand dollars which the poor mutt lent to her — in my case it is only a hundred. When you infect a prima donna with Hollywood you get a fearfully explosive mixture. Another joke is that her coloured maid is after
Oscar in the same way — Oscar has a wife here and is absolutely terrified. We sneak in and out of our flat like burglars, and we never answer the door to knocks and all telephone calls are taken in as messages by the desk downstairs. I would never have believed such a state of affairs possible. But there is absolutely nothing for you to worry about. Busch knows all about it and is fearfully amused; nothing can come to any harm at all, thank God. When I resume this letter after lunch I many be able to add something, having talked it over with Wagner — we are lunching in the studio restaurant because that is the only place where we can feel safe; no one of course can get in here without an elaborate system of passes and so on.

“My sexual life has started again with a bang. I had a colossal wet dream last night and the night before — stupendous ones which made the hell of a mess over everything. But there is a very decided advantage about a manservant — I don’t have to bother at all, but just tell Oscar that I want clean pajamas; I had to buy a new set, in fact, which I
hope you will like when I get back to England. Oscar doesn’t darn socks very well, either — I have to buy a good many pairs just at present. But my money affairs are pretty nearly straight now. If I keep this job I ought to be able to send £30 or £40 a week home — some I will send to you and some to Lillian [his agent’s secretary, not his ex-lover]. I suppose by now your money affairs are straight enough, too. I think you ought to save money from now on if I send you £20 a week — but if you don’t manage it, it doesn’t matter. If anything extends my contract to the full 6 months I shall make some money at last. I told you when I came away that we wouldn’t do much more than break even if they fired me at the end of 8 weeks, and that is pretty nearly correct, you see. By the way, if you can without trouble, please send me a copy of ‘Born at Sea’ as printed in the N.-C.;

30 I suppose it is out by now. If you can’t do it easily, don’t worry; and try to keep another copy at

30. The London newspaper the News-Chronicle, which Cecil subscribed to at home.
home until I arrive. And will you try to pay Gladys what I owe her? I don’t know how much it is — about £5 I expect.

“Thursday morning. Still sitting in my office waiting for my blasted telephone to ring. But if they pay me a pound an hour working time for sitting still I suppose I can’t complain. Wagner was a scream yesterday at lunch. He is furious about N.G. and so is his wife — absolutely livid. Of course he feels responsible about it, and so he is in a way. They go back to New York on Saturday. I wish they would take her with them, but of course they can’t. Last night I went to the pictures with Busch and his wife — most deliciously quiet evening. They are a nice pair, and Busch still thinks I am the most wonderful man living. His wife doesn’t — I am not too popular with her, which isn’t surprising. But I am in such a state that I am glad of it. But in this town if a man doesn’t sleep with women habitually he at once gets the reputation of being homosexual. Everyone who is mentioned in conversation either lies with so-and-so or is ‘queer,’ as they put it. I don’t care if they say
it about me.

“I will finish this letter later. Perhaps I shall have got some sense out of Lubitsch by then.

“**Thursday afternoon.** Nothing doing. Busch and I have sat in this bloody office the whole bloody day with nothing happening. But I have earned another £11 so I don’t mind really. But soon I shall put my hand up Miss Sullivan’s dress and get my face slapped out of sheer boredom. Busch says he is beginning to suffer from flat-arse disease and dropped pelvic arches. Busch has managed to get hold of Lubitsch’s secretary and made love to her in a corner\(^3\) and she has said that she likes our scripts; that is quite half the battle, Busch says. I am just going to telephone for Oscar and my car and will go on writing while waiting for it.

“Sorry to go on boring you with this letter, but you will just have to put up with it for another ten minutes or so. I have been working at this money problem again. If only I got my contract extended

\(^{31}\) British slang for sweet-talking her
we shall have no money worries at all for a long time. We ought to be safe without any miracles until Christmas 1937, I think, so it would be well worth my staying here until June. But very likely before you read this you will have had my cable about it one way or the another.

“Now I am off to have tea with the Wagners.

“Lots of love, darling. Go on writing to me anyway — any letters arriving after I have left here will be carefully sent back, so don’t worry.  

“Sunday, Feb. 2nd 36

“Dearest,

“That blasted conference which is to settle my fate hasn’t happened yet. I don’t really mind, but it is trying to have to sit and wait for a telephone call all day long for a week. Actually I am making money, because I had a bet with Busch that it would be after last Wednesday (he bet it would be before) and he is paying me a dollar a day while we wait — 

32. CSF-K, 289, 29 January 1936
tomorrow it will be 5 dollars! And it may easily be another fortnight, honestly. Yesterday as I went in at 9:30 I met Lubitsch’s assistant, and he promised me faithfully that it was going to happen this morning. It didn’t happen.

“I asked Miss Sullivan and her cousin who is staying here to lunch yesterday, and just as we were sitting down, 2 p.m., in walked Peters!\(^{33}\) It was a surprise. He wouldn’t stay although I begged him to — he felt in the way, although he wasn’t at all — Miss Sullivan is as I described her, and her cousin is 50 with a daughter on the N.Y. stage. I am going to see him at the studio tomorrow, and am looking forward to it.

“And last night I saw the Wagners off to N.Y. — and very sorry to see them go. They were genuinely sorry to lose me, too, and Wagner was worried

\(^{33}\) A. D. Peters, Cecil’s agent for world-wide sales except U.S. Apparently Zeppo Marx was Cecil’s agent for Hollywood contracts, possibly in cooperation with Peters.
about what N.G. would do to me in his absence. He can’t believe I can look after myself. I shall be lonely without them; Collier and Busch are so wrapped up in their new brides that they are not too good company at present.

“Next Wednesday I shall send you £25 and Lillian £25, I hope, unless an accident intervenes. I suppose, if I stay on here, that ought to clear off any arrears you have incurred and put you quite straight (although I won’t be angry if it hasn’t). Well, if I stay on here, I shall try to send you £10 a week and Lillian £20 a week after that. I don’t expect you to live on the £10 a week, although you can try if you like. Draw on Lillian for the balance of what you want — I am doing it that way so as to save income tax next year. All this is if I stay here. If I don’t, I shall send you about £25 (besides next Wednesday’s money) about Feb 10th and no more (I’m sorry) until I reach home. We shall be all right, don’t worry. I have found out about ships from here to England. There aren’t very many of them, and they take a longish time. Probably I shall sail in the Lochkatrine (Hol-
land American Royal Mail Lines) on Feb 15 from L.A. and reach Liverpool on March 15th. On the other hand I may change my mind and come straight back the way I came to reach home before the end of Feb. Another line I many sail on is the East Asiatic Line, probably the S.S. Europa.

“Sunday evening. I have just got back from a lovely day. I took Miss Sullivan and her cousin to San Pedro (the U.S. naval base, about 30 miles south of here) and we went over an American battleship. It was blowing like mad (the first real wind since I got here) and I loved it. Our trip over the ship was just like the trip you and I made over the Nelson at Southend, do you remember?”

“It has rained like blazes for 2 or 3 days now, and the street drains are inadequate and every road has a rushing river down each side, as big as the Wye at Plynlimon. There are little wooden piers put out at each street corner from the pavement to enable pedestrians to cross the roads.

“I am really worried about my contract. I want to come home and be with you very much indeed (in
fact I am genuinely homesick) but now at last we are beginning to save a little money I think I want to stay so that it will have been worthwhile. It is silly to have gone through all this and not made anything out of it. I should like to last out for another 4 weeks or so, except if they do that without taking up my contract, I don’t know any day when I shall be sacked. That would be a nuisance – I told you Busch has been like that for 4 weeks now. But by the time you receive this letter I may have cabled to you one way or the other. I hope so.

“I almost forgot to mention that on Friday I received your letter of Jan 14th and was very glad to have it. You sound much happier and not so rushed – I am glad of it, and I am waiting for your rest to tell me about Robertson’s party. It is a shame that it has been so cold, although I have gloated over the thought of it when I have been in the sunshine here. I certainly chose the best time of year to come here – although I have seen a lot of rain here (and will until March, if I stay) and it has sometimes been cold enough for us to have a fire if we had been at
home. Do your best to enjoy yourself and have a good time while I am away — you will have to sober up again when your elderly and steady husband arrives home again. And lots of love, dearest.”

“Mon Feb 3rd
“Dearest,
“This is just a hurried note to supplement yesterday’s letter because your very nice letter of Jan 18th with your measurements has just arrived. I loved your letter, sweetheart, and it gave me very great pleasure. Please don’t worry about things, darling. It doesn’t make the littlest tiniest bit of difference, honestly and really. I am always glad when you want to sleep with me and when you are hot and passionate, but (you know I always say so, and I mean it every time) it doesn’t matter if you aren’t. We can always be a good husband and wife to each other without sleeping together. You know, sweetheart, we are easily the happiest couple in all our circle after

34. CSF-K, 290, 2 February 1936

654
all these years, so we manage well enough, don’t we. You have given me far more happiness in the last 12 years than ever I have dearest, and twelve years is a hell of a long time to be happy in. Don’t brood about it, darling; you will upset yourself if you do.

“That’s enough of lovemaking, because this is my last piece of paper. There! Before I put the full stop after ‘paper’ the telephone went with the news. I am fired. I have lost my job and can leave here next week. But I have just rung up my agent and he swears he can get me another job, as good as this one or better, and I have promised to take it if he can find one before the 8th, when this job ends. I don’t care whether I get a job or not. I want to come home to you, and I want the money also. And I don’t like the prospect of having to start in a new office and begin all over again, but I suppose I can put up with it. If I am coming home I shall cable; if I get a job I shall not send you any money after next Wednesday (5th) until the following payday, whenever that may be, so don’t worry if there is a gap in the cheques.

655
“Now I just want to say goodbye to you, sweet-heart, and I hope I am with you soon. If I am, please don’t bother about things — we shall always be all right together, darling. I am all excited at the prospect of coming home.

“Lots and lots of love, dearest.”

“Tues Feb 4th 1936

“Dearest,

“It was queer last night that the telephone went to tell me I was fired just at the very moment I was going to say in my letter (which I sent to you by air mail) what I was going to do if I was fired.

“Today I have got a few more details. Lubitsch is very sorry to lose me — really and truly, but as the Buccaneer won’t do (not my fault) there is no job for me at all; that’s all. I’m not especially to blame, and I’ve got nothing to reproach myself about. Peters (who is here) quite agrees. And I have given him until next Saturday or so to find me another job. But

35. CSF-K, 291, 3 February 1936
now I have worked myself up about coming home and I shall be sorry if he gets me one, although of course I shall take it if he does — I have promised him. If I come home it will be in the Loch Katrine (as I have already said) or in the French Line ship Wisconsin, leaving here Feb 14th, arriving at Havre Mar 12th. By the way, Peters is broke, so I have repaid him the loan he made to me in London; so I can’t make any promises about money after tomorrow’s £25. I am sending Lillian £25 too, tomorrow, so you can borrow back from her if necessary. I may send you one more cheque if I sail, but I may not. If I don’t sail, I shall miss a week, almost for certain. Peters and Mrs. Peters are dining with me in my flat on Thursday. Also Busch and Mrs. Busch — I haven’t got a woman for myself.

“I had a hell of a wet dream again last night — I dreamed that I was on top of you and that Mrs. Lamb kept lifting up your legs and crossing them over my behind.” 36 She would be pleased if she

36. Mrs. Lamb: the landlady at No. 36 Longton Ave.
knew. But it was a lovely dream despite Mrs. Lamb, and I was very much in love with you, sweetheart — and I still am. I want you very badly indeed, as well as just being lonely for you as I have been ever since I came away. Even if I said it will be 6 weeks before I see you — a month after you receive this letter, darling. Sweetheart, I don’t want to harp on the sexual side of things, but your letter worried me a bit and I had better write this. It does not make me unhappy if I don’t fuck you, although I am very glad when I can. I always understand, and you can please yourself about it without worrying. I mean that, very sincerely, dear; do believe me. And another thing. If you think it will make you happier when I come home buy yourself a whirling spray and a rubber pessary — I think that combination is quite safe — and learn how to use them before I come home. You might find that a bare cock is better for you; but I don’t want you to worry. Out here Mrs. Busch uses a marvellous apparatus — a rubber pessary with a germicide inside it. There is some kind of vulcanite forceps which puts it on for certain without trouble,
and another gadget which fills the pessary with germicide without taking it off. Busch swears that the whole outfit is magnificent; and if it is for sale here it ought to be for sale somewhere in England. Why not try and find out? Go to Marie Stopes again, if you think it is worth it and you have time.

“Wed Feb 5th. No news of a job yet, although Hornblow is doing his best to make one for me here. Almost for certain I shall be coming home; in the Wisconsin, in that case, in Havre on March 12th, I think. (I am not dead sure). There is a night steamer on Thursday from Havre to Southampton. In that case I shall be in London Waterloo at 10 A.M. on Friday 13th March. If you would care to, send George to Southend and John to Eve’s for the weekend so that we can be quite together — that is only a suggestion, of course. Do just what you like.

“I enclose a £25 draught, dear, and about for certain I shall send one more next week — I am sending one to Lillian by this mail, too. There is a good balance accumulated for me at Peters, because I have paid him off at this end so much.

659
“I haven’t mucked up my career here — all this office is very apologetic about firing me. Busch says he has never seen that before.

“Lots of love, sweetheart. I am just longing for you.”

“Friday, Feb 7th, 1936

“Dearest,

“This is all very difficult and tedious and exciting at the same time. Zeppo Marx (my agent) has telephoned to say 1. there may be a job for me at M.G.M. 2. or a job at Universal. 3. or that 20th Century-Fox want to buy the film rights of The General. Also I am halfway towards selling ‘The Gun’ to Paramount. So I still don’t know what is happening. But I have fixed a deadline. If there is nothing certain by Tuesday night, Feb 11th, I am going to sail on Friday anyway. Of course, what I should like best is to sell ‘The Gun’ and ‘The General’ and come home. We could be in clover then. Naturally you will know

37. CSF-K, 292, 4 February 1936
about what I am doing long before this reaches you because I shall cable, but at the moment of writing I am very deeply involved and worried about it all — my job ends tomorrow, you see. So you will have to put up with the tedium of this letter, sweetheart, just because it enables me to blow off steam about my uncertain future.

“And that isn’t all. This morning I had a letter from another lawyer about N.G. — you remember how I wrote that the last one refused to do anything for her. I telephoned him and he was out.

“I shall try again, tomorrow. As long as she only finds honest lawyers I am all right; what worries me is if she comes across one who wants to exploit her. He might start some silly case (although I can’t imagine what sort of case — but the laws are funny in the U.S.A. — especially Hollywood) and cause me a good deal of trouble and worry; nothing else, of course, but that would be enough. In fact, what is worrying me most is the thought that if there was a suit pending I shouldn’t be allowed to leave this country. So if you hear that I have to delay my
return it may be for that reason and not because of a new job. But I don’t think so. If anything like that happens I shall go over the border by car to Mexico and work home that way — this is all silly, of course, and it won’t happen, but it is the way my mind is working at present with nothing to do except worry about not getting home.

“\[\text{I am sorry about your suit, sweetheart. I went out yesterday to order it, and they couldn’t promise me that it would be ready next Thursday. So I had to buy a ready made one. It is a lovely suit, but you will have to alter the trousers of it. I am so sorry, darling. It isn’t my fault. I only received your measurements on Monday and I wanted to have a woman help me buy it and as no woman I knew was free — even yesterday I had to do it myself. But it is a lovely suit, as I said — red blouse and yellow scarf and blue trousers (does that sound awful? It is fine, as a matter of fact) made of a kind of silk called ‘shark’s skin’ out here. I patted the seat of the trousers an wished your jolly little arse was inside. If I get another job I will send this one to you and be}\]
extravagant and buy you another made to your measure — I have kept that.

“Saturday morn. 8th Feb. This is my last day at Paramount — I am just going down there to draw my final 1/2 week’s pay and settle about my passage home — if I go. I am congratulating myself now that I have only to wait until Tuesday night to be quite sure. This morning’s paper announces a ship leaving here for England at 5 P.M. today — I very nearly made up my mind to take it, which would get me home right on the heels of this letter, but I have promised Marx that I won’t let him down and so I have got to wait for the next ship — next Friday. I am in a pitiable state today, what with one thing and another. But last Thursday I had a good dinner party — 2 Peters and 2 Buschs. It was a fine dinner, including roast duck; as a matter of fact it was the best meal I have had in the U.S.A. Mrs. Peters still looks very ill and worn; but at the same time she appeared to me to be wildly extravagant. Just like Hollywood. I don’t like that in my agent’s wife. I will finish this letter later.
“Sat. aft. Your letter of Jan 23rd was at the office when I arrived. I was so glad to have it, dear — and you need not worry about your subsequent letters because Miss Sullivan will look after them for me all right, whether I am here or not. I wish I knew which — but only two days to wait now. I have settled up everything with Paramount, and I have provisionally taken passage in the French Line ‘Wisconsin,’ sailing Feb 14th, arriving Havre Mar 12th. I can cancel it if M.G.M. makes me a good offer, and I hope I do. I was surprised by what you said in your letter about Dolin. I thought he was a rotten dancer the last time I saw him, when I was at Brighton a year ago. I suppose he is a woman’s choice.

“If I sail, I will send you a draft for £25 almost for certain the day I leave, and I hope to arrive in England with about £30. But we needn’t worry about money. There will be plenty in the bank or at Peters when I get home — and I may sell those film rights and I am taking it for granted that you are all right for money now. But borrow if you want any before I arrive. I don’t want you to worry. At least I
haven’t any more to say, sweetheart. These long letters all about my out of date affairs must be a bore to you when you have to read them. But lots of love, darling.”

“Mon Feb 10th 1936
“Dearest,

“These periods of uncertainty will end soon, I hope. I am just writing these few lines while Oscar is getting my lunch ready; I have spent the morning reading up Parnell in the public library, because this afternoon I am going to M.G.M. to discuss writing a film for them. I haven’t any idea whether anything will come of it. The important point is that if I do it I shall have to pay my own fare home – M.G.M. never pays fares. As long as it is settled one way or the other I shall be happy, as I am really upset with all the uncertainty — and Miss N.G. will worry me into my grave before she is finished.

“Yesterday I went to see some polo — England

38. CSF-K, 293, 7 February 1936
and California — with Busch. It was one of the finest
games ever played, so Busch said, and he has played
for years, and incidentally the cheapest afternoon I
have spent here — two shillings. It was lovely, and
the sun was just warm enough to do without an over-
coat, sitting in the open from 2:15 to 4:15.

“Three New Statesmans arrived this morning.
Thank you very much, dear. I am not going to look
at them until I know more about the future — they
may be invaluable on my 4 week’s voyage home.

“About 3 hours from now and I shall know
about M.G.M. — I may be cabling to you tonight to
say I am staying on. On the other hand if M.G.M.
don’t want to pay my terms I shall have to wait until
Wednesday before cabling. I will go on with this let-
ter on my return.

“Just back. I have seen Stahl, and partly settled
it — he is sending me the script of the play to see it. I
like it. Stahl is one of the great men of the screen,
the man who did Back Street and Magnificent
Obsession, and he is a very nice man indeed (at first
sight anyway). I think I have got the job, although of

666
course we have still got to haggle over money; I have
got to make enough to save my passage home, you
see. That means that I must ask 500 dollars a week
for a guaranteed six weeks, as minimum terms. It is
a very big salary, and I may not get it. But it will be
settled by tomorrow, I think. If I get the job, I shall
have to move from here — M.G.M. is 20 miles away.

“Today I have been to Zeppo Marx and then to
M.G.M. That is like driving from Longton Ave to
Hampstead and from Hampstead to Dorking and
back. These distances are inconceivable until you
live here and see for yourself. I shall have to live in
Beverly Hills, where all the ‘big shots’ (that is what
Oscar calls them) live — but there are some reason-
ably cheap apartment houses (i.e. blocks of flats)
there, too. Please God I cable you tomorrow night
one way or the other. And I am lunching with Horn-
blow on Wednesday to try and sell him ‘The Gun.”
And 20th Century-Fox are cabling back and forth
about ‘The General’ — something doing there, too.

“Tues. aft. It is hard for me to write sensibly
now — in fact my hands are shaking a little with agi-
tion. Three things typically Hollywood have happened.

1. M.G.M. haven’t sent the script they promised to let me have last night!

2. The man who was going to buy my car if I go hasn’t turned up. (I should have had to put him off anyway because of M.G.M.)

3. Worst of all. Really nasty. N.G.’s solicitor has just telephoned to me accusing me of making her pregnant!

“Please believe me, dear, when I promise you there is nothing in it at all. She may be pregnant for all I know, but it wasn’t me. I suspect however that it is just a lie to make trouble, but that sort of trouble is really serious in U.S.A. I have put him off until Saturday. That means I can throw up my chance of a job with M.G.M. and get out of the country. It sounds cowardly, but I have had so much bother and trouble since I have arrived here that I can’t stand much more. Affiliation [paternity finding] in U.S.A. means a lot more than 10/- a week for 14 years. It means damages and hell to pay. Prison in
some states, in fact, but not here, which is a slight comfort. The girl is mad, really mad, and as dangerous as dynamite. I am honestly worried to death about it. I have got to make up my mind tomorrow morning what I am going to do. If I don’t get the M.G.M. job well and good. I shall clear out and thank God — unless they stop me in the Panama Canal. If I do get it I shall have to make up my mind whether to stop and face the music or not.

“As a matter of fact I have now made up my mind — which was what I hoped when I started writing to you. I am going to M.G.M. to try and get the job, and to hell with N.G. She can do her worst, and if I end up in gaol [jail] it will be just one more experience, at any rate, it will be something permanent, which I haven’t experienced since I left England. If I don’t get the job, all right. I have to say tomorrow morning, you see, about confirming my booking of my passage home.

“I am much calmer and happier now, thank God. It was such a hell of a shock when it first came. Perhaps it is hard for you to realize how unpleasant
such a business is when you are alone in a country whose legal processes are so queer. It absolutely knocked me over at first. I shall be ever so glad to get comfortably home again where things do not happen quite so frequently. Of course you will know by the time you read this what I have decided upon — or rather what has been decided for me.

“Lots of love, darling, although this is such a distracted letter.”

“Wed, 12th Feb

“Dearest,

“I have booked my passage now — I shall call to you tonight. I am sailing in the Margaret Johnson of the Scandinavian Johnson Line — I expect they have an agency in London; look up Johnson Line in the telephone book and ring them up and they will tell you about the ship. It comes to London, so would you please send the car to meet me at the docks —

39. CSF-K, 294, 10 February 1936

670
don’t bother to come yourself. Send Phyllis, as it will be a nasty difficult drive, I expect. I am so excited about it. If there is no one to meet me when I arrive, I shall telephone F.H. 3364. The date of arrival is Monday March 16th — less than 5 weeks from now. Before I arrive letters will be arriving sent back from Hollywood — don’t worry about them; just save them up until I come.

“A nice letter from you dated Jan 29th came last night here with a photograph — it acknowledged my letters from Palm Springs.

“I didn’t lose my job at Paramount through incompetence; I have been meaning to write this to you for some days and have forgotten each time. The week I left them Lubitsch went out on his ear (5000 dolls. a week!) and everyone of his selections went out too. That is why I went — it was bad luck that my contract expired just at that moment, but I would have gone anyway as soon as they could put me out, I think. As for M.G.M., they haven’t sent that script yet, and it was due last Monday, so I rang up Stahl and we had a row. I couldn’t keep my tem-
per. I had been confined to this blasted flat for 48 hours waiting for it to come and be read that minute, as is Hollywood’s way. Busch tells me he is always like that, six weeks of it would drive me mad, so it is just as well that I am out of it — of course. I hadn’t yet had the job offered to me.

“I shall send you a draft for £25 tomorrow, and that is the last you will hear from me until March 16th. I love you lots and lots, darling.”

“Thursday 13 Feb 36
“Dearest,
“This is the last letter I shall be writing to you in this absence, dear and I shall be home less than three weeks after you receive it. I enclose a draft for £25 which will also be the last money you will receive until I get home. I sent you off a cable last night — I hope it arrived at a convenient time; I tried to work it out but the sum was so complicated that I gave it up in the end.

40. CSF-K, 295, 12 February 1936
“It has just stopped raining here, having rained without stop since Monday — 3 days, at well over an inch a day — yesterday we had 2-1/2 inches! The roads were just like rivers, and the floods washed a lot of rock — pebbles as big as bricks — down from the mountains and the roads are full of them. What with my trouble with M.G.M. on Wednesday and the rain, and a sore throat (I have my first bad cold at last — everyone I know has had one). I have had a bad few days. I was nearly all day yesterday settling up with Paramount. Today I have been all morning at the income tax people, and that is not yet settled. I haven’t got my sailing permit yet, but have to get it tomorrow. I hope it is ready then. A good thing I hadn’t arranged to sail on Friday, as I thought I was going to. The Wisconsin and the Margaret Johnson sail the same day, but the M.J. comes all the way to London, and people say she is the more comfortable ship, so I am taking her. She is the ship Greta Garbo always chooses to go back to Sweden in, so she ought to be all right. But I don’t care a damn about anything. As long as I get my sailing permit, and the
police don’t pick me up for seduction (?!?) so that I get away safely, I don’t care. I’m coming home and I’m simply silly with pleasure. I know I have done the right thing. I would have come straight back via N.Y. and been home by Feb 23rd, but I know that afterwards I would always regret missing Central America, so I am doing the other thing. Four weeks in a ship! I have just bought an armful of books to read — but I shall use them all up, of course. We have 14 days out of sight of land from America to England. It will be boring but nice, and I may do a bit of work if my nerves let me — they are all of a jitter at present. I am a cross at the moment between an Anglo Indian colonial and an old maid — in a terrible state. We call at San Jose de Guatemala (perhaps) San Salvador (perhaps) Balboa (Panama Canal) and Puerto Colombia. We shall be just leaving the canal when you get this letter. Leslie Waring will be able to tell you the movements of the ship — ring up Gladys and ask her.”

41. CSF-K, 296, 13 February 1936

674
"14°N 97°W (Look that up in the Atlas)

"I am writing this to you and will air mail it off at our first stop in the hope that it will reach you before I do, dear, and then we won’t be quite such strangers when we meet. So far this is the 6th day of the voyage and we are well in the tropics — it gives you an idea of how long the coast of Mexico is when you think that every day for 6 days we have travelled a distance equal to the whole Channel from Land’s [End] to the N. Foreland.

"This ship is quite good — very Swedish indeed. Stewards and officers can’t talk English, and there is a stewardess to scrub your back in the bath — but she hasn’t tried with the English people; she has learned that, anyway. The food and the bread are Swedish (do you remember the Swedish consul at Rouen?) and keep my bowels very well open. It is terribly hot, but they have a packing case on deck with a tarpaulin full of sea water, and I spend all the time in there. But it is too hot at night to sleep.

"There are 9 passengers — two other English-
men (one a very bad hat indeed) and a U.S.A. judge and his wife and a Swedish judge (a nice old boy who acts as interpreter for us) and a Danish ... and a Swedish couple, much too fat and heavy, but only about 30. He fucks her (please forgive the language) every afternoon very noisily so that all the ship can hear, and he sits all day with his hand on her breasts or up her dress, and her hand in his trousers — Taylor (one of the Englishmen) says they can’t possibly be married.

“This ship calls at Plymouth for a few hours. I shall telephone to you there, dear (and I am very excited about it). If you like you might join us there and come round to London; but only if you are sure that it won’t tire you to settle the kids and so on, and I don’t know that the Channel in March is very attractive. If you would like to do it I should love to have you (you could share my cabin) but I don’t want you to be too rushed the very minute I get back. Do just as you like about it, sweetheart, but bear in mind if you came that I have no birth control apparatus here at all. I love you very much.
“Every minute I am rejoicing at having got away from Hollywood, and realizing how much I hated my life there. I should enjoy this voyage even if it were a hellship, and it certainly isn’t that. I can’t sleep at night – partly nerves and partly heat – but I don’t care.

“I was very out of condition when I left Hollywood, and so I am conscientiously walking all day and doing exercises, to get straight again. I am quite worn out each evening, and I am ever so happy to be coming home. Tomorrow we start calling in Central America. We have about 5 calls on the Pacific Coast and 2 on the Atlantic, but they are very problematical and depend upon orders. The towns will be like furnaces – very dirty, but I shall land and do all the sightseeing I can and it would be silly to waste it.

“I love you so much, darling. I am simply longing to be with you again, and I want you to be happy to have me back. I am afraid you may find me dull after your lively times while I was away, but there will be no reason at all why you shouldn’t continue to go out with Gordon and so on after I get back. I
should like you to — if he isn’t too afraid of me to ask.

“The voyage ends probably at Tilbury or Royal Albert Docks. Don’t bother to come for me or to send the car unless it is very convenient. If it is Tilbury and you come, come to Gravesend. I will come across on the ferry. But make quite sure that I hear from you saying what you are doing — I will telephone as soon as I land, and if you don’t come I will get to Fenchurch St. and you can send the car to pick me up there.

“There isn’t anything more for me to say, darling, except again that I love you very dearly indeed and that I want you to be happy — as long as you are happy I haven’t a care in the world. Heaps and heaps and heaps of love, sweetheart, and a lot of kisses.

“P.S. Last night as I finished this letter, we ran into a circular storm — real ‘China Seas’ weather. We were thrown about like anything, and I never felt such a wind before. This ship rolls like mad; half the crew were sick and all the passengers but me. We
are still trying to get into Champerico — have been trying for hours now. P.P.S. Don’t be too jealous of this voyage of mine, sweetheart — I had nine weeks of hell first.”

In her notes, Kathleen remarked about Nannette Guildford: “There was more in that affair than C wrote about. … The journey in the Margaret Johnson started off the idea for all the Hornblower books; so we should be grateful for … the scare of N.G. which sent him home in a hurry.”

In later years Cecil told and published rather different stories about his experiences in Hollywood. Some were told repeatedly to his circle of friends; at least one was told to me for my special benefit.

One set of stories concerned the number of trips that he made to Hollywood. He said that because Hollywood paid so well he could live well

42. CSF-K, 297 approx 20 February 1936
in England by working there only six weeks a year. Therefore, he did so for several years in a kind of annual commute.

“I first came over as a result of Charles Laughton playing in Payment Deferred. Sometimes I did the oddest things. In those years, just as the talkies were superseding the silent films, there was a shortage of stars who could say their lines well, or even remember them. One job I had was to stand beside the set inventing lines that were easier to say and remember than those in the script, but which would advance the story in the same way.” (The talkie revolution occurred began in October, 1927, and within a year all pictures were talkies.)

The impression of repeated trips to Hollywood was amplified by a tale about his trips across the country by train. On one westbound trip he was accosted in the club car by a group of businessmen who were traveling from Chicago to Kansas City. They commented to this obvious Englishman that Kansas City was the last civilized point before the west began.
“At Kansas City the guards board the train, and set up machine guns on the platforms at the end of each car to keep the Indians away.”

“Oh, really? Is it dangerous out West?”

“Not really, unless the Indians have blocked the track. They usually just ride along beside the train shooting arrows at the windows.” This fantasy was kept up until the businessmen prepared to leave the train. Then Cecil, in taking leave of them, said, “It was pleasant to talk to you on this trip. And I must compliment you. Your vivid descriptions of Western life would do credit to professional authors. You have almost convinced me that this country has changed most violently since I last made this trip a year ago.”

I believed these stories. I could remember that he went to Hollywood when I was six, and that he went to America again when I was eight (although I did not know that then he did not go to Hollywood). The context of the stories, particularly the ones about the conversion from silents to talkies and the reference to Laughton’s starring in the stage play of
*Payment Deferred*, misled me into believing that the other trips had been made in the years that I was too young to remember.

Cecil published one paragraph ostensibly describing his experience in Hollywood as one part of *Some Personal Notes*. It appears there because his departure from Hollywood sparked the creation of Captain Horatio Hornblower. *Some Personal Notes* was published as the second parts of both *The Hornblower Companion* and *Long Before Forty*.

“The final crisis was personal to me. After going along from one job to another (in Hollywood) I found myself engaged by Irving Thalberg — perhaps the most prominent Hollywood personality at that time — to work on a screen play about Charles Stewart Parnell. No two people on earth, perhaps, were less suited to work together than Thalberg and me; and perhaps the spirit of Parnell did nothing to soften any personal difficulties. Then, idly, I noticed the announcement of the sailing next day from San Pedro of the Swedish ship *Margaret Johnson*, of the Johnson line, with freight and passengers for Cen-
tral American ports, the Panama Canal, and England. An idle reading, perhaps, but it brought about an immediate change. There was the instant realization that I wanted no more of Hollywood, that I never wanted to work under instruction again, that I wanted my freedom, that I was passionately anxious to see England once more. But this was the moment for action. Within the hour I was a free man, having tendered my resignation comfortably ahead of dismissal.”

In conversation Cecil embroidered on this fiction by saying that he often went to dinner at Thalberg’s house atop the Hollywood Hills, where Mrs. Thalberg, the actress Norma Shearer, was the charming hostess. However, to an Englishman, the dinners were not first rate. “Everything served hot was cold by the time you came to eat it. They insisted on eating from their famous gold plates, solid gold they were, but they conducted heat like Hell. Nice enough people, the nicest in Hollywood,

43. *Hornblower Companion* p 84; LBF p 190
but still afflicted with the Hollywood disease of conspicuous consumption.”

Cecil also told a story of spending a weekend at Hearst’s Castle, by command of William Randolph Hearst himself. You may be familiar with Aldous Huxley’s strange description of a weekend with Hearst; the imperious, far-distant command, the night train to San Luis Obispo, being met by a Hearst car, the weekend in lonely luxury, with the commanded presence at Saturday dinner the only required activity, and the only one in which Hearst himself took part, followed by the same impersonal dismissal and return. Naively, I used to tell people, “Oh yes, Huxley’s description is quite close to the truth. My father went there, too, in just the same way.”

Cecil always expressed an undying hatred for Hollywood and its ways, and he used that viewpoint to instruct me to be miserly with money. He complained to me of how extravagant Hollywood people were.

“A man who has been earning $5,000 a week
doesn’t have his option taken up one Friday, and by the following Friday you see him trying to sell his wife’s mink coat. That’s why I won’t stay in Hollywood for more than six weeks. I did once. As I said, it’s like a disease, it creeps up on you without warning. I wanted an eight-millimeter projector once, and told my secretary to have some salesmen call. They came, and talked about their machines and demonstrated them, showing off all their good points and attachments. Once it was over, I realized I didn’t give a damn what the prices were. It was a severe shock to realize that the disease was creeping up on me, like that. I ordered the cheapest and made plans to return to England again.”

We indeed had a movie projector, two of them in fact. The first was purchased in Europe for British voltage when Kathleen bought her German Nizo movie camera in 1936. The second was a cheap Keystone for use in America, but it was probably purchased by Kathleen in Berkeley in 1940.

All of these stories are false. The letters give the only correct account of Cecil’s one trip to Holly-
wood before World War II. Only when I was able to read these letters did I realize that this was his first time in America.

The letters describe what is obviously a first trip. Kathleen’s notes confirm this by calling this the first trip to America. Since he wrote practically every day, all his time is accounted for. He worked for only one film studio and worked on only one film, the cancelled *Buccaneer*. He neither met nor worked for Thalberg, he never worked on a script about Parnell, or went to Hearst’s Castle, or even ordered a movie projector. While he had been dithering for several weeks about the route he would take to return to England, the threat from Nanette Guilford caused him to go immediately by a route outside the jurisdiction of the sheriff.

While there is no direct evidence for the basis of her complaint, there is some indirect evidence. She spent the weekend at Lake Norconian with him and the Wagners. Somehow, there was a fourth at dinner in Palm Springs, added to the two Buschs and the one Forester whom we know were there. It
was entirely in Cecil’s character, as evidenced both by his previous letters and his behavior at other times, to have tried to seduce her. However, she was not one of the meek suburban women that Cecil had been toying with in England; she had a powerful personality and a position to match. She was not as prominent a singer as Cecil made out, but she had sung a few leading roles for the New York Metropolitan Opera in the years 1928-32. She may have been fading when Cecil met her. Perhaps the only basis of her complaint was that Cecil had courted her, lied to her, and jilted her; on the other hand, her conduct may have given her real reason to fear a pregnancy. Whatever reason she had, she made the most of it.

One can understand concealing the affair with Nannette Guilford, even when writing The Hornblower Companion in 1964. However, the rest of the

44. Her career was listed in a musical dictionary, but she does not appear in the New Groves Musicians or the New Groves Opera.
lies are just typical of Cecil’s way of life. He invented stories to promote any program that would benefit himself, whether it was merely inflating his reputation in the eyes of others, be they the general public or specific individuals from whom he expected favors, or convincing his son to be miserly with money and feel guilty about asking him for it.

Cecil’s complaint about both the high wages and the high prices he had to pay do not indicate a complete ignorance of economics. The British government insisted on pegging the pound sterling at five dollars, when in reality it was worth only half of that. The whole nation ended up injured by that foolishness. However, the inflations during Cecil’s adult years in France, and even more so in Germany, should have taught Cecil something, and he had written in Payment Deferred that William Marble had made his fortune in foreign exchange.

For one who complained so much about the prices, particularly given his expected short stay and his desire to send money home, Cecil certainly did
not economize. He started with a new, or nearly new, car, a luxury apartment, and a manservant/chauffeur. He could not look after himself; either he could not bring himself to do so, or he did not have the ability and wouldn’t learn. In fact, he was helpless when facing modern living; somebody had always looked after him. Perhaps his constant complaints then and later about Hollywood’s money values were a psychological balm for the guilt of spending so much while he was there.

Niven Busch obviously developed an admiration for Cecil, and particularly admired *The Gun*. His admiration may have been aided by the war stories that Cecil told Niven. Cecil told Niven, at this time or later, that during World War I he had been a subaltern (2nd. Lt.) in the British Army, serving as a courier on horseback between division headquarters and the front trenches. Busch admired Cecil’s writing style and professional ease of writing, and in later years would read something of Cecil’s when in need of inspiration for style.45

As a result of Cecil’s feelings about Hollywood,
I was prohibited from seeing movies. At an age when my friends went frequently, I was never allowed to, lest it corrupt my soul. Somehow, in my first ten years, I did see one movie as part of some school outing, some paltry thing about fools stranded on a tropical island. On the other hand, I was given box seats at two London revues that Father was part author of. I remember the title of only one: *Best Foot Forward*. Apparently such revues were much less likely to corrode my soul.

The return passage incident illustrates one other typically Forester characteristic, Cecil’s habit of planning (or shall we say confusing) six or seven different plans simultaneously. He had the additional ability of describing these plans in such words that you couldn’t tell what he really meant to do, or even what he wants to do. This trait was evident in the earliest letters, but here it is obvious. He could have been returning in the *Europa*, the *Wisconsin*, or by train via New York, or he could have been

45. Conversation, JF with Busch, 4 December 1985
remaining in Hollywood. He could have been arriv-
ing at le Havre in France, by ferry and train from le Havre, at Tilbury Dock, at the Royal Albert Dock, have been waiting to be picked up by car at the dock, or at Fenchurch Street station, or in Gra-
vesend after taking the ferry over on foot. In the end he came in the Margaret Johnson, a completely differ-
ent ship that he had never listed before. As Kathleen remarked of this habit of his: “Oh, we finally gave up trying to understand what your Father was going to do. I made up my mind to do what I thought would be best, and after that I didn’t worry whether his plans and mine would coincide. If they did, that was all right. If not, we had done our best and it wasn’t my fault.”

The voyage produced, by chance, the largest result in Cecil’s literary career: the creation of Cap-
tain Horatio Hornblower, Lieutenant Bush and Lady Barbara Wellesley in the The Happy Return [in the U.S.A., Beat To Quarters], the first of the Horn-
blower books. In Some Personal Notes Cecil tells the story of his creation of Hornblower, probably fairly
accurately, although he forgets to mention his childhood-long coaching in Napoleonic strategy and tactics. He also conceals that his mind had been filled with tales of pirates and pirate ships in the Caribbean and Central America, and that his colleagues had been Arthur Hornblow and Niven Busch, that Barbara Sutro was another passenger on the Margaret Johnson, and that he used their names in the new novel. Even though he is now C. S. Forester, the same desire to fabricate stories to conceal the personal truth continues.
Upon his return to England in the spring of 1936, Father bought me my first bicycle and taught me to ride. The garden of Number 36 was a long narrow lawn sloping away from the house toward the park, bordered on each side by herbaceous borders and at the end by rose bushes. Father held the bicycle steady at the top of the lawn while I mounted, then ran beside me as I coasted down, catching me as I inevitably fell over. Once I could coast down, he taught me how to turn round at the bottom and pedal up. I learned a lot about the prickliness of rose bushes before I acquired the skill. Finally, and a
great day it was, I could make a complete circuit of the lawn, riding round and round without falling down. From then on I was allowed to ride in the park and on the streets around it.

That year, as I remember, I finally went to school. I had not started with the other children my age because Father had submitted a certificate stating that I was being taught at home, which sufficed for the first year. Perhaps I was — but if so I don’t remember it. I do remember my first day at school. Mother walked me down to the Rowland Grove School, and left me there in an established class. All the other children were already there, sitting in rows and reading and writing on the blackboard. Oh, yes, I knew my letters and the sounds they made, so the teacher asked me if I could read what was on the board. But I did not recognize those letters — I knew only block capitals.

“That’s a T, but I don’t know the rest.”

“T, H, E,” the teacher pointed them out. “Now say the word.”

“Tehe,” I said, not knowing how ‘th’ was pro-
nounced.

One day that summer I found Father sitting on the first steps near the front door writing in his checkbook. “There, John, that is the last rent we pay here. Next month we move to a new house, a whole house to ourselves. Won’t that be fine?” He got up and carried the check into Mr. Lamb’s apartment. We moved down Longton Avenue to Number 7, across the street from one of the park gates. It was indeed a complete house to ourselves.

There was a study for Father at the ground floor front, and a dining room, kitchen, laundry, and sitting room. Upstairs were more bedrooms than I remember. Built out from the entire back of the house was an enormous glass greenhouse (conservatory) that reached up almost to the second story windows, equipped with its own steam heating system which turned one corner into a fantasy ship’s boiler room. Behind the greenhouse was the rest of the garden, a lawn just large enough for flying toy airplanes, surrounded by dark laurel bushes. For all of that, No. 7 did not have a garage. We rented one
just around the corner in Taylor Lane.

The upstairs passageway was lighted by a window at its dead end, past the last doors that it served. In that six feet or so of unused passageway I built my first model city. The Quaker Oats Company printed model houses and other municipal objects on their cereal boxes, to be cut out and constructed. With these were coupons for larger printed items, such as plans of city blocks on which to mount the houses. I developed the whole city, eating lots of Puffed Wheat and Puffed Rice in the process. I did it all myself, starting to develop skills that have served me well ever since, for both business and pleasure.

Starting behind in school did not hinder me, for by January, 1937, I was reading my first novel, the proofs of *The Happy Return*, and in May I read the first newspaper article that I remember, the report of the burning of the airship *Hindenburg*. I remember that one man burst his way through the burning wreckage by bending the hot aluminum with his bare hands. I suppose that is why I am not
nearly so famous a man as my father — he learned to read with Suetonius and Tacitus, while I learned from C. S. Forester and newspapers.

For me to read the proofs, Father had first to write the book. *The Happy Return* was written over the summer of 1936, in part at Number 36, in part at Number 7. Cecil had first thought of the plot during the *Margaret Johnson*’s calls at Central American ports, and had developed it during the remainder of the voyage. The first port of call was La Union on the Gulf of Fonseca. The opening to the gulf is between a pair of volcanoes, and there are several islands near its mouth, just as Hornblower finds them in the opening pages. Because other ships were using the piers, the *Margaret Johnson* had to wait. The captain took the opportunity to test the lifeboats, including a run with the motor lifeboat. Cecil and the first mate sailed it around the Gulf just for the pleasure of the trip. That location provided the first idea for the plot of *The Happy Return*. By the time the ship reached England, Cecil had the plot firmly in mind.
Hornblower’s character combined the character of Albert Brown with the situation of Matthew Dodd, and adds something more. Like Brown, Horatio Hornblower is the professional naval man with sufficient grasp of both the tactical and strategic aspects of his profession to recognize and seize appropriate opportunities. However, he is not in Brown’s situation, for as a frigate captain on detached service he could reasonably expect, if the opportunity arose, to leave his mark on history. His situation, like Matthew Dodd’s, nullifies his brilliant (or at least, supremely professional) actions. Whatever Hornblower accomplished, either in the naval or amatory realms, is cancelled by history itself — real history in the case of the naval affairs, fictional history of Lady Barbara and Maria in the case of the amatory.

The something more Cecil added is the reason for Hornblower’s popularity, not only with the public but with his author. There is no doubt that Cecil genuinely liked Hornblower. Time after time he “wrote the last Hornblower,” only to discover a fresh
Hornblower plot growing within his mind. Reviewers have given three general reasons for the popularity of the Hornblower books: exciting action, technical accuracy, and Hornblower’s humanly interesting character. Reviewers have felt that avoiding the superman in describing a successful naval hero was a real mark of Cecil’s skill. Perhaps it was, but there is more to it than that. Cecil, all his life, and you have read enough already to see, presented himself as a man of reason and knowledge, kindness and equability. He succeeded in this. He could advance good reasons for whatever he had done, and whatever he wanted you to do for him. He knew such a multitude of obscure facts in different subjects that one didn’t question whether he understood those subjects or had just picked up the facts willy-nilly. Even though some of his actions were unkind, he cloaked them with an appearance of kindness, and was quite willing to ascribe his kindness as the motivation of things that had never happened — provided his listener was not in a position to know that. Equability was a natural result of such
balancing of justice and kindness — one naturally ascribed it to him upon perceiving the other virtues. If indeed this picture were true, it would have been a mark of real literary skill to have invented the character of Hornblower, one so admirable yet made human by his own doubts, self-consciousness, and the self-recognition of the sources of his own desires. In point of fact, as you have also been given the chance to see, it was the other way round. Those aspects of Hornblower’s character which prevented him from being a superman were Cecil’s own; those virtues which lifted him above the ordinary were those Cecil attempted to arrogate to himself. In short, Hornblower was what Cecil wished himself to be, had he the character and ability to be so. Cecil later recognized this to a degree. He writes in *Some Personal Notes*, “Yet of course in making Hornblower a mathematician I was indulging in shameless wish fulfillment, but it is only today (1963), while writing these lines, that I realize it.”¹ But he allows himself a

1. *LBF* p 196
few pages later to comment upon the results of Hornblower’s second marriage in the revealing words “married at last to his Barbara, whom he respected and whom he would come as near to loving as his limited capacity would ever allow,”\textsuperscript{2} without wondering to what extent these words applied to his own situation. In the same way, Hornblower was an enthusiastic and intellectual whist player, while Cecil, one hundred and twenty years later, played its developed form of contract bridge enthusiastically and intelligently; both Cecil and Hornblower admired Gibbon’s presentation of the ironies of history, though Cecil added a few more recent ones in his fictional histories. Cecil argues in \textit{Some Personal Notes} that Hornblower’s character was determined by the plot; that only such a character could perform the actions required by the plot. However, character guides plot just as much as plot forms character. The fact remains that for \textit{The Happy Return} Cecil created a character who was very like what Cecil wished to

\textsuperscript{2} LBF p 215

701
be had he the courage and ability to be him. In that sense, with the creation of Hornblower, Cecil graduated from writing about his past to writing about his dreams.

The plot of *The Happy Return* is that of the exceedingly competent but self-critical British naval captain on detached service in the Napoleonic wars who carries out his instructions perfectly but achieves no results. He first captures a superior enemy ship for use by Britain’s ally against Britain’s enemy, then fights and sinks that ship when the allies and enemies change sides. Simultaneously, he attracts the love of a titled lady but cannot even express his love in return because he is of lower rank and is already married. His return from detached service does not even produce the pleasure that Dodd had in rejoining the Rifles and eating his bread and salt next to the camp fire. Supreme achievement, but no reward, just as in Cecil’s other books.

Some time after the completion of *The Happy Return* Cecil received the proofs for correction. He
received bound proofs, already paged and glued together like a paperback book, enclosed in a yellow, stiff paper cover. I found him with three of these spread out on the dining room table, trying to keep all open by resting other books upon the margins of the pages. He was marking the books with his pen, a desecration I had never seen him commit before. In our house, you never made marks in books; they were too precious, and many belonged to the library. As he turned the pages of the books, they turned their pages back themselves.

“What are you doing, Father? Can I hold these?”

“I’m correcting them. I have to mark them exactly alike. Here, hold this one while I correct that one.”

“What made them wrong?”

“These are the books you see me write at my desk. The printer has made these proofs and sent them back to me so I can see if he has done it correctly. I have to mark the mistakes and send him a copy back to he can correct the type.”
I looked at the word he was correcting. He underlined the word ‘Lydia.’

“Do you want a line under it?”

“No. That tells the printer to use italics, letters slanted like these.” He pointed out Natividad on the same page.

“That’s funny writing. Why is it like that?”

“These are the names of ships, and they are always written in either italics or capital letters. I like italics better.”

“Is this a book about ships?”

“Yes, it is. Here, don’t lose that page until I have finished.” There were not many mistakes. When he had finished I asked if I could read one.

“Not one of these. These are too precious now. But I have one more copy you may read.” He picked up the three copies and took them to his study. From his desk he handed me a fourth just like them. “Now run along. I have other work to do.”

That morning I opened the first pages, reading about a sea captain taking his bath, looking at his tummy in the mirror because he was starting to get
fat, tapping the weevils out of his breakfast hard-tack, and impatiently trying to finish his breakfast slowly because the lookout has hailed “Land Ho!” and he doesn’t want his men to see him in a hurry. Now I realize that I was probably the first of millions of Hornblower fans, but that morning there was nothing unusual about my father writing stories for other men to print so many other people could read them. It took me a week or so to read, and I was left wondering a little why Captain Hornblower was so angry at his happy return.

During the writing of *The Happy Return* Kathleen hired her first servant, Anna. In those years the British and Danish governments cooperated to allow a small number of Danish girls to work for a year each as domestic servants for selected families. The girls were not well paid, but they had the chance of improving their English and of seeing a bit of the world. Anna came from Aarhus, and in later years was followed by other girls from Aarhus, Grethe Larson and Ruth Krarup Basse. With a live-
in servant who was capable of looking after John and George, Cecil and Kathleen were free to travel more, and did so.

Three short incidents belong to this period. At sometime in the thirties Cecil was walking down a street with Kathleen. On the sidewalk before them was a crippled man holding out his cup for pennies. A beggar was bad enough, but a crippled beggar was more than Cecil’s courage could face. Abruptly he steered Kathleen across the street and along the opposite sidewalk to keep the horrible object as distant as possible.

On another occasion when Cecil could have appropriately brought Kathleen some flowers, he did not.

“Cecil, why don’t you ever bring me flowers? You never have.”

“Because if I were to bring you flowers now you would suspect that I had reason to bring them; that I had something to conceal.”

One day in 1937 Professor Troup-Home of Birkbeck College had the Foresters and
C. E. M. Joade, the professor of philosophy, to lunch at the college. Having talked and listened to everyone at the table, Joade, who was a controversial figure of prickly personality, turned to Kathleen with a quiet question.

“Does your husband beat you — is he a sadist?”

Kathleen laughingly replied, “You should see my thighs, all black and blue!” Obviously, her bantering statement was not true, but all three realized that the question was of psychological significance. That was why, Kathleen later said, Cecil always denigrated Joade in conversation. I myself, previous to the time Kathleen told me this story, had recognized that Father had gone out of his way to remark upon Joade when one of his opinions came under discussion. I can recall that at least half a dozen times Father made unkind remarks about Joade, and never once to my knowledge made a kind or even an impersonal remark.

In 1936 Spain turned to civil war. By 1937 the war was of international significance. Foreigners
poured in from many countries — some to fight, some to observe, some to report. The governments of Italy and Germany aided the rebel Franco. Russia aided the government. Britain and France remained neutral, but could not enforce neutral behavior on any other nation. The war divided British sentiment; some considered Franco was fighting the first war against communism, while others thought that the government was defending liberalism. Cecil accepted an offer by one of England’s conservative, sensational newspapers (possibly the Daily Mirror) to cover the Franco side. His stay was short enough and busy enough that he did not write any letters to Kathleen from Spain. That war produced politico-religious persecutions and murders by the thousands. What he personally saw I do not know, although his reports were published. He never talked about his Spanish front experiences. Kathleen recalled him telling her of tramping over mountains, of pocketing a cold Spanish omelette for

3. Kitty tape, 10 Nov 1984
a later lunch, of being driven in cars, but nothing about fighting. He went for the money that was offered, but she knew nothing of what was received.  

Cecil told me only one story, a rear area one. The Rio Tinto mining company, which supported Franco, gave an elaborate luncheon in England for a group of reporters. There were speeches of some kind, rather well-concealed propaganda so Cecil said, but he added, “The whole effect of the luncheon was lost upon me because of one silly error. It was quite an elaborate luncheon, and at the start the host told us we would be served a very rare delicacy. ‘In the sea around the Channel Islands there lives a marine shellfish whose shell is shaped like an ear, which gives it its name: oreille de mere. This shellfish clings to the rocks and can only be reached at the very lowest of low tides. Such a tide has occurred, and we have had sufficient oreille de mere flown here for your pleasure. You will be the only people outside the Channel Islands themselves able

4. Kitty tape 10 Nov 1984
today to taste this delicacy.’

“The moment I tasted it,” Father continued to me, “I realized that it was just plain abalone, which thousands of Californians were eating that very day. The rest of the propaganda was completely lost on me.”

Cecil’s first novel after *The Happy Return*, *The Pursued*, written before Cecil went to Spain, was never published, although, contrary to what Cecil thought, the manuscript still exists. It was part of the material that was left in their London house when they went to America, and Kathleen found it many years later. (*The Pursued* was revived and published in 2012.) In 1937 Cecil also wrote a weekly newspaper column, whose subject and context I never knew.

Upon his return from Spain he rented Tilbury Hall for part of the summer. This was a large country house in Essex, surrounded by its home farm, with a boating pond beside it. Here Cecil entertained a sequence of visitors. Kathleen’s niece and nephew, Bridget and Michael Belcher, stayed all
summer, with Grethe Larson (Anna’s successor) to look after us. Gordon Williams spent a week or so, playing bridge every evening and tennis in some afternoons. Bill and Gladys Clarke spent another week, during which the four of them motored round Essex, to picturesque places such as Lavenham, on a series of picnics during which Bill Clarke pursued his hobby of photography. Dorothy Foster visited also, walking tall and spare across the tennis court. Kathleen later passed on to me her collection of both still photographs and moving pictures of this period.

I was seven that summer, and with Bridget, who was a little younger, I had my first experience of sexual love. She used to swim naked (there’s a photo of that) and the two of us formed caves from the high reeds around the pond, where we could cuddle and caress in private.

At the time of the coronation of King George VI, in May, 1937, Cecil took a sea cruise around the British Isles. As he walked the deck he worked out the final problems of *A Ship of the Line* and *Flying*
Colours with “the old heart beating fast and the respiration quickened and so on.” By his own account, he was taken by surprise by the appearance in his mind of a new plot that placed his forgotten Captain Hornblower among the Spanish scenes and characters he had recently observed. Surprised or not, this foretold the pattern of future events. The Pursued was hastily cancelled — if it had not been rejected, an equally probable explanation for its never-published state — and A Ship of the Line was written for Michael Joseph’s Spring List, 1938.

Just as The Happy Return ended with Hornblower in an unhappy situation, having achieved nothing and stuck in his miserable marriage, so A Ship of the Line ends with Hornblower surrendering his ship after merely damaging some of the ships

5. CSF-FP 24 November 1946. Cecil first described his experience as having been with the plot of Flying Colours, and then corrected that to A Ship of the Line. The slip is some evidence that he thought of them as one, in addition to the evidence of the plots.
against him, still married to Maria and having seen Lady Barbara married to an admiral. However, this is not the same as the ending of *The Happy Return*. At the end of that book, Cecil was expressing his typical feeling that action should be pointless and he had no idea that he would ever write about Hornblower again. The end of *A Ship of the Line* is merely the division between two parts of one story that is told in two novels. Each part is long enough for a book, which is Cecil’s criterion, and the two parts are set in entirely different surroundings. The two parts tell a story that resolves Hornblower’s problems and demonstrates that action, when accompanied by luck, produces success. This is a new concept in a Forester story.

Both the social events and the naval adventures in *A Ship of the Line* are equally calculated to set the stage for the events of *Flying Colours*. That is, there are many “plants,” each of which must be made to appear a natural part of the first novel but which will control the events of the next. Cecil intends to reunite a Hornblower who has achieved fame with
Lady Barbara, this time in marriage. Hornblower will have naval adventures that produce fame and some fortune but which leave him in a hopeless situation, a prisoner of the French. Then he will escape by taking a small boat down the River Loire to the sea, on the way recapturing a British cutter. Cecil knew the Loire from his early voyaging in the Annie Marble, and he renewed his knowledge through a canoe trip in 1938.

Maria must die; however, Barbara would very likely have married someone else by the time Hornblower became free. Maria can die in childbirth, a regrettably frequent occurrence in those days, but that does not solve the problem of Barbara. Cecil solves this part of the problem by having Barbara marry the man who will be the admiral under whom Hornblower must serve. That puts Barbara into continued contact with Hornblower before he sails again, after which the contact is continued by having Barbara know that Maria is pregnant with Hornblower’s child. It is easy enough to have the admiral killed in action, and only a little bit more
difficult, in those times, to have Hornblower not know it. Then Hornblower, although only captured, and ignorant of the fates of both Maria and his admiral, will be reported dead, thus giving Barbara the opportunity to adopt the supposedly orphaned child. When Hornblower manages to return to England, Barbara and child will be waiting for him. This, for Cecil, is a very complex and inter-related plot; there is no wonder that he felt excited when he thought of it.

In the scenes of social life before sailing, Cecil contrasts Hornblower’s character against that of his wife Maria, and Maria Hornblower against Lady Barbara. Hornblower knows that he has made a poor marriage, both socially and intellectually, and the thought of Lady Barbara married to another sharpens his jealousy. That jealousy is barbed with shame as Maria tells Lady Barbara that she has hopes of being pregnant again. One way Cecil uses to show Maria’s low social status is by describing her as a former teacher in a fee-paying private school of the type that his own family despised: “readers paid
fourpence [per week], writers sixpence, and counters eightpence.”

Several of the naval adventures are also plants. To get Hornblower inland to the sources of the Loire, Cecil has him being transported to Paris to be tried by Napoleon as a war criminal. Therefore, he has to commit some act that could warrant at least a political trial. Cecil decides that Hornblower will use a French flag to temporarily deceive his enemy; some call that a legitimate ruse of war, while others do not. To make this reasonable, Hornblower’s ship must not look British. Therefore, right at the beginning of *A Ship of the Line*, the *Sutherland* is described as captured from the Dutch and looking very Dutch or French. This effect is reinforced by the action that gives Hornblower the idea of using the French flag to deceive the enemy. That action must occur where the news of it would reach Paris; hence Hornblower uses the French flag to storm a shore battery. The final action must occur in Spain but so close to

6. *A Ship of the Line* p 35
France that Hornblower, now captured, will not be rescued by Spanish guerillas. Finally, to force Hornblower to use a boat for his escape, Bush must be both wanted for trial and injured so he cannot walk. Hornblower’s escape requires another competent companion, so the character and skills of his coxswain, Brown, must be built up, and Bush’s injury also provides another reasonable excuse for Hornblower to choose Brown to accompany him and Bush to Paris instead of Hornblower’s characterless servant Polwheal.

Cecil did some of the writing at Number 7. As he was writing at his desk in the ground floor study, I intruded for some forgotten reason. Cecil enforced the rule that vacuum cleaners could be seen but not heard, and children neither seen nor heard, in his house during the morning hours when he was working and the afternoon hours while he slept.

“Are you writing another book, Father?”
“Yes, I am.”
“Is it about Captain Hornblower, too?”
“Yes, it is.”

717
“Oh, please hurry up and finish it. I liked the last one so much!”

Hornblower had quite carried me away into naval affairs. I built model boats to sail upon the park ponds (both in Sydenham Wells Park across the road and in Horniman’s Park, near my grandfather’s house), crude affairs suitable for a child of eight. The hull of one was improvised from half the shell of a toy airship with the keyhole plugged with plasticine. She was a proper ship, meaning a three-masted vessel carrying square sails on each mast. The masts were twigs, stepped in plasticine sockets, and the sails—course, topsail, topgallant, and royal on each mast—were laurel leaves taken from the bushes surrounding the pond. Father had been given a model steam launch, not like the African Queen, but a narrow, wicked-looking torpedo boat hull with arched foredeck, behind which was a boiler feeding a V-twin oscillating engine. He showed me how to fill the boiler and the burner, oil the engine and raise steam. I loved it dearly; for all that it wouldn’t run. The engine would make a few
turns just sufficient to get the boat out of reach, then run out of steam and stop. The boat had lost its boiler-room uptake and funnel; Cecil did not realize that these were missing, and without the draft the fire would burn only weakly. At that age I didn’t understand, but neither did anybody else.

Being an English boy I was close to the sea both geographically and socially. My Uncle Geoff and Auntie Molly lived at Southend, near the mouth of the Thames. My grandfather used to take me there by paddle steamer from London. The Thames was filled with ships from around the world, and at one time I knew many of the national ensigns and house flags. The paddle steamers had names beginning with *Golden*, such as *Golden Eagle*. I had my favorites, depending on how much of the engine room was visible to passengers. They had inclined three-cylinder engines with the brass and steel parts polished to a high shine. The sight of the massive cranks and eccentrics rotating to their steady rhythm fascinated me.

Father also had upon his mantelpiece a model
of a Nelsonic naval gun and a superb model of the last Ramsgate fishing smack, made by the old fisherman who used to sail in her. These served to indicate the love of the sea and the naval tradition appropriate to the author of Captain Hornblower.

In March of 1938 Cecil made his second trip to the U.S., a one-month publicity trip timed to coincide with publication of *A Ship of the Line*. The trip was made possible by the international currency situation. *The General* had sold well in Germany, partly because of the relevance of its subject to the next war. *The Happy Return* also may have sold well. In any case, Cecil had earned German marks. However, he could not spend them elsewhere because Hitler had prohibited conversion of marks to other currencies without governmental permission. Hitler’s policy was “guns before butter,” and Germany spent its foreign currencies on armament materials instead of luxuries. This availability of otherwise-wasted marks modified Cecil’s normally miserly behavior, as will be told. Cecil’s trip to America in
1938 was made practical because his travel expenses could be paid in marks by sailing in the German liner *Bremen*. Many of the *Bremen*’s officers had read and liked *Ein General*, and Cecil was given a tour of the ship. Either on the voyage out or the return, *Bremen* encountered a very strong storm. The waves were crashing against the ports of the dining saloon, high up amidships, and Cecil was the only passenger to sit down to dinner.

In the United States Cecil met for the first time the officers of his American publishers, Little, Brown & Co., of Boston. He liked them. He also met his American agent, Harold Matson, the U.S. associate of his English agent, Peters, and did not like him. He talked with magazine editors and arranged to be invited to a dinner party to meet Walt Disney. Harold Matson didn’t expect Cecil to work for Disney, but Cecil, amazingly, thought that he could do that type of work and that Disney might ask him. Upon publication of *A Ship of the Line*, Cecil traveled to the major bookstores of the American East Coast to meet the public and autograph copies. He also
made a side trip to see his sister Grace in Toronto, and left with the impression that her husband, Anglin Johnson, was a nice but ineffectual man who would never amount to anything, and that Grace, despite his low opinion of her, was worth two of him. Cecil also met Frances Phillips, the editor of the publishers William Morrow.  

Cecil’s letters of his first American trip in 1935 had been markedly different in style from his letters of the 1920s. He used a richer vocabulary, dispensed with the frequent use of slang words as short-cuts, and was better able to organize his sentences into interesting descriptions. His letters of 1938 showed an equally marked development in tone. No longer is there the whining about money, love, and sex, but he is explicit in a happier and more open sense. This change occurred after his first trip to the United  

7. In 1939 he sent her a picture postcard of a British scene, and remarked about that in a duplicate postcard sent after the war.
States and the creation of Hornblower. In a short note written from a country hotel (between the 1936 and the 1938 trips to the United States) he writes to Kathleen: “I hope you will open your legs for me about next Tuesday night if you feel like it, sweet-heart,” a phrasing and an openness that he wouldn’t have thought of using before. And he closes his last letter of 1938 from New York with: “When I started this letter I wanted to tell you how much my prick was looking forward to seeing you again, dear — for the last day or two I have noticed its existence for the first time since landing. I am looking forward very excitedly to sleeping with you as soon as you feel like it on my return. We haven’t any money worries for a long time ahead, and we can enjoy ourselves this summer.”

His first American adventure had widened Cecil’s horizons beyond suburban London, and it had led him to the creation of Hornblower. The public recognition of both

8. L 298, summertime 1936
9. L 306, 26 March 1938
The General and The Happy Return made a dramatic change in both his social and his financial standing. His response to both the release in pressure and the added freedom shows in these letters.

But there was little enough time for Cecil to enjoy his new life. He wrote Flying Colours, the plot of which he had sketched out before writing A Ship of the Line. Hornblower is to be transported under guard to Paris for trial as a war criminal, but escapes from his guards along the route and escapes from France by taking a small boat down the River Loire to the sea, “and the sea was England’s.” Cecil had sailed the Annie Marble on the Loire in 1928, but he wanted to see that river again. He planned a canoe trip down the Loire with his brother Geoff, but his sister Grace insisted on coming along as well. Cecil did not like her in any case, and in the close quarters of a canoeing trip he grew to hate her. Flying Colours was intended to be the “last Hornblower,” completing the originally unanticipated resolution.

10. CSF-FP 27 May 1945
of Hornblower’s meeting with Lady Barbara in the harbor off Panama. However, the route to Lady Barbara was not direct. Hornblower still thought himself married to Maria and Barbara still married to the admiral, though Hornblower had fantastic suppositions based on his one bit of news that the admiral had been wounded in action. Hornblower escapes from his guards in a blizzard, but cannot really escape before summer allows safe river travel. During the intervening time, while Bush and Brown are building their escape boat, Hornblower, no use at that kind of work (just as Cecil himself could not do it), has an affair with a war widow in the house in which the three are hiding. That lets Hornblower learn about the sensuous love of an intelligent woman, a subject of which he has heretofore been ignorant. *Flying Colours* was finished on May 12, 1938.\(^\text{11}\)

After writing *Flying Colours*, Cecil was deflected by world events from his unconscious course

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11. CSF-Walpole, A306.2, 13 May 1938
towards more Hornblower stories. Foreshadowing World War II, Hitler’s economic tightening provided Cecil with the reason for taking the Bremen to the United States. While he was in the United States, Hitler made his first conquest by annexing Austria in a practically bloodless coup (the Anschluss). Once Cecil was aboard the Bremen, he saw Hitler’s more direct civilian repression.

“The Bremen was full of German spies,” Cecil remarked to me. “I usually had two shadowing me round the ship. On the return trip I realized that I had more marks than I could conveniently spend, and since I could not convert them to pounds I decided to waste them on a radio-telephone call to your mother. I called up from the telephone booth with nothing much to say except what she knew already, that I was aboard the Bremen and would be arriving at such-and-such a time. It was a bit difficult explaining that I had nothing more to say. When I finished, I opened the door of the booth and stepped out, almost over my shadow who had obviously been listening to every word I said. He gave
me a very puzzled look as if he couldn’t understand the code I was using to transmit an obviously secret message. Not only that, but at home your mother couldn’t think of any reason for my call except that I wanted to establish that I was indeed aboard the Bremen at that time. She thought that I suspected a kidnapping attempt, or worse, and was all prepared to have the Navy hold the Bremen at Southampton if I didn’t come down the gangplank.”

Ein General’s success in Germany provided Cecil with more blocked marks than he could spend aboard the Bremen. He told me that he would be damned if, when war came, he had left any of his marks in Germany for Hitler to spend on the war. Instead, he planned each year to spend his German earnings on luxurious services, precisely those least calculated to strengthen the German economy. Kathleen learned to ski in the Austrian Tyrol after the Anschluss made Austria part of Germany. Both Kathleen and Cecil had taken up canoeing using the European folding kayak called a “Folbot” in accordance with its German origins. It folded up into two
packages, one like a golf bag, the other like a knapsack, and the two could be rolled along on a pair of small wheels. In Germany of the 1930s, on summer Friday evenings, the railroad stations were thronged with outward-bound weekend campers, the canoeists rolling their folded equipment along the platforms. They went by rail to the head of the river, canoed down the river for two days, and returned by rail from any convenient station near the river. Kathleen's and Cecil's first folbot was a Klepper touring double, German designed and probably German made. Kathleen was far more enthusiastic than Cecil, and she participated in a trip down the Danube organized by the German Canoe Club. Because she was so small, she ordered a custom-made single-seater from Graber that was built to suit her measurements. On this trip she met Karl Heinz Kastner and his cousin Hildegarde Quandt. Camping canoe trips, unfortunately, didn't spend as much German money as Cecil possessed.

Cecil, on the other hand, managed to get rid of his marks by doing things like staying in the best
hotel on the Viennese Ringstrasse with all the luxuries obtainable — from the rumors I later heard, that was quite a formidable accomplishment.

I, too, went to Germany. We took a steamer across the North Sea from Hull to Hamburg. I remember looking down from the forecastle and seeing dolphins riding the bow wave. I called loudly for Mother to come to see them, and somebody nearby mistook my concern for fear, telling me that the dolphins were harmless. I already knew that from seeing them offshore from where I had swum at Winchelsea Beach. While Mother went canoeing and Father luxuriated in Vienna, I spent part of the summer of 1938 at the house of Father’s German publisher, a mansion on the shores of the Kleine Wannsee, one of the lakes near Berlin. I am told that the entire household were violently Nazi and treated me most shamefully. The children hated the little English boy, probably for the sufficient (at that age) reason that he was different, thin and weak, and the adults saw no reason to attempt to modify that attitude. If so, I don’t remember. I do remember being
chased through the bushes of the garden, but that could have been any childish game. We spent a lot of time in the water. I remember the fresh-water clams I dredged up out of the lake bottom and kept in jars of water. The youngest daughter was about six, and she went swimming wearing nothing at all without any concern on the part of anybody. When my parents had finished their holiday trips they rejoined me in Berlin and took me home again.

Immediately after that the Munich crisis occurred. Hitler had already planned to overrun Czechoslovakia on 1 October, 1938, and the British and French politicians did not want to honor their obligations to protect Czech autonomy. In the last two weeks of September the British prime minister, Chamberlain, went twice to Germany, to Bad Godesburg and Munich, to hand Hitler much of Czechoslovakia on a silver platter in return for Hitler’s promise (later dishonored) not to go to war over the remaining defenseless bit. At the onset of the crisis Cecil flew to Prague with Marjorie Manus as interpreter. She was the woman in whose bridge

730
club Cecil had played professionally in the twenties, so he told me. She was an able interpreter as well as a bridge player of international standing. Cecil went with the credentials of a journalist, but he was also expected to talk to the Czech General Staff. That is the kind of assignment that being the author of *The General* brings you.

French defense depended on her alliances with the nations of Eastern Europe, because she could not hope to keep the Germans out if they could concentrate all their forces against France on a single front. Similarly, Eastern European nations relied on their alliances with France to attack Germany in her rear if Germany attacked them. British interests were parallel to French interests, because Britain would be hard pressed, might well not survive, if Germany succeeded in controlling the European coastline of Holland, Belgium, and France. It was inconceivable that Britain and France would let Czechoslovakia be raped by Hitler. That is what Cecil told the Czech General Staff, who at that time controlled one of the most effective armies in
Europe, one that the German army did not feel able to dislodge from its fortified mountain line just behind the frontier. What did Chamberlain do? He gave Hitler permission to take over the area of the mountains and their fortifications that protected Czechoslovakia from Germany, promising that neither Britain nor France would intervene. When word was received in Prague of Chamberlain’s treachery, the Czech government stated: “We were abandoned. We stand alone.” Cecil was so ashamed of Britain’s shameful action that without informing anyone in Prague he packed his bags and slunk away, “Like a dog with its tail between its legs.”

Chamberlain flew back from Munich on September 30, 1938, carrying an unofficial note from Hitler which he waved from the plane’s door saying that it meant “Peace for our time, peace with honour.” Churchill knew better: “The government had to choose between war and shame. They chose shame. They will get war too.”

12. His story to me.
With the dissolution of the system of alliances that might have protected Europe from Hitler’s Germany, Cecil also recognized that war was inevitable. There were several consequences to this recognition.

The first was that Father took me out for a weekend on the Thames immediately after his return from Prague. It was almost my ninth birthday, and our previous holiday arrangement had been completely disarranged by the crisis. I hadn’t complained, and as partial reward for my good behavior Father gave me this trip as soon as he could. It is my deepest memory of him.

We hired a camping punt and paddled it upriver through sights new to me. The water probably was shallow enough for poling, but I was far too small to use a punt pole. I knew the commercial river from London Pool down, because my grandfather used to take me down in the paddle steamer to visit my cousins in Southend, but the upper river has that singular English charm, both rural and civilized at once. Cows graze in carefully tended fields right down to the water’s edge, for the water level
varies only by inches throughout the year. The string of bungalows near the lock slowly crept behind as we paddled gently upriver through the sunshine. Father showed me how to grasp the paddle.

“Look, John, pull steadily without a jerk, and at the end of the stroke turn the blade like so, so it acts as a steering oar for a second. That way you counteract the turning effect of paddling on one side. Do it just often enough to keep the bow lined up with that tall tree at the next bend. That’s our steering point for this reach.”

“What’s a reach, Father?”

“Each section of the river between bends is a reach. It’s as long as you can hold a straight course. When we enter the bend by that tree we’ll leave this reach.”

“Look, Father, see the string of whirlpools my paddle leaves in the water.”

“Yes, those are the only marks you should leave. They show that you have pushed against the water with each stroke. Every other ripple or swirl is
a mark of wasted effort. See how smoothly my paddle goes through the water on the return stroke. Not a sound, not a ripple, and no drag at all. Can you do as well?”

Quietly the banks slid by. We heard music behind, and were overtaken by a steamer full of passengers gazing at us.

“See that flag, John. “That’s her house flag. It tells you she’s owned by Salters. She’s going up to Oxford, to come back tomorrow.”

Motorboats passed by both upriver and down.

“You don’t have to worry about them. You’re under oars, they’re under power and have to stay clear. Just don’t do anything unexpected at the last minute. The rule is: ‘Hold your course and speed.’”

One cruiser passed too close and too fast, her wash beating against the flat sides of the punt and a cupful of water came aboard.

“Pull up the cushions, John. Use the cloth to mop up before it spreads. She was going much too fast. It’s no danger to us, just a nuisance if they catch you while cooking dinner, but it washes down the
banks all along the river. The Thames Conservancy Board will be after him about it.”

In the late afternoon, we moored to a pair of willows along the bank, and let down the canvas camping cover on the shore side. While mooring the punt, Father showed me how to make a clove hitch with the mooring line around the branch of a willow tree. At some other time he had shown me how to make a reef (square) knot. These two were the only knots that he ever knew; they were the extent of his knowledge of marlinspike seamanship.

Father showed me how to start the Primus stove and prepare dinner. I did not at the time realize that warming an opened tin of beans in a sauce-pan of boiling water was hardly the way to make a hearty meal for active sailors, but it was as much as Cecil was capable of.

We ate slowly, watching the sun come down among the trees of the opposite bank.

A pair of glittering flashes appeared upriver from us. I pointed.

“That’s a rowing boat coming down. The sun is
flashing on his varnished oarblades as he feathers them. He’s coming down fast, too. Probably trying to be home before dark.”

I could see the rower long before I could see his boat. As he rowed closer, I could see a powerful young man balanced on a long narrow hull barely above the water, his oars pivoted on frames extending from each side of the hull. As he passed us, he turned his head to catch a quick glimpse of the river ahead, and I saw his open mouth, heaving chest, and the glitter of sweat on his forehead.

“Watch his blades in the water. See that they hardly pull through the water at all, while his pull on the sculls pushes the rowlocks forward, and with them the shell.”

“Is he racing?”

“No, not here, now. He may be practicing for the Diamond Sculls, the most famous race in the world for single sculls. Some want to win that more than anything else in the world. There was an American, of Irish family, who was a noted oarsman. He wanted to race, but his entry wasn’t accepted
because he’d been a bricklayer in his youth. You can’t race if you’ve been a manual laborer, it gives you an unfair advantage. So he raised his son to win the Diamond Sculls just because he couldn’t do it himself.”  

The oarsman round the bend, the sun below the trees, we unrolled our sleeping bags on the cushions that covered the bottom of the punt, pulled down the remaining sections of the cover, and went to sleep.  

The return trip the next day was a harder pull against the wind with a few showers of rain. Father took up the quant and poled us along for a little, but most of the water was too deep. We returned the punt at dusk and hungrily set off homeward.  

The memory of that weekend stayed with me. I made a model punt to place opposite the model fish-

13. Cecil knew the story of John B. Kelly of Philadelphia who brought up his son, John B. Kelly, Jr., to compete in the races from which he was excluded, and who was the father of Grace Kelly.
ing smack, to serve as a remembrance of that weekend. Looking back, it seemed to have been a marvelous model, made of the thin plywood that was also used for the marionettes’ stage properties, with carefully sewn cover and cushions as well, but I expect that if I saw it now I would recognize it for the trial effort of a nine-year-old.

Just as in that weekend on the Thames, Father knew everything and was always willing to share his knowledge. However, some of his more discerning acquaintances scathingly described this as “Cecil’s Infallibility.”

Another consequence of Munich was a short stay in Ledbury, where we had always spent Christmases. All London schoolchildren had evacuation plans, to stay with friends if they had any in the country, or to go with their school under care of the government if they did not. Since Charlotte Ballard (whom we called Auntie Lottie) operated a school in her large Abbey House in Ledbury, George and I were to go there. We had stayed there for a short
time in the autumn of 1938, not because war was expected then, for the immediate crisis soon passed, but because of the other consequence of Munich. Cecil and Kathleen had money enough to enjoy themselves, and so little time in which to do it. They decided to take a cruise to the West Indies that autumn, on the theory that it would be their last, best, chance before the coming war.

The cruise was typical. A few passengers were making passages to South America, but most were just tourists making the round-trip voyage, and as such dedicated to having fun. The ship touched at several of the Caribbean islands, Trinidad, British Guiana, and returned. From Kathleen’s movies the trip was just like any other cruise, but hidden in the holiday events were those of greater import. In British Guiana Cecil flew to the Kukenaam Falls, the second highest in the world, about 150 miles inland. The plane was a small flying boat, underpowered and barely able to make the trip. According to Cecil, they landed on the river above the falls. There was insufficient clear water above the falls for the plane
to take off again, a situation which the pilot understood. Again according to Cecil, the engine was fitted with both a flywheel and a propeller, one in front and one behind. The propeller could be disconnected and reconnected to the engine by a clutch. The pilot maneuvered the plane to the top of the reach above the falls and swung round facing downstream. He disconnected the propeller and raced the engine and flywheel madly. At maximum revolutions he then clutched in the propeller, and using both engine power and the power released by the flywheel as it slowed down, nearly reached flying speed as they fell over the brink of the falls. With 2,000 feet of drop, as long as they flew clear of the rocks on each side, they attained flying speed and proper control before they hit bottom. In the days when I believed Cecil, I used to retell this story of his, but no pilot I ever met — and some of those I have met were flying in those days — has ever believed it. (It is not theoretically impossible. A one-hundred pound flywheel, geared about 10:1 with the engine to achieve a speed fairly close to bursting
speed, could perhaps provide the equivalent of one minute’s take-off power. However, the complications and other weights are very significant, and aircraft engines can’t provide power at both ends. I deduce that the plane used a controllable-pitch propeller which enabled the engine to run up to maximum take-off revolutions in flat pitch before the take-off run was started. The sound would then match Cecil’s description of the takeoff. It is hard to tell whether Cecil was retelling the pilot’s tall story, had invented his own, or was simply confused.

From this trip came the background for The Earthly Paradise. As with The Happy Return, which was published in the United States as Beat To Quarters, Little, Brown & Co. did not relish the irony of the title and published it as To The Indies. It did not sell nearly as well as the three Hornblowers, even in the United States, which was still at peace when it was published. The Earthly Paradise continues Cecil’s pattern of irony. Don Narciso Rich, the learned lawyer, is dispatched to Columbus’s new discoveries to report on the conditions and prospects of the West
Indies and to review their government. He observes the degradation the Spanish and the church bring to the “earthly paradise,” observes Spanish mismanagement and social idiocy; almost becomes victim of the error of believing that hides and sugar would form a more valuable economy than gold; becomes enough of a man of action to save his own life; but delights in his return to his legal practice. His intervention into history summons Columbus’s replacement as governor of the Indies, but his emerging common sense is unavailing against the social forces of aristocratic Spanish militarism. The Earthly Paradise is as close as Cecil ever got to a story about a complete society, but even here it is only the reflection of Spanish society at the crude frontier that Cecil portrays. Rich is essentially an unwilling adventurer, but one with sufficient training to appreciate what he sees with some measure of modernism.

The prime personal result of the West Indies cruise was a crisis between Cecil and Kathleen. On
the outbound trans-Atlantic portion of the voyage, Kathleen, as usual, was seasick. She remained in her cabin. Once the ship entered the calmer Caribbean Kathleen came to life again and discovered that everyone aboard was noticeably nice to her. It was quite a revelation to her, since she had never before stayed or traveled in first-class comfort. There were two young South American women aboard who were returning from France where they had been studying the beauty trade. Kathleen was not one to care particularly how she looked, but these two fastened themselves on her and made her look pretty. They gave her a perm, made up her face, selected her clothes, for all the world like doting aunts launching their niece into society. Even more to the point, there seemed a conspiracy aboard to introduce Kathleen to eligible men, one after another (or at least temporarily eligible men, in the sense one may be eligible while in a ship at sea) leaving her alone with each in turn. “It made my head whirl; I’ve never been treated like that before or since. I fell once only, but it was so very difficult to resist so
many attempts."

The cause lay not in Kathleen, but in Cecil’s actions. During the Atlantic crossing, Cecil had obviously tried to seduce every woman aboard. In the small world of the cruise ship he couldn’t be as circumspect as usual, and the word was out. When Kathleen recovered and entered the ship’s society, either the Foresters had already achieved a reputation as a sexually free couple, or the women had decided to express their sympathy for Kathleen in concrete terms.

The results of this recognition of their infidelities were not visible to me, at least, upon their return to Ledbury just before Christmas, 1938. They brought back funny rubber models of canoes and palm trees, hand shaped from raw rubber by the Carib natives, and showed movies of the islands with typical tourist narratives. After Christmas we returned to Number 7 Longton Avenue.

Cecil had kept on favorable terms with the eminent men whom he had met, by complimenting
them so as to be remembered. One of them was the novelist J. B. Priestley, to whom he had written in August, 1937.

“Dear Priestley,

“May I offer my congratulations to you again, this time about ‘Time and the Conways’! It is a superb piece of work, of the very highest quality altogether, & there isn’t a single moment when it lapses in the least. I don’t know anything more satisfying on the stage than the beginning of the second act, which completes the first act so perfectly & goes on to make promises which are fulfilled all the way through to the end. ...

“Yours, C. S. Forester”

14

Another author with whom Cecil kept in touch was Hugh Walpole, an eminent British novelist fifteen years older than Cecil. Walpole’s recommendation had produced Cecil’s first trip to Hollywood. In May, 1937, Walpole was knighted and Cecil wrote appreciatively to him.

14. CSF-Priestley, A300.2, 31 August 1937
“Dear Sir Hugh,

“Congratulations on a knighthood which everyone will agree has been awarded with very special appropriateness to the most distinguished man of English letters.

“I have been hoping to welcome you to the Savage, but if you have been there I have missed you, and you are so senior a member now that welcoming is unnecessary. I will save it up now until the time comes for congratulating you on your peerage.

“Yours, C. S. Forester”\(^\text{15}\)

A year later, Cecil wrote again to Walpole, inviting him to a party at Number 7 with a performance of the Forester Marionettes. In that letter he mentioned that the day before he had finished *Flying Colours*, “an enormous relief. The last agonizing days were relieved by your nice letter about No. 2.—thank you very much. It was compliment of which I was specially proud.”\(^\text{16}\)

\(^{15}\) CSF-

\(^{16}\) CSF-Walpole, A306.2, 13 May 1938
Before the publication of *Flying Colours* but after the outcome of the Munich crisis had made a great war certain, Cecil wrote again to Walpole, with one request of a favor, one modest reminder of his own accomplishments, and one request about the coming war.

The favour is a literary one. “This letter enlists me in the army of those begging favours from you, so don’t read further unless you are feeling philanthropic. You see, the wretched Hornblower trilogy has been selected in America as the Book of the Month for June or July, and I want a piece about myself & the book for their ‘News,’ saying what a remarkable couple the book & I are, & naturally, signed by someone whose reputation for honesty has not been impugned up to that moment. Would you do this for me? I’ll write it, if you like, or if you would rather do it, I have here a sample ‘News’ which I could let you have if you would.”

This was followed with the reminder of accomplishment. “Of course, this American selection has pleased me enormously. But I think I have had more
pleasure from receiving the James Tait Black Memorial Prize—I have to reorient my view of myself now, as the last sort of person I considered myself was a writer of prize literature.”  

These letters are very different from those that Cecil typically wrote, even from his business letters. Certainly, he had reason to be deferential toward these well-known men of letters, but the fawning, even sycophantic air does not strike me as either best suited to his purpose or illustrative of Cecil as I knew him. He evidently thought that this approach was most appropriate when seeking favors from his betters, while I had seen him from the position of an inferior. The letter requesting Walpole to write a blurb for him combines absurd mock-modesty, “the wretched Hornblower trilogy,” with a not-so-subtle reminder that the central one of those had won the Tait Prize. The request for a blurb about himself and his book is reasonable, but to suggest that he would write it himself for Walpole’s signature is out-

17. CSF-Walpole, A306.3, 6 March 1939
rageous. No more creditable is Cecil’s suggestion that the blurb should exaggerate, not really tell the truth, but would pass because Walpole had a “reputation for honesty [that] has not been impugned up to that moment.” I think that while these letters appear to show a rather different side of Cecil’s character, when considered in depth they deepen our understanding of his primary characteristics. Cecil’s request about the coming war will be described when that war is discussed.

Early in the previous summer I had passed the entrance examination for Alleyn’s School and was admitted in September. I was following where my father, my paternal Uncle Geoff, his cousin before him, and my maternal uncles Geoff and Frank had attended before me. I started by walking up to the train at Upper Sydenham station, riding to Lordship Lane station, then either walking or taking the tram to Townley Road, and walking the long block to Alleyn’s.

I quickly learned, however, to take my bicycle. I
rode up the hill almost to the Crystal Palace, down the steep Fountain Drive to College Road, along past Dulwich College (where my father had attended after Alleyn’s) and the last toll gate in England, and through Dulwich Village to the other end of Townley Road. This six miles each day was enjoyable and good for me, and ever so much more convenient that the train, but required that my bicycle be better maintained.

The conservatory was my workshop, and there my father showed me how to patch a tire, using spoon handles for tire irons, and how to replace hub bearings, using butter to hold the balls in the bearing cups while reassembling the hub. I thought that I had really learned something, but three proper tire irons in my patch kit — the usual place to carry them — would have enabled me to patch when away from home, and if you use the correct technique you needn’t use butter to assemble hubs.

Then, before the lease on Number 7 had expired, we moved, just half the distance of the previous move from Number 36 to Number 7, for we
went half-way back up the street to Number 28. This was a large house with a large garden and its own garage. It stood, like Number 36, inset into the park with its front on the road. (Neither Number 36 nor Number 28 stands today. Their land has been returned to the park and their location is indistinguishable from the rest of the park.) More than this, this was the first house Cecil had ever owned, and was bought in anticipation of a hoped-for reconciliation. As Cecil wrote to Kathleen six years later, upon buying his second home, this one in California, “Frances in one of her letters recently reminded me of the difference in my circumstances between the last time I bought a house and this time. It was very much for the best that when you left you went to a new house and new job (and a new man!) because the effect of a complete change of scene is very salutary, as I knew but did not appreciate up to this moment — if I go to Japan next week, as I am told is likely, it ought to completely cure.

“The contrast between the two purchases is quite fantastic. When I bought Longton Avenue our
personal problem was at its most acute stage, and the danger of war was growing every day. I bought the house and went on living through the war danger hoping against hope, against my better judgement, that we would find happiness in the house for the rest of our days and that Hitler would behave himself. It turned out to be more than I should have hoped. Now I’ve bought another house just when the war has come to an end and our personal problem is settled. This visual imagination of mine always pictures the years from 1939 to now as a sort of dark tunnel through which we had to pass, and I look on the two houses as two landmarks one at each end. We are free of the sordidness and unpleasantness of those years, and are emerging into the sunshine — you came out by a different exit from me and so you’ll have another landmark.”

That his troubles were indeed serious, Cecil attested in a letter written one year after that previously quoted. “And I was glad to have your letter —

18. CSF-K, 460, 6 September 1945

753
you warned me that it might be morose and yet it wasn’t. It was bad luck you not having your house and garden, dear, but that wasn’t our fault. It is not one of those cases where we can wish we had done the other thing. I’ve often thought it might have been better if we had our divorce in the spring of 1939, better for all four of us, and yet I always come back to the conclusion that it would not have been. It would have hurt Flo and George too much (which was a principal factor with me) and too many other people would have gloated — which I idiotically didn’t want them to do. And by now the kids are pretty well disentangled after our misdeeds and I don’t think we need worry about them specially; it was hard work, but interesting. At any rate if I’d followed my impulse in 1939 I’m sure I’d still be saying to myself occasionally ‘If only I’d kept my mouth shut and gone through with it things would have worked out all right.’ As it is we don’t have that worry, which is a pretty good test. The things to regret are the ones one could do something about, not things like Hitler or our final business. And
after all the house and garden are still waiting for you in fairly good condition when you visit England again — you’re lucky in having happier memories of the place than I have.”¹⁹

Not only do these letters show Cecil’s thoughts and feelings of 1939, but they reaffirm two of his peculiarities. He was abnormally sensitive to the opinions of others, even though he always said he didn’t give a damn about them; to have those same people who had advised Kathleen not to marry him (because he wouldn’t make a good husband) proved correct in the end was more than he could bear. The second peculiarity is his relationship with his parents, for in this passage he shows more concern for the feelings of his wife’s parents (who were not very conventional) than for the feelings of his own parents (who were more conventional and hence more likely to have been upset by a divorce in the family). It is as though both he and they had recognized that in his own emotions he had long ago substituted the

¹⁹. CSF-K, 495, 7 August 1946
Belchers for his own parents, and continued to feel so even when he was thirty-nine years old.

As for his other conclusion, I do not find myself in agreement. What might have happened is of course an ‘if’ question — if I had stayed in London I could have been killed in the Blitz, though Number 28 suffered only mild damage. I do know, however, that far from being “pretty well disentangled from [his] misdeeds” in 1946, I was far more entangled, by believing his lies, than I had been in 1939, and the additional entanglements picked up in the twelve years after 1939 took more than a further twelve years to disentangle. I was not free for twenty-eight years after his decision in 1939. I believe that the same is true of George, although his reaction was almost the reverse of mine.

One of the ornaments Cecil quickly acquired for Number 28 was a pair of large aquaria. He spent some weeks perfecting the arrangements for a balanced and self-sufficient system. The aquaria were large, rectangular, all-glass containers, each of which
had contained a storage battery cell for the electric plant of a country house, used before the national power grid reached rural areas. Such jars were commonly available then. Father directed George and me — only I was old enough to really help — in washing the sand in bucket after bucket of fresh water. He then drove us to the ponds at Keston Common, and directed us in obtaining specimens of all the small water plants that grew there, frog and toad eggs, water snails, and as many jars of pond water as we could put in the car. We planted and filled the aquaria, waited a week to be sure all the plants were established, then started buying fish. These weren’t tropical fish, but we were able to obtain a variety of fish: goldfish, fantails, black telescope-eyed moors, and shubunkins of the carp family; golden bream, tench, and perch from English rivers; even catfish from American rivers, which you can’t buy in American petshops but were obtainable in English ones. To serve as a source of food, Father directed us in digging a pond in the garden, in which we grew an infusion of grass cuttings, a cloudy green mixture of
microscopic life. Father would pour teaspoonful after teaspoonful of this mixture into an aquarium, watching the fish dash madly after the almost invisible animalcules that were their prey.

One day he was extremely excited to find a hydra attached to the waterweed, and showed us how it reproduced by budding. His interest was never in just keeping fish, as others did goldfish in a bowl, but in so arranging the balance that, once started, the aquarium and the feeding pond formed a self-sufficient ecological cycle, a goal which he substantially achieved. In later years he nearly always had aquaria or fishponds wherever he lived.

Cecil developed another small indulgence in this period. For a few years France required no passport formalities for English visitors. It was only five miles from Longton Avenue to Croydon airport, from which planes left for Paris. I can remember seeing commercial biplane airliners flying in and out of Croydon, and the first autogiros that flew the mail between Croydon and the center of London often
flew over our house. Cecil found that if he decided, upon waking from his afternoon nap, that he would like a French dinner he could have one. He drove to Croydon, took the Paris plane, had dinner at Le Tour d’Argent, and returned in time for bed. “It was as well the war came when it did,” he told me years later, “for that habit was becoming more insidiously frequent than it should.” I am reminded of his similar attitude towards golf, which he had given up about 1930, but of which he told me at about the same time as he told me of the dinners in Paris.

“I used to play golf, but I found that the fascination of hitting the ball exactly right every stroke almost overcame me. I couldn’t leave the game alone. It was only by the greatest self-control I was able to escape that insidious fascination, and I have never let myself play since.”

In the early summer of 1938, the visa of Grethe Larson, our second Danish au pair girl, expired. She had written to her friends in Aarhus of the advantages of working at the Forester’s and Ruth Krarup Basse had applied to take her place. Contrary to
expectations, the war caused Ruth to stay with us longer in England, then to come with us to the United States, where she remains a valued friend.

In the spring or early summer of 1939, Kathleen went canoeing on the Wye and the Severn rivers, and then Cecil went motorboating with Lillian and her husband on the Severn. The films he took on that trip are in my collection today.

I again spent part of the summer holidays of 1939 in Berlin. Mother had been busy repainting the inside of the new house, and Hildegarde Quandt came from Berlin to visit us in London at the end of July. In early August she took me back to her apartment in Zehlendorf, a suburb of Berlin. Hildegarde was very nice, but she was teaching in the mornings. That made mornings a very lonely time for me in her apartment and its garden. I learned very little German, but quite a lot of English. The only English-language books Hildegarde had were *David Copperfield* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, both of which I read that month. *A Tale of Two Cities* I thought a
grand tale, but *David Copperfield* seemed filled with an oppressive melancholy, far more than necessary for the story itself. For a lonely little boy (I was only nine) in a foreign country, *David Copperfield* is not the best introduction to great literature. That experience, followed by the abbreviated *Tale of Two Cities* issued to California eighth graders (which naturally was not nearly as good a novel as the proper version I thought I remembered from 1939), deterred me from reading more of Dickens for twenty-five years.

In the afternoons Hildegarde often took me rowing on and swimming in the Grosse Wannsee (one of the larger lakes near Berlin). She belonged to a government-subsidized rowing club that had proper skiffs and shells. I think it amusing that I learned to row properly in, and using equipment of, a German-sponsored athletic club.

While in Germany I observed the social effect of the political differences between Nazis and others. Some people gave vigorous Nazi salutes when meeting friends, which was the required behavior before shaking hands, while others gave half-hearted
upwards flips of the right forearm that just met the requirement. Some houses contained pictures of Hitler and prominently displayed black swastikas on their red and white fields, while others did not. Hildegarde’s brother was a rabid Nazi, while Hildegarde was a quiet opponent. Such were the divisions in prewar Germany. Of course I understood none of the adult conversations and could discern no political content, even if there had been any, but in some of the houses there was an obvious reticence between Hildegarde and our hosts. There might not have been plenty of butter (I noticed no shortage), but there was an abundance of whipped cream and strawberries, on which I seemed to dine every day. In one summer, I think it must have been 1938, I saw a crowd watching a military parade and shouting Nazi slogans at full voice. At a similar parade in 1939, or perhaps just a troop movement, the air was

20. Films of Hitler’s less formal meetings show that he didn’t do much better than that when meeting friends.
different. The people on the sidewalks were somber, concerned with fears for the future.

During this time, Cecil again went to Vienna for a luxurious stay in a Ringstrasse hotel to spend his blocked German marks, and had speaking engagements in Berlin, one to be broadcast, for September. Since early summer, Hitler had been threatening to recover the port of Danzig, which had been awarded to Poland when that nation had been re-established after World War I, and which therefore separated the German province of East Prussia from the rest of Germany. Unknown to the world, Hitler had ordered his army to be ready to attack Poland at any time in August that he commanded. The British government, finally realizing that Hitler had to be stopped, had announced that there would be no more Munichs, that it would declare war on Germany if Germany invaded Poland. The French agreed, halfheartedly. Hitler didn’t believe either of them would carry through to a real war. When he told the Italians to be ready to enter the coming war, the horrified Italian ambassador to Berlin warned
his British colleague, on August 19, that war was imminent. Although Hitler always planned to conquer Poland and part of Russia beyond, he knew that he should not simultaneously fight Russia in the east and France and Britain in the west. So he enticed Stalin into a secret plan for dividing up Eastern Europe between them under the cover of a mutual non-aggression treaty. That treaty was announced on Berlin’s radio during the late evening of August 21. Anyone who paid attention knew that Hitler was free to fight off France and Britain without fear of Russian intervention. Poland would be conquered long before any other army could move.

The next afternoon, Father arrived in Berlin from Vienna unexpectedly and quite excited. “The international situation is very tense,” he said, words which I did not really understand but which I fully remembered from their obvious importance. We threw my clothes in my suitcase, forgetting my blazer, and dashed for the first train out of Germany.

The train was very hot and completely filled. I
had a seat, but no room to lie down. Father would not let me leave the compartment for any reason, although I desperately needed the toilet. The train started and stopped, started and stopped, all through the hot evening, across lower Germany, 250 miles to the frontier. We watched the stations as we passed through, snatching copies of the latest newspapers from the newsboys and munching a last Vienna sausage that was handed in through the window. Then the last delay, a tense moment at the frontier, the station all lit up by the intense blue of mercury vapor lamps, while we wondered whether we would be allowed to leave. Then we were through, and Father released me to run up and down the Dutch station platform in freedom. We crawled into our berths in the Hoek to Harwich ferry in grateful fatigue. By August 23 we were back in London.

Kathleen had planned another canoe trip for later in the autumn, but that plan had to be revised. On August 23 she wrote to Karl Heinz that she could meet him at the railway station in either Liege.
or Brussels on September 9. Before then, she would take George and me punting on the Thames for a week. “As usual I shall take a trunk with us packed with our spare clothes in case we can’t get back to London at all. Isn’t everything beastly!” Then the next morning she added: “I’m afraid this is the last letter I’m going to be able to write to you. We are all in for a nasty long miserable business. I hope you come through all right. If I survive I will try to find you again. I shall never forget my German friends or the happy times I have had there. My love to you all.”

War did not come until next week. After Hitler attacked Poland on September 1, Britain and France entered the war, on September 3, as they should have done when he attacked Czechoslovakia. Mother, Ruth, George and I were sent off to Ledbury, while Father remained in London. He had had an engagement for a second contract in Hollywood, to start in December, which he cancelled, and he

21. Kathleen to Karl Heinz
prepared the house and himself for war.

On September 4 Cecil wrote to Kathleen: “I wrote to you very hurriedly on Saturday as I was busy making the house light-tight & safe. ... We have made marvellous light proof shutters for the morning room and everything behind it & for my room & John’s room, where Marjorie sleeps. They are so good that there is no ventilation, but we manage by leaving both study doors open—otherwise we just suffocate, but by doing that we get all the air we need & don’t let any light out. We have built up all the cellar openings on the outside with earth retained by loose brick walls (no sandbags available yet) & made the cellar comfortable enough & quite safe against anything except a direct hit. The cellar roof is strong, & I am shoring it up a bit more today. I’m afraid we wrecked two small corners of your garden, dear ... we were working against time & we had to get the earth from as near the cellar as possible. The trial air raid warning on Sunday morning scared us into real activity, you see; & last night we had another, about 2:30 am, but we all got to sleep again after-
wards about 3:30. ... Marjorie tonight is starting a course of training in censorship at the War Office. ... The dug out in the garden won’t be ready until tonight, but when it is it’ll be perfectly grand—safer than houses, although a bit damp and cheerless. It’ll serve well if ever we have a daytime raid, which I suppose will be more dangerous than a nighttime one.”

In another letter he describes the situation in the cellar as “When the warning goes I sit among my favourite Burgundies.”

Other arrangements had to be considered. Cecil wrote that he could get Ruth’s clothes packed, and sent either to Ledbury or home to Denmark, wherever she chose to go. He wrote that he had heard nothing yet from Alleyn’s School to say where the schoolboys had gone. The London schoolboys whose parents had no other plans had been evacuated by the schoolful to country towns, and it was possible that I would be sent wherever the Alleyn’s

22. CSF-K, A312, 4 September 1939
23. CSF-Walpole, A312.1, 6 September 1939
boys had gone so I could continue my education. Such was the way that the war started in England.

Long after there was any need for secrecy, Father told me that he volunteered for whatever work he could do, and was set to work managing the inventory records and distribution of the warehouse-fulls of cardboard coffins which, unknown to the general public, the government thought it advisable to have on hand. He said he grew bored and restless at this misapplication of his talents, and came down to Ledbury with us.

The government had stockpiled 50,000 cardboard coffins, so Father told me; that was the official prediction for the deaths that would result from the immediate bombing of London by the German Luftwaffe. Before the invention of radar, it was impossible to prevent bombing attacks because the attacker could pick his time and target while the defender had to be airborne in all places at all times. Stanley Baldwin, Britain’s prime minister, had said in Parliament that “the bomber will always
get through.” While Britain had responded to this threat by inventing radar (housed in small buildings around the coast, with antennas the height of skyscrapers), the system was secret, unfinished, experimental, and nobody knew whether it would work. The government had also stockpiled gasmasks for at least the population of the larger southern cities. We were all issued them, to be carried in their cardboard boxes everywhere we went. Today, people discuss the psychological effects on children of fears of nuclear warfare. Well, we were afraid of poison gas spread by bombers, and that is very little different in effect. Various entrepreneurs prepared brochures displaying their expensive bombproof and gasproof underground shelters; I remember discussing such brochures with my parents during the summer before the war. When war came, people actually used Anderson shelters, cheap, mass-produced corrugated steel tents that were dug into the ground and covered with earth. They protected against flying debris but not against direct hits. Gas was not used, but I remember lying in bed in my tiny bed-
room in the Abbey House in Ledbury, wondering if that insidious poison gas could creep inside my bedroom and kill me while I slept, without warning.

Cecil’s story about being placed in charge of the 50,000 cardboard coffins was false. In 1935, Cecil had written *The General* partly as a warning of how not to fight the next war. Since the outcome of the Munich crisis had made war certain, he had thought about the role of propaganda during wartime and how he could contribute to that role, and he had tried to interest the government in that contribution.

Cecil’s letter of March 1939 to Hugh Walpole asking Walpole to write a blurb for *Captain Horatio Hornblower* in the American *Book of the Month Club News* terminated in another request to help Cecil get recognized by the Ministry of Information as a potential propaganda writer. “In addition to all this, are you interested in the question of propaganda in the event of a future war? I am, most desperately, & I am running over with ideas on the subject. I have tried to lay them before authority, but I have—natu-
rally—been fobbed off. If the subject interests you, could you help me again? One of my difficulties is having to convince people that I am not seeking a permanent job. Me!”

Hitler invaded Poland on September 1 and Britain went to war on September 3. Cecil’s letter of September 4, after describing the air raid precautions, continues by saying that he is waiting for instructions from Minney about an article, and that General Pile has given him an introduction to the private secretary of the Minister of Information, who wants to see Cecil, obviously about having him write about the war. “Of course I’m liable (at 40) to military service, but I don’t think they’ll take me any way on medical grounds; & in any case I’d rather do the work I can do best.”

Two days later Cecil wrote to Hugh Walpole again. “I’ve suggested in an application to the Ministry of Information that reference to you would con-

24. CSF-Walpole A306.3, 6 March 1939
25. R. J. Minney, editor of a London magazine
firm my own impudent notion that I have some reputation as a novelist & journalist. I don’t expect they’ll consult you on the point, but I want you to forgive my doing it without consulting you—things were rather hurried. …

“Have you any wires you could pull for me in the Ministry of Information, whether via Lord Macmillan or any of his assistants? And if so, would you pull them for me? I’m just running over with ideas & notions regarding how to win the war of words, & I’d like to put them forward. Would you do this for me? Possibly it might affect history a little. And I’m just eating my heart out without anything that’s worth doing, too.”

The next day he wrote to say that Walpole’s assistance would not be necessary. “I have just heard that I am on the books of the Ministry of Information, so please do not (if you intended to) bother Lord Macmillan & his assistants on my behalf. I am so sorry if I have put you already to any inconve-

26. CSF-Walpole, A 312.1, 6 September 1939
nience, but the last week seemed like a year of waiting & I couldn’t sit inactive. I expect I shall have to do so now, until further orders come, but that won’t be so bad.”

Contrary to his story about being manager of the inventory of cardboard coffins, Cecil had had a plan for his wartime actions and within a week of the start of the war he had carried out its first act. Most people would consider that admirable, yet Cecil chose to tell a story that understated his acts. While waiting for the orders that his plan would produce, Cecil came to us in Ledbury.

During this time, Hitler’s armies stormed across Poland in the first Blitzkrieg, the lightning assault by mobile armored forces that Fuller and Liddell Hart had first predicted and that Cecil had indirectly warned against in writing *The General*. The Germans still had lots of horse-drawn field artillery and transport (something few people remember), but it was the relatively few tanks, motorized field

27. CSF-Walpole, A312.2, 7 September 1939
artillery, and dive bombers that divided up and smashed the Polish army in attacks coordinated by radio. The world was no longer a place where nations could leisurely prepare for war and expect to hold off attackers while mobilizing. The blitzkrieg fury could storm across the border and destroy a nation in a fortnight.

The Ministry of Information was not nearly as rapid as the blitzkrieg. Cecil hung about with us in Ledbury wondering, and probably worrying, about the orders he would be given. While he was in Ledbury, Kathleen suggested that his proposed Hollywood contract, if it could be renegotiated, would provide the ideal chance for him to help England by encouraging the United States to stay on Britain’s side. This had been vital in the first World War, and obviously would be again. The right words in a few

28. One theory about Hitler’s later defeat in Russia is that he had great difficulty in coordinating his two armies, the armored motorized army that could penetrate and the foot and horse army that had to hold.
Hollywood movies would do more good than all the official propaganda possible. Cecil saw the point, suggested it in turn to the government, and was given permission to leave as soon as he could arrange it, with his family to follow whenever travel priority could be found for them. He sailed for New York aboard the *De Grasse* in the second week of October.
Cecil arrived in a New York avid for news. Two days after arrival he was settled in the Gramercy Park Hotel and writing: “I am very comfortable indeed, as it shows that my judgement was correct. Half the editors at least in N.Y are besieging me for copy, and by tomorrow I shall be really deep in work. I’ve done the right thing.

“Warners at present say they don’t want me in Hollywood until Jan 1st, and I expect (from what Matson says) that they will ask for a further postponement until March 1st, so that is most satisfactory.” In characteristic fashion, like Hornblower also,
he remarks: “In fact, I am quite frightened of my good luck, for fear, now, that something horrible and unanticipated will come along to pay me out. But I’ve been lucky so far, haven’t I dear.

“I do hope everything is all right with you. I feel very nervous about you, all the time, I am very nervous about opening the paper each morning.” Then, in another reverse mood, he adds, “But I’m really sure, all the same, that you’ll be all right.”¹

What Cecil did not tell Kathleen about the Gramercy Park Hotel was that Frances Phillips, one of the women whom he had met during his last trip to the United States, lived with her parents in the apartment wing of that hotel.

Cecil noted America’s dominant mood of neutrality. “Most of the U.S., as far as I can see, is strongly anti-Nazi, but at the same time not at all pro-British, if you understand me. And they just dread the possibility of being drawn into the war.”²

1. CSF-K, 314, 18 October 1939
2. CSF-K, 315, 25 October 1939
By the first week in November, Cecil realized that he might be in the U.S. for a long time. He had promised to do some speaking on behalf of England, and contacted a lecture agency. The agency started arrangements for a lecture tour in the winter of 1940-1941, one year away. Besides that, he managed to sell a lot of short stories and articles. *The Earthly Paradise*, after rejection for serialization by both *Colliers* and *The Saturday Evening Post*, was bought by *Argosy*. As a result, Cecil advanced a new suggestion. “Now, dear, there is one thing to think about. If I make a good deal of money this winter, and if the war takes a usual sort of course, you might come out here with the kids and Ruth in the spring in the Clipper (the aeroplane) when it starts again. It depends partly on the money, because it’ll mean, of course, abandoning all the cash we have in England, and the fares will be £400.”

Cecil had more than one thing to be proud of in those first months of the war. “There hasn’t been

3. CSF-K, 317, 2 November 1939
a mail in for ten days — the U.S. neutrality act, although it’s a hell of a good thing in most ways, is going to knock the mail just silly for a long time. I don’t expect letters will come in oftener than once a fortnight. So I’m writing to you without a letter to answer, dear. Everything here is all right, including the neutrality act, which I’m very pleased about. I think I was quite a lot of help in that, and I’ve justified my existence, thank God. I don’t care so much now.

“I’ve finished 2 short stories, one with a nice little pill of propaganda hidden in the jam, and I expect Matson will sell them both, and I’ve had a few bits in the papers. I haven’t quite cleared expenses yet, but I will catch up quite soon. I can work out my expenses now; I’m spending about 80 dollars a week (that’s £16 nominal) so I haven’t got to sell many stories at 1000 dollars to keep all right, to say nothing of the Hollywood contract, which will clear me enough for 50 weeks! I’ve earned about 260 dollars in 3½ weeks so far, from sources which will soon dry up.
“I am speaking at West Point (a sort of U.S. Sandhurst) next week, and at Columbia University, which is like the University of London, not very dignified ... I’ve got out of the literary crowd now, and am mixing with soldiers and newspapermen and colleges, which is where I wanted to get. Actually I’m quite pleased with myself, although I’m still horribly depressed, and will be as long as the war goes on.”4

On November 15 the mail arrived. “The mail has just come in — first for 15 days — and with it your letter of Oct 25th. I was so glad to get it — not that I was worrying, but because I’m so homesick. I’m working like a nigger in consequence; I’ve done a lot of articles and short stories about Hornblower. The Sat. Eve. Post has bought these 2 and want 2 more. They pay the highest rates in the world — Matson is arguing about the price, but I expect it will be about $1500 each; i.e. at present about £400! Each! I told you wrong in my last letter about my budget;

4. CSF-K, 318, 8 November 1939

781
I’m spending about 60 dollars a week, so 2 short stories pay my expenses for a year! I spoke yesterday very successfully at West Point, and today I’m due at Columbia University. Next week I’m going to Annapolis (Naval Academy), and there is some talk about my being in touch at the same time with the U.S. Senate (Washington is close by) … West Point was very sympathetic and interested — but at every turn I find how important Hornblower was; he’s smoothed the way for me all the time, and I had to talk about him a lot.”

“News is pretty good. I’ve heard from Whyte saying that I can go ahead with my lecture arrangements for 1940-41 … it will be something in reserve for England, you see, in case it is wanted … possibly I shall make a decent bit of money. And, more important than all, I have an excuse for lingering here (I mean an excuse in the eyes of Americans) which is very necessary, although I am rapidly being accepted into N.Y. society and the question may

5. CSF-K, 319, 15 November 1939

782
cease from troubling anyway — but, of course, that unless the wars ends I shan’t come home until the summer of 1941, if then. I miss you so much, dear, but this is duty, you know, and I’m proud of my work here.

“I’ve just signed a contract with Collier’s to supply them with 6 short Hornblower stories at an enormous price (better than the Sat. Eve. Post) and I’ve just finished the second one.”

With both the dollars and the prestige, Cecil was really able to promote his family’s emigration. “It means that all the money we have in England has to stop there, but we can afford it, I think. I shall make quite a lot of this year here ... I thought we might take a furnished house in Essex, Connecticut (a really lovely town on the sea) or somewhere near there, where I already know a lot of people with country houses, including the Wagners ... You will be hot in summer and damned cold in winter, but it’ll be better than England, I think ... I think you’ll

6. CSF-K, 320, 22 November 1939
be quite happy in the U.S.A. and not too lonely. Some of the country is lovely.”

Perhaps the memory of his unhappy visit to Hollywood left fears in him, or he feared it did in Kathleen, for he repeated again: “You won’t be unhappy in America, dear, I fancy — there’s a lot to be said for this country. You will feel strange housekeeping, of course, everything is different, the cuts of meat and the food and so on, but you’ll get used to that. You’ll hate the central heating, I’m afraid, and sometimes it’s too cold and sometimes it’s too hot, but a lot of the climate is pleasant and there’s lots more sunshine!

“In Connecticut we’ll start with no friends within 10 miles, but we’ll soon make some, and if we don’t we’ll be quite a large family anyway. We’ll have to be careful with money, but not too careful — by the time you arrive I shall be able to see more clearly and we may be quite rich.”

7. CSF-K, 321, 28 November 1939
8. CSF-K, 322, 29 November 1939
Cecil was actually under the orders of the British Library of Information, the American unit of the Ministry of Information, with offices on the 33rd to 38th floors of the RCA building, Rockefeller Center, New York City. Cecil arranged for some official help in arranging for his family to make the Atlantic passage. “This is still about your coming here. A letter has been sent from here to the Foreign Office by Mr. Angus Fletcher of the British Library of Information asking for assistance to be given you to come here with your 2 children and nurse, as regards exit visas. If you have any trouble you can mention this, but only use it if necessary and don’t spread it about ... Don’t tell anyone at all about the British Library who is not an official.”

In America, Cecil was not only required to conceal his official connection with the British government, but for his own purposes he wished to conceal his Smith background. He instructs Kathleen in the same letter: “If I’m not meeting you (when she

9. CSF-K, A-323, 4 December 1939

785
would arrive in New York) meet the reporters quite frankly; talk about Hollywood and lecture and so on; talk about the condition of England as optimistically as possible. It’ll be all right. I’m very much a public figure here by now. But don’t know anything about me before we got married, and of course nothing about the British Library; not to anybody at all.”

Cecil thus started to use the official secrecy as a cloak for his private secret, a practice he continued for at least twelve years. However, had Kathleen followed his instruction literally, and had any reporter asked, the result would have been disaster. Nobody would believe that she knew nothing about Cecil before they were married. She knew enough not to say that Cecil had been born a Smith, and she had been misled to believe that Cecil’s father had had a higher position than he actually had. That amount of deception sufficed.

The last letter to England that Kathleen was

10. CSF-K, A-323- 4 December 1939

786
able to save was dated 18 December, 1939. Cecil was still referring to living in Connecticut. “My calculation is that we can live in extreme comfort in New England on about 10000 dollars a year (supposed to be £2000) or a bit less. I think I’ll earn that all right, and have a reserve to start with. The stories I’m selling to Colliers (I’ve sold 2, contracted for 6, and just delivered No. 3) bring in 1500 or 1750 dollars each, so you see we ought to be all right. The Sat. Eve. Post want stories, too, but won’t pay quite so much. Money ought to be all right here, my dear. Everything will be strange, but manageable. You can go to N.Y. and have a good time while I look after the boys.”

During this time the four of us, Kathleen, Ruth, George, and I, were staying with Charlotte Ballard in the Abbey House, Ledbury. George and I attended Charlotte’s school, the Abbey School. Their colors were blue and white in place of Alleyn’s

11. CSF-K, A-324, 10 December 1939
black and white, so I wore a blue and white tie with my Alleyn’s blazer. The Abbey House was a very old house. Its present first floor was up a flight of stairs from the street. Probably below that, in medieval times, there had been a storage cellar with no access from the ground level. The house above that was half-timbered in the late medieval style; some said that some of the timbers came from ships of the Spanish Armada that were wrecked along Britain’s west coast while fleeing from Drake and his ships. The house had a wing built out to the rear during Stuart times, this time in brick. One reason for the addition was a very large room used as a chapel for worship by the family that did not follow the established church in that time of religious troubles. The fortunes of the Ballard family had fallen over the years. When gas lighting came in, the front two-thirds of the house were equipped with gas light, leaving the servants with candles and oil lamps. When electric lighting came in, only the front third, the public rooms, was converted from gas to electric light. There was electric light in the original chapel
also, which for years had been used as a school room for the older students of the Abbey School that Charlotte Ballard taught. I studied there, while George studied with the younger students in the house next door.

For years we had spent Christmases at the Abbey House. Charlotte lived there, her sister Nancy lived in a cottage at the north edge of town, and her brother Jack, who taught art in Folkestone, spent his holidays at the family home. On winter mornings we children would rise early with “Uncle” Jack for a fast walk up Dog’s Hill behind the town. Before wartime rationing, we returned to a typical British breakfast grill of mushrooms, bacon, sausages, fried bread, fried onions, and more. That meal had been cooked on the kitchen stove, ten feet long and coal fired. We ate in the main front room, near the Christmas tree, very tall, with presents around its base. That room was large enough for dancing; at Christmas 1939 the popular dance was the Lambeth Walk, and I watched the adult couples parading up and down to music from a gramo-
phone. On Christmas Eve the tree was lit with candles, while we children were cautioned about the danger of lighting them without adults present. On Christmas Day there was a big party, starting with dinner in the main front room, with a magnificent flaming Christmas pudding in which silver coins and small favors had been embedded, followed by distribution of presents. After that we moved to the drawing room for tea. That was a much cozier room with upholstered chairs and sofas, where we were served traditional fruit cake with marzipan topping. John Masefield, the British poet laureate of the time, had been born in Ledbury, and I remember him coming to tea in that room. At bedtime we children were sent upstairs to the former servants’ quarters, tiny cubbyholes of rooms lit by candles. I used to collect the used candle ends and secretly melt them down into new candles so that I had my own source of light to read by when I was supposed to be asleep.

The wartime stay was a little different from peacetime. As guests for Christmas, we children had
used the front staircase; as boarding students (at that time the only ones, and our mother was with us) George and I had to use the back stairs instead. However, we helped stir the Christmas pudding. That was made during the autumn, in an enormous bowl the size of a washpan. All the students in the school lined up; each in turn grasped the massive wooden spoon and stirred the mix, making a Christmas wish as he or she did so. That probably was the last luxury for a long time, for food and sweets were quickly rationed and England started on the lengthy dreariness of a wartime diet.

In another change from the prewar Christmas holidays, my bicycle had been brought with me. My mother’s brother Jack sent his family, my Aunt Audrey and her four children, including my favorite cousin Bridget, to a country house near Leominster, about 20 miles from Ledbury. Once I had learned the way from a family trip by car, I proposed a weekend bicycle trip there and was allowed to go. The trip became easier than I had thought, and I found that I could ride over to see Bridget, whom I loved.
dearly, and return in one day. Of course it rained on some trips; I remember the water sloshing about inside my rubber Wellington boots as I pedaled along. I was just ten years old, making my first cycling tours alone.

Once the voyage to America had been decided on, I was taught a bit about the new land. The money was easy, worth only an hour of study, just the decimal system instead of pounds, shilling, pence, and farthings. I found in the house’s library, either then or in a prior year, a travel book illustrated with steel engravings that told of how an explorer named Coulter discovered Hell, with boiling springs, sulphurous smokes and even geysers spouting into the air. I thought that that was a bit imaginative, but, unknowingly, I was reading of the discovery of Yellowstone. My Mother provided the books that she thought I should know: *Huckleberry Finn* and *Life on the Mississippi*. In years before I had also read Conan Doyle’s *A Study in Scarlet*, the first Sherlock Holmes story, whose plot started in the
migration of the Mormons to Utah across the deadly American desert. Compared to some, I was a well-informed immigrant.

Cecil had written at length in every letter about the various dangers of the different ways of crossing the Atlantic; flying by Clipper from Lisbon, sailing in an Italian liner from Genoa, sailing in a British ship. In the end, Mother, Ruth, George and I sailed in the *Britannic*, a fast diesel liner sailing unescorted from Liverpool to New York. We passed the North Channel between Ireland and Scotland in a hazy calm. Several half ships, blown apart by mines or torpedoes, lay aground beside the channel, their interior compartments all visible like the sectional drawing shown in steamship advertisements. I remember seeing one cabin trunk standing in its cabin just at the water level. Pink silky clothing hung out of a half-open drawer, falling down to trail in the small waves that lapped around the wreck. We had the usual false alarms, but otherwise a safe passage, arriving in New York at dawn in the middle of February, 1940. Cecil was in Hollywood so Kath-
leen handled the arrival herself. Looking out of our A deck cabin window, George and I saw the Statue of Liberty reflecting the first light of the rising sun. Customs and immigration took all morning, most of which George and I spent waiting in line on A deck watching New York’s harbor traffic and answering reporter’s questions. We were interviewed and photographed quite intensively for children, but we never saw anything in print. Looking toward the center of New York we saw the famous skyline, and things of much greater interest. I thought that New Yorkers must have funny wishes. One warehouse wall carried a picture of two camels, a palm tree and a pyramid, just like one of Grandpa’s picture postcards from Egypt, with the slogan “I’d walk a mile for a camel.” I pondered the demand for camels in the great American desert while the customs inspectors slowly progressed along the line. Remembering Conan Doyle’s account of the sufferings of the Mormon pioneers, I thought that I’d walk more than a mile to obtain a camel.

Once ashore and installed in the Gramercy
Park Hotel, I went out quite confident in my ability to handle myself and American money. Like any English boy just escaped from rationed food, I found a sweet shop and selected an “Oh Henry,” a pun quite lost on me.

“How much?” I asked.

The shopman gave a sort of unintelligible sound that disappeared down his throat before it could get out.

“How much?” I asked.

Another sort of gulp was the reply. I was quite baffled, and showed it. Like any ignorant immigrant who didn’t understand the language, I had to hold out my hand with coins in it. The shopman spoke again. “Five cents. You have a nickel there in your hand.”

“That’s a five cent piece,” I said.

“We call them nickels here,” he taught me laughingly.

Mrs. Wagner took Mother round the fashionable women’s shops, in accordance with Father’s instructions to dress her well. As a former actress,
Mrs. Wagner knew well what would impress Hollywood. “Damn it,” she said, “it’s his money. We’ll dress you up so you’ll knock Hollywood’s eyes out.”

George and I were also taken shopping, to Rogers Peet or somewhere like that, and outfitted completely with American-style prep-school outfits, knickerbockers and very heavy coats to withstand the extreme winter climate. I think I wore the knickerbockers once only, for Father instructed us from Hollywood to proceed to California to live.

“Don’t come to Hollywood,” were his words. “Go to San Francisco, it’s the only city on the coast.”

That would take three days on the train, a prison sentence for active little boys. As one toy to keep us interested, at the station we bought lead toy trains (Tootsietoy brand) with rubber wheels for pushing along the floor; locomotive, passenger car and club car.

Mother flew to Los Angeles to see Father while Ruth, George, and I went by train to San Francisco. We left New York on the Twentieth Century, a stainless steel streamlined train powered by a powerful
Hudson steam locomotive with a fancy stainless steel jacket. It was an overnight train, leaving New York in the early evening. I sat in the club car in the gathering darkness, watching the lights of stations and towns flash by as the prominently mounted speedometer climbed to 80 miles an hour. Arriving in Chicago the next morning, hordes of passengers piled into the Parmelee taxis for the transfer to the westbound stations. We left Chicago on the Overland Limited, headed for San Francisco. Rain pelted down most of the time, filling the fields with water. Ruth had a drawing room at the end of the car, while George and I shared a section whose upper berth had a small window at each end with sliding screens to keep out the light. He and I slept feet to feet, each with one window. I remember the first dawn out of Chicago, when I peered out of my tiny window at the rain soaked fields and the rain flurries. The fields became more and more flooded, until they were entirely under water, with the train traveling on an embankment and finally a trestle. I finally realized that the water was not just lying on
the fields but swirling under the train; and then we were on a bridge with a fierce brown flood swirling below. It was a long bridge, and I guessed with a thrill that we must be crossing Huck Finn’s river, the mighty Mississippi.

The meals in the dining car were very good. I discovered the tastiness of buckwheat pancakes, and had them as part of every breakfast. And hot chocolate to drink, with whipped cream on top. We had lots to read, but still felt cooped up. I pushed my toy train the length of the real train, all 18 cars of it, time after time, reading the time tables and inventing routes for my trains. These American trains were enormous. The Overland was pulled by a huge black Northern steam locomotive that spewed noise, steam, smoke and soot with every move. The train was not streamlined and the club car had an open observation platform. I would lean out over the side railing looking up ahead, watching the cars and hoping to see the locomotive when we rounded curves. I came back for meals with my face smeared with soot, white only around my eyes where my glasses
had protected my face.

We first crossed endless fields awaiting the spring seeding, with their farmhouses and towering silos; then we crossed endless miles of scrub and brush with nobody to be seen at all. The train stopped at Cheyenne in the midst of this wilderness, and I got out to run up and down the platform. Then a thundering great locomotive came the other way on the adjacent track, pulling a freight train. I stood there counting the cars with my ears filled with the bark of the locomotive, fast fading, and the crash and clatter of the freight cars as they rolled past. I was counting, “Eighty-five, eighty-six, nothing like this in England, eighty-eight, eighty-nine,” when I was snatched, picked up, and practically thrown aboard my own train, which had started behind my back, with the brakeman running and climbing aboard behind me. I very nearly had to wait overnight in Cheyenne for the next day’s train.

Then we came to the Sierra Nevada Mountains, climbing Donner Pass where the pioneer party had been stranded in the snow. Sure enough, there
was snow, piled high on each side of the tracks. The train slowed with the climb, following the curving track up mountains twice as high as any in England. One of the travelers was Mr. Swanson, manager of San Francisco’s tourist and convention bureau, who knew the route and the timetables. He swung over the railing of the observation platform, reaching out to where he could gather handfuls of snow. “Make snowballs,” he commanded. “There’s a train coming the other way.” Indeed there was, and we pelted the passengers on the rear platform of the other train as it rolled past.

Then we arrived at Oakland to transfer to the ferryboat Eureka for the last part of the trip to San Francisco. That boat had an engine unknown on English paddle steamers, with a single vertical cylinder connected to the paddle wheels by an enormous walking beam, rocking back and forth overhead. It was early evening, with the cold San Francisco fog in evidence. We stood at the forward end of the upper deck watching the yellow lights of the Bay Bridge overhead and the lights of San Francisco gradually
getting clearer as we approached the Ferry Building.

While we stayed at the Hotel Mark Hopkins, Mother looked for a suitable house. After considering Sausalito too foggy, she found one in Berkeley, at 1020 Keeler Avenue, a redwood and fieldstone, California-Spanish house anchored to a hillside, its view directly out the Golden Gate. It was owned by an Army colonel who was serving in the Philippine Islands, and we rented it completely furnished, even down to many books. We lived there for five years, while Father worked first in Hollywood, then with the British Information Service in New York, and finally largely at home with us.

In Hollywood Cecil worked on two films: a treatment of Hornblower, the early black-and-white one, and then *Eagle Squadron*. In both cases he felt that Hollywood ruined the story, however well they managed the technical part of film-making. “The film is still going all right, Wallace suggested improvements which nearly knocked the bottom out of what I’d done, but I’ve been able to circumnavig-
gate him so far.”

In that summer I was given a tour of the Warner’s lot, including the sound stage that contained a sailing warship big enough to look real when actors played their parts aboard it, and equipped with hydraulic jacks to make it pitch and roll as if the waves around it were large enough to cause the action.

Cecil had returned to the same Villa Carlotta where he had stayed in 1936, and every few weeks either Kathleen would go there or he would come up to Berkeley. He wrote letters such as the following, on Warner Brothers stationery and typed by his secretary:

“My Dear,

“I received your letter this morning. When you come on Sunday, will you please bring our marriage certificate and the children’s birth certificates, and you better bring your own birth certificate as well.

“On Tuesday, the 9th, we are having the devil

12. CSF-K, B-301, May 1940

802
of a big dinner party with twenty people coming, so
you had better bear that in mind when deciding
what clothes to bring. There is some sort of tennis
party on Sunday afternoon, but that is all I have
arranged.

“Looking forward to seeing you.”\textsuperscript{13}

Privately, he wrote less happily, with handwriting
from 5959 Franklin Avenue.

“My dear sweetheart,

“I’m scribbling this before starting for N.Y. I’ve
just written to Mackenzie saying we’re not going to
Catalina. Don’t think me too silly, but somehow I
feel I wouldn’t get any fun out of it in present cir-
cumstances. It’s hard to explain why. Sorry to spoil
your weekend, dear, but that’s how it is. Do forgive
me.

“I shall stay at the Gramercy Park while I’m in
N.Y. — I’ll have to go to Boston and Washington, I
expect. I shall come back here, arriving on Thurs-
day as we arranged. That’s Decoration Day, a public

\textsuperscript{13} CSF-K, B-300, 3 April 1940

803
holiday. If you care to be here I shall love to see you; otherwise I’ll soon be up to S.F. The picture world is in a turmoil, and jobs are very doubtful. But I’ve brought off a great coup which I’m proud of, even if it proves unnecessary.

“Write to me airmail in N.Y. if you’ve time.
“Lots of love, dear.
“I’m horribly unhappy.”

The undertone of unhappiness appears to be neither rare nor out of character. Some of it was undoubtedly caused by the war, but more by Cecil’s separation from his family and more still by Cecil’s own “cursed crossgrainedness,” his words to describe Hornblower’s character. Those latter portions of it were, consciously or unconsciously, of his own origination. I have never been able to discover why, for instance, Cecil set up his family life as he did in 1940. His nominal and professional work was in Hollywood; his patriotic (or otherwise motivated) avocation was based in New York. Why then did he

14. CSF-K, B-302, Sunday, May 1940
send us to San Francisco with instructions to find a house in that part of the country? When I was young, I believed his words that life in Hollywood was so terrible that no civilized person could bear to live there. Later on, as I came to understand his puritanical rejection (with one part of his character) of the comforts of living, liquor, money, and sex, I wondered whether he feared his family would be seduced by the Lotos Eaters who lived in Southern California. Discovering the other side of his character, I later surmised that instead, in both New York and Hollywood, he lived, or had lived in the past, in a style that he didn’t want us to discover. There is some evidence for all of these hypotheses; perhaps closest to the truth is the combination of all of these, mutually contradictory though they seem.

I am equally baffled by the true meaning of an event he repeatedly recounted to me as background for the character-building lectures he so often gave me. He was very insistent on honesty as the first virtue, closely followed by verity, reliability, promptness, and cheerfulness — just like the Boy Scout
promise.

“I am an honest man,” he told me. “So honest that I have acquired a reputation for honesty. No rumor of financial scandal or indeed of financial unreliability has ever touched my name. Not only that, but when I give my word I keep it, and in addition I am discreet about keeping it and about keeping other people’s secrets.” A boy believing his father, I took it all in, and listened to his further words. “As an example, when I was in Hollywood, where no one else had that reputation, I was awakened at four one morning by Niven Busch. Mr. Busch was extremely excited and perturbed. ‘Cecil,’ he said, ‘my wife has discovered me with my girl friend. The whole works — detectives with cameras and all. There’s Hell to pay. I’ll never escape her clutches now. She’ll take everything I’ve got. What can I do?’

“I told him,” Father went on, “that whatever she wanted to do she couldn’t get anything done before business hours, so we had time to plan. We correctly assessed her character as a designing
woman out for all the money she could get, so Mr. Busch decided to give me every loose possession he had and all his money, which I would hold until the divorce case was settled. We went down to his bank and waited until the doors opened. After writing a check to me for his balance and emptying his safe deposit box we prepared to leave the building. As we started towards the glass doors, who did we see coming up the steps but Mrs. Busch accompanied by the sheriff with an attachment order. She glared at us, but it was already too late. I held Mr. Busch’s possessions until after the divorce was over, then returned them to him as I had promised. You see, John, there was no reason except honesty for me to do so — Mr. Busch had legally given me everything he owned, and there was nothing he could have done about it. He trusted me because of my reputation for probity, and because I was honest I gave his possessions back to him. He was so pleased that he gave me this inscribed watch.”

Father took off his watch and turned it over to show the inscription. “FORESTER/FROM/
BUSCH/1940” I have the watch in my possession now — I had to steal it from his estate, but that’s a later part of the story.

As a boy, I accepted this story in the words in which he introduced it — as an example of the trust which follows honesty. Perhaps it should also have illustrated “all’s fair in love and war,” but I didn’t think of that until later. What is more peculiar is that Cecil would have risked his sensitive, quasi-diplomatic position by conduct which was, in fact, illegal, and which could have brought his name into court in the civil case even if the state did not press charges of conspiracy to conceal evidence. It is conceivable that Busch knew enough about Cecil’s life to have been able to persuade Cecil to take the risk to avoid a worse one. When Busch learned that this book was in typescript he asked to read it. As he told me afterward, “I was much more interested in learning what Cecil had told you about me than in what you had written about him. However, once I started reading your story I got taken up by the complicated account. You had a psychologically difficult task
and you handled it well.”15

By August, 1940, Cecil had decided to write a novel for the American market illustrating that the differences between Englishmen and Americans were of little importance when compared to their similarities. The result was The Captain from Connecticut. He wrote (and here again is the coincidence of a new plot started just as Kathleen leaves him). “I have been thinking about “The Captain from Connecticut” ever since you left, and now I am just itching to get started on it. With any luck, it will go with a rush when I begin. If you have time, will you get me: Mahan’s Sea Power in Relation to the War of 1812, Theodore Roosevelt’s History of the War of 1812, and any stray books they can recommend to you on the history of the American Navy.”16

Meanwhile, we in Berkeley were doing our bit as well. Upon moving into 1020 Keeler Avenue we

15. Conversation, JF with Busch, 4 December 1985
16. CSF-K, B-303, 5 August 1940
settled down quite smoothly. The house was spectacular. It was built on the lower side of the road, and from the street appeared to be a typical one-story stucco California ranch house with a single garage projecting toward the road. The tiled roof was pierced by a massive fieldstone chimney that appeared out of proportion to the house. The windows were protected by elaborate wrought-iron grilles.

The visitor who entered the front door was shocked to find himself on a bridge that crossed the living room whose floor was ten feet below. The size of the room was enhanced by the five tall windows, sixteen feet tall at least, each with an ogive top and the five forming a greater ogive, which opened the room to a view straight out through the Golden Gate. Above him, the ceiling was held up by redwood beams a foot square, joined by massive carriage bolts. Looking over the railing of the bridge, the visitor saw below him to the right the fire, two smaller logs burning before the five-foot stump of eucalyptus that formed its Yule log, in a fireplace
large enough to walk into. The hillside was so steep that what appeared from the street to be the single floor contained only three bedrooms and the top part of the living room.

This top floor of the house was divided into three parts. The southern third contained two bedrooms with a bathroom between them. The front bedroom was at street level. The back bedroom had a magnificent view of San Francisco Bay, a clear view because it was two or more floors above the ground, and it had a balcony from which to enjoy that view. The central third of the top floor was the top of the living room, with its bridge joining the front door and the two sets of bedrooms, and a pair of staircases descending, one from each end of the bridge, to the living room on the main floor. The northern third of the top floor contained a guest bedroom with its own bathroom, the garage, and the back stairs between them. The guest bedroom had an opening into the upper part of the living room, closed by shutters, so that if one opened the shutters and had some musicians playing in it the music
could be heard in the living room.

The main floor, below, contained the rest of the living room, an equally impressive dining room, breakfast room, kitchen, and laundry.

Below that still was a cavernous, almost sound-proof and indestructible, masonry playroom, a children’s library, the oil-fired furnace, a reasonably-sized bedroom with its own bathroom, and another bedroom, the size of a ship’s stateroom but lined with bookshelves.

At various levels around the three-storied sides of the house were balconies, patios, a fishpond, and a glass-enclosed workshop. Every level of the house had access to the garden. The garden extended from the street above to the street below, where a double garage (in addition to the single one above) was tunneled out of the bank below the garden and closed by double sliding doors capable of withstanding a madman with an axe. (Literally. I once got the door shut just in time when one of the neighboring boys ran amok with a lumberman’s axe. The notches were still in the doors the last time I saw them.)
In the garden was a two-room cottage, in which lived Harold Watkins, who was studying landscape architecture at the University of California and running a small landscaping firm. He paid his rent by looking after the garden, sometimes in person and sometimes by his employees. Naturally, Ruth and Harold sized each other up, and not quite so predictably, fell in love.

George and I entered the local school, Cragmont Elementary, and were placed according to our ages. I entered the High Fifth, where I found that I knew everything that was being taught except California history, a subject for which I felt no responsibility for not having learned in England. It was not for two and a half years, until I entered the eighth grade, that the teachers started teaching material that I did not already know. Aside from the waste of time, that situation is bad for inquisitive children. In arithmetic I completed the tests, turned the papers over and did more difficult problems, just to show that I could, but the teacher took no notice whatever. Instead of concentrating on learning the sub-
jects, I spent my time evaluating the teachers and their techniques, deciding on their level of competence, sometimes to their great detriment. While this did not lead me to physical disobedience, it did lead me to intellectual skepticism about teachers and the teaching profession.

The other schoolboys (I don’t remember the girls entering these discussions) exhibited typical suspicion of aliens. At that time the traditions of the War of 1812 appeared just as fresh in their minds as those of The Great War (now called World War I), yet these children were largely, almost completely, ignorant of Napoleon’s attempt to conquer the known civilized world that was the reason for the War of 1812, the war that never should have happened. They teased me with claims that the last time Americans fought the hated English they whipped them, just as they had done in the Revolution. Wendell Wilkie was running for president against the incumbent Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and there were heated arguments comparing those two. These were partly about domestic concerns, but equally
about the fear that Roosevelt was far more likely to get the nation into war than was the Republican Wilkie, even though Wilkie campaigned as a comparative internationalist, at least as compared to the stubborn isolationist wing of the Republican party. The schoolboys had no conception of the danger to America, without the protection of England, if a single power conquered the European and Western Asian continents, as Napoleon had tried, and Kaiser Wilhelm I after him, and as Hitler was trying, spectacularly successfully so far, at that time. In a few weeks in May, the second Blitzkrieg conquered Holland, Belgium, and France, covering many times the area over which the armies of 1914 fought for four years because they could not break through. Denmark and Norway had been conquered as a side attack the month before, leaving the entire European coastline facing Britain under the control of Hitler. Now only Britain and the Atlantic ocean stood between Hitler and America, and many Americans believed that the Atlantic ocean was wide enough to keep Hitler out of their lives. Therefore,
so they thought, Britain’s security was not very important to the United States. The schoolboys taunted me with their version of the battle of Jutland, when the German fleet challenged the British fleet for control of the seas, discovered that ships along half the horizon were firing at them, turned tail and fled. The German fleet never came out again, save to surrender, which is the proof of the battle. However, at Jutland the British lost more ships than the Germans, enabling American schoolboys to repeat the German claim that they did not lose the battle. They taunted me with that propaganda as well as that about the war of 1812.

I had social difficulties as well as political ones. The Berkeley climate and customs were entirely unsuited to the prep-school clothing that had been bought for me in New York. These boys wore jeans, T-shirts and Keds instead of the gray flannel short trousers, black oxfords, knee socks, shirt, tie, jacket, and cap, all the latter in the school colors, that I was used to, or instead of the similar, but warmer, winter clothing worn at prep schools on the East coast. I
was jeered at for coming to school in short pants. Later, as the weather warmed up, I was jeered at for wearing sandals instead of Keds. I didn’t care; that jeering showed the parochial ideas of those boys who had no idea of what the rest of the world did. I was well on the way to feeling superior because I had had the advantage of a somewhat wider appreciation of the world.

Before Cecil came to Berkeley, Kathleen had made friends there. When Cecil arrived in Berkeley, he was introduced around town as a literary celebrity. Naturally, he met various professors from the faculty of the University of California at Berkeley, including George Stewart, who was introduced as another author. “One more professor who thinks he can write and has written an unsaleable book,” thought Cecil when being introduced. It was only later that he realized that Stewart had written *Ordeal by Hunger*, the story of the Donner Party that we had all admired. My brother and I were invited to meet the Stewart’s son, Jack, on an afternoon when he
had a woodworking class at his house. Henry Sammett, a high-school shop teacher, taught Jack and two other boys in a workshop in the basement of Jack’s house. George and I joined, and when the Stewarts left for a sabbatical in Mexico, Mother hired Henry to continue teaching us in the workshop in Keeler Avenue. Henry remained an appreciated friend for decades, and the skills he taught us enabled both George and me to support our families in each of our economically disastrous years.

We arrived in San Francisco during its World’s Fair. I enjoyed the exhibits on Treasure Island while they lasted, but the Fair produced a longer-term result. The presence of foreign dancers performing the dances of their nations stimulated the international folk dance movement. Since she had taught English country dancing in England, Mother fitted right in. We held dances on the lawn in summer daylight and in the living room in the evenings. That living room was large enough for two squares of American square dancers. I learned my first dances there with that group. Later, when we left the house,
the owners alleged that we had shaken the house apart by dancing in that living room, but they couldn’t demonstrate any damage.

The only marionette Kathleen brought from England was the marvellous ballerina Mademoiselle Kickova. With Henry Sammett’s woodworking skill, the space available in the downstairs playroom, and the experience of Kathleen and Ruth (and Cecil when he was available), there were all the ingredients for restarting the marionette theater. Kathleen determined to do so to produce an attraction for British War Relief bazaars and similar activities. This time we all got into the act. George and I learned how to make and string puppets and, most important, how to disentangle their tangled strings. Henry built an effective stage whose pieces could be easily carried by car, Mrs. Evelyn Lewis (the mother of my best friend, Tom, who lived across the street) sewed the costumes onto the marionettes. During performances Kathleen, Ruth, Harold, and Henry (and me also, for daytime performances) operated marionettes and provided two female and two male
voices.

We went round from one fund-raising event to another, collecting money for civilian war relief, collecting used clothing for Bundles for Britain, and serving as an attraction to persuade people to listen to a bit of propaganda for Britain. Once we became well known, our most successful effort was to go down to Hollywood where, naturally, we had good publicity, and give performances whose entry fee was a pair of used binoculars for the British Merchant Marine Officers. We collected a truckload of binoculars, our audiences having cleaned out every pawn shop in Los Angeles.

We also entertained and introduced round Berkeley the crew of the Orion, a British cruiser which was in Mare Island Navy Yard for repairs to extensive battle damage. There was a great hollow space in the ship where the forward turret had been, with the guns of the turret above bent upward like limp wire by the force of the explosion. That damage had been caused by an aircraft bomb. The crew were a very nice lot, and the youngest, the drummer,
was only a few years older than me. Unfortunately, most of them were later killed when the *Orion* was sunk off Salerno.

The last half of 1940 Cecil spent in Berkeley working on *The Captain from Connecticut*. This American Navy story was designed to illustrate the true congruence of interests between England and America. Cecil assembled the themes he had used before into a warlike story of the British and American Navies that, most ingeniously, avoided bloodshed and recrimination and illustrated the historical theme that the War of 1812 had been a completely unnecessary war. There is nothing new about that theme — historians had propounded that long before. What is remarkable (in the sense of being distinguishable rather than extraordinary) is the facility with which Cecil’s earlier themes fitted the situation. Cecil wanted a war without bloodshed in which neither side wins, so he chose his events so that his characters (regardless of the activity going on elsewhere) were historically ineffectual while personally very active. It was Dodd, Rose, and Horn-
blower all over again. The glorious days of the American Navy, as in most navies, were the times of war, but of these the most glorious, with their famous single-ship actions, were those of 1812, only one year after Hornblower returned with flying colors. In 1940 there was still an undercurrent of American opinion, a kind of folk memory rather than a self-recognized thought, that harked back to the last time Americans had fought the British, in 1812, and this, too, Cecil could counteract by choosing the War of 1812 as his milieu. Hornblower, of course, could not be in this story at this time, nor even later, after World War II, when Cecil took him to Russia in 1812 to avoid American complications. The captain from Connecticut is Josiah Peabody, a rather Americanized Hornblower, with the same internal sensitivity covered by a seaman’s physically armoured but socially inexperienced hide. The specific changes which make Peabody an American are, I suppose, characteristics which Cecil thought particularly appropriate. So, Peabody is far more familiar with the Bible than is Hornblower, and the fact
that he comes from a poverty-stricken farm is not something remarkable for one who goes to sea. He has two drunken parents, a father with “the bottle beside him and the Bible in front of him, and the furious texts foaming out of his mouth, drunk with rum and the Old Testament,” and a mother from whose drunken caresses he shrank and who left him with “nightmares of a loving mother” which only “gradually ceased in intensity” after he went to sea. Certainly the latter helped explain why Captain Peabody was still single at the start of the story, which required a happy romance to replace the missing action, but it is hardly either a necessary or a complete explanation. Peabody suffered from a sense of sin, of guilt, merely for being human. Those who have read Cotton Mather’s sermon describing the angry God holding the sinner over the opening of the flaming pit, liable to let him fall at any moment, can understand the background for Peabody’s psychology. I don’t know where the religious portion of this portrait entered Cecil’s mind, unless he thought that this was the best way to describe the New
England tradition, but the drunkenness reflects again his lifetime horror of drunkenness in general and of his drunken mother in particular. The peculiar juxtaposition of thoughts in the phrase “[Peabody’s] nightmares of a loving mother” is also indicative of the connection in Cecil’s mind between horror, love, and a puritanical view of women, if not explicitly of sex itself.

After the autumn of 1940, Cecil returned to duty with the now renamed British Information Service in New York. He always said that he served out of patriotism and he took no pay beyond his expenses, but by doing so he also kept himself as free as he could in a society where compulsory service was almost universal. Upon arriving in New York he wrote back: “Of course I’m waiting horribly anxiously for this damned interview tomorrow; it’ll settle my destination one way or the other, I expect. If there’s anything vital I’ll wire you, dear. The conscription age is 1 year behind me now.”

17. CSF-K, B-307, January 1941
Before his position with BIS was settled, Cecil took time out to enjoy himself and settle a few other affairs. He moved into the Gramercy Park Hotel where he had stayed the year before. The Gramercy Park contained both a hotel and a luxury apartment block with hotel services available. In the apartment section lived Miss Frances Phillips, the editor for the publishing firm of William Morrow and Company, whose president, Thayer Hobson, was also known to Cecil. In the same letter quoted above, written 5 days after he arrived in New York, the connection is first mentioned. “I’m going in for a bit of speculation, dear — perhaps I shall invest in William Morrow and Co. There’s a block of shares which awaits disposal. You see, dear, as a precaution against inflation it’s as well to own shares in a firm like a publishers’ which depends so much on goodwill; it’s speculative, but I know the firm well, of course, and we’ve got enough decently invested to keep us from starving, and this might show a handsome return and can’t be altogether lost. But I haven’t decided for sure. I’m lunching with Hobson
(after the dentist’s!) to make up my mind.”\textsuperscript{18} He did not at this time buy the stock, but he instead lent Morrow $10,000 to help them out of some sort of financial difficulty.

He went on to say “And I’m dining with Walter Millis (‘Why Europe Fights’) which will be lively and interesting. The Cruising Club of the U.S. is having me to dinner tomorrow — after the big conference. I’ve seen a good deal of Wendy Marsh.” Wendy Marsh was the name usually used by Molly Cossart (as I remember her name), an employee of the administrative section of New York University, who wrote poetry and lived in Greenwich Village a few blocks south and west of the Gramercy Park. Cecil also took a young man to a musical comedy, met Jerry and Norma Wagner in the lobby, and all four went backstage and ended the evening by taking the leading ladies to supper at Sardi’s.

Cecil’s first official actions were to make the lecture tour that had been planned the year before.

\textsuperscript{18} CSF-K, B-307, January 1941
In the middle of February Cecil wrote: “I’m speaking at Columbia again tomorrow — reengagement (!) and after that — I leave here 24th Feb. Speak at Madison 25th, Chicago, 26th, Bloomfield Hills (near Detroit) 27th.

“I spend the night of Feb 27th and March 1st in New York (here in Gramercy Park) and speak at the Union.

“Speak at Pittsburgh March 3rd and I’ll be at Gramercy Park again on night of March 4th. Speak at Milwaukee March 6th, Louisville, Kentucky on March 7th, and come home from there via Kansas City and L.A. — I’ll be home about March 11th, and of course I’ll write again before then. If you want to get hold of me, wire to the G.P. for the nights I’ll be there. Or write — they’ll hold my mail.

“I’m missing you a lot, and wish I were home. But the lectures so far have been a big success. If you hear from two men called Wheeler-Bennett and Aubrey Morgan they’re British Press Service people; do anything they want. And I gave a card to a nice redhaired lad whose name I’ve forgotten and sug-
C. S. Forester, by Barbara Sutro, 1941
gested he should look you up in Berkeley — he’s an American and no one official, but I thought you’d like him.

“Niven Busch has been asked to go to England as a reporter for ‘Life’ and he’s accepted! He’ll see reality for once in a way, which’ll be good for him. There’s extraordinary optimism here about England.”

At his first stop at Madison, Wisconsin, Cecil was met at the station by an escort of undergraduates. They were very respectful, saw him settled at his hotel, and asked if there was anything he would like them to show him or do with him. He told me the story. “I looked at their young faces and thought ‘How polite they are, when obviously they have much better things to do than waste an afternoon with an old duffer like me.’ So I told them I had letters to write until dinnertime.

“At dinner they told me that they had spent the afternoon iceboating on the lakes on each side of

19. CSF-K, B-310, February 1941
Madison. If I had known I would have let nothing stop me from going with them.”

After the lecture tour Cecil returned to Berkeley until September. This last peacetime American summer was a halcyon time for his children, but carried forebodings of evil apparent to the adults.

Cecil worked on stories that combined propaganda and sales appeal, stories like An Egg for the Major, which appeared in the Saturday Evening Post and has been anthologized since. In this story Cecil describes the British conquest of Marshal Graziani’s Italian Army of Cyrenaica. A hopelessly outnumbered — but both armored and mobile — British Army advanced 500 miles across the desert from Egypt into Italian Africa and cut off 130,000 Italians, 400 tanks, and 1200 guns in a classic exposition of Liddell Hart’s twin theorems of armored mobility and indirect approach. Cecil illustrated his friend’s theorems, dramatized the case of the British conquest and humanized the conquerors by telling of the British major who led the spearhead. Out in
the desert, suffering from campaign routine, eating tasteless canned rations and drinking sun-warmed water tainted with the taste of chlorine and jerrycan (to use a later word), the major navigated his fast squadron of light tanks in a sweep towards the sea, unsure within twenty miles of where he was, and dreamed every night of fresh eggs. One morning he reached within gunshot of the coastal highway just in advance of the fleeing Italians, roadblocked their advance guard and thereby sealed their fate. The truckloads of Italian infantry, though they try half-heartedly, can do nothing against the light tanks, but a roaring two-day battle follows when the Italians manage to bring up field guns and heavy tanks. The British reinforcements start to arrive; at first infantry and anti-tank guns barely able to fight a delaying retreat along the highway as the Italians fight to break through to continue their retreat, then the cruiser tanks in another flank attack out of the desert that settles the issue. The Italians surrender. That evening, as the major rests beside his tank, one of the few remaining of that leading squadron, his
tank driver presents him with his reward — a fresh egg taken from the first farm in the fertile fringe between the desert and the sea.

Cecil here used the skill he had developed in making interesting his former military but historically inconsequential stories to render amusing, believable, and pleasant a historically and politically important campaign. Of all of those who wrote for The Saturday Evening Post (which, in a literary sense, is paying no compliment), Cecil was the most skillful. The Saturday Evening Post and Colliers served the same function as NBC and ABC television before cable, and their rewards were similar in comparative scale. Their repetitive and recurrent serials were written marvelously well for stories without any spark of originality whatever. Just as today, if you care to watch a TV drama, you can predict the ending of every episode after seeing the second commercial, and follow along with the dialogue knowing twenty seconds in advance every word that will be spoken, so then could I know every important point about an SEP story by reading the first
two paragraphs. That is, except for a story by CSF. In these — even, as I recall, in the *Captain D[estroyers]* series — just as he did with Hornblower, he succeeded in concealing the obvious and inciting concern for the hero, even though one intellectually recognized that the hero was really invulnerable.

Cecil describes Captain Crowe (the Captain D) as regularly writing four letters a week to four different women, able to keep each of them in a different watertight compartment and unwilling to discuss the relationship with any of the others because of the delicate nature of each of the affairs. One letter describes the memory of Crowe and this lady friend in a restaurant, hiding behind the palms lest they be recognized. Cecil closes one story in which Crowe succeeds because he outthinks the enemy with a statement that reflects on himself as well. “What Crowe did not realize was that it was the same telepathic sympathy, the same instinctive estimate of the other’s feelings, which made him a success with women and a success in war at the same time.”20
However, Cecil didn’t employ his skill when writing letters to his friends and family in England. The English people enjoyed Kathleen’s letters, while they thought Cecil’s were dull and uninformative.

At least one of Cecil’s Hollywood friends did not forget him. Marjorie Gateson, actress on stage, screen and radio, sent him a phonograph disk, titled “Welcome, C. S. Forester” and dated 1/9/41.

“Hail, – Cecil Forester!

“You who write so successfully of adventure and travel, where have you been, what have you done? Somehow we feel, even though you have been confined within the walls of your charming Berkeley home, sitting grimly before a typewriter, you are from the recesses of that imaginative mind of yours sailing the seven seas of romance and winning the glamorous heroines of all the ages.

“Meanwhile, Forester, your very faithful but unglamorous friends in Hollywood have missed you. The teas, the premiers, on the tennis courts,

20. The closing sentence of *Dawn Attack*. 

834
yes, even that favorite haunt of yours, Ciros, have been dulled by your absence, and the Villa Carlotta is only an ordinary apartment house and not a castle any more.

“If the similes are mixed, forget it; we forget you are a fine author. Remember only, we are just admiring friends who say, quote, ‘He was a man who women loved easily,’ unquote.

“Do you feel uncomfortable?

“Come back to us often, Cecil.”

The recording opens with a fanfare, then Miss Gateson speaks, using a radio voice. By the time she gives the quotation, which is CSF’s description of Hornblower that she now applies to him, her voice is more natural. The final sentence is spoken in an intimate voice.

Cecil produced an amateur story over this summer, *Poo-Poo and the Dragons*, designed to encourage his son George to eat better. George at this time did not eat well. We discovered later that he had a low-grade allergy to eggs, which made him puny, irrita-
ble, obscurely ill, and uninterested in food. Naturally, we attempted to strengthen him with plenty of good food, particularly milk and eggs, which was the worst thing we could have done — he would have done better on a sharecropper’s diet than on the wholesome one that we selected. Father then decided to tell a story at lunchtime as long as George ate. When George stopped eating, the story stopped. (In the English tradition, our lunch was really dinner, a large meal.) This story grew famous in the neighborhood, and soon not only George and me but Tom Lewis and John and Bill Underhill were regular visitors for lunch, all of us encouraging George to eat so we could hear more of the story. Like any successful serial writer, Father managed to foreshadow a crucial event just at the critical time, which was not at the end of the day’s installment but just as George would be wondering whether or not to ask for a second helping.

Father’s day, as had been his usual plan for years, began with breakfast in bed at eight exactly, continued with the newspaper, letters if the postman
had arrived, and thoughts about his professional story. At nine-thirty he rose, shaved, and dressed, with the day’s writing in his head, and from ten to twelve he wrote out that story. At ten past twelve, when we returned from school, Father came straight down to the dining room prepared to eat lunch while continuing his amateur story of Poo-Poo without any apparent effort or pause.

He played for time every once in a while, giving his characters outrageous names and using them to test our attention while he thought out the next incident. Poo-Poo had a real name, Harold Heavyside Brown, which we all had to remember and repeat when asked, but everybody called him Poo-Poo. One day he went walking and found a lost dragon, named Horatio, who later acquired a mate, Ermentrude, and child, Marmaduke. “You know that eggs have to be kept warm to hatch, don’t you? Well, dragon’s eggs have to be kept red hot by the father dragon breathing fire upon them. It was rather like having a blast furnace in the back garden, and when the baby dragon hatched out Horatio roared in joy,
making a noise like all the lawnmowers on earth, never oiled, being run at once. That noise brought the policeman.

“As Mr. Brown said this, the policeman scratched his head and said ... And what was the policeman’s name?”

“The policeman’s name was Patrick MacGillicuddy,” we chorused.

“He said, ‘I know there’s no regulation that specifically prohibits keeping dragons, but I do have one here (he opened his notebook that contained all the laws and regulations) that prohibits keeping dangerous animals.’

“Would you call that a dangerous animal?’ asked Mr. Brown, pointing to Ermentrude, who was proudly rocking Marmaduke’s perambulator back and forth and singing to herself, blowing little puffs of steam and smoke with every note.

“Well ... er,’ said Officer MacGillicuddy.

“Well, er, indeed,’ said Mr. Brown. And what do you remember about Mr. Brown?”

“Mr. Brown was a very clever man!” was our
The fact that we knew very well that “the very clever man” was C. S. Forester we could never hold against him. He was charming about it, and, confounded it all, he was indeed a very clever man.

Sometime after the Poo-Poo stories had run their course Cecil wrote them out for publication and the book was accepted in the fall by Little, Brown & Co. Father had commissioned the most talented of his listeners, Bill Underhill, to prepare drawings for the book. Bill was the son of an art teacher and wanted to be a commercial artist (he later became one). He prepared quite nice drawings of roly-poly dragons, rather in the Disney style, but Little, Brown’s editors preferred a different style. “And I’ve got a nasty piece of news for Bill Underhill. L.B. want to illustrate Poo-Poo by Lawson, the great man here for kid’s books. Would you break the news to him? Pay him for any work he has done since I left. I am really very sorry, and I think L.B. are wrong. But I’m too busy to fight them, and they ought to know best — anyway, they are sparing no
Perhaps Father was right. At any rate, when we saw Lawson’s drawings of bony dragons we compared them very unfavourably with Bill’s. We thought Lawson was drawing plucked chickens. And of course Lawson showed that he knew nothing at all about ferryboats, which was our special hobby, for he had drawn a tugboat instead.

After finishing the Poo-Poo stories Father took to running a quiz contest at mealtimes, rewarding peanuts or raisins as prizes for every correct answer. “You know that many flexible fabrics are woven of fibers. In thirty seconds I want you, John, to give me …” here he looked at his watch, then rushed out the rest of the question. “One from each of the major kingdoms, or classes of material, the sources and uses of four different fibers used in fabrics.”

He demanded full and complete answers. For this question he would reward a peanut only for the

21. CSF-K, 318, 13 September 1941
complete answer: “Wool, from sheep, an animal product used for sweaters. Cotton, from cotton plants, vegetable, used for sheets. Nylon, man-made from oil, used for stockings. And ... and ...” Here time began to run out swiftly. “And asbestos, a mineral that’s mined, for rescue suits and insulation.”

At the time I thought he knew everything of importance. He told me then his fictional tale that when he was very small he would collect all the library cards his brothers and sisters had, to obtain the maximum number of books at one time, and repeat that performance every week. I remember seeing him average between one and two books a day, plus an hour or so of the Encyclopedia Britannica as a soporific at bedtime. He claimed to be the only man in the world who had read the Britannica through more than once, and he said he’d read it through three times. Much of what he read he retained for years in an unsystematic fashion, recalling abstruse facts at will whatever the subject of discussion, except when it was music or philosophy. Music he never talked about except to say that he
never read anything about it, but about philosophy he quoted the old chestnut that “Philosophy is a blind man in a darkened room seeking a black cat that isn’t there.” He didn’t say so, but he also did not understand the mathematics that was in the scientific articles. However, his ability to recall odd facts, or what he stated as facts, about the most abstruse of subjects led his listeners to believe that he was a well educated man.

About this time Father first told me of his opinions concerning Hollywood society’s extravagancies and materialistic way of life. He told me that there they spend everything they earn, that when a man earning a thousand a week suddenly finds his option isn’t taken up he’s seen next Friday trying to sell his wife’s fur coat. He called it conspicuous consumption, spending just to show you have it to spend. Those words introduced me to the concept of conspicuous consumption in funeral customs, and the money spent on coffins and flowers.

“It’s ridiculous. More than that, it’s almost extortion and I expect it’s very profitable. The
English working man used to be extremely proud of his ability to pay his way and avoid the poorhouse, and he’d stint and save even in his old age to leave enough money for a brass-mounted coffin [one with fancy polished handles]. That’s where the slang phrase “with knobs on” came from. I don’t really hold with inheritance, but believe that a man should be buried with his last dollar. To stint and save in like for a fancy funeral, however, is nothing but perverted vanity.”

In the house library was a copy of Thorstein Veblen’s devastatingly critical *Theory of the Leisure Class*, which had introduced the phrase ‘conspicuous consumption’ to sociology. Father recommended Veblen’s book as an interesting exposition and support of the ideas he had just expressed to me. As an eleven-year-old’s introduction to economics and sociology, that’s quite an experience. I was already a foreign observer of American customs, and with the experience of reading that book, I never became quite acclimatized.

The line of conversation about funeral customs
naturally led to a consideration of death. “Death comes to us all, not very considerately, perhaps, but inevitably. Remember, John, that I have been a medical student; I have seen men die. For many it comes as a release; for others, it steals upon them unawares. In either case, it is not an event one should place great importance on. Remember ...” was I likely to forget after the third retelling? “that when Charles II lay dying, he still maintained his charm and consideration. His courtiers waited about his deathbed, as they must to be able to report honestly the circumstances and time of their King’s death. Knowing that they had been in attendance a long time, Charles remarked to them, ‘I’m sorry, gentlemen, to be such a plaguey long time dying.’”

Father also told me Suetonius’s story of the Roman emperor Vespasian, who, as he lay dying, referring to the custom of deification of past emperors, remarked to his courtiers, “Gentlemen, I fancy I am becoming a god.”

When we had first settled in Berkeley, Mother
had joined the Sierra Club, the corresponding organization to our Camping Club of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The Sierra Club was very active in Berkeley and the San Francisco Bay Area in general. Beyond the next house on Keeler Avenue was a whole block wiped out by a recent landslide, overgrown with new brush, young trees, and poison oak. Poised on the edge of the slide area was Pinnacle Rock, a volcanic pinnacle about eighty feet tall which we boys found to be a marvelous jungle gym, spot for playing tag, a fort when desired, or a tower from which to test model airplanes. The Sierra Club also used it for rock-climbing practice. The experts climbed the vertical faces which we boys could not, while the beginners climbed the easier pitches and practiced their belays and ropework at every possible spot. Round and among the serious-faced beginners (always a little frightened) and their casual instructors the boys of the neighborhood played tag or cops-and-robbers. Within a few blocks of that place lived several prominent members of the Sierra Club, who, even if not rock climbers themselves,
often stopped by the training sessions to talk to the committee members.

At about the same time, Kathleen had found a similar activity for George and me. Vinson Brown, an entomologist who had been, among other things, a professional bug collector in Panama, at that time earned his living by teaching boys nature study and outdoor living. For twenty-five cents a head he took a station-wagon-load of boys out for an afternoon after school (What kind of a living could that have been?), driving them up into the hills or down to the Bay shore for a hike and a lesson. He had seven groups of boys, one group each weekday afternoon after school, and two groups for Saturday. On Sunday he ran a special trip open to boys from all groups up to the capacity of the station wagon, for which he charged two dollars or so. Vinson called his organization the Boy Naturalists, and he named each group after an Indian tribe and provided a colored neckerchief to which we sewed the badges signifying what we had learned and the rank we had attained. Aside from that, there was none of the
Kitty in Skiing Clothes,
Claire Tapaan Lodge, 1941 or 1942
organizational hocus-pocus and the para-military air of the Boy Scouts. It was strictly outdoor living and conservation. We saw the Scouts out once in a while, struggling under excessive and useless impedimenta, on an overnight “walk” (hiking was what we did — one day in the Yolla Bolla Primitive Area a selected group of us did 13 miles under packs), and we inwardly laughed at the difficulties they caused themselves.

In this year of 1941, Cecil had several short-term, official but confidential, assignments that he later related to me. Colonel McCormick, owner and policymaker of the Chicago Tribune, was a pronounced and vocal isolationist, and as such a thorn in the side of the British. The Tribune published a story that because England needed so many of America’s fresh eggs, Americans were reduced to eating powdered eggs, supporting this with details of a powdered-egg factory. Father investigated the story, found that the plant had been making powdered eggs for forty years or so and had not had a
boom in business in the last year. He then persuaded Colonel McCormick to publish a full retraction given equal prominence, not the kind of about-face the stubborn Colonel was used to making. This powdered egg story is almost certainly false, because the Tribune’s archivist can find no trace of either the original story or the recantation. It is possible that some other newspaper published this story and Father magnified his accomplishment by attributing it to the Colonel and his newspaper.

The airborne radar set brought him into the fringes of the world of spies. English scientists had succeeded in developing the first vacuum tube capable of producing shorter radio waves at higher power than anything before, the magnetron tube. It produced six hundred times more power than anything else at that wavelength. The high power and small wavelength enabled building a radar set sufficiently small and accurate to be carried in a fighter plane. When the Luftwaffe and the RAF fought the daylight Battle of Britain, ground-based radar got
the RAF fighters to within visual range of the enemy for combat. When heavy losses forced the Luftwaffe to switch to night bombing, the fighter pilots, although close, could not see the bombers. That meant airborne radar sets, and the magnetron was the only means of providing sufficient power at the short wavelengths required.

Britain had its hands full and needed American assistance. The British government sent a scientific mission to America, the Tizard mission, carrying all the British military secrets, hoping to trade them for assistance. The secrets included preliminary work on the atomic bomb and on the proximity fuze for anti-aircraft shells, but by far the most important was a magnetron with its power supply, only the twelfth one ever made. Once the Americans created a secret committee, the British demonstrated their secrets. When the Americans saw the British magnetron, set up on a bench, emitting six thousand watts of microwave power, they were completely astonished. That demonstration led to the establishment of MIT’s Radiation Laboratory to
develop radar transmitters and receivers to use magnetron-produced microwaves. Some people have said that Allied superiority in radar was the most important factor in winning the war; the magnetron was the heart of that superiority.

Britain also produced radar equipment. Building it into an airborne radar set was a British accomplishment, and very secret. The British equipped the first operational single-seat fighters with airborne radar in 1942. This secret was so well kept that the Germans did not find it out for three years, at a time when we were prepared to risk its discovery by using it over Germany in a bomb-aiming radar. The Germans extracted from several downed bombers enough black boxes to make a system, and turned it on to see what it would do. Until it came to life, they didn’t realize that it would give them a detailed picture of the city around their laboratory. Their ignorance showed how well the secret had been kept.

Back in the autumn of 1940, the RAF’s Spitfires and Hurricanes, guided by the first effective interceptor control system informed by ground-
based radar, fought off the German Luftwaffe’s attempt to bomb away, in daylight, Britain’s ability to resist an invasion. This was against all prewar predictions that most bombers would always get through and the Germans did not know why they had been beaten. They had switched to night bombing because then their bombers could not be seen by the British fighter pilots, even if the Britons could be guided to the correct part of the sky. Throughout 1941, getting the airborne fighter radar into use was of first importance, and preventing the Germans from finding out about it was of next importance. As long as the Germans didn’t know of it, they would continue to believe that night bombing, while less accurate, was so much harder to defend against that it tied up enormous resources simply to keep thousands of defending fighter planes in the air while being relatively safe for the Germans. To prevent the Germans from finding out, no plane equipped with radar was allowed to fly where it might be discovered by Germans or their agents, and elaborate stories were invented to provide a
cover for England’s efforts. One of these stories was the “Vitamin A in carrots” hoax. Every night-fighter pilot, so the story went, was kept as much in the dark as possible, wore red glasses in the light, and, most important of all, ate enormous quantities of carrots because carrots contained the Vitamin A that enabled him to “see in the dark.” There’s just enough truth in this theory to convince the Germans that England was trying desperately to impede the German bombers, filling the night sky with thousands of night fighter planes, each piloted by a man who could see a bomber in starlight at one hundred yards when normal men could only pick one out in moonlight at fifty yards.

England’s need for night fighter planes required that some be of American design bought from American factories, who would of course have to know some of the secret, and would be advised by both pilots and technicians experienced in airborne radar. These experts were to be secretly flown to Los Angeles, the hub of the American aircraft industry, but their plane was forced down near Tulsa, Okla-
homa, leaving the experts exposed to bright sunlight and the gaze of the local populace.

Father flew to Tulsa, bought a truckload of carrots, arranged for dark accommodations and red glasses, and explained to the press that these men were indeed night fighting experts, the pick of England’s experience, specially trained and specially adapted for night vision. And, he added, that even now these men could not be exposed to bright lights and had to keep eating their carrots all day long, or their ability would disappear. Particularly harmful were the intense flashes of photographic flashbulbs; “Sorry, gentlemen, no pictures please.”

Once safely in Los Angeles there were more opportunities for the Secret to be compromised. In preventing this Father used his fast car. He who had bought medium-priced family sedans in England, and a Chevrolet the only previous time he’d had a car in the States, now bought a 1939 Cadillac 60 Special. The Cadillac, he assured me in a defense of his basic financial conservatism (which some have termed stinginess), was for work, not pleasure.
When she had first arrived, Kathleen had bought a 1937 Buick as the family car. Cecil had already bought a recent LaSalle (like a Buick with a Cadillac engine), which he discarded because it overheated at high speed. He replaced that with the car at the top of the line, the 60 Special Cadillac. Someone in Los Angeles stole the radar’s secret, and three Englishmen headed south in pursuit on the three different roads to Mexico.

“It was a wild ride at night, down those lonely roads. One of us overtook the spy, I may not tell you which one, forced him off the road and prevented disclosure of the secret.”

Lockheed’s night fighter, the Black Widow, may have been the subject of these stories. However, there certainly was cooperation between the British government and the American aircraft factories, cooperation that resulted in the P-51 fighter, often considered the best American fighter of the war.

Father went out on the sea trials of the Free French submarine *Surcouf*, the largest submarine in
the world, which had refitted at an American port. “I was never so frightened in my life,” he told me. “Because of her size, this submarine was very slow to handle, and the crew were erratic Frenchmen. They shouted orders up and down the echoing tunnel of the hull. ‘Plongee, plongee,’ shouted the control room. ‘Plongee, plongee,’ would come back from bow and stern, and the deck tilted down steeply. They had a devil of a time controlling her—I was scared stiff. When I went ashore I was convinced that that crew could inadvertently lose control on any dive and put her below her test depth. Actually, she was lost at sea on her next patrol, and I’m convinced that the Germans didn’t have to sink her.”

Aside from these excursions, Father stayed home over the summer of 1941. We spent two weeks on the Russian River, staying in the riverside cottage of Dorothy Dale, a field-hockey-playing friend of Mother’s, rowing and canoeing far up beyond the populated area. After that I went to Vinson Brown’s camp at Branscombe in Mendocino County on the
Eel River, while George, who was too young for such a rough camp, went to a more normal, but far more expensive, camp at Lokoya on the edge of the wine country. While we were away, Mother went on the Sierra Club High Trip, four weeks of hiking in the High Sierras in a group of about one hundred.

Mumps went round Vinson’s camp that year. One boy developed it in the first week and was sent home. I was staying the full time of six weeks, and at the end of the fifth week the four week incubation period had elapsed and I developed mumps. I didn’t want to go home yet, so Vinson put me out in the woods on a camp bed with orange crates around it for table and bookcases, and there I stayed. The deer and raccoons came to steal the food from the table at my bedside and I had the entire camp library on my other side and I was quite happy. At the end of camp Vinson assigned only those who had already had mumps to one car, and I returned to Berkeley, but not to home. Father had not had mumps; he was horrified at the thought and wouldn’t let me near the house. I was driven directly
to the apartment in which Ruth and Harold Watkins then lived.

Next week Mother returned from the mountains. I saw her immediately upon her return, when she visited me at the Watkin’s apartment, and she was happy. When I returned home in another week, there was obviously something wrong. Mother and Father wrangled and fought, and I spent most of my time across the road with Tom Lewis, where in his top floor rooms we were building and operating a model of San Francisco Bay with all its ferryboats, interurban trains and streetcars.

Tom’s father was a marine engineer who had served on the Bay ferryboats and in coastal service, and Tom’s grandfather had been the vice president in charge of the Southern Pacific’s ferryboat fleet. Consequently, there were many marine engineering books around Tom’s house. One rainy day I drew a paper model of one of the ships illustrated, using the skills I had developed in England with the Quaker Oats City. I cut it out and glued it together, showing Tom how it was done. From then on we
copied ferryboats and paddle steamers from all the books we could find and all the interurban railroad cars and streetcars we could see, all at a scale of 24 feet to the inch. Later, during the war, when Tom’s father took longer voyages and the top floor was unused, we built a system as similar to San Francisco Bay as the floor plan allowed, and operated these paper models according to pre-determined schedules. Is this heredity? I knew nothing at the time of the cardboard ships and games of strategy that my father and uncles had played, yet Tom and I did the same thing for a transportation system that they had done for the Napoleonic Wars. If the market for railroading fiction weren’t so dead, might I have been writing that as well as this?

The origin of the month-long wrangle between my parents, which persisted until Father returned to New York, was quite simple, though in most circles unmentionable. Kathleen returned from the High Sierra trip and, as always, was required to jump straightway into bed with Cecil. The following morning while in the bathroom she found upon her
body a tiny crab-like creature, which she crushed. She looked herself over and found one more, so she put it under an upturned glass and called her doctor. She described the beasts and stated that she had just returned from a camping trip in the Sierras.

Doctor Leet told her that she had described body lice.

“Oh,” she said. “I got back yesterday and I have been in bed with my husband. Could I have given him one?”

“Well,” said Dr. Leet very cautiously, as if feeling for the right expression, “that is the usual way in which body lice are transmitted. You should certainly tell him of what you have found.”

She did so. They both looked him over and found that he was covered with lice from the waist down, hundreds of them according to her description. “I should have sent him to the hospital where they could get rid of them properly, but he didn’t want anybody to know.” This was in the days before DDT, so Kathleen used the old-fashioned technique. “I found the best thing to do was to scrape them off
with a razor. I had to rig a bright spotlamp in the bathroom so I could see to shave him all over. It was a horrible business, made more so because Cecil was so acutely prudish and embarrassed about the whole thing. And of course I received some more that I had to get off me, after all that. It took a month to get rid of them all.”

Cecil’s comments on the matter are in writing. Two months later he wrote from New York: “It’s extraordinary how little my hair has grown again after the disasters of last August — how is yours going along, dear? I hope I have something to show you in Chicago — and I hope I haven’t lost my strength like Samson with my hair.”

Cecil was in New York because he had returned to working for the British Information Service. The primary purpose of this service was to convince American public opinion to support Britain in the fight against Hitler. A very few Americans

22. CSF-K, 328, 15 October 1941

861
actively supported Hitler and his ideas. Some other Americans agreed with Hitler’s hatred of the Jews, and some members of these two groups had formed an American Nazi party. A greater number of Americans favored Germany as the nation of their past, even though it was now governed by Hitler. A much larger number of Americans simply wanted to stay out of the war, partly because they did not want to get into any war and partly because they didn’t want to join the losing side. After all, by the fall of 1941 Hitler had spectacularly conquered all of continental Europe that he wanted and was well on the way to conquering Russia as well. The most influential of these pessimists was the American aviation hero Charles Lindbergh, who thought that the Luftwaffe was invincible and made speeches to audiences of many thousands about how America must stay out of the war. These people argued that even if Hitler conquered Britain the Atlantic Ocean was still wide enough to protect America. This was the isolationist view that America could stay out of European affairs. America was not likely to enter the war on
Hitler’s side (although in similar circumstances America had gone to war against Britain in 1812), but there was sufficient sentiment for Germany and for isolationism to prevent America from helping Britain. Those Americans who understood Hitler’s threat and the need to assist Britain by all methods short of war had to fight a political battle against daunting odds. The function of the British Information Service was to provide information that countered the pessimists and isolationists and supported the pro-British faction.

Cecil’s new job in New York was to supply the radio news commentators with all the British news they might require. He foresees what it will be like in his first letter from New York in September.

“Dearest,

“The job has been arranged satisfactorily in most ways. I am going to be the personal contact man with the radio commentators. There is nothing much secret about this. It means that we won’t see each other much, I am afraid, dear. But it is a job which I can at any rate do — it doesn’t employ my
writing ability, but it does employ any other talents I have got. What I have to do is to be ready to explain anything and supply any possible information needed by the radio people — it will be personal work almost entirely, and done by word of mouth most of the time. Most of the important commentators centre on New York. There is a big group round Washington and the next biggest is round Detroit. Of course my main function will be to induce them to say things in the way I want them said, and if I can arrange it that I have some little bit of exclusive news to dole out now and then that ought to be a help.

“I spent all day yesterday at the office, The British Information Service, 30 Rockefeller Plaza. I am one of Campbell’s five Chief Assistants, and I am engaged on a month to month basis, being paid subsistence here which will just meet my hotel bills — of course I shall be travelling a lot and that will be paid for. I expect I shall come out to the West Coast fairly often. I shall spend the next week going round the office finding out how it works (if it has really
started working) and then make the announcement about what my job is, and I expect the commentators, who must be pretty often at a loss for something to say, seeing that most of them talk ten minutes a day, will be glad to cooperate with me to a limited extent. I’ve already met several of them. The department is entirely new, and I shall be able to make of it just as much as I am able. The four other chief assistants (Wheeler Bennett is one of them) seem very nice fellows, most of them younger than me. The Treasury official told me that there would be no objection to my publishing any work I found time to do, which may be useful if we got hard up and I am able to spare the energy. When Little Brown’s account comes in I shall be able to give you a budget, telling you how much you can spend during the next six months. That ought to be the same as usual, but for the six months after that we may have to economize, but there is no point in worrying until we know. The thing I am worrying about is whether I shall be able to hold this job down — I shall be fired without mercy, and quite properly too,
if I do it badly. I should just hate that, though — I am so glad at present to have something to put my teeth in, although I’m already damned lonely here, dear. I’ll write all the other details tomorrow. Lots of love, dear.”

That was written on Saturday. By Monday Cecil knew some more details, writing under the official letterhead “Director General, British Information Service, 30 Rockefeller Plaza, New York City.”

“I’ve started work here. The job will be as big and as important as I care to make it, I think. It’s nominally radio, but I’m here as a general man of all work, too, with lots of things to do. One of the main functions, as far as I can see, is to give my judgement on any scheme that people here think of, and to be ready to put forward ideas when necessary. I shall have to get about the country a lot and I don’t doubt that I shall be in California fairly often. I shall have a sort of watchkeeper opposite number

23. CSF-K, B-315, 6 September 1941
with me, and one or other of us will have to be here to answer questions from radio people, while we take it in turns to go out and persuade them to come to us with the questions. But I shouldn’t be surprised if at any minute my job wasn’t changed — it works out to a large extent that I am chief of staff to Sir Gerald. One thing, I think, is that it will be ages before anyone will be able to discover whether I am doing anything or not — in other words I won’t get any thanks for anything I do, so that it is just as well that I don’t expect any.”

He closes by consoling Kathleen: “I’m in a hell of a whirl and simply can’t think so as to write you a nice letter.”

As a consequence of this position, Cecil was acknowledged for the first time to be an agent of the British government, and he sent in this letter the U.S. government forms with which Kathleen had to register as the wife of a British agent.

By Friday he had extracted some order from

24. CSF-K, B-316, 8 September 1941
his information. “It’s all right here — the men are all first rate minds and every one of them tries to help the others — there are very few civil servants and the others have no career to think about and all they want to do is to get the job done. I’m starting to make arrangements for the future; there are about 200 men in the U.S. whom I have to make contact with; at the rate of two a day (which would be pretty good) that means that I shall be on the move for over three months, but it has got to be done. I shall get out to California sooner or later, of course; about the end of the month I shall have to go to Washington for a fortnight, which I dread, but I have to go through with it.”

“The job still goes well. I am having lots of responsibility heaped on me, and I am having to do it all without any instructions or order, but I like both those ... And I lunched with Barbara Sutro in her apartment — she is just as nice as ever, and she is a bridge enthusiast and is arranging a four next

25. CSF-K, B-317, 12 September 1941
week; one of the four is an isolationist editor whom I have to contact! She doesn’t know. Of course I am having to exploit all my personal popularity; that’s what I am paid for. The Oct. date is to speak at the Boston Book Fair — I’m trying to wangle it for Oct 21st — Trafalgar Day.”  

One of Cecil’s additional tasks combined politics and publicity. “This morning the whole office is upside down and we are all working like blazes because the Windsors have arrived — there is far more business to be got through than if there were a battle in the North Sea or if an offensive had opened in Libya. It makes me sick, but it’s got to be done — there’s a hell of a lot of potential dynamite in this business.”

“I lunched with Louis Mountbatten yesterday and he made a tremendous impression on me — I went prejudiced against him, and came away quite the reverse. I shouldn’t mind at all if he were to com-

26. CSF-K, B-318, 13 September 1941
27. CSF-K, B-321, 25 September 1941

869
mand a British fleet in an important battle. But his damned cousin, W., and his damned wife, both need a good swift kick up their arses.”

“By going to Boston next week I am missing meeting the Windsors — I’m not sorry; the amount of trouble and anxiety that couple has caused me is enormous.”

Perhaps it was just as well they didn’t meet him, for as he heard a month later, “H. R. Knickerbocker told me that when he was a war correspondent in Paris last year he spent all his time giving copies of The General to the British staff, including the Duke of Windsor. He seemed to think it funny, but I’m not so sure.”

Cecil’s visits to Washington placed him in military company of a familiar sort. “Here I’ve been with all sorts of admirals and generals, British and otherwise — the British ones are just like my general and I am having a hell of a time conforming to their

28. CSF-K, 327, 11 October 1941
29. CSF-K, 328, 15 October 1941
30. CSF-K, 334, 24 November 1941
type — I haven’t tried to do that for years and it’s irksome, but it has to be done. The junior ranks whom I have seen are fine, and not that type at all.”

Cecil reacted to office routine as one would expect. He started by thinking it was easy: “I have been as busy as hell, although as I’ve always said I’ve found that a day in an office is nothing like as tiring as two hours at my desk; it’s interesting work, but I’m quite fresh at the end of it so far, and of course I haven’t had an afternoon sleep since I started.” Three works of work, however, leave their mark. “Today I’m going to sleep — the first time I’ve slept in the afternoon for a long time; actually for the first time I am really uncontrollably tired; I don’t know how the blokes here keep it up, working until midnight for weeks at a stretch; there’s one man here who has had six Sundays [off] and nothing else for the past year. I should die, and I’ll never let myself get drawn in like that.”

31. CSF-K, 323, 27 September 1941
32. CSF-K, B-317, 12 September 1941
By October 15 Cecil was proud of his results. “I love the job I’m doing, dear, and I think I’m doing it well, but of course it takes a lot out of me. Fortunately I’m left pretty well to myself and I’m not bothered by higher authority. The figures for the Washington trip have just come through. When I went the number of inquiries a day was about 10; now it has gone up to 150! My job was to popularize the office and encourage inquiries, so you see I did it all right. I’m as pleased as hell about it and Sir. G. C. is too. That is what I have to do in Chicago when I get there — I shall be doing it in Boston next week. Of course it is a whole time job, with what I do in this office, but Campbell is most insistent that I should write as well and I know how important it is, so I get along somehow. I have written to a lot of people in England — Margery Sharp and R. C. Hutchinson among them — to try and get them over here and start a real campaign, but there have been no results yet; in Margery Sharp’s case it

33. CSF-K, 325, 4 October 1941
would be the most effective thing she could do for England.”  

One of Cecil’s contacts in Chicago was with the *Chicago Tribune*, an isolationist thorn in the British side. He went to Chicago to talk to its management, perhaps Colonel McCormick himself. His trip was made more pleasant by Kathleen, who visited Chicago in order to be with him, and he returned to New York feeling pretty pleased with himself, only to be followed by a blast from the Colonel. “I’m in a bit of hot water at the moment about something the *Chicago Tribune* said about me yesterday [that would be 5 Nov. 41] — you remember the filthy rag, and I don’t think I am to blame; you can’t work for England without that paper saying something or other. I think it’ll blow over all right, but it’s a funny sensation to me to be nervous about going in to see the boss and be told off — that’s what happened to me this morning.”

34. CSF-K, 328, 15 October 1941  
35. CSF-K, 330, 6 November 1941
The rift with his boss lasted a month, when: “The bad patch I went through in this office has suddenly and dramatically ended, with a very handsome apology from the D.G. (I was in the right all the time) and an invitation to dinner ... Tonight I’m having a party here — all the people of the office, God knows why, except that it suddenly came into my head this morning when I hadn’t a date for tonight. Three men and all the typists and secretaries, about ten altogether! As I say, God knows why, but everyone seems delighted with the prospect, so I’m glad. I suppose it’s really to celebrate the end of the war between the D.G. and me, which has afflicted everyone.”

Given the approximate date, I asked the Chicago Tribune office to quote their comments which were the origin of this incident. They reported that, as far as they could find, the Chicago Tribune had not printed any items in this period which met my description.

36. CSF-K, 333, 17 November 1941
Because Cecil received no pay for his services beyond expenses, he could keep the money that his stories earned, and that was much more than in pre-war England. On October 15th that arrangement was not yet settled. “There’s still nothing settled about the money I earn by writing while I have this job, but I’m quite sure that I shall be able to keep it, and that will make a big difference — I’ve just sold an article about Benghazi (do you remember how I sat over the wireless when that news was coming through last year?) for $1500, and I have just been commissioned by the S.E.P. (who bought the article) to do a series of short stories about the Navy. I have an idea for a sort of Hornblower character, a Captain D. (ask your Navy friends what that means) who has a lot of adventures — I haven’t got to invent them, because there have been enough adventures in this war to fill books and books without any decoration. The Captain’s name will be Edward Crowe (I had a hell of a time with a Navy List trying to find a name that wasn’t in the Navy and which I liked). He starts off in the series by rescuing 26 tons of gold
from Crete — something that was really done. I expect the S.E.P. will pay me two thousand each for them, and there ought to be something doing in Hollywood too.”

Not only did Cecil earn money by writing for himself, but he earned money for his office too. “I’m working like a nigger again; the S.E.P. has bought the Captain D. series and I have promised delivery at once, so I’m getting at them — I’ve finished two and started a third out of six, so it’s not bad. I keep the money I get for them (big money) and the office has started selling the releases and things I write, making quite something out of them, so that I’m showing a profit; there can’t be many civil servants who can say that.”

Despite all of this Cecil had a little time for private life and unofficial adventures. He continued his friendship with the management of William Morrow & Co., writing to Kathleen that “I lunched yes-

37. CSF-K, 328, 15 October 1941
38. CSF-K, 334, 24 November 1941
terday with Thayer Hobson — it was very nice, but (this will make you smile) every minute I was grudging the time spent away from my work.”

He followed this with a request to Kathleen. “Either I gave you to put in your safe or else in the right-hand drawers of my desk is Morrow’s acknowledgment of owing me 10,000 dollars. I want that posted back to me as quick as you can, please dear — sorry to give you the trouble, but the purchase of stock is going through at once and I have to hand the note back.”

Suddenly the world-wide situation changed radically. On the far side of the world the Japanese, nominally allies of Germany and Italy but pursuing their own interests, without warning made a carrier air attack against the American battleship fleet at Pearl Harbor, crippling that fleet. Japan and the United States were immediately at war, and a day or

39. CSF-K, 320, 17 September 1941
40. CSF-K, 333, 17 November 1941
so later both Hitler and Mussolini declared war against the United States. The United States was in the war in a patriotic rush; the primary task of the British Information Service was overtaken by events. Churchill recorded how he felt that a great burden had been lifted from him now that Britain had the full support of the United States, making final victory almost certain.
America and the Allies suffered a series of disasters in the first six months that America was in the war. Three days after Pearl Harbor, Japanese aircraft sank the corresponding British battleships off Singapore. German submarines sank enormous numbers of the ships supplying Britain, and sank, in sight of Americans ashore, the tankers supplying the American East Coast with oil from Texas. They practically wiped out the convoys of ships supplying Russia. In 1941 the German armies had penetrated to within sight of Moscow and had been held back by the onset of the fierce Russian winter. Whether the Russians
could maintain resistance once better weather returned appeared doubtful. The Germans also almost reached across North Africa to the Suez Canal, being stopped at El Alamein. The Japanese destroyed the American battleship fleet at Pearl Harbor, although, what people did not realize, the ships that would become all-important, the aircraft carriers, escaped because they had been at sea. The Japanese then swept over most of Southeast Asia, getting almost to India, Australia, and the Hawaiian Islands, being stopped at midyear by the naval battle of Midway and later in the year by land and naval battles around Guadalcanal Island in the Solomon Islands and by land battles on the border between India and Burma. The grim situation made the public very anxious, and there was considerable civilian fear of air or naval raids against the West Coast.

Hastily improvised civil defense measures were undertaken on the West Coast. Kathleen, who had been through that twice before in England, in 1938 and 1939, became the nerve center for the local air
raid precautions group. I spent several training evenings, and one of genuine alarm, standing by as a bicycle messenger at Cragmont School.

Cecil’s attitude was a commonsense one of no reason for worry. Four days after Pearl Harbor he wrote “The stories about cruising Japanese airplanes [what a combination of British and American misspellings] round San Francisco are nonsense of course; if they had come they would have dropped a few bombs — they never would have come and gone without doing that. It is perfectly possible that there may be a small raid or two on the Pacific coast, but nothing more serious than that unless the war takes a much bigger turn for the worse and I don’t expect that. I suppose they are talking about black-outs and you will find it a horrible nuisance as always. I don’t expect you want to move but if you do, of course, I don’t mind. Now that America and England are allies they may lift the restriction on aliens doing war work, and you might get yourself a job as warden or something — I would like it if you did ... of course there is a very minute chance of a very small
air-raid on this coast; on the Pacific coast the best targets from all considerations are San Diego and Los Angeles, but none of them in the present condition have more than a very outside chance. Don’t quote me on any of this.”¹

As had been arranged before Pearl Harbor, I visited Father in New York over Christmas vacation, being able to travel before that became restricted. “I’m so excited about John coming; we ought to have a good time together, and if there’s any sort of crisis I’ve got a whole line of women waiting for the chance to look after him instead of me.”²

I came by train as soon as school let out, and had a ten-day stay. I was supposed to have been met between trains in Chicago by John Collier, of whom I knew nothing except that he was a writer who then worked for the Crane Valve Company, but the train schedules were so upset, probably by America’s

1. CSF-K, 338, 11 December 1941
2. CSF-K, 340, 15 December 1941

882
recent entry into the war, that we never met. (Cecil had met Collier during his first Hollywood trip.) Being all of twelve years old, I made the transfer across Chicago without trouble, and arrived in New York where Father met me. Had he not been able to meet me I had instructions to take a cab to the Gramercy Park Hotel and ask for Miss Frances Phillips, who lived in the apartment wing with her crippled mother.

I had a marvelous time. Frances took me not only round the sights of New York that attract boys of twelve, like the Brooklyn Zoo, the Museum of Science and Industry, and the Hayden Planetarium, but also round the offices of William Morrow & Co., where she was editor-in-chief, and to the book printing plant of Quinn and Boden, in New Jersey, where many of their books were produced. The Quinn and Boden plant tour was in that sense the highlight of my stay in New York, something I always remembered. You may believe that that was because books were my father’s life, and that may be true, but, equally important, my guide in the plant (probably
an assistant manager) showed me every step in the process, explaining why each operation was done, how it was done, and why this way was better than other ways of doing the same things.

Frances was very nice, and remained an esteemed friend for the rest of her life. At this time she was probably in her late thirties, tall, with somewhat of an educated southern accent. As a boy, I didn’t question her motivation in taking so much trouble over my stay, but of course there were two other reasons which may have had influence over her. She was a very close friend of Father’s, and he was an important stockholder in her firm. Father, of course, concealed the intimacy of their relationship. In later years, he also concealed the investment from me by telling me that he had once only lent Thayer Hobson, the president of William Morrow & Co., a small sum of money to keep the firm from going down the drain.

Father showed me around the BIS offices in Rockefeller Center. They had several floors, 33rd to 38th as I recall, and at least one of them in the mid-
dle was secret with locked doors and unobtrusive guards. Father walked me past that floor as we climbed the stairs between the floors, remarking that nobody from outside was allowed inside. I met his new secretary, Mrs. Dorothy Bathhurst, an English girl who had recently arrived from England to marry one of the Englishmen serving in America. The office was full of people working — writing, typing, making telephone calls, and making blue-pencilled comments on pages from newspapers. It wasn’t frantic, but things certainly moved.

In the evening, Father and I walked out for dinner. Almost around the corner was Billy the Oysterman’s, where the sea food was delicious. However, I discovered that Eastern oysters disagreed with me, making me terribly sick in the middle of the night. I confirmed the diagnosis five years later; I could eat Western oysters but not Eastern ones.

Toward the end of my stay, Wendy Marsh\(^3\) and

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3. Pen name of Mollie Cossart, poet and staff employee of New York University.
I gave Father a little Christmas party. Wendy and I went round to a joke shop to buy some practical joke favors for each of the guests. I selected them carefully and when the time came I handed them round on a tray as if they were hors d’oeuvres, giving Father’s to him last. He, of course, realized as each guest opened his package in turn that each was a practical joke. Some exploded, some smelled, some collapsed into nothing. With complete confidence he picked up his, prepared to open it and face the consequences. As his fingers first gripped his package it exploded. He jumped back, dropping it on the table with an alarmed expression, and only then realized that the joke was not that each package contained a surprise, but that *his* package was so delicately balanced that it was triggered by the slightest touch.

Cecil’s work and reputation were successful enough for the Admiralty to offer him an appointment. “The Admiralty want me to write the official history of the war — £6000 a year on a contract. It
means going to England, of course, and a deadly job which will make me a lot of enemies, and it’ll last 10 years after the war is over, I fancy.”

Money was no longer the great worry of previous years. “If I go to England, don’t worry about money; it’s all yours, and there’s enough to keep you going very easily for about 15 years!”

Cecil managed to turn down this offer on the grounds that now, with America’s reentry into the war, his talents were much more valuable in Hollywood. As he wrote, Hollywood wanted war movies in a hurry, England was the only immediate source of stories, and Cecil was the only available Englishman with Hollywood experience.

Cecil was able to interest Columbia Studios and Paul Muni in a commando film, later released as *The Commandos Strike at Dawn*. He worked on that in New York, for Paul Muni lived nearby on Long Island.

4. CSF-K, 349, 16 January 1942
5. CSF-K, 352, 24 January 1942
Paul Muni also passed on some Hollywood gossip. The story that interested Cecil most, probably because it simultaneously excited his ribald sense, his fear of detection, and his anti-Hollywood bias, he passed on to Kathleen in a letter. He later told it to me as part of his continuing tale about the evils of Hollywood society, telling the story as if he had known the participants personally and had been present at the denouement. “Muni told us a yarn about the latest Hollywood practical joke. A man hired a prostitute to pretend to be his wife, and then invited a new male friend to his apartment to dinner and had himself called away by telephone leaving the friend alone with the girl. She of course started making advances to him, so urgently that at last he gave way and went to bed with her; in the middle of it, of course, the husband came back unexpectedly and the friend had a hell of a shock. To top it all, the husband had fixed up sound recording apparatus in the apartment, and next day gave another party and played over them all the recordings of what had been going on. It’s a hell of a
place, isn’t it?”

By spring *The Commandos Strike at Dawn* was almost finished, and another prospect came Cecil’s way. “I had a very mysterious interview with Colonel Donovan; I like him and approve of him. He was lying in bed in the St. Regis hotel with two broken legs as the result of a car accident, and he and two regular U.S. colonels went through me and turned me inside out as if they were three doses of salts. It was interesting — obviously they were sizing me up for some mysterious purpose of their own — and he liked the commando story too. I hope I made a good impression; I expect so, but of course I can’t ever tell.” Whatever Donovan wanted, Cecil wasn’t it, for that was as close as he ever came to the secret war. Of course the British secret was headquartered just upstairs from Cecil’s office, where Sir William

6. CSF-K, 367, 25 March 1942
7. Donovan commanded the Office of Strategic Services, a forerunner of the CIA.
8. CSF-K, 371, 10 April 1942
Stephenson (“Little Bill,” to distinguish him from “Big Bill” or “Wild Bill” Donovan) had his office. Stephenson and Ian Fleming, then the Personal Assistant to the British Director of Naval Intelligence, had been instrumental before America entered the war in persuading President Roosevelt to set up Donovan’s Office of Strategic Services.

Fleming’s work in New York had another aftermath. From Stephenson’s window could be seen the Japanese secret code clerk encoding and decoding messages at his desk in another office of Rockefeller Center. Fleming wrote, fifteen years later in fictional form, the story of the deadly teamwork which first shot a hole in the window and then shot the clerk before he could duck. In truth they did something far more important. They entered the office undetected and copied the codes without letting the Japanese know. When Fleming first began to write and I heard rumors of his past, I asked Father if he had known Fleming.

“Oh, yes,” he said, “I knew him in New York. Before America entered the war, England had to
supply her own security on war cargoes in American warehouses and leaving American ports. Fleming was associated with the arrangements for maintaining this security.” This story was the originally proposed cover story for Fleming’s trip to the United States to advise Roosevelt in setting up O.S.S. Evidently, Cecil knew neither the true story nor the fact, which was no secret, that Fleming’s official position was that of Personal Assistant to the Director of Naval Intelligence. Were Cecil really on the inside of the naval war information, as he said he was, Ian Fleming would have been almost the first person Cecil would have met or heard about in his official capacity.

Also associated with Fleming, but on a lower level in the office, was the novelist Charles Morgan, whom Cecil always described as his friend. In December, 1941, Cecil met Mrs. Charles Morgan for the first time in New York, and discovered that they had many mutual friends among the Ballards of Ledbury.

Still and all, Cecil really expected great things
from his work. “The struggle over the film has begun to develop at last — I am having violent cable arguments with London about it. But on Saturday I had a hell of an official pat on the back about it all; London is very pleased about it, and I think the further possibilities are enormous as long as the cards are played the right way.

“Lord Louis Mountbatten, whom I met last year and liked so much, is the officer commanding Commandos — it is only just announced today although I have known about it for a long time. It’s a grand appointment and I am pleased about it — and he is desperately interested in the film, too, I think. At any rate, he is a Forester fan. That knighthood is just around the corner now — not that it matters.”

Cecil was never knighted but he took great care to tell his intimates that he had been offered first a knighthood and then possibly a baronetcy, but had declined each time out of consideration for Ameri-

9. CSF-K, 336, 5 December 1941
10. CSF-K, 372, 13 April 1942
can feelings and customs.

Besides that expectation, Cecil was always expecting a promotion. His letters are one continuous turmoil of expectations regarding his being in charge of the Washington office, or of being asked to establish the San Francisco office (offices of the British Information Service). Word for word, his expectations are almost identical to those regarding jobs in his letters of the penniless 1920s.

Meanwhile, Berkeley society was adjusting to the war. The war work which most women of Kathleen’s set took up was nursing. Not professionally trained, they became nurses aides who were able to relieve the trained nurses in their less technical duties, freeing some of these for service in military hospitals. Evelyn Lewis and Celia Bissell and others did this, Celia achieving a supervisory position and Evelyn becoming so devoted to the work that after the war she transferred to Children’s Hospital of the East Bay, and was still aiding in the 1960s. Evelyn’s son Tom, my best friend, had been born prema-
turely with the then not understood Rh- blood factor and had required extensive care. With that experience behind her, Evelyn specialized in the care of infants, becoming practically in charge of the well-baby ward of the local hospital.

Kathleen had brought with her from England her physical therapy notebook. When she entered training for nurse’s aide work she turned the notebook around and kept her new notes in it starting from its back. Nurse’s aides were taught care of equipment, general patient care and precautions for different conditions and diseases, up to skills as complex as managing intravenous feeding. A fair amount of the training pertained to the normally healthy obstetrical and newborn patients.

Soon gasoline became rationed, partly to save tires since so many rubber plantations had been conquered by the Japanese, and partly for equity with the East Coast, where the Germans had interrupted the ocean shipments of oil from Texas. The first really large pipelines were being built to provide an overland route instead of the submarine-
infested ocean route. Gasoline rationing put an end to my outings with Vinson Brown.

Later still, Father’s new secretary, Dorothy Bathurst, came to Berkeley to have her first baby in
peace and quiet because her husband was having to move about so much. Father enjoyed a Number 2 air travel priority and was able to come out twice over the summer, in May and in July. The first time was after Mrs. Bathurst had lost her baby — it was premature and born dead. Two evenings after he arrived, Father was driving Mother, George and me up the hill towards home, perhaps after visiting Mrs. Bathurst in the hospital. For whatever the cause, George and I were talking quietly in the back seat about the baby. George asked me what happened to the body.

"Would they have a proper funeral and all that, John? Will we have to go to it?"

"On, no," I replied from the worldly knowledge of the age of twelve, and knowing what Father had told me about the foolishness of funerals and an excessive show of death ceremonies. "They wouldn’t have a funeral for that. After all, the baby never became a real person. Remember, it was never even given a name. The hospital has a rubbish bin, and I expect it was put in there with all the legs and
appendixes and other things they...

“That’s enough of that!” roared Father, jamming on the brakes and turning round in the front seat. “Not another word out of you!”

The suddenness, vehemence, unpredictability and general out of character nature of the attack stunned me. I came to the conclusion that death and funerals were subjects that he and I could discuss as mature equals, but children couldn’t even mention among themselves, a kind of Les Jeux Défendu complex.

Summer was just starting. After Father returned to New York, Mother, George, and I took Dorothy Bathurst up to the Russian River to recuperate from her episode. We didn’t stay with Dorothy Dale, although her house was our home base, but took our canoes and kayaks up the river through the next set of rapids. Without fuel for motor boats

11. A French film about WW II, in which the children’s preferred games are enactments of funerals.
no Americans came up there, and we four lived on an island for two weeks or so, only putting on clothes when we went to town for supplies. I was just old enough to be very slightly curious about Dorothy, and certainly about the intimate parts of life, but very definitely far too young to do anything about it. We laid naked in the sunlight, side by side, just talking about life in general terms, and sometimes about more intimate subjects, such as how Dorothy’s tummy was flattening again. Dorothy was a very good looking woman with pendulous breasts that floated beside her when she swam. The description I came to was as if one had dropped grapefruits into stockings.

Two years afterward, when Father for some reason took the trouble to tell me that “Dorothy Bathurst is one of England’s noted beauties,” I didn’t question his taste but came to the conclusion that what one can see of a woman, dressed, was only a conspicuous display of art and dressmaking; far removed, even in a pretty woman, from what she really is. Remember, those were the days of bullet-
shaped, high-uplift brassieres, when most women would be ashamed to have their actual figures recognized. After that, I never expected that women naturally possessed their public shape, and I have always been enchanted by whatever I have discovered.

However, there was more to this story of Dorothy than meets the eye. The story was false, but the rumors that ran around Berkeley society, perhaps for many years, were equally false, and the final act was not played until 1968.

Cecil, when first in New York, did not have a secretary, but shared one with another information officer. By a strange coincidence “the secretary I am sharing at present lived for years at 1030 Keeler Ave. [This was immediately next door to our house at 1020 Keeler Ave, Berkeley.] She knew Mrs. Schroeder [our landlady] very well and thought she was delightful. Her name is McCall and she is a blonde and as pretty as a picture — perhaps Harold remembers her.”

12. CSF-K, B-318, 13 September 1941

899
The British Information Services needed more secretaries, and some had to be British subjects who could be made subject to the Official Secrets Act so they could handle secret information. The name of Dorothy Stevens was mentioned. She was an English girl who was engaged to one of the information officers, but had been left in England when he was assigned to New York. Arrangements were made. “Did I tell you about my secretary from England? She has arrived — she’s marrying a member of the staff at the end of the week. She seems all right at first sight. She was shipped out here under an agreement to work without pay for three months in exchange for her passage. She had a hell of a time — she was in the convoy that was with the *Reuben James*. It’ll be far more convenient to me to have my own [secretary].”

There is already a lie in this. The only public knowledge of the *Reuben James* was that she was the first American warship sunk in the “short of war”

13. CSF-K, 331, 10 November 1941

900
period while performing escort duty in the Atlantic, one week before, on October 31. Cecil obviously means to imply that the *Reuben James* was escorting the convoy Dorothy was in, but in fact the *Reuben James* was escorting Convoy HX-156 eastbound to England when she was sunk.\(^{14}\)

“My new secretary was married yesterday, and turned up this morning absolutely blooming and (really and truly) walking as if it hurt her a bit. Her wretched husband had to take the nasty shift at the office — twelve to six in the morning — but apparently they had time before that to do the mischief. He was at home in bed recovering while she was working for me this morning, but I was nice to her and sent her home at lunchtime, because I know that tonight he has to attend a C.I.O. meeting or something [Confidential Information Officers, not Congress of Industrial Organizations], and they have to have some time together, poor dears. They

\(^{14}\) Roscoe, Theodore; *United States Destroyer Operations in World War II*; U.S. Naval Institute, 1953; p 39
are only babies.”\textsuperscript{15}

“My little secretary is pregnant. It solves an interesting question, because I’ve heard all the gory details. It happened the first 2 nights she was married — and she had a maidenhead which caused a lot of pain and trouble both nights. She wasn’t fucked for 2 weeks, and by then the trick was done! I’ll do something much the same to you, shortly, dear.”\textsuperscript{16}

“My poor secretary is enormous already, and she’s vomiting badly — enough to worry me a lot. But she’s got a good doctor.”\textsuperscript{17}

“There may be trouble for you — it may not happen, but I am writing this to explain a telegram that may reach you soon. I want to ask you to take in my secretary, Miss Stevens, for a couple of months. She is in terrible trouble, and there is a child going to be born, in April I fancy. I want you to see her through it. I know it will be a horrible nuisance to

\textsuperscript{15.} CSF-K, 333, 17 November 1941
\textsuperscript{16.} CSF-K, 351, 19 January 1942
\textsuperscript{17.} CSF-K, 355, 20 February 1942
you, sweetheart, but this is human charity and something connected with our duty as well. I want you to see her through her trouble. The child will be adopted out, so don’t worry about that side of it. And in case you think of it, I don’t want you to think of taking the child yourself — not that it is likely you will want to, but I won’t have it. All this sounds a horrible muddle, I expect, dear, but I’ll explain more fully when I see you or when I write next. Of course you won’t ask Miss Stevens any questions — I know that. She may tell you a lot of things, she may not. In any case just be nice to her, as I know you will. The poor devil has been through hell for the last few months and needs a bit of peace — I expect you can guess what the trouble is. She needs peace and kindness until the child is born. I expect it would be best for her to call herself Mrs. Stevens — her real name at present is Mrs. Bathurst, Dorothy. I am so sorry you are being given this trouble dear. If you see any reason really why you can’t have her for those two months (I can’t think of any) wire me immediately — but I hope it is all right. I expect I
shall write you about the end of this week saying when she will be starting and arriving; but I shall write again too, before that. And it may not happen at all, but I expect it will. She is an awful liar – don’t know whether it is congenital or just because of her troubles, but that is another reason for not asking questions.”

To preserve secrecy, Kathleen was expected to send her letters to Cecil’s residence instead of the office, but she must have forgotten and was reminded by a letter from Dorothy Bathurst, using her maiden name.

“Hotel Gramercy Park
52 Gramercy Park North
New York
February 24, 1942

“Dear Mrs. Forester,
“Mr. Forester asks me to ask you again to send

18. CSF-K, 356, 23 February 1942
his letters to the Gramercy Park Hotel and not to the Office. It is quite important.

“Mr. Forester is a little rushed today, and will be writing to you shortly.

“Yours truly,

“(Signed) Dorothy E. Stevens
“Secretary”

Cecil continued with more instructions in the next letter. “I expect I shall send you a wire today about Mrs. Bathurst (that is the name she will use). If the wire doesn’t come you will know that a hitch has happened. She is much happier now — I’ve assured her that you will look after her and be kind to her; I know you will, dear, although she’ll be a nuisance. I may not be paying for all this — I am consulting about it with her husband, but I expect I shall. I usually do. You’ll have to find a doctor for her and make arrangements for a nursing home for the confinement. She leaves here Friday 27th at 11:30. Chicago Sat. 28th at 4:30. Leaves Chicago on
the Challenger Saturday 28th at 9:30, and arrives Berkeley 7:30 a.m. Tuesday, March 3rd. Pay everything for her — I’ll be sending you plenty of money shortly. Don’t bother to meet her. I’ve given her instructions how to get to Keeler and she’ll take a taxi. It’s the hell of a mess, but we’ve got to keep this quiet, as well as looking after the miserable little kid. ...

“I’m in such a flutter about Mrs. Bathurst that I can’t write a decent letter, dear ... Tell people Mrs. B is coming to have her child because her husband is moving about so much he can’t be with her, and that she has to look after herself carefully and has no friends in N.Y. That’s nearly true.”

“Now at least I can give you some details about this damn business. The point is of course, that she arrived here to marry one of the men in the office and she was already three months pregnant by another man. We just can’t have any scandal, apart from it being perfectly horrible for her. What makes

19. CSFd-K, 358, 26 February 1942
things even harder is that her husband has just got
the chance of being third secretary at the Embassy,
which is the hell of a promotion for him and the
devil of a compliment, so we can’t have things go
wrong.

“So the things you have to do follow (of course
all this is most secret). First of all she must have as
few social engagements as possible. And she must
see nothing of any British officials – the Consul or
anyone of that sort, the whole thing must be kept as
quiet as you can without exciting suspicion. There’s
a new complication. The San Francisco office is
being opened, and I haven’t been given it. The man
in charge is Leeming, Graham Hutton’s good assis-
tant in Chicago. He’s fine, and he is being given Bar-
bara Wace, lately Sir Gerald’s secretary to help him.
But Dorothy was a friend of Barbara’s in the old
days, and of course you will have a lot to do with
them when the time comes. On no account whatever
is Barbara to guess how pregnant Dorothy is. If she
comes to the house Dorothy must stay in bed.

“The story we are telling here (and you must
play up to it in your way) is that she is pregnant by her husband and everything is going wrong with her pregnancy and we are sending her to you because she must be looked after. You won’t be able to carry that off in Berkeley, but you must work it that no one who matters can work out anything regarding dates. When the birth comes the child must officially be born dead, according to you in Berkeley. In New York, of course, it will be a miscarriage, just the thing we had been afraid of all along. You must see to it that she doesn’t start getting sentimental about the child (don’t think me hard, but I can’t wrap the business up in better words at present — too rushed). It would be best if she were discouraged from thinking about it at all, and when it is born she mustn’t even set eyes on it. I want you to start at once inquiries about getting the child adopted — see if there is a child adoption society in S.F. and start finding out all you can, and start making arrangements for the immediate adoption. The husband is doing something about it at this end but you won’t clash. He will keep in touch with you. Before the birth you will
get further instructions about the birth certificate. But you don’t let her weaken about the child, as she easily may.

“She is a terrible liar, largely, I think, because she is still madly in love with the man in England. You can’t believe a word she says on that subject. The husband wanted me to ask you to watch her correspondence and see she doesn’t get any correspondence from him, but I refused to ask you to do that. Actually she is going through all this hell to keep trouble away from him.

“The bad symptoms that we are telling about here are vomiting and anaemia — the two together nearly always mean disaster. You keep that in mind when you see Barbara Wace.

“The husband is getting an annulment of the marriage — he can get it secretly. But he is still damned fond of the girl and wants to make a do of it later, when it is all settled, unless he starts getting the annulment immediately he can’t get it at all, which is why he is doing it. Then he proposes to have her back in New York, put on a front to the
office, and if she plays up to him properly he wants to marry her again. This part of it sounds insane to me, but we’ll see later on about it. I told you not to ask questions, but of course ask her any questions that are necessary for you in the matter of secrecy.”

Cecil wrote again after Dorothy had arrived in Berkeley. “Nice to have your letter of Friday. I knew you’d do what you could, dear, although I know it’s going to be a hell of a lot of trouble to you. The worst will be arranging the adoption — Bathurst may be able to do that from here, but there’s no time to be lost and you will have to start on it too directly. And, dear, I don’t know if it occurs to you that you might want the child yourself. In that case (of course I may be just wasting my time saying this if you have no idea of doing it) I have to say all over again that I cannot let it happen. It is always fatal to adopt a child of known parents, and for the parents to know where the child has gone. It is always bad, and you

20. CSF-K, 359, 28 February 1942

910
must not think of it again, if you think of it at all. ...

“This is the hell of a Monday morning — everyone feeling like death. Tell Mrs. Bathurst that everyone in the office has asked after her, especially Miss Alliam. I do so hope that you’ll get on all right with her. She’s a nice little thing, although she’ll fight like a dog for that man of hers. But if anything does go wrong, don’t take any nonsense from her, although of course you’ll be patient as long as you can.”

In the next letter Cecil reflects on the meaning he might make of this drama. “I suppose by now you have been able to settle down with your new lodger. I do hope that she won’t be too much trouble. Bathurst wants to pay all expenses; I told him that I didn’t expect you’d take any money to have someone living in your house, but you can do what you like about it — Bathurst seems not to be really hampered about money, and I think he would have the sense to say so if he were. He has been really good

21. CSF-K, 360, 2 March 1942

911
about all this business, as you can guess. It has taken up far too much of my time and energy lately, but as a human drama it has been well worth it. If you take any money make it a minimum. One of these days I shall profit by it to the extent of a novel, possibly, and that will pay all expenses. ...

“Please write to me, dear, and tell Mrs. Bathurst that I want her to write to me as fully and as often as possible, also to her husband.”

Then, on a Monday in March, Cecil instructs that Dorothy must now change back to her maiden name, as if that would be unnoticed by those she had been introduced to. “Hurried additional instructions. She’s to be Miss Stevens not Mrs. Bathurst. Most important. Bathurst will give you further instructions directly. Use Lyle Cook [Cecil’s attorney] — in strictest confidence — if you see signs of a mess. Bathurst is paying all expenses — he’s repaid me for what I have spent.”

As I remember, Dorothy was always Mrs. Bathurst, regardless of

22. CSF-K, 361, 5 March 1942

912
Cecil’s instruction.

In his next letter, Cecil gives his explanation of why all this secrecy is necessary. “I think you are grand about Mrs. Bathurst. I expect there will be a lot of tension between you before the affair is over, but of course you can see the necessity for it all – we couldn’t possibly have a scandal here at any price, and if the staff knew about it it would leak out sooner or later. Its just the sort of juicy titbit that the N.Y. Daily News would love.” In other words, Cecil feared that, even though the United States was now fighting the war, the word of an extramarital pregnancy by a typist in a British government office would upset British-American relations and cooperation.

“I had a fine long letter from Dorothy yesterday – I’ll try to answer it. But it was nice to hear from her that apparently you and she are getting

23. CSF-K, 362. Mondays in March were 2, 9, 16, 23, 30
24. CSF-K, 363, 9 March 1942
along bearably at any rate. The poor kid has a long row ahead of her — it’s her own fault. I know, but there’s no need to add to her unhappiness ...

“And your letter of March 10th was grand, too, dear. You seem to have fixed up about the doctor in first rate fashion.”

“I saw Bathurst last week and talked things over with him. He’s all right — don’t bully the poor man quite so much when you write to him, after all he’s having the hell of a time and he’s had a dreadful shock and he’s doing pretty well regarding this business. For your special information, he’s not nearly the brute that Dorothy thinks he is — really he’s a very harmless young fellow, with a lot of brains and no vice at all, and no personality either, but that’s not his fault. Judging from what Dorothy said about him before I got to know him he was a perfect monster.

“Leeming says he will call you as soon as he reaches S.F. For God’s sake, dear, keep Barbara

25. CSF-K, 365, 15 March 1942

914
Wace away from Dorothy — you can do it unobtrusively. She’s a very dangerous woman indeed; she has the longest tongue of anyone and she and Bathurst don’t get on any too well. It doesn’t matter about anyone else nearly so much, but I mean it about her. Please don’t think we’re all against Dorothy and you have to stick up for her ... One thing to be careful about. If there is anything about the birth in the papers, see that it is said to be stillborn. And it would be better if the adoption society should think her single.”

“I’ve got a date to speak in N.Y. (two dates, as a matter of fact on the same day) on April 23rd, which is St. George’s day. If Leeming can get along without me until after that, I shall postpone my visit, arriving in Berkeley on April 27th or so. Would that do? It means that I shall be there when all the excitement takes place, I suppose, but that can’t be helped. I certainly don’t think that Dorothy should be left alone in the house while you come East.

26. CSF-K, 366, Thursday, 12 or 19 March 1942
There are all sorts of objections to it — one of them is that she will have the pip pretty badly and ought to be busy and not left alone. It is time that something is decided about what she is going to do, but that is not the thing to decide on. My God, how pleased I shall be when the whole thing is over and done with — if it ever is done with. We shall probably get echoes of it all the rest of our lives.”

“It seems fairly certain that I shall be coming to California, arriving about April 28th. By golly, I am looking forward to it, too — even though I do arrive in the middle of Dorothy’s affair. Will you work things out on your calendar, dear? I don’t think I shall be able to change the date, but I should like to know, anyway and what’s the latest real facts about Dorothy’s date? I’ve got a bit vague about it.”

Since Dorothy was a married woman, her husband had to formally agree to the adoption. “I heard

27. CSF-K, 368, 30 March 1942
28. CSF-K, 370, 5 April 1942
from B. He says he will sign the relinquishment, all right — I expect it has already reached you.”

“I had a note from Bathurst saying just what I said, that it is of the utmost importance that Dorothy should come back just as soon as it is possible for her to travel; we want to keep the office mystified as much as possible. She mustn’t delay at all. I really mean that. All the office here knows that she is in a bad way with her pregnancy, and that something might easily go wrong.”

“I’ve just made my reservations for coming home — it seems as sure as anything that I’ll be with you on Monday 4th [May]. Don’t let D. get in touch with Barbara Wace. I shall be very upset if you let them meet. They must not, unless she is in bed or well concealed. I mean this — B.W. is a most dangerous woman with a feud against B. Please be careful just for a week or two more.”

29. CSF-K, 371, 10 April 1942
30. CSF-K, 372, 13 April 1942
31. CSF-K, 375, 22 April 1942
“Some hurried last minute instructions. First let Bathurst know as soon as the agency has taken over the child. Also send him the forms for the relinquishment of his claims on the child — he has been expecting them for some time. Also the birth certificate or a copy of it. His address is 238 West 56th St. New York. And let him know how much it cost. Please get all these things done, dear, and then we will be out of the wood — it’s a hateful business and the sooner we are free from it the better. You know it’s the best thing that Dorothy should be without the child. By the way, the father’s name on the certificate must be Salisbury.”

While Cecil was writing these instructions from New York, in Berkeley Kathleen and Dorothy were trying to make their arrangements to carry them out. The medical arrangements were straightforward and easily made. The legal arrangement was difficult and trying. The birth of any illegitimate child is a trying event. This one was more so

32. CSF-K, 376, 24 April 1942
because the child, although socially illegitimate, was legitimate in law.

Dorothy’s story was one typical of wartime. The war separated Dorothy and her fiance. In the years of 1940 and 1941 the RAF had been duelling the Luftwaffe in the skies over England, and fighter pilots were regarded as the knights of the skies. They had been somewhat despised before the war as a harum-scarum group of feckless young men, although not without a certain charm, but now death was very close in duels fought before the eyes of millions. Naturally, some of those eyes belonged to pretty girls. It is no wonder that love blossomed rapidly, and perhaps as quickly died, over those years. So, I suppose, it had been with Dorothy and her pilot. In the fear and excitement of the trans-Atlantic passage Dorothy had not suspected, or at least had not confirmed, the burden she was carrying. When she arrived, her fiance, Maurice Bathurst, was humanly insistent, and by the time the facts were known they were already married. So at least goes the story that Kathleen heard.
Maurice Bathurst’s refusal to accept Dorothy’s presence in New York was the root of the legal trouble. If it was important to England to avoid the scandal of the worst sort, as Cecil argued to Kathleen, Maurice could have, as have other men before him, accepted the situation and supported Dorothy as his wife in public. While some voices would have been heard they would have been ineffective in turning their suspicions into any real social objections in the face of an ostensibly happy marriage. That would have been a comparatively small sacrifice, in the troubled years of ‘41 and ‘42, to England’s cause. However, I think that Cecil had his own psychological reasons for exaggerating the scandal of bastardy, and I think that the American war effort was hardly likely to be impeded by public knowledge of an extramarital pregnancy of a typist employed in New York by the British government. These things happen in wartime.

Of course, Maurice might have worried that the child would be born defective, but that was no more likely than if it had been his own. That’s a
chance every father takes. Particularly if, in his long-range view, Maurice really wanted Dorothy to be his wife, accepting the situation would be his best course of action. But he did not follow that. He sent her away; perhaps on Cecil’s urging, because of Cecil’s advocacy of the scandal issue. Maurice planned to remove the legitimacy portion of the difficulty by having his marriage annulled, making Dorothy plain Miss Stevens, pregnant with an illegitimate child. For one reason or another, he did not obtain the annulment, and this put Dorothy and Kathleen into trouble.

There were three adoption agencies in the East Bay, two large and one small. As Kathleen approached one of the two largest, the staff were all sympathy and promises, until Dorothy’s marital status was disclosed. “Married, but wants to place her child for adoption?” they asked. “Then her husband must release his claims upon the child. It is legally his. We won’t touch it until he signs the release.”

Sign a release was what Maurice would not do, so Kathleen told me. None of the agencies would
promise anything until that was done. There the situation stalled right up to the time of birth. Kathleen was desperate. Dorothy, I suppose, was more so. She couldn’t take the child home and place it for adoption later, as some mothers can. Once seen with it, it was hers, and that was the point at issue.

The matter was still under discussion while Dorothy was in the hospital recovering from the birth of her son. Kathleen finally said to Dorothy, “Look here, Dorothy, it’s all this bloody war business that has everybody so upset. It wouldn’t have happened if there hadn’t been a war, but that’s not what I mean. Maurice is upset and unreasonable because of the war. When it’s all over and things return to normal he’ll be much more understanding. I’ll keep your son as long as you like, while you return to New York. After the war you two can decide whether you want him or leave him with me. Or sooner, if you want him sooner. The adoption business we don’t have to worry about now, but later when everybody’s nerves are in better shape.”

This conversation, or others like it, were over-
heard, or mis-overheard, by one or more of Berkeley society’s wartime nurse’s aides who worked in that hospital. Since care of newborns was an area that nurse’s aides specialized in, one or more of them may even have looked after the baby. At least one of them was a notorious gossip, and you can guess what rumors flew around Berkeley: Cecil had been making love to his secretary in New York, that’s the Dorothy Bathurst who’s been at Kathleen’s house, and he was the father of her child; and Kathleen was not indignant about it, either, but then you knew she never cared for conventions anyway; that was why Dorothy was sent from New York to have her child. That is how the rumor mongers had it.

In the midst of this dilemma, Cecil arrived in Berkeley. Without finding out what was going on, and apparently in an obvious hurry, he announced, to those members of Berkeley society who mattered, that Dorothy’s child had been born dead. In doing so he was indeed carrying out his plan devised in the winter. Equally obviously, from the evidence of his letters, he was driven by a horror of having a bas-
tard in his house. In his first letters on the subject, he first brought up the matter of forbidding Kathleen to take Dorothy’s child, and now, even though it might be on a temporary basis, he was prepared to carry out that plan at any cost.

There was indeed a cost. Several of the people to whom he announced that Dorothy’s child had been born dead knew that that was a lie. Some had telephoned the hospital and been informed that mother and son were doing fine; others, like Evelyn Lewis, may have actually tended the baby and certainly had close ties with those who had. The volunteer supervisor of Nurses’ Aides was Celia Bissell, whom my father described to Frances Phillips, about four years later, when discussing another aspect of Berkeley’s society, as “the most dangerous woman in Berkeley.” 33 Cecil’s public denials, when combined with the previous rumors from the hospital, reinforced and confirmed each other and more stories circulated around Berkeley. Of course, Cecil

33. CSF-FP 20 March 1946
could not have been the father of Dorothy’s child, which undoubtedly had been conceived in England. However, Berkeley society never learned that part of the story, and might not have believed it if that part had been told.

There is also the distinct possibility that Berkeley friends of the Mc Calls, who had lived for many years next door to the house that Kathleen rented, and whose daughter Betty was the typist Cecil had shared before Dorothy’s arrival from England, provided another link for rumors between New York and Berkeley.

It is small wonder that Father lost control of his temper and his tongue in such an out-of-character way when I prattled on to George about the lack of need for a funeral for the ostensibly dead baby. Of course I knew that Dorothy had had a full term pregnancy, and I believed that the child had been born dead. I knew nothing more until I read Cecil’s letters in 1969 or 1970, but I suffered at least one serious consequence of these events without understanding its cause, as I will tell later.
With all this going on, the smallest adoption agency decided on placing the child before receiving or without receiving Maurice Bathurst’s release. They managed to do so, and there have been no repercussions.

You would think that after this Cecil would be only too pleased to see the last of Dorothy and to hear the last of her in Berkeley. He had also previously written that she must return to New York as soon as possible after the child had been born, to help allay suspicion. But he left Berkeley on June 2nd without making up his mind about what should be done about Dorothy, and on June 7th wrote from New York. “I’ve seen a lot of Bathurst. He’s all right. He said he misses Dorothy around the house! He wants her back, though why he should after what she did to him I can’t imagine. Talk about turning all four cheeks! I said I might use her for two weeks in Hollywood, and he said he would like that. But I’m a bit puzzled about what to do myself — how would she stay in Hollywood, and how would I look after her, and so on? I know she’d like it, but on
thinking it over I think she’d be more trouble to me
that she’d be worth. What do you think? Don’t speak
about it to her unless you think she either ought to
come to Hollywood or ought not. I can’t make up
my mind at all about it. I don’t think I want her — I
wish I hadn’t suggested it to Bathurst ...

“I’m sorry to hear about George [who had just
shown the symptoms of mumps] — of course what is
worrying me is whether I’ve got [it] or not! And what
will happen to my balls if I have!34 I told Bathurst,
and his first thought was about quarantining Doro-
thy. I don’t know anything about that.”35

“I have to be in Hollywood at the end of this
month, the officer they are lending me [the com-
mmando expert advisor for The Commandos Strike at
Dawn] will be there then and I have written to fix
things up there. I’ll let you know exact dates next let-

34. Mumps in adult males painfully inflames and
swells the testicles and often produces sterility. It is
not a minor illness.
35. CSF-K, 379, 7 June 1942
ter. What about Dorothy? I simply can’t make up my mind. She won’t be a lot of use to me. I think the best thing for her to do is to come home without working for me there. Talk to her and see what she says.”

“I’ll talk to Thomas and Bathurst about what to do with Dorothy, and I’ll wire her as soon as I have settled anything or made up my mind about what to do with her, whether to have her in Hollywood or not. She’ll be the devil of a nuisance there – I want someone to look after me, not someone I have to look after.” You might think, from reading these letters, that Kathleen and Maurice were pushing Cecil and Dorothy to have a fortnight together in Hollywood, but it wasn’t really so.

“You seem to have had a lovely time on the Russian River; I do hope that the chance of my returning hasn’t cut in to the time you might have had there.”

36. CSF-K, 381, 13 June 1942
37. CSF-K, 382, 14 June 1942
“I had long talk with Bathurst. There’s nothing against him at all, dear. He talked about Dorothy very nicely and he is obviously quite excited about her returning. Of course, he’s a lonely man who has got into bachelor ways, and he’s so damned conscientious and scrupulous that he may be a bore occasionally, but he’s one of the best all the same. I like him.”

“But Bathurst rang me this morning, apparently there is the usual chance (it happens pretty often) that he is going to be permanently transferred to Washington. He asked me if you would mind if Dorothy stayed on with you until he was sure, and I said I didn’t think there’d be any objection. If she is in your way, you’ll have to send her back, but otherwise, keep her — I’ll have her at Hollywood if necessary, if she still needs a home when I get there, which will be Monday 13th July. I’ll stay at the Elysee, unless you can think of anything better.

38. CSF-K, 383, 18 June 1942
39. CSF-K, 385, 26 June 1942
Bathurst is doing very well in this office — he’s got the hell of a lot of ability and the hell of a good career ahead of him.”

Cecil made his Hollywood trip to finish the screen play for *The Commandos Strike at Dawn*, taking Dorothy with him. At the end of August they returned to New York, he in order to be ready to observe the sea trials of the British cruiser *Penelope* that had been repaired at the Philadelphia Navy Yard, and she to join Maurice in Washington. “I saw D. off; she was a bit depressed, and I don’t wonder; the morning she left she got an incredibly cruel and stupid letter from him. Perhaps it is because he can’t write so as to express his meaning, but if that isn’t the case the sooner she is free of him the better. I gave her a lot of what I thought was good advice, about standing up for herself and taking the offensive if necessary. I hope she takes it, but I’m afraid she’s one of those natural born doormat types — which also means she is born to trouble, I am afraid.

40. CSF-K, 386, 29 June 1942
I should say it is about even chances that she comes back to us.”

“This is a very hurried countermanding of my last letter. I had a most amusing note from Dorothy this morning. Apparently she has brought it off, and (I gather, although she doesn’t actually say so) she slept with Bathurst on Tuesday night even though in the Tuesday morning, when she wrote to me the first time, he was certain that she was not going to live with him. I had suggested to her that if she were able to seduce him it would settle everything at least for the time — it does away with his chance of annulling the marriage for good and all, and either she remembered that or else when the two young people found themselves alone together they couldn’t help remembering that they were married, after all — I think that’s the likeliest explanation. It was a most amusing letter — shy, like a bride’s, and skirting round the subject, and yet hinting at a lot of happiness. I hope it’s all right — it’s easily the best thing

41. CSF-K, 388, 25 August 1942
that could have happened, I think. But something she said in it made me think that it is likely in her opinion that he would see her letters (she didn’t sound as if she would resent it, either) so if you write to her for God’s sake be discreet. I do so hope they are happy. And that leads to the next point, which [is] that I think you may as well reconcile yourself (although I have nothing yet to go on) to losing them as friends. I think it is bound to happen, slowly — we know too much about them, and they are too much in debt to me. They are bound to come to resent that, sooner or later. They will never like to remember how dependent they were on us — it is a very natural reaction. And when in the course of time they are Sir Maurice and Lady Bathurst, as they are bound to be, I think, it will be even worse. Don’t be hurt about it, and I may be wrong, of course. But it is as well to be prepared. ...

“If Dorothy writes to you, let me see her letters or else tell me exactly what she says. I am most intensely interested both through idle curiosity and for professional reasons. Send me her letters. I
was never more earnest about anything in my life. I want the full and artistic ending to the story, and she’s too shy of me to tell me. I think I have earned it.”

There are many odd points about this letter. Cecil urges Kathleen to be prepared to lose “them” as friends, when Kathleen had never met Maurice at all, and their written contacts about the release of the child were hardly of the sort to encourage or suggest friendship. In any case, Kathleen was not likely to meet the Bathursts again to have their friendship to lose, while Cecil was. Then there is Cecil’s statement that he was intensely interested in the story itself, and had done sufficient to earn knowledge of the denouement, surely a hint at least that he felt he had masterminded Dorothy’s retreat to California. It is as if he had used the Bathursts in their unusual political situation as characters in another of the imaginary plays that flowed through his mind. Then there is the emphasis on how much

42. CSF-K, 389, 27 August 1942

933
the Bathursts were under obligation (Cecil uses the word *debt*) to the Foresters, and how that in itself will separate them, presumably because Cecil himself resents any feeling of obligation. If Cecil correctly stated his feelings that they were in debt to him, why did he desire in 1964 to leave Dorothy a legacy?

“And I’ve had another letter from Dorothy. She says in it that she likes writing letters, and that’s obvious. She’s written as many to me this week as I have to you, dear, and that’s saying a lot. She’s getting along fairly well apparently, and as far as I can guess she is trying to get herself pregnant, which is the best thing she can do, I think ... What the devil am I going to do for a secretary this winter? [That winter Cecil planned to be in California, writing the novel *The Ship* from his experiences aboard HMS *Penelope.*] I think it’s most unlikely that I shall have Dorothy, which will be a nuisance ... before I go to Washington I shall try to get a definite statement out of Dorothy — but I’m sure she won’t. Unless there is another quarrel and she runs away to us — but I expect by the time she does I shall already
have engaged one and then we shall have another woman on our hands still!”

“I hear that the Bathursts have got a flat in Washington where I can stay, thank God. I don’t think she will ever come West again. I’m glad; if she plays her cards properly she will get him under her thumb all right — I gave her a lot of good advice on how to do that, and it ought to be easy when he has made an effort at resistance and has then failed as miserably as he has. She ought to be able to boss him all right, and he’s just the type to be bossed.”

One wonders whether Cecil is playing marriage counselor or God, but certainly his ideas of how to behave in one’s family life emphasize the dependency and control aspects of relationships to the almost complete exclusion of anything else.

Cecil stayed with the Bathursts in Washington while doing his business there. Cecil is exaggerating about the unavailability of hotel rooms in Washington.

43. CSF-K, 390, 29 August 1942
44. CSF-K, 391, 2 September 1942
ton. It was well known that permanent living space was tight; junior government employees slept four to a room wherever they could find space. However, with Cecil’s connections he could always obtain a hotel room. There is some basis for Cecil’s concern about hiring another typist if Dorothy would not be available. Practically everybody who could be employed was employed, and most of those people who were not in armed forces were assigned to the most important jobs.

“At the moment I am staying with the Bathursts, having arrived from the South, and I’m doing my Washington business, before going to N.Y. ... The novel will be all right, I think — I’ve started it, but I won’t be able to do much on it before I’m home ... It’s most amusing in this house; D. has started asserting herself, and M. is already half under her thumb; he’ll be entirely under it soon, and will be completely henpecked. It’s been all I could to not to burst out laughing at the sight of them together. She’s a very different woman from the one I remember at first in N.Y. ... She definitely
is not coming west to be my secretary.”

The memory of his stay continued to interest Cecil when he returned to New York. “I’m still smiling over my stay with the Bathursts. She is bossing him about properly, and he likes it — she bullies him quite shamelessly. I don’t think I’ve ever seen anything quite as funny as his trying to be skittish, with Dorothy pinching his bottom. I think they’re all right now, although they have had one or two bitter quarrels — but honeymoons are the time when you quarrel, I fancy. As far as I could gather, I don’t think they are quite adjusted sexually, but they ought to put that right or get used to it sooner or later. I shall be seeing them again before I come to Berkeley, so that I shall bring you the latest developments.”

An assertive female, as was Dorothy Bathurst, is the distinguishing characteristic of all the women who aroused Cecil’s interests after his early years.

45. CSF-K, 392, 18 September 1942
46. CSF-K, 394, 23 September 1942
That is, after the years when he played author and fan with Dorothy Beale and Phyllis Callaghan, who lived in his home neighborhood. In addition, that statement excepts the Dorothy Foster who became his second wife. Kathleen of course was the assertive type, as had Lillian been before her, and others of whom I learned later. Perhaps Cecil merely preferred the type, or perhaps he estimated later that he would run less danger and have more opportunity when deceiving the henpecked husband of an assertive woman than when deceiving the masterful husband of a submissive woman.

The condition of the Bathurst’s marriage continued to cycle between happiness and unhappiness. In October Cecil again went to Washington and again stayed with the Bathursts. “I stayed two nights with the Bathursts again — the news is not so good, and you must be very careful what you write. I’ll tell you all about it when I see you; some of it isn’t fit to print. As a matter of fact I sit here wondering if I really did hear it or if it is just the hell of a nightmare — unbelievable, some of it.”47
Two years later Dorothy Bathurst makes her penultimate appearance in this story. By 1944, Cecil was living permanently in Berkeley. That spring and summer, because Kathleen was away on several short trips, two with me and one alone, Cecil wrote to Kathleen. During part of that time, Dorothy Bathurst, who had not managed to get herself pregnant again, visited the West Coast. “So far there has been no news of Dorothy Bathurst. I think if a letter comes from her to you this week I had better open it. One theory I have is that finding herself at L.A. she has decided to visit Ruth [Watkins] and has caught the no-letter habit from her.”

“There was a postcard for you from Dorothy yesterday, which I read. She was writing from Indiana, the hell of a long way away, but she still says she will be arriving Tuesday (today) but I haven’t heard from her at all since then. And there is a postcard from M. for her this morning which I have also

47. CSF-K, 396, 30 October 1942
48. CSF-K, 426, 2 April 1944
read, in which he says he is very lonely without her and why hasn’t she written and how he is looking forward to her coming back — a very newly married postcard, in fact. There’s no making those two out.”

Dorothy arrived and spent the summer in Berkeley. During the periods when Kathleen was away Dorothy received at least two letters from her husband which Cecil described in letters to Kathleen. “Dorothy had a perfectly insulting postcard from her husband a day or two ago — something perfectly dreadful, quite incredible, raking up the old business for no reason at all. If I were she I would never see him again ever, and she felt like that at first but is getting over it fast enough. I suppose he gets fits of wanting to hurt her, either that or he is asserting himself in the only way he can think of. They are an impossible couple.”

Dorothy apparently agreed, for she decided to

49. CSF-K, 427, 4 April 1944
50. CSF-K, 431, 3 June 1944
get a job in San Francisco. “Dorothy went over to S.F. this morning, because she heard that there was a job going with R.N. [Royal Navy] here and she wondered if she would like to have it (she hasn’t made up her mind whether or not to forgive Maurice for his appalling postcard yet) and after that she was going to the tennis tournament with Mrs. VanCourt — maybe George and I will have to get our own dinner, but if we do that will be the first time for a long time. ...

“Dorothy has just come in and she is taking the job of secretary to the B.N.L.O. [British Naval Liaison Officer] in S.F. She says she will start next Monday. What settled the matter was a letter that came for her this morning and which she has just opened. It is a bit of newspaper posted in Santa Barbara on the day Bathurst left it last week, cut into the shape of a gallows (she didn’t recognize it, so it would have been wasted if I hadn’t been there) with the name of Mrs. Bathurst occurring in the print of it; the envelope was addressed in a disguised hand. Never a dull moment. [Maurice had been in Santa Barbara
without Dorothy. They were obviously not on good
terms. A newspaper available in Santa Barbara men-
tioned an entirely different Mrs. Bathurst. Someone
cut that page of the newspaper to resemble a gallows
with the words “Mrs. Bathurst” labelling the victim
hanging from it. Cecil and Dorothy decided that the
name was a coincidence that caught Maurice’s eye
and this coincidence brought to his mind this pecu-
liar comment on his marriage. Alternatively, Mau-
rice could have stayed in Santa Barbara with
another woman said to be Mrs. Bathurst; the fact
was reported in some social context, and someone
who knew the truth sent this message. I suggest that
this is a less likely explanation because such a
sender would have made plain the relationship
between the supposed Mrs. Bathurst and Maurice in
such terms that Cecil and Dorothy would have rec-
ognized it.] She [Dorothy] came back [from San
Francisco] undecided about it, but this made up her
mind — if she is with the R.N. they will fight for her
tooth and nail so that her position ought to be all
right. Well, well, well, of course, I have said that she
can live here if she wants to — she will have to leave here about 7:00 and she will get back here about 6:30. I think it is a very good idea; working for the R.N. will give her an established position whatever Bathurst does.”\textsuperscript{51}

In the summer of 1942 Cecil met the crew of the British light cruiser \textit{Penelope}, which had served extensively under Admiral Vian in the Mediterranean, been damaged, and had come to the Philadelphia Navy Yard for repair and refit. Cecil listened to the crew’s stories and learned his way around the ship, and when the repairs were finished he sailed in her on her trials. “I’m going to be on Information Please [a radio quiz program] on Friday night, and then I shall go on board the ship. Then I expect I shall be utterly cut off for about two weeks. I don’t want you to misinterpret this, I shall be in no danger at all, not any, but I shall be unable to receive any messages or send any. I’m going to have a very

\textsuperscript{51}. CSF-K, 432, 5 June 1944
remarkable experience but a very safe one, and I’m as pleased as anything about it and I’m looking forward to it so much that I can’t do any work here at all.”

He returned safely. “I am back again now, after having had the most wonderful and delightful experience anyone could imagine — a really amazing time. By the time I see you it won’t be secret any longer and I’ll be able to tell you all about it.”

The novel that Cecil wrote that year was *The Ship*, based on one of the naval actions in the Mediterranean and reflecting what he had learned aboard HMS *Penelope*. In that action, a squadron of cruisers escorting a convoy to resupply the hard-pressed and vital island of Malta frightens off an Italian squadron that included battleships. Had the Italians pressed on they could have sunk the cruisers with little damage to themselves and scattered and sunk the convoy. However, because the British cruis-
ers were superbly handled, concealing themselves in clouds of smoke from which they emerged at unpredictable times with guns already trained on the Italians, the Italians thought that a pitched battle was too risky and turned back.

Cecil created HMS *Artemis* as the vehicle for his story. Since a ship is but an inanimate machine, although her crew does not so look on her, Cecil tells his story by telling the stories of her crew as they steer her, load and fire her guns, and as they die when she is hit. One sensitive observer is aboard, Jerningham, the Captain’s secretary, in peacetime a successful advertising copywriter and seducer of women. Immediately before the action starts Jerningham finds the opportunity to open and read a letter he had received in port the day before. Dora Derby, the most attractive of his prewar girl friends, has written to say that she has married a man they both know, and ... “What will make you laugh even more is that Bill has been doing his best to get me with child, and I have been aiding and abetting him all I can. That is in the air too. And
honestly, it means something to me after all these years of doing the other thing. And another thing is I shouldn’t be surprised if Bill’s efforts have been successful.” Dora’s words “simply infuriate” Jerningham, and this fury drives his usual fear from Jerningham’s thoughts, steadying him during the action. Jerningham’s function during Artemis’s action, to keep the historical record, is almost the same as Cecil’s unofficial one during Penelope’s trials. The similarity between the two characters is unmistakable, as is the similarity between the names of Dora and Dorothy and between the subjects of their letters.

Then there is the captain, Captain the Hon. Miles Ernest Troughton-Harrington-Yorke. Jerningham, who thought he had better judgement than most advertising managers, and who knew he was superior to most husbands, recognizes that his captain performs with an ability far beyond his own. Yet Cecil has given the captain his own middle name of

54. The Ship p 23

946
Troughton and endorsed him with his own past. “As a boy and as a youth [the captain] had indulged and indulged again in the rich dark pleasure of insane evil temper. He had revelled in the joy of having no bounds to his passion, of every restraint cast aside—the sort of joy whose intensity not even the drunkard or the drug addict can know ... he had come to realize the insidious danger of a lack of self-control, and the insidious habit that could be formed by self-indulgence, more binding ever than a drunkard’s. He had mastered his passions, slowly and determinedly.”

True or not, these are almost the very words Father used to me when describing his own youth. Furthermore, the captain’s youth had been encumbered by poverty whose shame he had felt. If Jerningham is Cecil as he felt himself, the Captain is Cecil as he wished he were, another Hornblower so to speak.

Among the many characters of the crew, some are resurrected from the past. Albert Whipple at the

55. *The Ship* p 125-6

947
masthead is Leading Seaman Albert Brown all over again. Other men have overtones of Rifleman Dodd and General Curzon, but most are new inventions.

Then there is the collection of technological errors. Cecil describes the air pressure in the boiler room in a single sentence as both higher than atmospheric and as “dragged into the boiler room by the partial vacuum set up by the combustion.” 56 The air pressure in the boiler room cannot be simultaneously above and below atmospheric pressure. Warships at high speed (any fast steamships for that matter) use large fans to blow the air necessary for combustion into the boiler rooms at a pressure greater than atmospheric (forced draft). At low speed, they use the natural draft of the heated air in the smokestacks to drag in the air. On the next page Cecil describes *Artemis* at 31 knots “with the wind abeam [directly from the side] and the sea nearly so she lurched savagely and with unremitting regularity, hitting each wave as if it were something solid,

56. *The Ship* p 63
her forecastle awash with the white water which came leaping over her port bow.” Waves from abeam, of all directions, are the least hindrance when a ship must travel fast. If the ship must face the waves, or if she travels with them but faster than they move themselves, any increase in speed results in a violent increase in motion and shock, whereas with a beam sea an increase in speed has much less effect. A little further on the Captain is surprised to note that the bridge was quieter when running before the wind. A war correspondent might have been surprised to notice that, but a seaman would have learned that ordinary fact from his second time in a small boat. Then, on a scientific rather than a seamanship level, Cecil states that the energy of a gun’s recoil equals the energy of its shell. It doesn’t. The momentum of recoil equals the momentum of the shell, where momentum is mass times speed. Because the shell is so much lighter

57. *The Ship* p 68
58. *The Ship* p 96
than the gun, it moves much faster and acquires the lion’s share of the energy, where energy is mass times speed times speed.

The biggest difference between *The Ship* and other Forester works is that the action is historically significant. The real *Penelope*, on which *Artemis* is based, fought an action with historical significance. *Penelope* had been one ship of a brilliantly handled squadron of light cruisers that frightened away an Italian squadron containing battleships, thus ensuring that the island of Malta was resupplied. The continued existence of Malta as an unsinkable aircraft carrier\(^{59}\) between Italy and Africa ensured that the Germans would continue to lose more than half of the supplies that they tried to send to General Rommel in North Africa, thus preventing him from conquering Egypt, turning the Mediterranean Sea into

\(^{59}\) Planes based on Malta attacked German planes and Italian ships trying to supply their forces in North Africa, and protected British ships against German and Italian planes.
a German lake, cutting off the supply route to Russia, and maybe making it possible for Hitler to conquer that part of the Old World the Japanese didn’t get to first. Humanizing that action, showing its importance yet showing how its success was produced by a very few well-equipped and superbly trained British seamen, was one of Cecil’s objectives. There was no need in this book to devise an explanation of why these marvelous events do not appear in history.

Real history occupied Cecil’s mind in another way while he was writing *The Ship*. He formed, or joined, a discussion group named The Armchair Strategist’s Society, which debated current military events one evening each month. The members were old Berkeley friends of Cecil’s: Joseph Henry Jackson, the literary critic; George R. Stewart, the professor and novelist; Arthur Lewis, the marine engineer (on the occasions when he was not at sea); Lyle Cook, the attorney who, until he entered the army, handled Cecil’s legal affairs; and a few others whom I now forget. An occasional participant was Reid
Railton, the automotive engineer, two of whose designs, at that time, held the world’s land speed and the world’s water speed records. On the occasions when the meeting was held at Keeler Avenue I was allowed the special favor of listening in. The members pulled the living room’s armchairs into a friendly circle, sherry and coffee circulated, and after the usual preliminary gossip they talked about the month’s military and naval events. In Europe these events ranged from the invasion of North Africa to the Battle of the Bulge, in the Pacific from the Solomon Islands to Iwo Jima, an exciting time in which the ingenuity of the amateur strategists was exercised to the full.

They had the news reports supplemented by a little bit of not-so-secret scuttlebutt and what they saw with their own eyes. Using news reports that were, by and large, correct reporting of events but complete concealment of preparations, the armchair strategists set about assessing the importance of what they had heard, as if they were the generals of both sides. Was this attack the opening of an offen-
Armchair Strategists, c spring 1945.
C. S. Forester nearest radio, George R. Stewart, me, Joseph Henry Jackson, Arthur Lewis. Reid Railton at far right.
G. R. Stewart Collection, Bancroft Library
Cecil playing tin whistle,
Orinda CC tennis court 1942 or 1943
sive or a desperate ruse to gain time? Was this island fortified or not? Was this fleet able to continue in battle or was it so severely damaged that major units were in for repairs? In real life, the strategists of one side or the other knew these answers. In the amateurs’ case, no one knew. This only opened the game up to wilder flights of fancy, from which they were restrained by the custom of the monthly prediction. After discussion of the meaning of current events, the chairman took out of his pocket the envelope containing the prediction for the events of the past month. He returned it to the member who had prepared it, who then opened it and read to the group what he had predicted would have happened in the month just past. As I recall, there were several predictions of the invasion of Europe before June, 1944, and several more of stupendous Russian successes that forced an early German collapse. Sometimes these predictions appeared in hindsight to be ludicrous, resulting in a circle of barely concealed grins; at others the members wondered why these events had not come to pass, and frowned and puzzled over
the state of the world until the member finished reading his prediction. Then at the end of the evening, another member submitted his sealed prediction for the coming month, and the meeting broke up. Cecil played this game with all the gusto you would expect of one to whom this had been his first childhood interest.

Besides letting me discreetly listen in to the Armchair Strategists, Father took the time to add his own favorite subjects to my public school curriculum. During this year of 1942-3, when I was in the eighth grade, he set me two additional tasks. The first was the copying out of many of Lord Chesterfield’s *Letters to his Son*, one or two each week, on the theory that such an exercise would improve both my penmanship and my manners. Father thought this necessary because he caught me picking my nose, and the strongest memory I have of that course of study is Father’s severe declaration that Lord Chesterfield wrote that he’d rather know a man had had his finger up his arse than see him picking his nose.
Any improvement in my penmanship was purely temporary and for the occasion (it is still execrable), while Lord Chesterfield’s ideas on manners were so far removed from my own and from my experience that I could not separate those useful to me from those not. My mother’s idea of manners was what you did to please others. Lord Chesterfield and my father had the different thought that manners were the facade that one put on to make people think better of you and succumb to your will. I early realized that the manners of Chesterfield’s letters fit Michael Curtin’s later description of “appear[ing] to represent manners at their most cynical, expedient and immoral light,”\textsuperscript{60} and Samuel Johnson’s description of the letters as teaching “the morals of a whore and the manners of a dancing master.” I wanted no part of such a society.

The second task was to memorize Gray’s \textit{Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard}, the poem that Father

\textsuperscript{60} Curtin, Michael: Journal of Modern History, September 1985
thought one of the greatest in the English language. Having heard Father’s expressed opinions concerning the sinfulness of conspicuous consumption, the propriety of a modest life and attitude, and the virtue of a reasonable approach to death, I believed that he truly reflected his own opinion when he carefully coached me over the lines: “Far from the madding crowd’s ignoble strife, /Their sober wishes never learned to stray; /Along the cool sequestered vale of life, /They kept the noiseless tenor of their way. /The boast of heraldry, the pomp of pow’r, /And all that beauty, all that wealth e’er gave, /Awaits alike the inevitable hour. /The paths of glory lead but to the grave.”

I recognized also that such a life was modest because fame did not come there: “Some village-Hampden, that with dauntless breast /The petty tyrant of his fields withstood, /Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest, /Some Cromwell guiltless of his country’s blood.” I was old enough to understand that fame, by its very nature, could only come to a few, and certainly, in a personal context, I did
not expect it to come to me. I understood, then, the charitable interpretation that these country folk should not be despised as unknowns, merely because they were never in a position to become famous. I understood, also, what he told me in other words as well, that just because he was famous I should not expect to be.

However, I completely missed the third facet of Gray’s thought, that poverty and obscurity have the positive virtue of limiting one’s crimes and vices. In Gray’s words: “Forbad to wade through slaughter to a throne, /And shut the gates of mercy on mankind; /The struggling pangs of conscious truth to hide, /To quench the blushes of ingenuous shame, /Or heap the shrine of luxury and pride /With incense kindled at the Muse’s flame.” In excuse, I can only say that I was young and didn’t yet understand the vices of which I had heard and read and, in addition, Father passed over this section without comment.

Considering his early and enthusiastic acquaintance with the history of the Roman Empire, as seen
both by the Romans and by Gibbon, that interpretation would not have escaped him. I think it likely that the contrast between my pastoral appreciation of the *Elegy* and his ironic one provided an extra fillip of interest to his task of properly educating me.

In May of 1943 the preparation of my proposed school schedule for the ninth grade caused Father to consider my school career, and he was displeased with what he saw. I had arrived in America at the age of ten and had been placed in the grade appropriate for my age. Having up to this time a superior English education I was given nothing new to learn except California history for about two and a half years. Of course I was bored in school, and found no need to do much homework. I had started to point this out to my teachers, but they, correctly in light of contemporary theory, ignored these intimations of maladjustment to my school curriculum. Far better it was for me to be among my age group than in my education group. Perhaps Father thought that I did little work because I couldn’t, or wouldn’t, do more. He was convinced that I would do very badly when
faced with geometry, so he insisted that I be scheduled for both dumbbell mathematics and first year algebra, “In order,” as he told me, “that you will receive that grounding in geometry which you will so sorely need when you have to face it.”

I believe that I was the only student in the school who took both subjects and the combination preempted any study hall I might have had. I used to shyly sneak out as the algebra class ended, mingle with the traffic in the hall until my friends had departed for other classes, then cross the hall to dumbbell math, with whose students I had no other contact. Dumbbell math did not provide much grounding for geometry, but it did provide a lot of drill. By chance, for we were seated alphabetically, my desk was directly before Miss Almy’s desk. She

61. He did not understand that the paper models that I had been designing and building for years were practical applications of the principles of geometry. If I had not had the appropriate aptitude I could not have done that work.
was an impossibly massive spinster who ruled strictly. First thing, every day, there was one problem on the board, a sheet of paper on which to solve it, and ten minutes to do it in. She used to wonder why I, who always had the right answer, always took all of the allowed ten minutes, working right up to her command to trade papers for correction. I kept up this charade until two weeks before the end of the school year, when she discovered that I not only did her problem, but her advance assignments and most of my algebra assignments also. When she found me out, she was extremely angry and demanded to know why I had not requested additional work on more advanced material. Her anger shamed me as if it were my father’s anger directly applied, rather than at second hand.

In the next year, 1944-5, when I got to geometry I found it the easiest subject I had ever taken. I was again seated before the teacher, Miss Lewis, a frail woman in a wheelchair with skin yellowed by age, who had returned to teaching because of the labor shortage. I could do anything I liked in her
class as long as I didn’t disturb it; the only time she criticized me was the time I tipped my chair over. She knew that I didn’t pay any attention, for whenever any other student got stuck she never asked me point blank, “John, what’s the next step?” but instead she said, “John, Charles has proved that angle A equals Angle B. Can you go on from there?” Of course, had I ever been unable to go on in one of the correct ways to prove the proposition, my privileges would have been immediately revoked.

In English literature I was not so fortunate. In the eighth grade one required book was *A Tale of Two Cities*, which I had read when I was nine years old in Germany. I thought my taste must have improved a lot in the intervening years, for I had then thought it was a wonderful novel but now realized that it was not nearly as good as I had thought. I may well have said as much, an opinion which merely convinced my teachers of my poor taste and intellectually arrogant ignorance. I didn’t give Dickens another try for twenty years, when finding that *A Tale of Two Cities* was the only paperback in an airport bookstall that I

963
cared to try at all, I bought it. I immediately realized that the California State School Edition had been badly bowdlerized and abridged, and what I had criticized had not been Dickens at all.

I was, however, poor in Latin, and this was the only homework I brought home regularly, and I brought it home for help. Whatever he saw and understood of my school career, Father remained convinced that it was inadequate.

In addition to schoolwork, I always had projects under way. On the top floor of his house, Tom and I had the paper models that constituted our Bay Area transportation system. Outside, because those winters were unusually wet, we had many locations suitable for dams: the street gutters, the springs in the empty lots next door, the creek that ran down the landslide at the end of the block. We also had a source of adobe clay, almost as good as sculptor’s clay. From that material, Tom built beautiful dams according to the engineering principle of the least material to hold back the most water, dams that were arched, buttressed, and as thin as possible. We
extended such systems into the large, sloping garden. We built a dam, with power houses below it. We built a city whose water was distributed from the dam and whose street trees were the discarded tops of kitchen carrots, replanted. The dam connected to a canal system along which candle-powered steam boats towed barges. We graded road systems over the mountains of the garden. Once the rains stopped and we started using household water, the household water bill put an end to that. Mrs. Schroeder, our landlady, paid the water bill because she didn’t want us to skimp on watering the garden. However, she was very surprised one month to find a bill four times what it had been. It is no wonder that Tom, at quite an early age for the responsibility, was later placed in charge of the largest railroad construction job that was done in America in decades.

I had a toy stationary steam engine that I used to drive model machines. I designed and built an aerial tram that ran from one corner of the living room diagonally up to the end of the bridge across
it. Since such toy engines, unlike real ones, full size or model, will not run slowly, must be hand started, and will not reverse, I had to build a clutch and a reduction gear to connect the engine to the tram’s winch. Provided it is only a toy in which one does not have to worry about human life, one can gadgeteer such machinery using household tools and materials. The engineering was about equal to that of the earliest powered machinery.

I designed and built model boats, both sail and electric, and model airplanes. I built from kits several rubber-powered scale model planes that didn’t fly very well; now I know that such planes never fly very well. I designed gliders, scale and performance, that I built from paper. My craftsmanship in making these operating machines did not look elegant. A few boys in Berkeley owned beautiful gasoline-powered planes, but they had contributed none of the design and, quite possibly, little to the construction. I designed and built, myself, what I could make from cheap materials, and kept at it until I got the item running right. It would have been easier in
peacetime; even model airplane cement was difficult to get, and came in bottles instead of squeezable tubes.

Louis Howard and I went through a phase of making various kinds of gunpowder, and when we needed hydrogen for a project we were lucky that our equipment did not shatter when we used a match to test for the presence of hydrogen.

Those things that my father decided to teach me himself were hardly more adequate or timely than the things he thought the school should teach me. There was the business of my sex education. Being an omnivorous reader, of an inquisitive mind, and not a lonely boy at all, I exploited most sources of information open to me and had a pretty good idea of what was usual and a smattering of knowledge of what was unusual. Out in the open in our house were copies of Havelock Ellis’s *Psychopathia Sexualis*; Malinowski’s accounts of the habits, sexual and otherwise, of the Trobriand Islanders; Sheldon’s hypothesis (later largely disproved) of the way in which physical form determines psychological
behavior; *The Chinese Room*, a novel about discovering release from the inhibitions of middle-class British sexual inhibitions; the Chinese classic erotic novel *Hsing Ping Mei*; and similar items.

Discovering the proper functioning of my own body was a joyful and confident, though still solitary, revelation. I had known that my body had been developing normally. Indeed, I had recognized the very first signs in that summer I had lain in the sun beside Dorothy Bathurst. By the next summer my body was showing that it was getting ready to perform as it should, and already wanted to do so. I was attracted to girls and enjoyed the company of particular girls in dancing class and skating performances, though without the maturity that would have taken me as far as kisses. Responding to my body’s desires, after several fruitless tries I experimented with what I thought might be a practical imitation of coition, masturbation lubricated with olive oil. I wondered at the new found, intensely powerful pleasure that I was getting and which told me that I must not stop, and then was completely surprised at the cataclys-

968
mic, throbbing release. I knew immediately that that indicated the moment, once I had matured a bit more, when I would ejaculate. I had no feeling of guilt or shame. I knew that this was a proper function of anybody’s body. Since girls were not ready to have sex with me, and in any case going all the way would be very inadvisable for many years to come, I accepted that that part of my sexual life would naturally be solitary, indeed that that was, socially speaking, the most acceptable behavior.

Sometime after all of this Father presented me, very shamefacedly and a very apologetically, with a paperback book of elementary physiology, hinting that it contained things I ought to know. Technically it was no match to the beautifully produced *Anatomy and Physiology* that Tom Lewis’s very proper and devout mother had been letting us read for years. What impressed me most about the situation was Father’s very obvious embarrassment, from which I drew the obvious conclusion that he was a very shy and proper man, but I failed to speculate further upon the relationship between the embarrassment
and what I had already glimpsed, through the books he possessed (some of which had already been in the house when we moved in), of his personal tastes.

To return to 1943, in that spring I attempted to emulate my friends with their fathers, and call him Dad. When I slipped the new name casually into a sentence, he immediately broke into my words, his brows came down in a severe frown, and he spoke harshly. “I will not have you ever calling me anything but ‘Father.’ Not ever again will you do that. Now go on with what you were saying.” But I was too flustered and ashamed to remember what I had been talking about — I don’t remember to this day. My father evidently believed the authoritarian Victorian position that boys must call their male parent Father, lest the authority of his position be lowered by signs of familiarity and affection.

As you would expect from Cecil’s own record of his previous years, in Berkeley too he searched out women with whom he could have frequent tete-a-tetes over cups of tea and light gossip and whatever else occurred to the pair of them. Mrs. Audrey ‘Lit-
tle audrey’ Railton, Miss Sara Cundiff, Miss or Mrs. ‘Baby’ Bunting, Mrs. Dorothy Lamb, are some of the names that I know. Naturally, as in the past, he made his visits without Kathleen, as in the future he would make them without Dorothy. Generally, Kathleen knew of his destination and acquiesced, but sometimes she did not know. On one evening she was quite excited at the prospect of making her first political speech, about Britain’s war effort or something of the sort. Cecil had heard her practicing, and declined to go. He was going to play bridge at the Berkeley Tennis Club instead. Kathleen made her speech and, knowing that nobody would be up when she returned home, and still keyed up, she stopped at International House of the University of California on the way home to find somebody to tell. She told one of her Indian friends about her speech, and he decided the occasion required a celebration, so he asked her up to the Claremont Hotel Terrace for a drink. Just below that was the Tennis Club, and on the way Kathleen stopped to tell Cecil where she was going. He wasn’t there. On the Ter-
race, her friend asked whether Cecil still had the black 60 Special Cadillac, which Kathleen con-

firmed.

“Well,” he said, “I believe that that was the car I saw parked as we were driving here.” The two of

them returned to where the car was parked, they looked, and it was indeed Cecil’s car parked outside

a strange house. When Cecil returned home, he described in his usual entertaining manner the

peculiarities of the evening’s hands of cards at the Tennis Club and the players’ errors, or successes, in

playing them.

In June of 1943 Cecil went off with the United States Navy to the Aleutian Islands in search of

material for a new book. I believe this was one of the times when we drove him down at night to the dis-

mal and deserted Berkeley Pier, where a captain’s gig waited to take him off to a ship that was sailing

secretly in the dark hours. He traveled aboard the destroyer *Abner Reed*, the cruiser *Santa Fe* (where he

occupied Franklin Roosevelt’s cabin with the
sunken bathtub), the battleship *Tennessee*, and the oiler *Neosho*. These ships were supporting the operations that recaptured the Aleutian Islands from the Japanese. There wasn’t any naval action, but the weather was bad enough for him to observe skilled seamanship and ship handling.

At all times either a gale blew or there was fog, sometimes both at once. He wrote from the *Abner Reed*, “I expect it will make you smile a bit to hear that I have been seasick at last.” Two days later he had transferred to the *Santa Fe*, and watched the ship fire by radar at some suspected targets which turned out to be suspected radar ghosts instead. “It is all very exciting and interesting; as a matter of fact I am so full up of new impressions that I shall have mental indigestion if it doesn’t let up soon. I have actually all I need for the book, I think, but it would be silly for me to miss all these opportunities. I have been extremely well fed, much better than I have known in a ship of war before, and people have

62. CSF-K, 406, 19 June 1943
been very kind to me — I’ve talked to Admirals and Generals as well as to everyone else. It’s still no use writing to me.” (Because letters would not get to the right ship.)

It may have been as well that Kathleen couldn’t write to Cecil, for she would have written a shocked letter. He had left on short notice, and upon leaving had deposited some torn up scraps of letters in his wastebasket instead of holding them for the next bonfire. As Kathleen was emptying the wastebasket a phrase or two caught her eye, words that she did not expect in a letter to her husband. She collected the pieces and assembled them together.

There were two letters. The first was from Frances Phillips. In it, Frances wrote as if she believed that she was Cecil’s steady mistress in New York. The second letter was from a Swedish woman, who wrote in openly intimate terms of her lovemaking with three men during a skiing holiday. She closed on the taunting note that those three brought her

63. CSF-K, 407, 21 June 1943

974
score up to 164, and she doubted that Cecil was enough of a man to have caught up to her from his last reported score of 143. Some years later, Cecil referred to “Dora Ekelund in Sweden”\(^6\) in a letter to Frances that presumed that Frances knew of Dora.

Kathleen had calmed down considerably before Cecil’s return, but there were still bitter words. The climax she remembers was when she asked him how many bastards he had left around the world.

“Bastards! What kind of a fool do you take me for?” he replied. I suppose with this attitude that any woman unfortunate enough to become pregnant by him had a pretty rough time.

In any case, two other events served to break the course of the argument. Kathleen was leaving to take a small group of boys to the Russian River valley to help with the fruit harvest, a trip of four weeks or so. During the war years everybody who could

\(^6\) CSF-FP 6 November 1946
help with the harvest was asked to do so, and we harvested for three summers. We worked in the mornings and played on the river in the afternoons. Even before she left, Cecil’s right leg started giving trouble in an ill-defined way. He first found that while playing tennis his right leg became tired before his left. In a few weeks, even normal walks such as from the train station to the garage where he often parked his car caused his leg to ache as if he had marched all day. Dr. Leet tried a course of injections for the month of August, but the leg did not improve. This was the onset of the disease that changed his life.
Cecil found he could not make a start on the book about the U.S. Navy. He had a better idea, or at least a more interesting one, for another book, but he didn’t start on that one either. Then Washington suggested that Cecil, when he had finished the U.S. Navy book, should visit the Mediterranean theater of war to write about amphibious assaults and cooperation between the allied armies. Cecil accepted, providing that his leg got better. “Ships are all right, but I don’t see how I could see anything of troops if I’m still like this. You have to walk to see soldiers — I’d be no good if I didn’t.”¹
When Kathleen returned from the mountains with George and me at the start of school, Cecil’s leg had not improved at all. He went to see a specialist in San Francisco, Dr. Montgomery, who was very pessimistic about Cecil’s prospects. The blood supply to his leg was being reduced by the deposit of fat inside his arteries, a condition which would progress until his extremities received too little blood to live, and he would die by inches, with the surgeon cutting off the dying parts one by one, in a race before gangrene set in. Montgomery tried dilation of the arteries by injections of sal ammoniac, a procedure that temporarily relaxed the arterial muscle system, thus increasing the flow while the blood pressure dropped alarmingly. He tried a massage machine that cyclically applied pressure to the leg, but without results. Since penicillin was just then available, it was tried in a test to see whether it would have any effect, but it did not.

Just after Christmas Cecil went to the Mayo

1. CSF-K, 415, 30 August 1943
Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, where he was given a very careful examination.

“Dearest,

“I’ve just sent off a wire to you. I had the final interview (nominally) with Barker half an hour ago. He says I have something (after all) which is not Buerger’s disease, thereby agreeing with Montgomery again. It isn’t too bad at present, and, judging by Montgomery’s measurements last year, it isn’t progressing fast. With luck, if I don’t injure my feet, I may last for years. I’ve got to have another course of injections, the same as the last ones, but much bigger, and into my arms — even my arse is too near my feet to risk it. The big doses may cripple my arms for a bit. He also doesn’t approve of violent climates, but he says heat isn’t so bad, but I mustn’t ever be cold. I can exercise as much as I can (he didn’t like the idea of tennis much, but he swallowed it) but I must not ride horses! (massage of legs contraindicated). I can drink if I want to, and he wouldn’t mind if I smoked, much, but I won’t. No nervous strain, but gentle work. Swimming O.K. if not cold.
And there’s a chance (not a big one, he says, but a chance) that reestablished alternative circulation may be set up in time to race the gangrene and save me. But he wouldn’t bet on it. Anyway, there’s nothing desperately urgent as far as he can see.

“That’s all very good news, dear, and I hope you’re pleased. He wants me to submit to some more tests (for his sake, this time, not for mine) and of course I’ve said yes. I shall be busy with them all day tomorrow, I expect. Then I shall see about coming home. If I can get an earlier reservation of course I shall, but I doubt it. I’ll wire if my plans change. Otherwise I suppose I’ll be home Tuesday night.

“Lots of love dear.”

So Cecil returned home with news which was neither alarming nor optimistic. He settled down to work on various naval articles and the start of *The Commodore*. In *The Hornblower Companion* Cecil states it somewhat more dramatically, and he gives the

2. CSF-K, 424, 10 January 1944

980
impression that in his first period of illness Hornblower, so to speak, came to his rescue without his conscious request and single-handedly saved him from melancholia. That is false. In his letters of this period, which are only a few, he lists stories about U-boats, midget submarines (these are X-boats, so this is a different story), a submarine tender and something also intended for the Reader’s Digest, in addition to The Commodore. As for Hornblower’s uncalled-for appearance in his mind at that time, in actuality he had been trying since June, 1942, to find time to write The Commodore, later known as Commodore Hornblower. As he wrote then in unknowing ironic prescience, “The itch to get a new volume of Hornblower finished is growing terribly strong. I’m afraid I shall have to do something about it somehow or other — God knows how I wish I could break my leg painlessly.”

Cecil had come across considerable informa-

3. CSF-K, 380, 6 June 1942

981
tion about bomb ketches. These were the ungainly vessels that each carried two enormous guns that hurled an explosive shell over a high trajectory, for use against forts that protected harbors. The fuses were not very accurate; the shell could land inside the fort and burst on the ground, or it could burst on the descent. In either case it sprayed the target with shrapnel.  

Cecil’s knowledge of the weapon demanded a Hornblower story about it. The years in which a Hornblower story could exist were limited to the times left vacant by the previous stories. In one of those, when Hornblower would be a senior captain or a commodore, the British Navy operated against forts: it bombarded Fort McHenry near Baltimore with the “bombs bursting in air.” Since the political circumstances of 1943 dictated that Hornblower must not be involved in the bombardment of Fort McHenry, Cecil decided to send Hornblower to the

4. Henry Shrapnel of the British Army had invented this type of shell.
surtage of the port of Riga in the Baltic during Napoleon’s Russian campaign.

The story opens with domestic scenes of Hornblower and Lady Barbara, intended to show both Hornblower’s love for and happiness with Barbara and his irritation with civilian life. Hornblower is assigned a squadron for service in the Baltic, consisting of a ship of the line, two sloops, two bomb ketches, and a cutter. The international situation is very tense. Napoleon is threatening Russia with invasion; nobody knows which side the Swedes will choose; the Finns would like to side with whoever opposes Russia. Hornblower’s assignment has as much political as naval significance. Napoleon angers Sweden, perhaps as a result of Hornblower’s actions, and then invades Russia. After naval adventures and political intrigues, Hornblower supports the port of Riga as the French besiege it and is present at the land battle of Daugavgriva, the furthest the French advanced along the Baltic coast. (The main French army reached Moscow, from which it retreated with enormous losses.) At the end of the
story Hornblower contracts typhus and will be invalided home.

If Cecil wanted the story to end with Hornblower becoming sick, there was no difficulty in arranging that. However, Cecil told a different story in *The Hornblower Companion*. I compare both versions. Hornblower at the siege of Riga, when he served ashore directing the defense, contracted typhus. Now typhus used to be the scourge of sieges, because, being transmitted primarily by lice (in a milder form, secondarily by fleas), it flourished whenever an army settled down to sedentary warfare. Almost every army in history had suffered from it until modern methods for controlling lice appeared in the twentieth century. Before that: "Typhus had come to be the inevitable and expected companion of war and revolution; no encampment, no campaigning army, and no besieged city escaped it."5 Cecil therefore required no special explanation for Hornblower’s illness. Yet, explicitly knowing

5. Zinsser, Hans; *Rats, Lice, and History*; Boston, 1935
this, he invented and inserted a special episode in which Hornblower was exposed to the body vermin of a lady of the Russian court who seduced him. Cecil comments on and justifies this episode in the following words: “The commodore ... certainly was the Saturday Evening Post’s first adulterer.

“There was an odd reason for that adultery, too — I suppose there is an odd reason for most adulteries, but this one I consider odder than most. Hornblower was destined at the end of the book to come down with typhus, the jail-fever that killed off whole armies that winter, and typhus is a disease transmitted by lice. I knew — more than one volume of memoirs mention the fact — that dignitaries of the Russian court were usually carriers of body vermin, and I wanted to show Hornblower with at least a flea, and he had to be provided with ample opportunity for acquiring a minimum of one. He also, like many mercurial souls, did not carry his liquor well; and the bond that united him to his Barbara was as frail as any bond would prove to be when applied to Hornblower; so that one way or another that adul-
tery was pretty inevitable.”\textsuperscript{6} Having thus justified the adultery, Cecil then, as he so often did in his letters, denies the whole thought by asserting the opposite in the next sentence: “But I fancy that Hornblower picked up the louse that gave him typhus at some moment when he was helping to defend the village of Daugavgriva.”\textsuperscript{7}

From a literary point of view, it is interesting that Cecil, knowing that “typhus is a disease transmitted by lice,” selected a flea as the nominal carrier. Lice were far too horrible or disgusting to be mentioned in print. Cecil’s words and his chronic fear of discomposing his readers show that Cecil intended Hornblower to have acquired lice for which the flea was a surrogate acceptable in print.

Although the Russian countess might have given Hornblower lice, any lice she gave him could not have been the cause of his typhus, which occurred far later than is scientifically possible.\textsuperscript{8}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{6} LBF 222
  \item \textsuperscript{7} LBF p 222
\end{itemize}

986
The idea that the amorous episode with the countess was necessary for Hornblower to contract typhus is false; the episode was not only unnecessary but its supposed result is scientifically impossible.

The question remains, why acquire lice by adultery, when more normal methods were present, particularly by adultery that is so underwritten that it isn’t interesting in itself? It’s just another piece of autobiography—Hornblower needed lice to further the story, but his method of acquiring them was Cecil’s own, the method by which he had acquired lice in 1941. When lice were needed in a Hornblower story, Cecil felt that he had to tell the story of his lice, even when that was scientifically unreasonable. Cecil’s words describing Hornblower (quoted above) are as descriptive of himself as of Hornblower.

When *The Commodore* was published in 1945, Cecil received letters about his other inaccuracies. His descriptions of ships dropping anchor without

8. This is not new knowledge: Hans Zinsser’s book and the Encyclopedia Britannica explain the reasons.
first coming head to wind upset the mariners. He infuriated the British Grenadier Guards because he had one of their officers wearing a bearskin helmet three years before these were awarded for beating Napoleon’s Guards, who wore such helmets, at Waterloo. Those who know about bomb ketches have written that his account is full of errors. However, Cecil never mentioned receiving any letters about the incubation period of typhus; probably none of the scientific readers recognized that the amorous episode was intended to be the source of Hornblower’s typhus.

The most distressing of these letters was one from Sir Charles Oman, the famous historian of the Napoleonic period. Oman sent much information about the siege of Riga and the battle of Daugavgriva: the Spanish troops that defected; the character of the governor of Riga illustrated by quotations from his memoirs; the reported presence of gunboats, but not British bomb ketches; the small number of casualties at the battle of Daugavgriva; quotations from Clausewitz’s memoirs. Cecil wrote
to his friend Frances Phillips that “I didn’t know [the governor of Riga] had even written a book. ... I made him [a character] just to help the damned book along. ... I’d no idea that there were any British vessels at Riga. I put them there because I wanted to write about bomb ketches and that was the only place where they could be employed! ... I didn’t know that Daugagriva had ever been assaulted. I just made it up. ... I never read [Clausewitz’s memoirs], but thank God I made sense, apparently. What in the world shall I write back, dear? Shall I confess? I’ve no shame about it, but I’m afraid of shocking the old man—he must be 95.”

Cecil had nothing to be ashamed of; he could justly have boasted instead. The story illustrates Cecil’s literary skill; he could invent a story that so incorporated a smattering of fact that it deceived even the most eminent authorities in the field.

10. CSF-FP 15 May 1945
Something Cecil did not mention in The Hornblower Companion was his initiation into music, a field that he had previously avoided. About 1943, George and I were given tin whistles at a party. We tried to play them, and succeeded as well as you would expect of untrained children with little patience. Our attempts aroused Father’s interest. He tried to play them and, practicing in the time he would formerly have spent walking, succeeded quite well. But tin whistles are miserable instruments, harsh toned and incapable of a chromatic scale. Father was then introduced, probably by Frances Phillips, to the old English recorder, a wooden predecessor of the flute, and took it up with enthusiasm. For the rest of his life playing folk tunes and older compositions on the recorder occupied almost as much of his time as reading.

Sometime in the early spring of 1944 Kathleen received a telephone invitation to lunch in San Francisco with Mr. Lamb, a man of their tennis crowd
who worked in the city. He wouldn’t tell her why, but intimated it was a matter of importance. She accepted. After lunch he very tactfully asked if she knew of the relationship between his wife and her husband. Kathleen said she knew they had played tennis together and conversed over cups of tea, but that was all it was.

“Don’t worry over nothing,” she told him. “That’s just the way he is with all women.”

“I am sure it is more than that,” he replied. “I am going to divorce Dorothy, and one of the grounds I could use would be adultery with Cecil. It would be legally easiest that way, but I would not take the easy way unless you were also thinking of parting with Cecil.”

“No, I am not thinking of doing that. I think you’re wrong about Dorothy, but I am sure you know her better than I do.”

“Well, that’s all right. I will use some of the other grounds. It won’t be as easy, but I won’t involve you and Cecil.”

Kathleen later remarked, somewhat ruefully
and with a wry grin, “I guess I should have taken my chance, when it was offered to me like that, on a platter so to speak.”

Just after this Cecil’s left leg began to show the same symptoms as the right. By Easter week, when Kathleen had taken George and me to the Sierra Club Lodge for skiing, Dr. Montgomery told Cecil that although his right leg was not getting worse very fast, his left leg was now as bad. Cecil’s walking endurance was now two or three blocks, where it remained until the last years of his life. This period, with *The Commodore* progressing well,\(^\text{11}\) is when Cecil had his blackest thoughts and the deepest gloom descended on him. Another event to distress him was the death of his brother Hugh, who died from tuberculous meningitis, a rather horrible illness. At the time I knew this only indirectly, for my father didn’t describe his feelings to anyone in the family

\(^{11}\) The finished typescript was delivered no later than mid-May. CSF-K, 428, 28 May 1944

992
except my mother. His words then were threatening enough that she took some covert safety precautions.

Cecil had the front bedroom on the top floor, Kathleen had the back bedroom with the balcony and view. Her bed was adjacent to the windows that opened onto the balcony, and because she liked the view and fresh air she removed the screens from the window. That didn’t matter; mosquitoes were rare in Berkeley. George and I used the bedrooms three floors below. Kathleen kept a set of old gardening clothes in the closet of the downstairs bedroom.

The view from Kathleen’s windows and balcony would have been shut off by a cypress tree that was growing from below. To prevent this, the cypress tree had been topped about five feet below the level of the floor. Its branches had curved up at their tips, forming a basket of closely spaced small limbs. George and I had discovered that we could jump from Kathleen’s balcony into this basket in relative safety, and we did so when playing cops and robbers and similar games.
What this has to do with Cecil’s illness is not apparent, and I had no idea of the connection at the time. Kathleen told me years later of the connection.

“When his blackest moods had descended on your Father, he used to threaten to hamstring me so that I would be as crippled as he was. In case he tried to trap me in my bedroom, I removed the screens from the window so that I could jump from my bed onto the balcony and thence into the tree. The clothes in your closet were there in case I had to do so naked.” Kathleen was too courageous to show fear by either telling Cecil that she was frightened or by locking her door, but she had arranged for an escape route.

Kathleen had always been a very vital person. Cecil had never been as vital, but now he was much less so, and sometime during the progress of Cecil’s disease Kathleen had come to believe that Cecil was not recovering because he didn’t want to. She believed that his condition would not remain so bad if he really got out and tried. Naturally, the extremely pessimistic prognosis that he had been
given by Dr. Montgomery did nothing to alleviate his black thoughts. Both Kathleen’s vitality and her vitalistic opinions served to accentuate in Cecil’s mind the contrast between them and, if Kathleen’s story is correct, fueled the envy that he felt.

We know much more now about Cecil’s condition than was known then. It is possible that modern treatment would have materially eased Cecil’s condition. He suffered from atherosclerosis, partial blocking of some of his arteries by deposits of cholesterol. When this occurs with the legs, the critical deposits are often where the main artery divides to feed each leg. Surgical replacement of that section of artery with a synthetic one often makes considerable improvement, but that technique was not known then.

Low blood flow has two obvious effects: it weakens the muscles and it reduces their endurance. Cecil could still climb stairs, but he could do it only twice a day. As a result of her professional training, Kathleen knew that the normal way to increase endurance is to exercise until fatigued. The person’s
endurance increases with each day of such exercise. She tried to get Cecil to do this, believing that while Cecil would never be the athletic person he had been he would no longer be crippled. However, Cecil refused; he appeared to just give up.

Cecil didn’t just give up. He physically could not do any more, he could not improve, and he was in pain, but nobody knew why. Today we understand. Coincidentally, my investigations into the physiology of bicycle racing also explained my father’s symptoms of thirty years before. In nontechnical summary, Cecil could walk short distances on the level without a great deal of fatigue, but climbing stairs quickly used up the energy chemicals stored in his leg muscles. Once these were used up he could not climb any more no matter how hard he tried, and his legs ached. These particular chemicals can be replenished only by overnight rest, so he could not climb any more stairs, or even walk, until the next day. There was nothing he could do to alter that condition. Normal people do most of their exercise on a different chemical system that requires full
blood flow, but that normal system was unavailable to Cecil because he had insufficient blood flow. Technically, Cecil had no aerobic power, only anaerobic power, and not much of that.

Today we know this, but at the time it was all a great mystery. So Kathleen was mistaken in thinking that Cecil’s black thoughts had frightened him so much that he had just given up, but nobody knew how to correct her belief.

Cecil finally took the step of using a wheelchair for events that required more distance than he could walk, which was two to three blocks in one day. He took his first outing with the chair at the end of May, 1945. “For me personally, it has been a rather drastic and queer business, not like taking a cold plunge, but something of more moral effect than that. More like the average modest man having to reconcile himself for the first time to the intimate physical attentions of a nurse. I think I’m all right already. ... I had to get used to the crowd parting hastily for me and everybody did what I always do with a cripple—averted their eyes and looked away so as not to
embarrass me, which felt really queer. ... It will never cost me as much again. ... Evelyn Lewis burst into tears at the sight of John pushing me by.”

When Niven Busch inquired about Cecil’s health, Kathleen told him her opinions. Naturally, she connected Cecil’s arterial trouble with the heart condition that kept him out of the British Army in 1918. Because Cecil had told Niven earlier that he had been a subaltern (2nd. Lt.) in the British Army in 1918, Niven then realized that Cecil told lies about his past.

Over the years Cecil had lost much of the reticence with which he concealed his thoughts about sex. The American letters are much more outspoken and explicit about things which the English letters treat with circumlocution, but in addition to that division (one of several years and a change in soci-

12. CSF-FP 31 May 1945
13. Conversation, JF with Busch, 4 December 1985
ety) there is steady progress towards a more open vocabulary. By August, 1943, Cecil casually threw in closing comments like “Goodbye, sweetheart. Keep those knees firmly together and think about me sometimes,”¹⁴ and “tell the kids I hope they’re earning a lot of money. Then I won’t have to send you out to earn some for me later on — better to earn it on your knees [prunes, which we were picking, are ripe only when they fall to the ground] than on your back.”¹⁵ If there was anything unusual about these particular comments it was not the mention of sex itself, but the joking attitude toward extramarital sex (which in itself could be the cover for a tortured jealousy).

Kathleen went to the Sierras three times that summer of 1943, the last week in May, two weeks in July and August, and the first week in September, with consequences neither she nor Cecil foresaw. At these times Cecil wrote to her as before, with one

¹⁴. CSF-K, 412, 24 August 1943
¹⁵. CSF-K, 413, 25 August 1943
startling addition. He started drawing pictures in his letters. The first drawing shows Kathleen in the mountains, squatting to defecate, with a snake crawling between her legs. Cecil labels the picture: THE SERPENT IN EDEN OR WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR IN YOSEMITE BESIDES WOLVES AND BEARS.\textsuperscript{16}

He follows this with a paragraph illustrated with the sketch of a penis. “Have you caught any fish, dear? There is one fish that you must be very careful about if you catch one, as it is very likely to bite if you handle it carelessly. It’s not peculiar to California, but it’s shaped like this — [sketch here]. People (especially some women) who are careless with them are liable to swell up, after first having gone into convulsions.”\textsuperscript{17}

These are followed by crude sketches to illustrate his account of a wet dream\textsuperscript{18} and some more illustrating different positions for coitus.\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{flushleft}
16. CSF-K, 428, 28 May 1944
17. CSF-K, 429, 29 May 1944
18. CSF-K, 431, 3 June 1944
\end{flushleft}
In one sense these letters represent the end of the road for Cecil, for they are the last he wrote to Kathleen while they were married. Their content also represents the end of a line of development. The pictures are startling to the unexpecting eye, but they are only a visual presentation of what Cecil had been developing verbally ever since he first wrote letters. He started in 1925 by making only the most discreet allusions to sexual activities. By 1928 he was far more explicit, writing to Kathleen in words she would certainly understand, even though the meaning would be slightly veiled from outsiders who did not recognize his allusions. His first American letters of 1935 include frank accounts of other people’s sexual activities, descriptions of various types of contraceptive apparatus employed by American women, and the like. By 1943 he was making jokes about the possibility that Kathleen might be having extramarital coitus, and now in 1944 he was drawing graffiti about that subject and like those

19. CSF-K, 433, 9 August 1944
found on the walls of public toilets. Looked at in this light, the drawings suggest only a normal progression of explicitness rather than an abrupt change in personality. Some of Cecil’s friends, Frances Phillips especially, thought that the onset of Cecil’s disease caused a sudden and permanent change in his personality. As I see it, the most noticeable change in Cecil’s private letters is the appearance of the drawings, and, it appears to me, the action of the disease was only to restrict Cecil’s other activities and give him the leisure to draw what he would otherwise, indeed had already been, putting into words.

In August Cecil spent two weeks in Washington in preparation for a series of articles about the logistics of the Pacific war. The United States forces who were planning to assault Japan compared that task with the fighting they had already experienced at Tarawa and Saipan, and reached the conclusion that the assault on Japan would be an arduous task. Men and supplies would have to be massed around Japan in an invincible armada before the invasion
started. Because of the geography of Japan, beach after beach would have to be assaulted — men would drown and be shot by the tens of thousands. The government’s purpose was to persuade Cecil to render this agony palatable to both the civilians and the drafted soldiers, who having first beaten the Germans would then be sent, without so much as a home leave when crossing the United States, to fight the Japanese.

“The Washington visit was a huge success — I saw 20 American admirals and four English men and lots of generals. Everything was laid open to me; I had interviews with King\textsuperscript{20} and Forrestal\textsuperscript{21} ... I shall start the articles sometime next week ... The opening lunch had the Undersecretary of the Navy and 12 admirals and four generals ... . and Keyes (Admiral of the Fleet Lord Keyes, the man who stormed Zeebrugge\textsuperscript{22}) was passing through and had

\textsuperscript{20} Admiral Ernest J. King, U.S. Chief of Naval Operations
\textsuperscript{21} U. S. Secretary of the Navy
\textsuperscript{22}
me to lunch.”

“I wanted to tell you and forgot in my last letter that my reception at the Embassy was very flattering indeed, with people falling over themselves after me. I lunched alone with Halifax and debated with him very solemnly, and I held a sort of reception of the others in my apartment — I have an idea that that knighthood isn’t very far away after all.

“Halifax stoutly maintained that there isn’t any German army left at all between the allies and Berlin so that the only thing to delay the march is the difficulty of getting the men forward and supplied. I hope he’s right, although I don’t agree with him — if he’s right the war will be over in three weeks. I’ll be seeing you, dear — I haven’t even had the energy to do a drawing this time.

22. A heroic assault on a Belgian port in World War I, to block its channel that was being used by German submarines.
23. CSF-K, 434, 1 September 1944
24. Lord Halifax, British Ambassador to U.S.
“So much love, dear.”

When Kathleen returned from her last trip to the Sierras, Cecil learned that she had spent some of her time with another man. There is no doubt that he knew; two years later, when writing to Kathleen about meeting her mother when he was visiting England, he asked, “Does she know that I knew about your movements during the summer before the divorce?”

This was not news to George and me. Neil Lynch had accompanied the three of us, Tom Lewis, and the packer on a mule pack trip of two weeks duration. We had camped in the open and slept around the fire. Whatever Neil and Mother may have done that was improper was not noticed by us boys, although we laughingly speculated about what they might be able to get away with. After all, privacy was available in the mountains; Tom and I had

25. CSF-K, 435, 3 September 1944
26. CSF-K, 493, 24 June 1946

1005
found it for the times when we needed to masturbate. I didn’t mind my mother’s actions, for I was at the age when the desire for sexual love had hit me hard, while the concept of infidelity seemed, at that age, more a sensible recognition of the actions of people who fulfilled their real emotions rather than either a blot upon the presumed respectability of the family or the destruction of the complex emotional relationship of family life. If that is what my mother wanted, that was fine with me.

Had I been asked (which I was not), I think I would have compared my family as I had experienced it with the virulence of Veblen and the cynical rationalism of Chesterfield, and seen nothing remarkable in the comparison. The presumed respectability to my mind was nothing more than an outward sham, and the complex emotional relationships were tangles that in the process of growing up one had to overcome, the sooner the better. I do not inject here my attitudes of that time to suggest their validity, but to show their existence in at least one of Cecil’s children, the one, moreover, with whom he
took the greatest pains. It is reasonable to believe that Cecil’s own attitudes, in the way in which they were displayed to his eldest son, contributed heavily to his son’s emotional development. The antecedents and consequences of Cecil’s life, as well as his life itself, are the substance of this story.

Neil was just the type to re-arouse Kathleen’s strongest emotions. A few years older than she, he was a philosophical failure in competitive life. A graduate of Princeton, he had received a liberal arts degree and entered business, selling American-made cars in the European market. The routine competitiveness of a business career dissatisfied him, and he had retired to a contemplative existence supported by odd-jobs and attacked, sporadically, by too much Dago Red. I didn’t like Neil because I didn’t like ineffective people who gave up, I didn’t like poverty, and, later, I disliked the times that I saw him drunk. It was only much later that I started to appreciate his gentleness, his level of thought, and his equanimity.
Neil’s attributes were exactly what Kathleen had always loved, attributes which Cecil had outgrown, both in his own eyes and those of the world. Perhaps because she had observed the slow death of her first love, Kathleen was attracted to people whom she felt needed her care. For years after she had first met him, Cecil had been obviously in need of her care, but once he had become famous and prosperous such a relationship was no longer appropriate. As far as Neil was concerned, his low economic state when Kathleen met him and his occasional lapses from sobriety were characteristics that endeared him to Kathleen.

To say that Cecil no longer needed Kathleen is neglecting Cecil’s health, for as a partial cripple, and potentially a complete one, he needed help, but this was a matter on which Kathleen disagreed. To her mind, Cecil’s abandonment of hope was too complete, his pleasure in the idea that now his family would have to look after him was too evident. Both of these attributes were but developments of those in his early life, making Kathleen believe that
much of his disability was psychosomatic.

Neglecting Cecil’s state of health, with whatever rationalization, Kathleen gave her heart to Neil and could no longer feel an honest woman in her husband’s house. She determined to leave.

She took with her her clothes and her car, a Packard 110 6-cylinder convertible. As she was leaving, Cecil accused her of having Neil waiting around the corner, and complainingly asked her, “Must you leave by the front door in plain sight of all the neighbors instead of using the back door to Poppy Lane?”

Whatever his fears, there was no scandal, then or later. Cecil managed to keep the divorce so quiet, by such stratagems as filing under his original name of “Cecil Louis Troughton Smith,” and by persuading Kathleen to avoid sensation, that nobody besides the legal officials realized what was going on. Obtaining Kathleen’s silence without paying a price was indeed a work of art, despite the fact that Kathleen both desired the divorce and was a guilty party. Cecil’s guilt was far better concealed, and he apparently did not sufficiently desire the divorce to
Kitty in 1945
trade much for it. As well, he took good care to follow his lawyer's advice while, for one reason or another, Kathleen did not employ a lawyer. Looked at in one sense, Kathleen, emotional but desperately honest to her emotions and declining the legal assistance she may have felt too guilty to employ, met in Cecil a calculating, selfish, and perhaps vindictive mind who employed the best assistance he could obtain to serve his own ends. Kathleen probably could have made accusations based on what she knew and suspected of Cecil’s scandalous life, but in proving those accusations she would have brought in too many Berkeley families in which the wife had transgressed once or twice only before retreating (after realizing the true situation and its probable consequences); and the Lamb’s divorce case, in which Cecil could have been accused of adultery, had already been decided.

Cecil reinforced his hand with several dubious tactics. He made Kathleen feel guilty by asserting that her behavior with Neil in the Sierras had completely upset my (meaning me, John Forester) whole
attitude to life and sex, making me a nervous wreck. The only stated grounds for the divorce were: “That since the marriage [Kathleen] has been and still is guilty of extreme cruelty toward [Cecil] and has wrongfully inflicted upon [Cecil], and is still causing [Cecil] grievous mental suffering.” Kathleen received the house in London, which was of little value, her personal belongings, her car, and $9,500 in a combination of British War Bonds, U.S. War Bonds, and cash. Cecil received all his literary properties, his car, and $88,000 in a combination of British loan, U.S. War Bonds, cash and blue chip U.S. stocks and bonds, which latter category

27. The land of the few houses that were on the south side of Longton Avenue, each of them inset into Sydenham Wells Park, was owned by the Bishop of Lambeth. This land was transferred to the park and the houses demolished in the 1960s. Even the house’s value at the time was useless, because pounds sterling could not be converted to dollars until long after the war.
was half of the total.

When in 1968 Mother apologized to me for her behavior that had so upset me, I thought she had been unduly worried by the little things I had noticed, such as obviously not wearing a bra under her T-shirts, and brushed it off.

“But your father was so insistent at the time of the divorce that my behavior with Neil had upset your whole outlook on life. Didn’t I?”

“No, of course not. I thought I understood, and anyway it was only a conjecture over which Tom Lewis and I laughed to ourselves. If making love with Neil was what you really wanted, I was more inclined to approve than disapprove. After all, Father had already instructed me in Lord Chesterfield’s opinions.”

Mother looked dumbfounded. “But he was so insistent – so insistent. He insisted you were in a nervous state, and so savagely accused me I felt terribly guilty about it all. You mean it’s never been true?”

“No, not ever.”
For various reasons, then, Cecil remained in control and kept the children and the bulk of the community property. Of this I knew nothing. Only after the agreement was reached did Cecil announce the fact to his sons. One evening, Father called a household meeting. In portentous tones he announced to George and me, with Mother standing in the background, “Your mother and I are getting divorced. You know what happened with Neil Lynch this last summer.” At this point I worried that I might be required to live with Mother and Neil, with Neil’s ineffectiveness and poverty. But I was relieved by the next phrase. “You two will continue to live here with me.” That was all we were told.

Only after the court hearing and decree did the public hear of the events. The Christmas holidays occurred immediately after the hearing, and Mother, as had been usual, took George and me skiing at the Sierra Club Lodge at Donner Summit. While she was away, Cecil informed his friends in Berkeley that Kathleen and he had been divorced.
and she would not be returning to Berkeley. “Talking to Charlotte Jackson\textsuperscript{28} on the telephone this morning she said that they were dining with the Stewarts\textsuperscript{29} tomorrow, and Ted, while inviting her, asked after you and she had hedged. So I arranged with her that I shall call Ted tomorrow morning and tell her that we are divorced; and I am spending Thursday evening with some gossipy people and shall tell them, and I think that will do the trick. The ice really has got to be broken somehow, as otherwise I really don’t see how it is really going to get out at all, and I want all the flurry over as far as possible before you and the kids come back.”\textsuperscript{30}

Indeed it was, for two days later he wrote: “The news of the Forester divorce has been accepted with great calmness; no one seems in the least surprised, and the principal difficulty I experienced was over

\textsuperscript{28} Wife of Joseph Henry Jackson, the literary critic.  
\textsuperscript{29} Professor and author George R. Stewart and his wife Theodosia (Ted)  
\textsuperscript{30} CSF-K, 438, 19 December 1944
the mere matter of convincing people that I wasn’t spoofing – they wouldn’t believe me because not a single rumor of real trouble had reached their ears. But they believe it all right now and I don’t think you’ll meet with any awkwardness at all ... seeing you’re wearing ski pants there’s no need to suggest you keeping your frock down!”

If one’s personal life is considered only as a game of strategy, Cecil played this one very well. In California, of all places, where a husband rarely wins, he satisfied his inmost fears of publicity and shame, he had whatever public approval goes with winning a divorce settlement, and he kept the property. His losses were Kathleen and one car. The car he replaced easily, by ordering over the telephone “a used car that uses very little gas” (gasoline was rationed at the time, and there were no new cars), a request that produced a 1941 Willys. His loss of Kathleen was of a different quality, and may have meant much to him. However, he always maintained

31. CSF-K, 439, 21 December 1944

1016
at home that the true basis for the divorce (as distinct from the legal one of “mental cruelty”) was that he divorced Kathleen for her infidelity with Neil Lynch. By doing so he maintained a high moral tone and appeared both instigator and winner — but in reality Kathleen wanted to love someone else, wanted to leave him, and wanted the divorce, all goals she reached.

Cecil was understandably jealous about Neil. The Bay Area had become a major shipbuilding area (Kaiser shipyards building Liberty ships) in which thousands of new migrants were crammed into insufficient housing. Kathleen had to either move in with Neil or move away beyond the overcrowded area, for by herself she had no priority in obtaining living quarters. First she moved in with Neil, but Cecil threatened, because of the presumed moral effect on George and me, to obtain a court order preventing her from seeing us at all. He complained to me about the moral indefensibility of my mother’s habits and asserted angrily that he would take the necessary steps to punish such behavior if it
didn’t stop immediately.

His moralistic outbursts were probably the emergence of a deeper resentment about his other little problem, that Kathleen now refused to make love with him. In a desperate maneuver he had told her that he had the power (political, financial, or social) to obtain an apartment for her and would pay for the apartment and give her five hundred dollars a month if he could visit her frequently. His words and actions led Kathleen to infer that her ex-husband had completely misinterpreted her motivations for the divorce. She proceeded in her forthright way to put the record straight.

“You mustn’t believe that I left my house and my boys because I had any difficulty with them. I gave them up because I could stand you no longer!”

In later years Kathleen said that until after the divorce she didn’t know the half of it. Only after their parting had been announced, which was after the divorce hearing, did she find out which of their acquaintances were real friends and which were status seekers. The status seekers dropped her; the real
friends became much closer to her. Only then did she realize how many potential friends had been deterred because she was the presumably complaisant wife of a man with a bad reputation.
As 1945 opened, the rains came, bringing to California their annual miracle of rebirth and springtime glory. For Cecil in particular that springtime foretold a marvelous sense of happiness. The war was coming to its end. The Germans were obviously beaten, and would surrender shortly. The Japanese, a puny empire though endowed with a ferocious bravery, could never stand against the rest of the world. The sense of foreboding with which Cecil had lived since 1937, which had been so amplified by his two flights from German aggression, from Prague at the Munich agreement of 1938 and from Berlin with me
at the outbreak of war in 1939, was now no more than an anxiety to swiftly clear away the whole mess and to start again on a new course. Unknown to him was the peculiar savagery with which the Germans would resist, and the indescribable horrors which their defeat would disclose.

During that spring, Hildegarde Quandt, the teacher with whom I had spent the summer of 1939, who had been imprisoned in 1918 for buying an egg on the black market and whose every boyfriend had been killed in war, cowered in the basement of her apartment building while Russians and Germans shot it out above her head. With the other women hiding there, she unavailingly implored the fourteen- and fifteen-year-old Hitler Youth “soldiers,” whose only uniforms were swastika armbands added to civilian tatters, to tear them off and take refuge below. One of the lads was killed on her doorstep. Eighteen months after the fall of Berlin, Hildegard was able to send a letter to Cecil through the military government. Cecil described her situation as “utterly miserable but very brave ... as well off as
any German can be—for what that is worth. ... I’ve always been unhappy thinking about that nice girl in such a hell of a mess that she didn’t deserve at all.”¹ He arranged to send her food parcels and for someone in the military government to see that she received all the assistance possible.

Shortly before this time Cecil had acquired the secretary who would remain with him for about seven years. Betty Brown and her husband Lenny were fellow members of the tennis group at the Orinda Country Club and the Berkeley Tennis Club and probably slightly younger than Cecil and Kathleen. The Browns had no children; they lived a few blocks from Keeler Avenue, next to the end of the streetcar line. Lenny was an insurance broker in San Francisco; Betty had had a staff position with the Berkeley public schools, but was no longer employed, or didn’t want to work full time. She became Cecil’s secretary, working mostly at his house and partly at her home.

¹ CSF-FP 14 October, 8 November 1946
In this spring of 1945, Frances Phillips visited in Berkeley and Cecil and Frances either became lovers then or, more probably, intensified a pre-existing affair. They had met during Cecil’s trip to America in 1938; Frances was then living with her parents in the apartment wing of the Gramercy Park Hotel when Cecil moved into a normal hotel room of that hotel. Frances was the editor of William Morrow & Co., publishers. When writing to Frances at the end of the war, Cecil wrote “Darling, it’s been a long six years, and I’ve changed like hell during them, and you’ve been so good to me all that time. I’m grateful in a way that even the author of H.H. can’t describe. Without you I should have been a much poorer thing than I have been. I feel that I could never have borne it without you, in fact. It’s beyond all words—just that. But I know it.”

2. A picture postcard to Frances of an English scene, dated 1939, shows that Cecil had met Frances the year before.
There is no other record of the relationship between Frances and Cecil until 13 April, 1945, when Frances started saving the letters that Cecil sent her. In that letter Cecil says that he misses her, and the sexual nature of their relationship was confirmed in Cecil’s letter of 29 July. “Do you remember my cock, dear, and what I used to do with it? Write and tell me what you think about it sometimes, dear. Do you remember my teaching you and what I taught you? I live bathed in your love and friendship, dear. But every now and again I wish those nice thighs of yours were round me, even though I would lie impotent between them.”

Cecil did not save Frances’s letters. “Has anyone ever told you that you write the nicest letters of any woman on either side of the Atlantic? It’s true. That profound observation is the result of re-read-

3. CSF-FP 10 August 1945
4. Cecil rarely dated his letters to Frances. She gave them a date of arrival.
5. CSF-FP 29 July 1945

1024
ing several prior to consigning them to destruction, dear."\textsuperscript{6}

It is one tradition to idolize one’s lover, thereby implying that one is not worthy of him or her, and modesty is also admired, but Cecil’s words in this vein disclose deep feelings of inferiority. “Your letters are so sweet, dear. They make me dreadfully ashamed, though, because I don’t deserve them at all. ... I feel guilty as hell. It’s all very well for idiots and unsympathetic persons who don’t understand things to like me—I’m used to that, dear—but it beats me altogether when someone with sense and sensibility does. I suppose I ought to try to deserve it, but even that is beyond me, dear.”\textsuperscript{7} He worried that his explicit sexual description might have upset Frances, and in the next letter he excuses himself with, “Sometimes I get tired of my fate, dear, and you might as well know me in my moments of weakness as well as in those of resignation.”\textsuperscript{8}

\textsuperscript{6} CSF-FP 1 January 1946
\textsuperscript{7} CSF-FP 17 April 1945
\textsuperscript{8}
Cecil’s springtime was marred by the prospect of having to leave the Keeler Avenue house. The owner of the house, Colonel Schroeder of the U.S. Army, had been serving in the Philippines when the Japanese war had started, had been rescued from a Japanese prison camp, and would return shortly. Housing was difficult to obtain, though less so than a year earlier. Some building had been permitted, and the shipyards were shutting down. Cecil had a frantic time looking at unsuitable houses, one after another, but swore he wouldn’t build.

He told me that, “You start building a house and never know when to stop. Dollar after dollar goes in, and there’s always something else desirable to add. Authors, in particular, are peculiarly susceptible to grandiose building schemes. Sir Walter Scott is only the most outstanding of many flagrant examples. Once he started building Abbotsford, he never knew a day free from worries about how to pay for it. He slaved day after day, worked himself out and

8. CSF-FP 1 August 1945

1026
killed himself trying to pay for that damned house.”

It is indicative of the quality of Cecil’s fallacious tutorship that I believed that story until, in preparation for writing this in 1970, I consulted the Encyclopedia Britannica. The Britannica clearly states that Scott’s financial troubles were caused by failure of a London publisher connected with his own, in which he had invested heavily. One brought down the other, leaving Scott with a debt equivalent to several million dollars today. Scott nearly succeeded in paying off that debt. Despite the teaching of history, Cecil invested in publishers and was well rewarded, financially and otherwise. The historical facts I obtained from Cecil’s own copy of the encyclopedia, which he boasted of having read through three times, “The only man in the world to have done so,” as he put it.

However, in that spring, Cecil was able to find another house, not for rent, but for sale in the summer. The owner, an idealistic clergyman, was prepared, in order to avoid the stigma of wartime profiteering, to sell at the same price he had paid
just before the war started. The price was $19,000. Cecil jumped at this lucky chance, and acquired a house that was most satisfactory for ten years.

Although Cecil had to buy the house he did not intend to stay in it. One of Cecil’s first decisions in his new life was to select the way of life he would choose to follow, now that he was a “parent without a partner.” By March, 1945, he had it all worked out, and confided in Charlotte Ballard. “I have been trying to make some plans for the future, and have reached some vague decisions. In the first place, the boys are so Americanized now that it would be cruel to uproot them and transfer them to England again; John especially, after his American education, would be quite badly handicapped if he had to earn a living in England. So I think they are going to be Americans, (Kitty [Kathleen] by the way, made the legal announcement of her intention to apply for American citizenship quite a long time ago) and they will go to American universities. In less than two years from now I shall send both boys to a school in the eastern states, John because it will be
high time and George because I can’t very well live alone with one child, to get them ready for an eastern university — Yale or Harvard or Princeton, I don’t know which yet. Then assuming that there is some sort of peace and that I am still able to travel (both doubtful) I shall spend the summers in England and France and the boys will spend their summer vacations, about two months or so, with me. I shall be in England I hope from May to September, and the rest of the year I shall spend in New York and California. It ought to work out all right. Can I bring my bath chair [wheelchair] to Ledbury for J.B. to push me around? I hope I shall still be able to drive a car.”

Cecil’s plan for his lifestyle is confirmed in a letter that Cecil wrote to Frances at the time he was moving into the new house. “Business. First of all, I really don’t think I need nor want (don’t let this upset you dear) a notepaper die. There are things it would be useful for, but then Betty has already

9. CSF-K, 440, 12 March 1945
ordered, bought, paid for, and had delivered, a huge lot of printed paper. Please God I’m not going to live in that house forever — it’s hardly worth buying one for just eighteen months. I suppose if I then let the house furnished [rent the house furnished] the die will be a useful part of the furnishings if it didn’t have CSF on it, but it wouldn’t raise the rent more than five cents. It’s a fine idea for a present, sweetheart, but I think it would be an unnecessary spending of your money.”

Although Cecil intended not to stay in this house, and in fact to have no permanent residence for his family, he was careful not to tell his sons of his plans.

Cecil’s sister Grace had her second divorce shortly following Cecil’s. Grace suggested to Cecil that she become his housekeeper. Cecil described to Frances his feelings and reply. “I had to write back and say flatly no. One of the troubles is (I didn’t say

10. CSF-FP 4 August, 1945
it) that I don’t like her–she is like CSF under a magnifying glass, moody and bad tempered and self centred but her brains are like CSF’s through the wrong end of a telescope, if she has any at all which I doubt. I couldn’t possibly live with her, and I certainly wouldn’t inflict her on the boys.” A year later, when Cecil’s brother Geoff and his wife were planning to visit Cecil in Berkeley, Cecil wrote to Grace to say that she would not be welcome in Berkeley to see them. “She’s just like me with all my worst faults magnified ten times. God damn it, here comes the family.”

Cecil followed the springtime custom by courting Dorothy Lamb, the lady into whose divorce proceedings he had nearly been dragged the previous spring. (Her father had been one of the pioneer motorists of California, who led expeditions to the wilderness of Plumas County when axes and tow ropes were required equipment.) She had a daughter, and on occasion the three males in our family

11. CSF-FP 24 August 1946
took out to dinner the two females in theirs. I found it not at all strange to find myself considering in the back seat of the car what I had good reason to believe was being considered in more explicit and advanced detail in the front seat: whether the girl beside me was of an age to think that kissing was a suitable amusement. Among the younger generation, I was quite ready, but she was evidently not. Cecil’s courting of that lady came to a dead end.

While Cecil was friendly with Dorothy Lamb, he showed her some of the family films, including some that he had never seen (Kathleen had been the photographer in the family). Both Marjorie Manus and Mrs. Adams were also present. Many of the films showed George and me in earlier years. In a sequence taken during our vacation at the Russian River in 1942, one shot showed Dorothy Bathurst naked in the river, followed by another of Kathleen, also naked and washing herself. From Cecil’s friends came only the “grimmest silence.”

12. CSF-FP 22 December 1945
then hid this reel of film so that George and I would not see it. What did he think, that we had not already seen Dorothy and our mother naked, and gone naked ourselves, for two weeks at a time, except for going to town for supplies?\textsuperscript{13}

That summer Cecil took his first quiet holiday since the war started. Victory in Europe and the certainty of victory in the Pacific had eased the supply situation, enabling Cecil to request, in good conscience, a supplementary ration of gasoline,\textsuperscript{14} when, had his legs been healthy, he would have taken public transportation.\textsuperscript{15}

He decided to spend the first part of summer on the Mendocino coast, partly on the recommendation of Dorothy Lamb, whose family still lived near there. He rented the larger part of a tiny motel, the Lazy I, on the coast between Albion and Little River, and invited Ruth Watkins with her two small daughters, her friend Chris Vaughn\textsuperscript{16} with her small son, and Betty Brown to stay with him,

\textsuperscript{13} CSF-FP 24 October 1946

\textsuperscript{14} 1033
George and me. George and I cycled up. My father drove up in the 1939 Cadillac with Ruth and Fluffy the cat. The others traveled by bus according to their own convenience.

It was an extraordinarily quiet and pleasant holiday. “This is a marvellous place and piece of

14. Gasoline had been rationed for three reasons. It was required for the war effort, the American East Coast was desperately short of gasoline because German submarines had sunk the tankers that carried it from Texas, and because rationing gasoline saved tires. The largest prewar sources of rubber had been conquered by the Japanese, and the synthetic rubber of the time was not very good. By 1945 only the tire shortage was significant. On the first weekend after V-J Day, when general gasoline rationing and the wartime speed limit of 35 m.p.h. were lifted, the roads were littered with parts of burst tires.

15. CSF-FP 7 June 1945

16. Friend of Ruth’s. Another soldier’s wife, her professor husband had taught landscape architecture to Ruth’s husband.
country — not so unlike the coast near Fairliegh before it was spoiled. And we have had the best holiday I can ever remember, with nothing going wrong in any way at all. It has been like what Winchelsea ought to have been, but never was to me, owing to my own temperamental shortcomings, I suppose. The weather was perfect, and I had lots of willing volunteers to push my chair. The Little River Inn was only a mile away and had a really distinguished cuisine, most amazing for these parts. I’ve fallen in love with this place. We had four or five rivers to swim in, and the beaches are lovely for the infants — two within walking distance of here. I don’t know whether I shall ever again attain to such arcadian happiness, though.”

Ollie, the host of the Little River Inn, besides serving delicious abalone, provided Cecil with another anti-Hollywood story, which he told repeatedly and gleefully. The film *Frenchman’s Creek* had been made just up the coast from there, and all the

17. CSF-K, 455, August 1945

1035
locals had had a few bit parts or had provided services, and were full of new stories about their days in the film industry. They liked the Hollywood people, or their money, by and large, with a few noticeable exceptions. One was with the starring actress, Joan Fontaine, with whom they had some notable personality clashes.

The stars and director lived at the Little River Inn, and when the shooting was complete they prepared to leave. Joan came down the stairs, the director following. As she prepared to pay her bill, Ollie spoke to her in the hotelier’s manner, “I hope you had a pleasant stay, Miss Fontaine?”

She stared at him, and perhaps believing that he was as sophisticated as herself, unwillingly deposited in the wilds of Mendocino, replied, “Really, Ollie, your scenery is simply perfect, but the people are frightful.”

Ollie smiled back, looked her scenery up and down from head to toe and back again, scratched the back of his own head apologetically, and replied, “Well, now, Miss Fontaine, do you realize the feel-

1036
ing’s mutual?”

Joan looked at him with both horror and anger, dropped her bag and stormed out, leaving the director to pick up after her and pay her bill.

As you can guess, this story amused Cecil mightily, and to hear him tell it, you would believe it the high point of his trip. In truth, though, the high point, or the low point, was elsewhere. The party occupied three, sometimes four, buildings of the motel. One building consisted of a large country kitchen and dining room, with a curtained-off area at one end where George and I slept. The young children had a room to themselves while Cecil and the two women shared a double unit, nominally two rooms but separated only by a folding partition. The two young wives, their husbands away at the war, were classic prey for a recently divorced man.  

18. Ruth was a beautiful woman. I had been at Cecil’s parties when Ruth entered the room, and heard people who did not know her whispering about Ingrid Bergman’s presence.
mutual protection afforded by the pair in one bed was almost unavailing. “We had a terrible time keeping Cecil out of our bed. It was a matter of physical effort,” Ruth told me, “for he kept trying to climb between the sheets.”

The unexpected return of Ruth’s husband, Harold, called a halt to the holiday. Although Cecil wrote of the fact to Kathleen, he was unable to keep the disappointment from his words and his grammar under control. “Ruth and I will be driving up the road after them [George and me on bicycles], anyway, on Tuesday, when your holiday ends (not Thursday, as previously arranged; Harold is home, going to be stationed apparently in Oakland) and Ruth wants to get back to him.”19 (Errors in original.) He wrote a different description to Frances, saying that Harold reached Little River and that he, Cecil, “last night had the felicity of hearing him in bed with Ruth. ... They kept it up a long time, by Golly, not having seen each other for five

19. CSF-K, 455, Sunday, 22 July 1945

1038
months.”

The failure to seduce Ruth must have been doubly disconcerting to Cecil, because for three years he had believed Ruth’s marriage was unhappy and that she’d be better off remarried to a wealthy husband.

Cecil returned to Berkeley, where he completed arrangements to move into the new house, saw old friends and new acquaintances who were attending the founding of the United Nations in San Francisco, and waited for orders for his proposed Pacific tour. The war ended on 16 August, but the Navy still wanted him to write about it.

He moved into the new house in the first week of September, 1945. Our household consisted of him, George and me, Mrs. Adams (the current elderly housekeeper), Fluffy the cat, and a houseful of unknown furniture. The furniture had been

20. CSF-FP 22 July 1945
21. CSF-K, 328, December 1941

1039
bought from a lady who had stored it while hoping for a reconciliation with her husband, but had given up hope. Cecil had never seen it, but it had been recommended by someone who had seen it in use.

In his first letter to Kathleen from the new house, Cecil commented on the difference between 1945 and 1939. “You will see from the new address that we have moved (same telephone number) and we’re pretty comfortable. This is quite an attractive house and the boys’ rooms are much nicer than the ones they used to have. Frances in one of her letters recently reminded me of the difference in my circumstances between the time I last bought a house and this time. It was very much for the best that when you left you went to a new home and new job (and new man!) because the effect of a complete change of scene is very salutary, as I know but did not appreciate up to this moment — if I go to Japan next week, as I am told is likely, it ought to completely cure. The contrast between the two purchases is quite fantastic. When I bought Longton Avenue our personal problem was at its most acute
stage, and the danger of war was growing every day. I bought the house and went on living through the war danger hoping against hope, against my better judgement, that we would find happiness in the house for the rest of our days and that Hitler would behave himself. It turned out to be more than I should have hoped. Now I’ve bought another house just when the war has come to an end [and] our personal problem is settled. This visual imagination of mine always pictures the years from 1939 to now as a sort of dark tunnel through which we had to pass, and I look on the two houses as two landmarks one at each end. We are free of the sordidness and unpleasantness of these years, and are emerging into the sunshine — you came out by a different exit from me, and so you’ll have another landmark. Even my illness comes into those dark years as far as I am concerned — now that I am adjusted to it, it doesn’t have nearly the importance it had two years ago, and I am able to stop it affecting my spirits unless and until there is some very serious change for the worse. The worst part of it is behind me back in the
tunnel, where I hope all your sorrows are too.”

This house is at 1570 Hawthorne Terrace, just above the foot of the Berkeley Hills and half a mile north of the University campus. Originally built by a professor of Spanish, whose hobby was ceramic work, it was a more than typical Spanish-style stucco house decorated with numerous original tiles and plaques. Tiles bearing the arms of the provinces of Spain surrounded the fireplace, plaques portraying the adventures of Don Quixote lined the hall anteroom, and patterns of blue and yellow intertwined lines decorated the beams of the dining room ceiling. Like the Keeler Avenue house, it was of three storeys, but was entered at the middle. Above were three bedrooms and a study, projecting forward over an arcade that sheltered the front door, with a large sundeck at the rear. On the ground floor were the hall, the anteroom that was used for bridge playing, the living room, dining room and kitchen. Below, extending rearwards as the ground sloped away,

22. CSF-K, 460, 6 September 1945

1042
were two more bedrooms, a bathroom, and the laundry and furnace rooms. These lower bedrooms were at ground level with their own doorway into the garden, which at that time occupied two lots. The extra lot has since been sold off and built on, destroying much of the charm of the house. Cecil moved into the master bedroom with adjoining study, Mrs. Adams took the smallest upstairs bedroom, and George and I moved into the lowest floor.

Years later when I was in college, two girls, one of whom I had known when we lived at Keeler Avenue and with whom I had skated, came to the front door asking if they could come in to see the house that their uncle had built. They had no idea that my father had bought the house and that I was living there.

Within the month of moving in, Cecil received his travel authorizations for Japan. He arrived in Yokohama just after the peace ceremonial and was one of the earliest of many to be completely charmed as that nation opened up to the Western world. Cecil received VIP treatment and was
granted unusual privileges. Frances had recommended Cecil to her friend in immediate command of the occupation forces, General Eichelberger, who in addition was a Hornblower fan. Military and diplomatic personnel were at first restricted to the urban areas. Also, both Army and Navy officers’ messes were clamoring for fresh food. As a result of this combination of circumstances, the Army lent Cecil an ex-Japanese-government limousine and recruited a driver, the Navy contributed jerry-cans of gasoline, and Eichelberger gave Cecil permission to go where he liked. Cecil started off into the Japanese countryside with some little trepidation, for the fierce resistance of the Japanese armed forces had created a legend of Japanese hate and cruelty, but his fears were quickly dispelled. In many villages he was the first white man anybody had seen, and as the car stopped in the village street it was surrounded by a curious but courteous and very respectful circle of villagers. Cecil chuckled at the children and smiled at their mothers, giving an uncharacteristically silent pantomime version of his
charming-gentleman act. He disclosed that he had money to spend, and with his finger in the dust he drew an egg. No response. He drew a clutch of eggs. Still nothing but respectful curiosity. He then perched over the drawing, flapped his arms and clucked vigorously. A delighted smile ran around the faces, and hurried words were passed between those villagers who had seen the performance and those behind who hadn’t. In a moment a basket of eggs and a protesting hen were brought into the circle, given to the most important villager present, and presented by him to Cecil. Cecil accepted most formally and offered some money in return, which he sometimes had to insist be taken.

As I remember, he managed to travel to the old capital of Kyoto as well; he certainly afterwards spoke of its beauty. Whatever else he sampled of the many attractions of Japan, I do not know, but he returned full of the beauty he had seen and charmed by the behavior and friendliness of the Japanese. That trip was the best ending to Cecil’s war that could ever have been invented, even in fic-
tion, and it gave Cecil thoughts about stories with a Japanese background. “I’m afraid I’ve come back a bit pro-Japanese. I fell quite in love with the country and got fond of the people, & glad because I went there without any notions at all. I’ve got the plots for a few stories; but maybe they won’t be acceptable, seeing that they are going to have, as I said, a bit of pro-Japanese about them. There’s a good deal of wild talk about letting the Japs starve a bit just to learn ‘em to be Japanese, and I am hot against it both on grounds of expediency and on moral grounds too.”23

Although the Armchair Strategists had disbanded, they “have called an emergency meeting for tonight to hear what I have to say about Japan–I’m dining with George Stewart first. I’m glad the organization hasn’t died away for good, as I’m fond of that gang.”24

23. CSF-FP 11 October 1945
24. CSF-FP 17 October 1945
Upon his return to Berkeley, Cecil restarted his life upon the peacetime path he had chosen to follow. Everything was done for him. Successive housekeepers looked after his domestic well being, his sons, and his house. This didn’t work too well, because trained housekeepers were hard to locate, and untrained women of any particular ability could find better jobs to take. His housekeepers, from time of the divorce until after conditions had returned to what passed for peacetime, were a succession of incompetents, except for one. The last of the wartime housekeepers, Mrs. Adams was not incompetent. She was a Quaker, the widow of a physician, who had assisted her husband in treating the victims of the San Francisco earthquake of 1907. She was allergic to wheat flour and to milk, so I did some of the cooking that required flour. One day in the spring of 1945 the guests at dinner were Mr. and Mrs. Maconatie.\(^{25}\) He was a famous test pilot for Douglas Aircraft and his wife was a luscious blonde.

\(^{25}\) CSF-FP 13 April 1945
We had roast beef and yorkshire pudding, and I had cooked the pudding. The lady complimented Mrs. Adams upon it, but Mrs. Adams, always strictly honest, said that I had cooked it. “Oh,” said the lady, looking at me, “You must come and visit us. We have a house on the beach at Santa Monica, and a daughter of sixteen.” As I pondered a suitable reply, she added, “They say she looks like me.” However enticing that invitation was, I never managed to accept it.

Mrs. Adams was equally straight in other ways. Cecil always had his breakfast in bed. On Sunday mornings George and I would spread out the newspaper on the living-room floor to read it while eating our breakfasts. Mrs. Adams was heard to describe us as “Eating their breakfasts off the floor, like animals!” Mrs. Adams also disapproved of the amount of reading that we did, and that we often did it in other postures than sitting at a desk or table. ²⁶

Once travel could be resumed, Cecil persuaded

²⁶. CSF-FP 6 May 1945
Marjorie Manus to come from England to be his housekeeper. After considerable delay waiting for governmental travel authorizations, she arrived in December, 1945. As my father explained to me, “Mrs. Manus is an old, old friend, a woman of ability. She’s much older than me, for she was married to a Dutchman before the 1914 war and left him because he beat her. She has travelled, and can speak eight languages well, including infrequent ones, like Czech, in which she is fluent. For that reason, she was my interpreter in Prague during the Munich crisis. She also plays bridge well, for she was an international player for England. (Later he added the story that she had been the owner of the bridge parlor in which he had been a professional player.) I’m sure you’ll get along, for she’ll take charge and I’ll be able to trust her.”

Trust her he could, for she became fanatically loyal to him, causing others to believe she wanted to marry Cecil and considered the possibility not unlikely. But her housekeeping experience was non-existent. She tried very hard to learn to cook, to
drive a car, and to manage the house. Contrary to most women, she succeeded uncommonly well in mastering the administrative details of housekeeping, but failed to acquire the far more common mastery of practice. Everything she did, she did by the book, exactly, and if something went wrong, or required a change of plan, she was reduced to nervous irritation.

Still, Cecil was able to arrange that his domestic life ran as he wanted it. The household ran to an exact schedule, with his breakfast at 8:00 exactly (George and I made our own breakfasts according to our school schedule) and dinner at 6:30 exactly. In the mornings, Marjorie would wait patiently outside Cecil’s bedroom door with the tray in her hands, straining her ears and demanding silence, in order to hear the first striking of the bells of the campanile of the University of California. Marjorie accepted this schedule with her usual loyalty. One day I found her plugging and unplugging the power cord for the electric clock on the stove. Puzzled, I asked why. She was trying to get the second hand of the clock syn-
chronized with the time sent over the telephone. Because the second hand of the usual electric clock cannot be rotated to the exact time (only the hour and minute hands can be set), Marjorie was intent on being able to keep Cecil’s schedule to the second.

Cecil’s secretary, Betty Brown, gave Cecil the same fanatic devotion as Marjorie Manus (indeed that was what we all gave). Betty didn’t really understand Cecil and his doings, but she typed his books and took his letters with a sense of awe. One day, she named him “The Great Man,” a sobriquet in which he revelled and which stuck with him for life. It stuck with me too; the initial title of this book was *The Great Man*. For one period Betty did the household shopping, and since this was before I was driving, Cecil drove her from shop to shop.

“Is there anything else you would like, Boss,” asked Betty as she left the car for the grocery.

“Yes, there is,” replied Cecil. “I’m taking a pretty girl out to dinner and I need a corsage. Please get me the largest artichoke they have.” Betty didn’t laugh. She returned with three overgrown inedible
artichokes, the largest from each of the three local markets, and was quite hurt by Cecil’s controlled but obvious amusement.

The first postwar visitors arrived. Two women of Cecil’s age, traveling together, arrived from England. Having driven across the United States from Boston by car, they commented on the isolation of California. Their refusal to believe our denial puzzled us, until they explained their route, practically the loneliest desert and mountain roads across America, including Tioga Pass over the Sierras. They thought that this was the normal route. They also picked lovely bouquets of red-leaved poison oak and freshened them in their bathtub, which resulted in a short stay in the hospital for both of them.

These ladies resumed their travels, and Cecil courted another Berkeley woman, a divorcee with two teen-aged daughters (which promised an interesting possibility for the youth on both sides). The lady lived in one of the better parts of Berkeley, not far from the Berkeley Tennis Club and not far from
my own first girl friend. This romance looked from the outside as if it might result in positive action, but it died a sudden death and the lady was never mentioned again. This frustration seemed to annoy Cecil as much as disappoint him, from the few words he spoke about the incident. The possible causes of lovers’ quarrels are infinite in number, but the lady was in the location and social circle in which there was already gossip about Cecil’s reputation. Another lady friend was Pat Stava, a young blonde who preferred older men. She assisted at George’s birthday party in February, 1946, but later married an attorney considerably older than herself.

Cecil’s friend Marjorie Gateson played in a touring company of *The Voice of the Turtle* that came through San Francisco just after the war. That romantic comedy had four characters: a young man, a young woman, her younger sister, and her mother, played by Marjorie. Father, George, and I saw the play and later took the three actresses out to dinner, twice. I was just sixteen, George was twelve. The actress playing the romantic lead was as beautiful as
one would expect, while that playing the younger sister was a street-wise New Yorker. Recognizing that I would be of no interest to the romantic lead, during dinner conversation I concentrated on the younger actress, with whom I might be able to develop some mutual interests. Afterwards, Father criticized my taste for preferring the one who was a “mere gutter-snipe” over the real beauty whom he preferred. However, he wrote to Frances that I had fallen for the real beauty, “and I would too except that Marjorie [Gateson] would have been so hurt.”

Frances Phillips visited Cecil for the first two weeks of March, 1946. The visit had been planned at least six weeks before, for Cecil’s letters show eager anticipation over that time. He also sent a telegram “Still waiting for you. No trouble possible from Kitty. Love, Forester.” (His divorce had gone through on 20 December, 1945, and Kathleen had married Neil in early January, 1946.) He originally suggested that they take a motor trip to the desert,

27. CSF-FP 3 December 1945

1054
for which he had two of the Cadillac’s tires recapped, but as I remember it Frances spent much of the time in Berkeley. It didn’t matter to me whether or not Frances was sleeping with my father, although there was no outward sign that they were lovers. Frances was a very nice maiden lady whom I had known since I was ten, and I had seen my father courting other ladies in the intervening years. I had also become used to people traveling internationally to see old friends. If Frances was a very special friend the relationship was not evident. One day, Frances and I were talking on the sofa in the living room, probably between my return from school and my father arising from his afternoon nap. I didn’t have a steady girl friend, and I thought how nice it

28. CSF-FP 22 December 1945
29. The Willys and the Cadillac both used unusual sizes of tire. Cecil received new tires for the Cadillac in May, 1946 as a special favor, and new tires for the Willys near the end of the year. CSF-FP 20 and 27 May 1946

1055
would be to kiss Frances. So I did. That time, and once more before she left, we kissed, cuddled, and petted quietly for half an hour or so.

Cecil next saw Frances in New York in early June of 1946, as he was on his way to England for his first time there since he had left in 1939. Cecil happily anticipated that meeting; “The thought that I shall be with you so overshadows the thought that I am going to England that I don’t think about that part of it.”

In this same spring of 1946, Cecil paid for Flo Belcher’s visit from England to her daughter Kathleen in California. Geoffrey Belcher, one of Kathleen’s brothers, made the arrangements for Flo’s visit according to Cecil’s instructions. Cecil then changed his mind in typical fashion, for immediately after sending Geoff the money, he wrote to Kathleen that Flo perhaps did not want to travel by herself, and that perhaps also Kathleen did not want her mother to visit her in California. Therefore, he

30. CSF-FP 9 June 1946

1056
suggested to Kathleen, “you can make that the grounds for terminating the whole business, as long as you do it immediately. Flo is my friend, as well as your mother, and I don’t want to get myself into trouble with her.”

These are strange words considering the history of the relationship between Cecil and Flo. Cecil had been first a schoolboy, then an unemployed ne’er do well visiting Flo’s house. He had first seduced her daughter, then, in what was surely not recompense, had secretly married the girl against the wishes of all concerned. Once that had been discovered and acknowledged, he had then moved in with her until, practically speaking, he had been ejected. Since then he had divorced her daughter, with a shameful financial division, and now, evidently regretting a promise, he attempted to avoid the responsibility, financial or social, of her visit as long as he could put the blame on her daughter without suspicion attaching to himself. That gambit

31. CSF-K, 490, early June 1946
didn’t work, for Flo came anyway. True, she tried to stay longer, and thereby put Cecil to some trouble, but that is a later part of the story.

Cecil turned George and me over to Kathleen for the month of June and made his trip to England. His good humor and enthusiasm upon his return speak well of the trip, and one seemingly unguarded letter to Kathleen records some of it.

“Savoy Hotel, London, Monday June 24 1946

“My dear,

“I saw Flo yesterday, and she seems better and less aged than I had been led to expect. When I hinted that perhaps it would be better if she did not visit California this Autumn she was in arms at once — putting both hands on the floor without bending her knees to demonstrate her fitness — and was so worried that I gave way at once, and she will be coming. Did you make arrangements with Wendy Marsh to see her through N.Y.? I remember writing you about it. I shall write to her myself just in case; if she can’t do it I shall have to do something about it quickly. Flo is very alert and quite her old self, des-
perately keen on travelling and seeing a new country. I could see almost no change in her. She told me about [her husband] George’s death with a good deal of emotion. I shall arrange for her to go home by sea after staying a month or two — you can arrange with her when she shall visit you and so on. It was very touching seeing her again; you know how fond of her I have always been. I was a trifle embarrassed when she wanted to discuss the divorce, and I had in fact to refuse to discuss it, as I didn’t know what she knew and what she didn’t. I wish you would tell me sometime as soon as you can. For instance, does she know that I knew about your movements during the summer before the divorce? It’s like going back into another world to remember those things, but it isn’t for Flo, who wanted to talk about everything and was a little hurt when I wouldn’t.

“This has been a wonderful week for me, seeing all the old friends and places. Of course they’ve received me with open arms (or open legs as the case might be) and I haven’t had a quiet moment so far.
[There followed a list of people, including Dorothy Foster.] Do you remember the backwaters below the lock where we camped one night with the Allens, 20 years or so ago? We lunched there and it was just as lovely and unspoilt as ever. There’s a charming house on Winters Hill for sale which I am strongly tempted to buy.

“I went to 28 Longton Ave. The Bairds are nice young people with a pair of fine sons – it just turned my heart over to see them playing in that garden. What I wanted to find was the film of the kids playing in the Rogers’s garden and any other of your older films. But I couldn’t. Do you know what happened to them? The house is badly shaken [bombing damage during the war] but they are about to start work on it.

“Geoff [his brother] had bought a Vauxhall car for me and I’ve been driving it about. There was a minutes uncertainty about the right side of the road and so on, but then it was all right. I could remember the way round London, much to my astonishment, although of course the landmarks have
changed a lot. ... Longton Ave. is much battered. Underhill Rd. & Belvoir aren’t as much damaged as I had been led to expect.

“This seems to be the hell of a letter when I just started to tell you about Flo, but I’ve run on as usual. She really is as well as anyone her age could possibly be, and I shouldn’t worry about her if I were you. The journey is a bit of a strain but I think it will be all right — it wouldn’t be easy to stop her anyway. Please write to Flo and Wendy Marsh as soon as you can.

“Gordon\textsuperscript{32} is here looking after me, quite unchanged.”\textsuperscript{33}

The Dorothy Foster whom Cecil visited was the woman whom he had taken to a few dances at Alleyn’s Tennis Club during the time that Kathleen had been teaching in the west of England, and for whom he had then had some flicker of attachment.

\begin{flushright}
32. Gordon Williams, a Forester groupie since the 1930s.\par
33. CSF-K, 493, 24 June 1946
\end{flushright}
Just as she had been in the 1920’s, in 1946 Dorothy was keeping house for her parents. However, they were now very old and frail and Dorothy was as much a nurse as a housekeeper.

Cecil also visited Lillian, his first steady love, without telling Kathleen, but the visit was not a success. As Lillian wrote to Kathleen four years later, “That is the trouble with Cecil. One sometimes doubts when one should believe, because one is not sure if he is just playing cat and mouse. When he came to England in ‘46 I was too tired to stand that sort of thing, and maybe I reacted a little oddly. I too have pride, but I have lowered it to try and wipe out misunderstanding.”

Cecil’s visit to his old house, now Kathleen’s property, at 28 Longton Avenue, was prompted by more than the search for the family movies. He went to find what he called “The Lost Novel,” the novel he said he wrote but did not publish in order to get *A Ship of the Line* out before the Hornblower market

34. Lillian to Kathleen, February 1950
subsided. He also bore a request from me to look for my model steam launch. The woman renting the house, Mrs. Baird, later remarked that she was puzzled about the reports of Cecil’s illness, because he impatiently bounded up the stairs like a boy, all the way to the attic above the third floor, where were stored the things left behind in 1939. He found some material to his liking, but not the lost novel, and not the steam launch. Of course, now I think he didn’t bother to look for the launch. Later, he remarked to Kathleen that he had taken everything he wanted and all the rest she could do with as she pleased. Among these things were a few movies taken in the late 1930s, a few horribly dated unsalable manuscripts, and his prewar letters.

Cecil also visited his family, evidently with some qualms about them, as he wrote to Frances. “Back again from Geoff’s, where I had a marvellous time, & fell in love with my country all over again. The whole family was there, millions of them, but it was all right. My mother seemed quite as usual, & as sharp tongued as I always remember her. This has
been the hell of a nice stay. The quarrels will start next week when some people (I expect) will say I haven’t given them enough time.”

As always, Cecil didn’t care to look after himself, and found no difficulty in persuading Gordon Williams to act the role of gentleman’s gentleman. In later years, after Gordon’s death, the role fell to Cecil’s nephew Stephen, who accepted it with good grace, despite some competition for the position. As Cecil remarked to me that year or the next, “Whenever I go to England everybody looks on me as ‘Rich Uncle Cecil from America;’ they all have their hands out for money. What do they think I am — made of money? Of course, you know better, but they don’t.”

That summer’s events affected both Cecil and Frances, and also their relationship. Frances’s mother had died early in July after a long illness. Cecil returned from England to New York after her

35. CSF-FP 4 July 1946
36. CSF-FP 5 July 1946
death and left for Berkeley before the burial. Frances, as an only child, had had the entire responsibility for everything involved in the illness and the death. She was worried, nervous, and grieving, while Cecil was not very sympathetic and rather disliked seeing her in that state. After the burial he wrote, “I hope so much that everything went off all right and didn’t upset you too much,” followed by admonitions to “take things absolutely easy.” The relationship between Frances and Cecil was changed by more than Frances’s grief and Cecil’s unsympathetic attitude toward her. While in England, Cecil had encountered people or events or thoughts that changed him greatly, as he later admitted in two letters to Frances. The following January he wrote, “But I have changed, more and more. My visit to

37. FP to CSF 12 March 1950
38. Frances’s father had been Surgeon General of the U.S. Army. Cecil’s reference to her trip to Arlington presumably referred to the National Cemetery.
39. CSF-FP 20 July 1946
England changed me most, as I think I told you at the time. I don’t want to explain in greater detail, & I don’t expect you will want me to, but if you do want me to of course I will.”

They did not meet again for three years. Then, referring to their estrangement, Frances wrote that their next meeting would not be on intimate terms, to which Cecil replied, “The very worst you could think about me (you—not somebody with a morbid imagination) wouldn’t be as bad as the real thing.”

Mother, George, and I spent the early part of the summer hiking in the Sierras. I stayed longer, and shortly after I returned, my father returned from England. He then took George, me, Marjorie Manus, and Fluffy the cat to Fallen Leaf Lake Lodge for two weeks, traveling in both the Cadillac and the Willys. During this time I had pretty general use of the Willys, the “car that used very little gas”

40. CSF-FP 29 January 1947. Cecil nowhere described these events or changes.
41. CSF-FP 20 March 1950
that my father had bought during the war as a second car after my mother had left with her car. Even a year after the war had ended, new tires of its small size were still unavailable. On the earlier trip to the Sierras with the Willys, the second blowout of our recapped tires had stranded that car halfway there and left us to hitch-hike. On the later trip, with more second-hand, recapped tires, the speed had to be limited to thirty miles an hour because of vibration.

In return for use of the car, I had chores to perform. One chore was getting Marjorie Manus into shape for finally taking her driving test. She was supposed to be competent, just needed a bit more practice, and I was not expected to provide detailed instruction. I had her driving around the streets of upper Berkeley, choosing her own route, when she started down a street with a very sharp downhill corner. She neither turned the wheel sharply enough to get round the corner, which was the normal routine, nor stopped to ask what to do next. Before I could do anything she entered the corner without turning the wheel sufficiently and rammed the guard rail at
low speed. Fortunately, this was a stout concrete and steel pipe structure, but it smashed up one fender so that its headlamp pointed down to the ground. That ended Marjorie’s expectations of ever driving for Cecil, and Cecil’s expectations about Marjorie. As Cecil ruminated: “the thought that she never will be able to drive, and no one should have this job without being able to drive—it throws too much burden on me. .. I’m beginning to be afraid lest she is temperamentally unsuited for this job. God damn it, if she can’t stand the pace I shall begin to think there was something in what Kitty said about the business of looking after me. ... If ever a woman looked like breaking down it’s Marjorie. I can’t understand it. Am I such an exacting or terrifying person? I can’t think I am demanding. ... But if this goes on Christ only knows what will happen. I hark back again to Kitty and what she said about my unpleasant personality. ... It must be damned hard on a person who thinks she’s inadequate to be in close contact with me—everyone thinks I’m so hellish efficient and good at things and so unsparing about faults, all of
which is utterly wrong, of course. The thing is that I’m so observant and that it’s no use my being as easygoing as I am–people want things unnoticed, not forgiven. ... I honestly wish I was dead.”

How Cecil arranged for his sons’ education will be told in the next chapter, but, to sum up, he entered them at St. George’s School, Newport, RI. In the fall of 1946, after he had taken his sons to New York, spent a little time with them enjoying that city, and then left them at St. George’s School, Cecil returned to Berkeley where Florence Belcher, Kathleen’s mother, had been visiting. Her visit caused many problems. Cecil wrote to Kathleen even before he left New York.

“It seems that Flo will never understand my point of view in this business, and I am writing to you much more fully than to her in the hope that you may come to appreciate my position and explain it to her.

42. CSF-FP 7 August 1946
“I assumed certain obligations with regard to Flo, and I settled the details with her brother by letter and personally. My invitation to her was expressly limited to the time up to the middle of November, and when Flo said, last spring, that she wanted to stay longer I said that it would not be convenient to me, and she agreed. Now she asks me to extend my invitation, and I say I do not want to; any host is entitled to say that to a guest. But that is not the point. Flo let her house for six months, and told several people she was going to stay for six months, and all this after I talked to her. In other words, she had every intention of forcing my hand (to put it politely) or tricking me (one might think) into extending my obligation. She said nothing to me about it during the fortnight we were together — I can only think the reason was because she already knew what I thought about it. The obligation I entered into was a serious one, having regard to her and your position. Suppose Flo should feel ill. Could you nurse her? No. Could you get her into a hospital? No. Where would she be nursed? In my
house, at the cost of some considerable trouble, direct or indirect, to me. Supposing she ages too much to be trusted to go home alone? Could you arrange to have her escorted home? NO. I should have to. I was ready to do that for a limited time, but not for longer. But this is all quite beside the point, which is that I refuse to allow my hand to be forced or to be tricked. I have never been put into such a position by any business associate, and to be treated like this by a friend of thirty odd years is very painful — I don’t have to tell you, I hope, how much it costs me to write like this. If Flo did not like my invitation, she should have refused it, and she should certainly not be offended at my not wanting to continue it. I simply could not think Flo could behave in this way. I find it hard to believe even now. Is it too old fashioned to say to you that it’s something a lady would not do? The whole of civilization is based on the assumption that people will not murder each other or deceive each other. I’m equally amazed to find you blind to the same fact. It isn’t the practical considerations, however important they are, but it’s
the moral standpoint. If you don’t see it that way, I can’t argue with you about it. I don’t believe that you knew about this sharp practice before Flo came to America, but it seems very much as if you have approved of it since. I hope I’m wrong. I have no doubt that if you had pointed out to Flo what she was doing, she wouldn’t have done this, and I wish so much that you had. I can only say what I said in my last letter, and this is that if you and Flo persist in what you propose, I shall have nothing more to do with either of you. In that case I would think it best if you took Flo away before my return, along with all her things; if there are any of yours still in my house to take them too, as neither you nor she will ever come into it again.”

Flo’s behavior, if the facts were indeed as Cecil put them, cannot be defended. How would you like your ex-mother-in-law as a long-term houseguest and be required to assume a possibly major financial obligation for her well being in a foreign country?

43. CSF-K, 501, 7 October 1946
That thought didn’t please Cecil one bit, and his letter persuades us of that as he advances his personal objections to impolite behavior, the underhanded application of social pressure, following this up by declaring such actions immoral because they disrupt the social fabric and socially despicable because they are unladylike. But Flo was not merely Cecil’s ex-mother-in-law. She was first his friend, almost in the position of his mother. She became his mother-in-law only because Cecil treated her daughter and herself with precisely that lack of regard of which he now accuses her. He married her daughter secretly, and as her son-in-law lived in her house because he could not afford to keep his wife, and the possible financial obligations and inconvenience associated with that state of affairs was surely more onerous to the Belchers than Flo’s was to Cecil when he was rich. Then after that he delayed his divorce from her daughter because he felt that Flo would be hurt, only to divorce her daughter with the smallest possible, unethical financial settlement. This letter is one more example of Cecil’s ability to conjure up
facile arguments that appear, unless one knows the whole story, to be applicable and valid. But the argument changes when the shoe is on the other foot. When it was Cecil’s own convenience and selfish desires that were at stake, then he told lies to persuade people to do what he wanted them to do, all the while proclaiming the morality and necessity of his policy.

During this year Kathleen had irritated Cecil by intruding into his house to make arrangements for seeing their sons and to pick up various items of her own personal property. Cecil objected to her intrusions, considering her as “dirty, untidy, vulgar, coarse.” Cecil was also visited by Marjorie’s sister, Sylvia Anderson, and by the wife of his English agent, Mrs. Peters. When all the women were there at one time (Kathleen, Betty Brown, Marjorie, Sylvia, and Mrs. Peters), all the women became angry at each other over matters that were probably unim-

44. CSF-FP 13 April 1946

1074
portant. As well, Kathleen wanted to schedule her time with John and George over their Christmas holidays, and argued with Cecil about that within earshot of everyone else. “Kitty said with the utmost, unspeakable bitterness, that now she would not be able to see them [John and George] in Berkeley. … The change in her reminded me exactly of the scene in Dracula when they wait by the tomb and see the heroine come back from a blood-drinking raid, and how the teeth were sharper and the expression altered—Kitty was transformed just like that.”

Flo did not leave until Christmas, and spent the last few days at Cecil’s house. By then she had had some upsetting experiences in California. “The night before Christmas Eve Flo had a fearful emotional disturbance sitting on the roof with me watching the sunset. It was a horrible business, the realization on her part that she really didn’t like Kitty. It upset me like hell.”

45. CSF-FP 16 November 1946
46. CSF-FP 26 December 1946
Cecil’s eldest brother, Geoff, and his wife, Molly, visited in the fall of 1946. Geoff realized that Marjorie Manus had expectations of marrying Cecil, a hope Geoff found amusing for its absurdity. He took to teasing her pretensions by singing an old song he knew, whose refrain was “What? Marry young Marjorie? No! No! No!”

Geoff and Molly “enjoyed [their visit] the same way children might, with complete abandon, that it just wrings my heart to think of their going back to the rather grim life in England.”

It was some time after this visit that my father told me about Geoff’s attempts at writing. The story came up during a discussion of the difference between amateur and professional writers.

“I have been intending to write an autobiography,” my father said. “Your Uncle Geoff is the keeper of the family tree, and knows a lot about the family history, so I asked him if he would prepare

47. CSF-FP 22 November 1946
some opening chapters about the past. He did so, and showed them to me but his work was that of a complete amateur. Oh, it was logical and factual and grammatically correct, but it was completely unreadable. Nobody would bother to read such stuff.” Having since then read both *Long Before Forty* and Geoff’s autobiography, I think that my father’s rejection of Geoff’s work, and his description of it to me in terms sufficient to discourage my inquiring about it from Geoff, was motivated not by dullness but by the conflicting stories they each told about the past.

In the fall of 1946, the marital problems of Ruth Watkins reached the divorce stage, as Cecil had foreseen. Now, if anytime, was Cecil’s chance to confirm his prediction that “she’ll make a wealthy marriage and make a real go of it next time.”48 He tried hard, telling Ruth that he had come through the divorce with his money intact. “Oh, yes,” he

48. CSF-K, 328 15 October 1941

1077
said, “During the divorce period I was terribly nervous lest Kitty demand her share of the community property, but since she did not, I have enough to live on very handsomely. We could live anywhere in the world, literally, in complete comfort, even travel as we pleased. You could visit your family in Denmark each summer, and we could spend winters in California or the South of France or among the West Indian Islands.” When Ruth did not succumb to the lure of money Cecil dangled social prestige before her eye. “You know that I have been asked to accept a knighthood. It would take only one word from me now to have my name on the next honors list, and your name would be ‘Lady Forester.’” Do you remember Hornblower wishing for a ribbon and star to dangle before Lady Barbara’s eyes, then realizing how paltry such an homage would be to the sister of an Earl? So the past haunts each of us within this story. This approach failing, Cecil tried to arouse Ruth’s interest by trying to convince her that he was still a great lover despite his physical condition. A literateur to the end, his means of doing this
was to read her great sections of the letters he had received from other women, in which those accomplished lovers acknowledged that despite their other loves, it was Cecil they really missed. Somewhere along the line Cecil also offered Ruth and another woman, a mutual friend, $500 for a weekend “a trois.”

Ruth’s replies grew from noncommittal to downright refusal, terminating with, “Cecil, you must be crazy. I know far too much about you, and I wouldn’t let you touch me with a ten-foot pole.”

Once the divorce proceedings were complete and she had obtained an interlocutory decree, Ruth returned to Denmark for a visit to her family. She stayed much of the winter and spring, returning in June 1947, when I saw her again staying at Hawthorne Terrace.

Cecil kept fondling other women also. When the chance arose, he caressed the buttocks of Niven Busch’s several wives and girlfriends. He did so as Niven, one of the ladies, and he were entering
John’s Rendezvous for dinner. The lady slapped him for his unwanted familiarity. 49

Cecil’s father died in early January, 1947. After the war he and Sarah had moved in with Geoff and Molly in Southend, and obviously Geoff had written to Cecil about their father’s health and death. Cecil commented to Kathleen at the end of a letter discussing plans for the summer: “I heard yesterday that my father had just died. All the best. C” 50

Eighteen months later, Gordon Williams died. (Gordon Williams has been mentioned before. Since the 1930s he had been a Forester groupie, willing to undertake tasks such as making the arrangements for my father’s stays in England.) Cecil’s comments then are an interesting contrast: “P.S. In case you haven’t heard the shocking news about Gordon, he died (of heart failure, I think) last July. He didn’t know he was ill and didn’t suffer much, thank God.

49. Conversation, JF with Busch, 4 December 1985
50. CSF-K, 504, 8 January 1947

1080
He was a true friend, and I shall always miss him.”

“There was a horrible P.S. to my last letter, and I’m repeating it in this one in case you haven’t heard the very bad news. Gordon died last July; you’ll find the details in my other letter. I told you in that that he didn’t suffer much.” Cecil expressed no emotion about the death of his father, but felt enough about Gordon’s death to send Kathleen a pair of letters containing illogical thoughts. If she did not know of Gordon’s death because she had not received the first letter, there was no point in telling her in the second letter that the details were in the letter she had not received.

One other item may have upset Cecil’s emotions. Frances had told him that I was attracted to her. “I’m not surprised about John falling for you; he’s liable to be prejudiced in favour of anyone who can carry on an intelligent conversation along the usual Foresterian lines; you know–ten of Forester to

51. CSF-K, 508, 27 August 1948
52. CSF-K, 509, 31 August 1948
one of you. After all, you’ve had ten years train-
ing.”

All in all, Cecil had recently had a very upset-
ting time with women: Kathleen, although at least he now was legally free of her; disdained by Lillian; rejected by Ruth; unsuccessful with the ladies of Berkeley; with his present problems with Frances; and with his personal comfort and convenience jeopardized by an incompetent housekeeper who was overwhelmed by feelings of inferiority and who was jealous of the others because she wanted to marry Cecil.

Over this winter of 1946-1947 Cecil came to his decision. He decided that he would marry Dorothy Foster for his second wife. She would be a respect-
able, presentable wife, a competent housekeeper, and a nurse when he came to need one. Although she was narrow-minded, as much from ignorance as from prejudice, her colorless, unimaginative, and

53. CSF-FP 21 November 1946
forceless nature, and her obvious lack of any alternate choice, would probably ensure that she became complaisant about Cecil’s affairs instead of jealous. About midwinter, Cecil obtained sufficient assurance that he would be accepted, and he told Marjorie in January that he hoped to marry Dorothy in May.

Cecil broke up with Frances without telling her of his intention to marry Dorothy, probably in a telephone conversation after 18 January, 1947. His letters up to that date appear completely normal and regularly spaced. After that he wrote three letters to her in a large, scrawling hand that is entirely unlike his normal small hand. On 29 January, 1947, he wrote:

“I have been putting off writing this letter for a longish time. Perhaps you can guess why.

“You haven’t changed at all, not in any way. But I have changed, more and more. My visit to England changed me most, as I think I told you at the time. I don’t want to explain in greater detail, & I don’t expect you will want me to, but if you do
want me to of course I will.

“You won’t want to be friends with me any more. What else can I say? I could say thank you for everything, and mean it so much, but I feel you wouldn’t want me to. You have been a friend, which means more than any other word. [signed] C”\textsuperscript{54}

Cecil followed this with:

“There isn’t any truth that I can tell you, and if there were you know you wouldn’t believe it. Would you?

“It’s all freaks of chance, one way & the other, adding up to a final balance. You can’t pick out one thing out of the mixture, you know. You understand that, don’t you, my dear? And I’m madder than any hatter you ever met. [signed] C”\textsuperscript{55}

Cecil’s next letter is a week later, and he writes “Unless you yourself break off relations with the boys (and I hope so much you won’t) you’ll be seeing them...”\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{54}. CSF-FP 29 January 1947
\textsuperscript{55}. CSF-FP 8 February 1947

1084
There is only one more letter that spring, discussing schooling plans for George and me.

In April, 1947, Cecil returned to England for a summer’s visit. On May 3, (so his will states) he married Dorothy Foster in another secret ceremony. Dorothy’s description of that day was that she and Cecil met at the Registry Office in London, were married, had a cup of tea, after which she returned to her house to look after her parents. There she remained, by and large, for the next two years, while Cecil continued his life in England and California as before.

The decision to marry, while an important step in any life, usually neither requires explanation nor is susceptible to being better understood through it. A decision to marry secretly and remain apart, accepting the obligations without receiving the pleasure of the results, more nearly demands a complex explanation. That explanation, to be persuasive, must combine the social pressures or other circum-

56. CSF-FP 15 Feb 1947

1085
stances which motivate the secrecy as well as the emotional forces which motivate the marriage.

Consider the bride and groom. They had first met twenty years before when he had been an unsuccessful, would-be author secretly married to Kathleen, who had to earn her living far away. At that time they had had some slight romantic involvement. Since then, he had become almost famous, returned to bachelorhood as a popular man with money and time to do as he pleased, although hindered by a chronic but bearable physical disability. She had remained as she then was, a Victorian daughter looking after her parents, with sufficient money for a large house and a comfortable painless existence, becoming more old maidish every year, for all the world like Lady Emily Curzon in The General.

Is it likely that they carried a torch, each for the other, over the intervening twenty years? I can, for instance, remember Dorothy visiting us in the 1930s fairly frequently. She shows up in Kathleen’s films of 1937. But neither Cecil nor Dorothy seized the
chances that first came to them in the emotional crises of the almost-divorce in 1939 and the final divorce in 1944-45, and if they had been separated lovers, would they then have married so casually and parted so easily? Furthermore, Cecil’s obvious attempts to marry other women once he was free from Kathleen suggest that he had other intentions than loving Dorothy.

Perhaps, when Cecil was on a loose end in London, he looked up Dorothy because she was an old friend and unmarried. They fell head over heels in love that would tolerate no delay, and got married immediately. When Cecil first told me some years later of his marriage he intimated something of the sort without in any way describing the time or circumstances. But Dorothy herself is not the seductive type. Picture Lady Emily of *The General* at 48. Does it seem likely that a man who had courted lovely and luscious women, and who set a high value on intellectual interest, would fall so hard for an intellectually dull, utterly conventional woman who was on the verge of being a skinny, dried-up spinster? Then
again, there is the matter of secrecy. The official explanation was that the secrecy was a kindness to Mr. and Mrs. Foster. Since they had to be looked after, it would have been an unkindness to have inflicted on them the knowledge that they were keeping their married daughter from living with her husband. It was then only a matter of maintaining the secrecy until the old people died, and they were then in their eighties. But to conceal the marriage under these circumstances, meant exactly to act as if the marriage had never taken place. I have believed many things about my father that just were not so, and so I may be gunshy, but now I cannot believe that he would have thought marriage a worthwhile price to pay for the once a year privilege of two weeks in Bermuda with Dorothy. As conventional as she appears, Dorothy might well have not participated in such vacations otherwise, but I don’t think he would have paid the price of marriage for that privilege.

In any case, was Cecil the marrying type? He first married at a time in life and career when the
emotional urge to marry was strong, yet he never became the faithful husband and father. He obtained a divorce under a surprisingly lucky settlement, after, in his own words, “a very nervous time,” lest Kathleen claim her share of the community property. His own comment that Hornblower, his shadow or ideal, could not be expected to be faithful to Lady Barbara was another of his self-descriptive phrases. Knowing his own desire for sexual and domestic freedom, knowing the risks involved in being unfaithful to a wife, what to him was the value of marriage?

I think his motivation to marry was his lifelong inability to look after himself, his permanent need for someone to look after him, reinforced by his fears for his future health. Until he divorced Kathleen, he had never lived alone, and for most of his life he had had several women looking after his comfort. First it was his mother and his sisters. Then it was Kathleen with first her mother, then his mother again. For a few years it was Kathleen only, and then it was Kathleen with the succession of Danish au
pair girls. For his short stay in Hollywood he hired a full-time manservant, and when he lived in New York while working for the British Information Service he lived in a first-class hotel. Furthermore, he disliked owning a house. Only the need to heal the rift between him and Kathleen in 1939 had compelled him to buy a house (28 Longton Avenue, London) at the age of 39, and only the wartime unavailability of houses to rent forced him to buy another at the age of 45 (1570 Hawthorne Terrace, Berkeley). He was unable to look after himself, and in any case did not want to be bothered by such cares.

He saw in Dorothy exactly the character of Lady Emily looking after General Curzon in *The General*. There was the additional similarity that he had based General Curzon’s disability, and Bush’s too, on his own fears that had come true, and that he would, in the future, use the same disability to describe Mrs. Randall’s lover in *Randall and the River of Time*. Having decided on a person who would look after him, I think it would be in charac-
ter for him to reduce the risks associated with being unfaithful to his chosen wife by selecting a woman with adequate motive for being complaisant. He had the choice of either reaching an agreement with Dorothy to accept his extramarital affairs, or of deceiving her when it was to her own interest to accept deceit. I think that he deceived her but I think that she cooperated in being deceived by not examining events that might upset her.

Lillian Artesani (later married name), the girl to whom Cecil had first become engaged, and who at that time understood his personality better than any others of their set, wrote to Kathleen about Cecil’s marriage once it had been announced in 1949. “Dorothy has had long experience of living with and nursing sick people, and if she agrees with all Cecil does (or all she knows about) she may be able to manage him. If she does not, and obviously from what you say happened at Christmas Cecil enters the marriage in a terrible state of mind, then with her narrow views she is likely to suffer, and she will find herself faced with a terrible dilemma.”

1091
I am equally sure that Dorothy’s motive for secrecy was also different from the official description, and given that conclusion the motive for her marriage may well have been the same as for keeping it secret. Very shortly after Cecil died, Dorothy told my then wife, Jean, with, I suppose, a different purpose in mind, of the bitterness that follows excessive expectations. “I remember,” she said, “My bitterness after my father died and I discovered that he had divided his estate equally among my two brothers and myself. After I had looked after him all those years! (Brother X) felt as I did that I should have received half, and he would have arranged it so, but (Brother Y) disagreed, and so it remained divided equally.” In other words, Dorothy expected money for looking after her parents, and probably expected money for looking after Cecil, but if her parents learned of her marriage to Cecil they might well leave her less of their money.

57. Lillian to Kathleen, Feb 1950

1092
Cecil’s niece, Anne, Geoff’s second daughter, visited Cecil in the fall of 1947. She arrived by train; My father and I met her, and I drove up to Hawthorne Terrace by an exceedingly rough and round-about way through the wilds behind the University, while my father and I discoursed on the difficulties of living in the hills during these times of frequent bus strikes. Anne evidently knew my father’s penchant for fiction, for she took it all in stride. Not only that, but she was a sharp-spoken young woman with both a nursing degree and literary opinions of her own. Cecil defended his reputation by forewarning me that “Anne has had a very highbrow education. As a result she has a very low opinion of my work in comparison with that of the literary greats who are praised by teachers of literature.” This early warning was of little value because neither of us was interested: Anne did not introduce the subject to me, and I was far too busy with the start of my course in physics to search out literary comparisons. Anne’s visit was but the first of several by young women of Cecil’s family, all apparently paid for by
Cecil. In later years Anne’s sister, Kate, and Cecil’s niece, Patsy Troughton-Smith, were also his guests at different times. As Frances Phillips once told Cecil, “All your children should have been daughters, for then you would have treated them affectionately.”

During this time Cecil still had to conceal his secrets and lies. He continued his habit of burning the letters that he received. However, in the California climate we often had no fire in the house, so he was reduced to throwing the torn-up letters into the garden incinerator when I was burning leaves. Once, having told me that one of his great friends from the Savage Club in London was the famous pianist Benno Moseivitch, he had to argue his way out of a meeting when I informed him that Moseivitch would be playing in San Francisco.

In addition to his fears of discovery, Cecil had

58. Frances told me that.
another one. On sunny mornings, he would dress in shorts and bathrobe and write or dictate letters on the sunroof. The sunroof was surrounded by a low wall three feet high surmounted by a double railing. Fluffy, as cats will, would often walk along the top of the wall, looking down the 2½ storeys into the garden and across at the birds in the trees. For Cecil, the sight of Fluffy standing on that edge and looking down that drop “gave me the horrors,” so much so that for a time Fluffy was forbidden the sunroof while Cecil was working there.

The largest disaster of the season was a serious coronary occlusion about December 15, 1948. The attack was massive; the autopsy after Cecil’s death 18 years later showed that the old scars were as large as a man can receive and still live. The ‘even chance’ that Cecil thought he had in the first hours after the attack became the germ of the first story he wrote about Midshipman Hornblower. But before this developed, the other consequences of the heart attack had to be handled. The report of Cecil’s heart attack had hit the press and radio; while in
Forest Hill, London, England, there was a secret Mrs. Forester for whom the media were the most direct source of information. She would undoubtedly learn of Cecil’s illness, learn just as much as the general public and no more. Her attempts to find out more, or possibly attempts to come in aid, would compromise the secret, to the great interest of all those people whose curiosity Cecil deplored.

It was skiing season and Christmas holiday time; I had previously planned a long weekend of skiing at Donner Summit. A few days after the heart attack, having learned from Dr. Fox that my father would not be allowed to come home until after the end of my skiing trip, I went to the hospital to ask my father’s permission to go skiing. I found my father still exhausted and somewhat sedated, but quite capable of the short conversation that I expected.

“Hello, Father.”
“John.”
“How’s it going?”
“All right; about as well as can be expected.
Everything all right at home?”

"Sure. George is at school as usual. Mrs. Manus is looking after us in the usual way. No problems.

“Dr. Fox says that you’ll be here at least through the next week. There’s not much I can do for you, is there, until you’re ready to come home?”

“No. Nothing.”

“‘I’d like to go on my ski trip, then. You know I’ll be at Claire Tapaan Lodge, and I’ll leave the telephone number with Mrs. Manus. Is that all right?”

“Yes, of course it is. But, John, there’s something important I must tell you.

“I am married. I have a wife in England, and she’ll be coming over directly to be with me as soon as she can get a flight. Do you remember Dorothy Foster who used to look after you sometimes when you were little? She has been a close friend for many years, and she is now my wife, but she has been looking after her parents. She’ll be here soon, but I don’t know when.

“To show you how old a friend she is, I went
over to her house, where she lived with her parents, to tell them that you had been born. The old man — he wasn’t young even then — saw me out of the front door and closed it behind him. In the garden he quietly asked me, ‘Cecil, have you enough money to see this thing through?’ Of course you know I’d never start a family without achieving financial stability, so I answered, ‘Of course I do. You don’t believe that I would have started this unless I had enough money, do you?’ So you understand that Dorothy is an old friend whom I have known well, and I am sure you’ll get along well with her.

“Don’t tell anybody else for the moment, but in case you hear of her or from her that is who she is. Go now, and have a good time.”

I left, rearranging my thoughts in accordance with the new order. I could not remember that Dorothy Foster had ever looked after me, presumably for a week or so sometime before Anna came in 1936, but I could remember her as a visitor in later years; a tall thin woman wearing a red hat. Well, at least my father had married someone who was an old
friend and not a chance pickup.

Cecil recovered well from his heart attack. His heart was able to support as much exercise as his body was otherwise able to produce. His teeth were never good; poor British dental hygiene had done irreversible damage and by this period he had full dentures. He had a few minor problems from time to time, but nothing serious. The condition of his legs was measured from time to time, but showed little change. “Mercifully the deterioration is very small indeed. If I were in the best of health I’d be deteriorating as I moved from the forties into the fifties, so what the hell.”

One thought didn’t cross my mind: that thereby I would never have Marjorie Manus as a stepmother. Having lived under her care, and having seen her naked beside the bath one day when she forgot to lock the door, I couldn’t imagine my father marrying her under any conditions whatever.

59. CSF-FP 28 November 1950

1099
However, realistic or not, she carried that hope until Cecil told her about his intention of marrying Dorothy Foster.

Betty Brown was also informed somewhat before the public announcement, but just when is uncertain. There was a long delay between Cecil’s first disclosure, forced by the crisis of his illness, and Dorothy’s appearance in Berkeley. As he told me, “Airplane reservations are still hard to get, and Dorothy could not get a passage until well after I would be either out of danger or dead. It seemed silly to have her rush here to be available when I am convalescing, in no danger but unable to entertain her, and then have to return to England to settle her affairs later, so she is staying in England, getting everything ready to move here while I am regaining my strength.”

Cecil informed Frances with the following words.

“Very different kind of news in this letter.
“My dear,
“I expect you’ve expected to hear this news.
“I’m married. Dorothy is a very old friend of mine; it’s nearly thirty years since I first knew her, and during the last few years we’ve renewed the friendship. She is a very nice woman indeed; I don’t believe that she ever had a malicious impulse or even a malicious thought, and she will be a good wife to me, and a much better one than I deserve. I know you will wish me happiness. ...

“I’m writing this to you before telling the rest of the world—it will be public a day or two after you receive this. I don’t know if you will want to go on writing to me. I hope you will. I shall be very sorry if you do not, although I am already deeply in your debt and the longer we are friends the deeper I shall be.

“C”

There are no more letters to Frances for four months, when they resume in much the same manner as before. These later letters discuss his work and his family and other events, much as did his ear-

60. CSF-FP 26 January 1949

1101
lier ones. While Cecil makes no declarations of love, he habitually closes his letters with “Lots and lots of love” and there are fairly frequent mentions of sexual matters, such as Cecil’s frequent wishful statements about his desire to spank Frances’s bottom, and his remembering not to buy Frances panties for Christmas because he knows she doesn’t wear any.

However, Cecil and Frances did not meet again until May, 1950. In February of that year Cecil planned a trip to New York and invited Frances to dinner while he would be there. Frances did not reply as promptly as she usually had. Cecil asked Frances, “What is the matter? ... I’m worried, dear—what have I done or omitted now? Is it something there might have been a misunderstanding about? If it is, I ought to have a chance to clear it up, and if it isn’t I can at least say I’m sorry.”

Frances’s reply to this is the one letter from her that she saved. This is not a casual letter; what exists is the typewritten draft with extensive handwritten

61. CSF-FP 11 February 1950

1102
revisions. That is probably why she had a copy to save.

“Now, about dinner, my Southern blood curdles at the idea of a man taking me out to dinner with a cloud on the horizon: I think I had better be disagreeable now, instead of then.

“You and I are strangers: we have been ever since you broke off the friendship. Editorially, you patched things up, but that is professional, as if I were a doctor.

“I have heard that you felt bound by a promise not to talk about your marriage, but Marjorie told me (with a lot of other things that are irrelevant) that you had told her in January [1947] you were hoping to marry in May, so I discount that report.

“You disliked me in 1946 so no communication was possible; no doubt you had plenty of reason to because I was in a bad state of nerves after my mother’s death. But three years have gone by now: perhaps some communication is possible.

“I thought that the doctor had told you [you] had cancer, or a brain tumor—something of that
kind and I was very unhappy for you. I am so glad I was wrong.”

Cecil replied with “My dear,

“I wish I knew what you meant to say in your letter. Or perhaps I don’t. You have every right to be disagreeable. I’m all on your side on that point. Even with the facts, or without the facts, the very worst you could think about me (you—not somebody with a morbid imagination) wouldn’t be as bad as the real thing. So that although your facts are not quite right there’s no sense in disputing them. But I don’t know what you want to do. Leave off being the patient’s doctor? Scold me? If you just want to humiliate me please do but you won’t do it nearly as well as I’ve done it to myself. I don’t know what else to say; I can only ask you to write your letter again only more explicitly, as quite honestly I don’t understand it. I mean the actual contents of the letter, not the reason why you wrote it. For that reason I can’t write any more in this answer; I would gladly write

62. FP-CSF 12 March 1950
more but I can’t because I don’t know what it is I have to answer.”
  
  “Love, C”

The delayed announcement of the marriage required an explanation of why Dorothy had remained in England for two years after she married my father. My father told me, “Dorothy had been brought up as a very Victorian daughter, in the old tradition that one of the many children was destined to look after her parents in their old age. When we married they were both alive, and we couldn’t bear the thought of telling them, because they would have insisted that their welfare was insufficient cause for keeping a married couple apart. Now Dorothy’s mother is dead, and the old man, fortunately, has become senile enough that he forgets everything, including how time is passing. He’s been told of the marriage, but it hasn’t sunk in and he doesn’t care who is looking after him.”

Of course, these explanations were not publicly announced. They covered the ‘facts’ for those who
had to know in advance. The public announcement waited until just before Dorothy’s arrival. Betty Brown was instructed to obtain the formal announcements. She took to the social printer Cecil’s own words and ordered a printing. The printer demurred. “That’s not the usual form of announcement. Are you sure you want it done this way?”

“Those are my Boss’s own words. That’s just what he wants.”

“Of course, I’ll print whatever he wants. But with this wording I’ll have to insist that you pay in advance, just in case he changes his mind about it.”

The announcement was very simple: “Dorothy E. Foster and C. S. Forester announce their recent marriage.” Still the passion for secrecy — no date, no place. The omissions encouraged speculative gossip but kept it purely speculative — Cecil could have been married anytime after 1945 and without dates there could be no assertion, for instance, that in going out with Mrs. X on such and such a date Cecil had been two-timing his wife. The
secret remained secret. Not until reading my father’s will in 1966 did I learn that the marriage had taken place on May 3, 1947, and as far as I know that is the only public information.

Dorothy arrived and settled in as lady of the house. As soon as she became familiar with Berkeley and the American shopping and housekeeping practices, Marjorie Manus returned to England. She changed planes in New York (as was usual in those days), spending the intervening night with Frances Phillips, and disclosing, with the aid of a few drinks, her information about Dorothy, about Cecil’s planning to marry Dorothy, and her own thwarted hope of marrying Cecil.63

Dorothy was a tall thin woman of Cecil’s age (48 or so when she came to Berkeley). In the twenties she had played tennis enthusiastically, but at this time her only physical activity was walking in town or the local park for a mile or so. She was quiet and

63. Frances told me part of this, and see Frances’s letter to CSF of 12 March 1950
restrained in her movements, and her smile, which never developed into a happy laugh, had always an air of uncertainty or embarrassment, as if she feared that others would laugh, not at the subject of her amusement, but at the fact that she found it amusing. When, as was sometimes necessary, at museums or large-scale public events, Dorothy had to wheel Cecil in his wheelchair, they looked strangely like General Curzon and Lady Emily.

She entered the domestic side of Cecil’s Berkeley life without making a single wave. In appearance, interests and opinions she was utterly commonplace. A first meeting convinced the gossip mongers that no glamour queen had stolen a prize in Cecil and convinced others that no change in Berkeley’s hierarchy of social status was either warranted or threatened. Her presence raised no recognition of interest among the intellectuals. Dorothy could play bridge, and she entered the circle of middle-level businessmen and their wives, whose bridge-playing activities formed Cecil’s quiet refuge from his other, more active interests. She was also a com-
petent English-style cook, who set a much appreciated tea table at four o’clock nearly every afternoon.

In addition to being Cecil’s housekeeper and prospective nurse, Dorothy was also his wife. She had never outgrown her Victorian middle-class childhood milieu. While Cecil had never obeyed its precepts, he feared them and he kept up the appearance of supporting them. Despite the general social changes since, they behaved so reservedly that no one could ever tell how well they lived that side of life. The only sign of affection that I ever sensed, beyond their very conventional kisses of greeting after an absence, was the sound of vigorous slapping, accompanied by Dorothy’s mock screams, that once penetrated their bedroom door into the upstairs hallway as I was carrying up their breakfast tray. An unimportant event, but one that correlates with Cecil’s known interest in pornographic treatments of flagellation, his frequent written comments to Frances that he would like to spank her bottom, and Professor Joad’s query of Kathleen: “Does Cecil beat you?”
Although Cecil was married to Dorothy, some matters remained from his divorce from Kathleen. Kathleen wanted $10,000 with which to buy a subsistence farm in the Russian River valley. It was common knowledge that before the divorce Cecil had agreed to give her such a place, and the purchase had been almost consummated. Now, of course, it was a different proposition that most people would consider an unreasonable request, unless it were payment to Kathleen of part of her share of the community property. I think Kathleen so looked on it — but the division of property had been settled long before and Cecil treated the request as a new proposition. His refusal was a reasonable action, but his tone has all the whining self-pity of old that he used to disguise his attempt to conceal how much money he had.

“My dear,

“I am not going to do what you ask. I am very sorry to have to say so to you. But I have to plan for a crippled old age and for my family’s future, and
you ask me for a great deal of money. And, after all, what I suppose is more important, you have been married for a long time to someone else and I do not want to provide a farm for you both. And because of Uncle Sam, to provide $10,000 I must earn $20,000.

“Perhaps my explanation is as unpleasant as my refusal. All I can say again is that I am very sorry to write like this. Your memory of our talk when Frances was at Keeler Avenue is faulty, I think. I can remember when you suggested it, and I said that you would have to put up satisfactory security, and I meant it. The time when I offered you a farm was in the summer of 1944, when we were still married and I wanted to cheer your life up in consequence.

“You know, dear, that I will never let you want. I have never ceased to regret that we are in a position where we have to write such things to each other.”

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64. CSF-K, 510, 14 Feb 1949
In the spring of 1949, Cecil’s mother died at the home of his brother Geoff. Geoff wrote that she had died peacefully. Cecil took the news with equanimity.

Once Cecil had patched up the worst blunders of his relationship with Frances, he resumed seeing her as he traveled through New York on his way to and from England. Since Dorothy often traveled with him, it was likely that Frances and Dorothy would at sometime be close enough to meet. Each of them knew of the other’s existence, although whether Dorothy understood the relationship between her husband and Frances is unknown. The first time that they were in proximity was in February, 1952. Cecil very cautiously asked Frances whether she wanted to meet Dorothy. “Now I don’t know whether the information in this next paragraph is going to hurt your feelings or not, dear. It isn’t intended to. I’m coming to New York ... and Dorothy will be coming with me. ... Would care to meet Dorothy while she is there? I’m not asking you
to, and I’m not asking you not to, and I’m only saying this anyway for fear lest your feelings would be more hurt if I didn’t (this is very involved but it’s trying to be genuine).”

65 Cecil then closed with a request for a date during the time he would be in New York without Dorothy. Whether Frances met Dorothy during this trip is unknown.

However, Dorothy’s presence and obvious conventionality did not recoup Cecil’s lost reputation among those in Berkeley who had heard and believed the tales of the past decade. Cecil’s evil reputation was quite widespread in Berkeley. Some years after these events my brother married Barbara, a girl from the East, and brought her west to Berkeley. Barbara sought out a physician to oversee her first pregnancy. Some time after the mutual acceptance of patient and doctor, the doctor discovered that his patient was Cecil’s daughter-in-law.

“I’m glad you didn’t let me know that when I first saw you,” he said, “for I would never have

65. CSF-FP 16 January 1952

1113
accepted him or anyone connected with him as regular patients of mine.”

Cecil’s reputation was not enhanced by his predilection for telling small lies. One of these playful falsehoods was the impossible telephone response. Cecil enjoyed words for themselves, as he did when inventing unlikely names for the characters in *Poo-Poo and the Dragons*. Sometimes he played with words when answering the telephone. “Good morning. This is the California Coffin, Casket, Columbarium, and Crematorium Company, Inc.” As I remember, even Betty Brown used that one once, but was reprimanded for doing so.

He told small lies to my friends. One of these friends was a graduate student in Romance languages. She was an active member of the International House group. I was not romantically interested in her, but once or twice I took her to the films. My father misjudged my interest and, referring to her limp, said he didn’t like the idea of a cripple in the family. However, my father decided to impress her with his knowledge of languages. The
subject may have come up because Hornblower had served in Latvia (The Commodore) and his author might be expected to have some knowledge of the area and its language, which is akin to Finnish and Hungarian. So my father gave this girl a lecture on the peculiarities of the Latvian language. He wrote the story to Frances.

“And John has let his hair grow into a mop and allows a curly quiff to hang down gracefully over his forehead in a way that turns my stomach but I think it’s done for the benefit of the latest girl, another twenty five year old working for her master’s degree in Romance languages with one twisted leg (polio I think poor kid) which might possibly be an obstacle if he wants to get between them. Nice girl, but with a mouth which could easily take in a slice of cantaloupe crossways and which she paints like a nigger minstrel corner boy apparently with the idea that then the casual observer wouldn’t believe such a thing could exist (I didn’t believe it myself when I saw it first) but I expect with a really deep and intelligent understanding of the Romance languages. I
had a difficult time when she found out from John that I didn’t know a word of Latvian after I had given her a long lecture on the construction and peculiarities of the Latvian language with examples.”

He was a story-teller, a compulsive liar if you like. He often used his talent to serve his selfish desires, but he also delighted in telling falsehoods for his own amusement.

That lady was never one of my romantic interests. My father naturally met several ladies in those years who were, and his judgement about them was very poor. He really liked only one of them, eagerly conversing with her when he had the chance, and describing her to Frances as “the charming widow aged 22 that I liked.” She was a non-resident member of International House who lived in a cottage at the very top of the Berkeley Hills. I met her when I accompanied other I-House friends to a party at her

66. CSF - FP 11 Aug 1950
67. CSF-FP 16 May 1951

1116
cottage. We were attracted to each other, and I spent the night with her. She was pretty, talkative, and fun to know. Her breasts had white lines radiating from the nipples. She told me that she was an American who had been living in the Philippines when the war had started. She was trapped there, and spent the first part of the war living in the jungle, partly escaping and partly resisting the Japanese soldiers as opportunity allowed. Then she was caught and held in the San Thomas prison for the rest of the war. She said that the white streaks radiating from her nipples were scars where the Japanese soldiers had cut rising suns into her breasts. It was a good story. After we had been lovers for two weeks or so I discovered that she was not a widow, for I found her arguing loudly in her cottage with her husband. I therefore have some doubts about the rest of her story. I do not know whether the white streaks were scars and her story genuine, or stretch marks with a falsehood to account for them. That was the only one of my lady friends whom my father specially liked and approved.
The other of my lady friends with whom my father took direct action at the time came from New York and was what one would call nicely rounded. When she was at home in New York and my father was staying at the St. Regis Hotel\textsuperscript{68}, probably for the work on \textit{Victory at Sea}, she called at his hotel for a luncheon engagement. When they were in the elevator together, he stuck a forefinger into her well-padded hip and remarked, “We can’t have any of that in our family.”

Cecil’s letters to Frances about their breakup, and his later references to that event, contain his most direct admissions that he recognized the dark trouble that existed inside his psyche. There are many other such references (for example, his statements that his sons had inherited horrid characteristics), but these are the starkest. For that reason, I

\textsuperscript{68} He stopped using the Gramercy Park Hotel because the St. Regis was air conditioned and the GPH was not.
discuss their implications here rather than at the end of this book.

“I’m madder than any hatter you’ve ever met” is not an admission to be taken lightly. His personality was a tangle of contrary forces. He loathed his parents while idolizing an imaginary father. He feared, while despising, the social proprieties of the narrow circle into which he had been borne. The proprieties required him to tell the commonplace truth while his imagination provided stories that both pleased him better and produced the results that he preferred. While his sexual drive did not steer him into professional vice, it steered him into relationships about which he had to lie. He might have loved his children, but he believed that his sons had inherited the worst of his own traits and the worst of what he thought to be Kathleen’s character. While he played the part of a self-sufficient, competent adult, he feared that he would be left alone, quite unable to look after himself. Considering the extent to which he had been lying to his closest friends, he probably had some fear that they would
desert him.

His telling Frances that he was madder than a hatter could convey any of several meanings. He could be saying that his sexual drive had got him into too many complications with different women, with consequent lying and cheating. He could be saying that he knew that he was an unsuitable mate for someone as nice as Frances. He could be saying that his fear that he would have to manage his own household affairs, or his old age, had driven him into a marriage that he regretted. He could be saying that his fear that he would have to manage his own household affairs, or his old age, had driven him into a marriage that he regretted. He could be saying that his ancestors, himself, and his descendents were psychologically inadequate and unstable. He could have been saying all of these things in that one sentence.

Yet he felt, with justification, that he had the intellectual ability to carry out the acts that he desired without significant risk of detection. Without his letters, especially these, nobody would have ever known enough of his deeds and thoughts to understand his motivation, and in any case general knowledge of his secrets remained unknown until
his death. Since he cared nothing for what might occur after his death, that degree of secrecy is all that he desired.

By the fall of 1951, Cecil’s plan for his life had been delayed for four years by the events that are told in the next chapter. At least, that is how he chose to see the situation. Now, after that delay, Cecil was able to take up the type of life that he most desired, or as much as he could with Dorothy, his wife, beside him much of the time.
When I was just fifteen I first learned about kissing women. Betty Brown was my father’s secretary, but I had known her since my father’s tennis-playing days at the Orinda Country Club. George and I often stopped by the Browns as we walked between the streetcar and home, to have a lemonade and a few minutes of conversation. One evening, returning from a rehearsal at my skating club, I returned alone and stopped by the Brown’s. Betty invited me in, but was alone; Lenny was away for some reason. Greatly daring, for I had never done this before, I put my arm around her, tried to kiss her, and found that I
was being kissed in return. Betty taught me the elements of necking, this far and no farther, with grace and dignity, for which I have always been grateful.

By this time Cecil had worked out the life that he would impose on his sons. In March, 1945, he confided in Charlotte Ballard. “I have been trying to make some plans for the future, and have reached some vague decisions. In the first place, the boys are so Americanized now that it would be cruel to uproot them and transfer them to England again; John especially, after his American education, would be quite badly handicapped if he had to earn a living in England. So I think they are going to be Americans, (Kitty by the way, made the legal announcement of her intention to apply for American citizenship quite a long time ago) and they will go to American universities. In less than two years from now I shall send both boys to a school in the eastern states, John because it will be high time and George because I can’t very well live alone with one child, to get them ready for an eastern university —
Yale or Harvard or Princeton, I don’t know which yet. Then assuming that there is some sort of peace and that I am still able to travel (both doubtful) I shall spend the summers in England and France and the boys will spend their summer vacations, about two months or so, with me. I shall be in England I hope from May to September, and the rest of the year I shall spend in New York and California. It ought to work out all right. Can I bring my bath chair to Ledbury for J.B. to push me around? I hope I shall still be able to drive a car.”¹

Cecil also told Frances Phillips of his plan to exercise his parental responsibilities for only two months a year (except in the financial sense of paying school fees he could easily afford). He described his negotiations with St. George’s, at Newport, Rhode Island. It is “expensive as hell,” but will take John and George next year “providing they are up to scholastic standard–there’s a faint chance that they won’t be, especially in the case of John.”²

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1. CSF-K, 440, 12 March 1945

1124
May, 1945, she sent him brochures for several more schools, just in case St. George’s did not work out. In the fall, Kathleen was told that the boys needed an Eastern prep school to be able to enter a good university.

In November, 1945, Cecil visited St. George’s and sent his opinion to Kathleen. “The school the boys are going to [go to] is all right — I spent the day there yesterday. Of course the buildings and labs and infirmary and so on are good; the school is on the edge of the sea in a district like Sheppey or Romney and the kids are going to feel something in the way of bitter cold winds in winter, but the summers should not be too hot. I had after lunch coffee with the staff in the common room, and they seemed as near the staff of an English public school as possible — cultured and matter of fact. Eccles, the head master, is all right — he was assistant head for some time at Andover, which has a good reputation. His degree is in mechanical engineering. He’s about 40, and I

2. CSF-FP 27 May 1945

1125
couldn’t detect very much of the school-teacher complex in him. He’s quite sane and his sense of proportion is all right. The kids will have to work while they are here, which is fine. I talked to a few boys, and they were all right too; I don’t think you need worry much about snobbery. Altogether, the school was as good as I hoped and much better than I feared.”³

Is it strange that Cecil, with his fear of snobbery and his suspicion of schoolmasters, had chosen a school sight unseen, for the reason, I believe, that his editor at Little, Brown & Co. in Boston, Erd Brandt, had sent his son there? It is one more of those matters in which he had great quantities of ideas and no understanding of his own ignorance. The only portion of this plan that I was told before being interviewed for the prep school in early summer was that the first summer after the war was over we would rent a chateau on the Loire. That was one more of those Forester promises whose failure to

³. CSF-K, 470, November 1945

1126
materialize I should have recognized much earlier. A large part of Cecil’s motivation was solely his own selfish convenience, which was in some way associated with a horror of keeping house with one son. I did not learn that part of the story until after his death; those who knew it did not tell me. Because of that ignorance, I was puzzled when I observed his reactions to later events.

Since arriving in Berkeley I had attended the public schools; first Cragmont Elementary, then Garfield Junior High, and was now at Berkeley High. Berkeley High was actually three schools in one: shop, business, and academic, with some common contacts in the required courses. As both a bedroom suburb of San Francisco and the home of the University of California, Berkeley High had a fairly large body of high-level students. Among the friends of my own age were Jack Stewart, whose father was a professor of English and well-known novelist; Waldo and Stanton Cook, whose father taught zoology; Eleanor Latimer, whose father was dean of Chemis-
try; Ursula Kroeber, whose father was a famous anthropologist, and who is now well-known in science fiction as Ursula K. LeGuin.

The normal daily schedule provided one or two study periods, but because I always took an extra two-period laboratory class I rarely had one. I started class at eight and went until just after three. Our house at Keeler Avenue was about 1,000 feet above the city center. Early each morning, in the dark in winter, I got on my bicycle and rode down the winding roads to school. It was often cold and foggy, with the roads wet with condensed fog, and I would roll down the hill as fast as the cars. Sometimes I sang as I coasted, tuneless renditions of *The Wreck of Old 97* or *Don’t Fence Me In*. “He was coming down the mountain making ninety mile an hour / When his whistle broke into a scream. / He was found in the wreck with his hand on the throttle, / Scalded to death by the steam;” the words matched the dark descent and my love of trains. Once at school I sat down to work immediately. Between classes I sneaked in a little more work, and often did
some during lunch period. In the spring I trained for the swimming team after school, and then did some more work. I took very little work home, mostly Latin in which I was very poor and my father quite accomplished. I traded help with an older girl who lived between the end of the streetcar line and my house. In school, I helped her with physics, while she helped me with Latin, but we were nothing more than friends. Climbing the hill homeward was a bit different from the morning descent. On those times when I left school immediately, if I rode well I could meet the streetcar when it reached the end of the line, to walk the last few blocks with my physics student.

As my father was experiencing the happiness of planning his own life and courting his lady friends, although pessimistically anticipating future disappointment, I was experiencing the joys of youth without looking forward to the consequent unhappiness. While swimming at the Orinda Country Club I had found my first girl friend, Janet, and together we met the joys and pangs of first love.
Youth in love foresees but dimly; a glorious myopia well matched to love’s impermanence. Neither she nor I believed that this was more than just a temporary preparation for the real thing, but we were emotionally wholehearted for the time which it would last. The foreshadow of future troubles, all unknown to us, was in my father’s next letter to my mother. “I enclose a letter from George — John wrote to you last week. They are both very well and happy; John is a bit tangled up with a girl but nothing serious. The girl’s mother seems to have the darkest suspicion about her daughter and about boys in general and John in particular, and I honestly don’t blame her!”

Janet and I were both too inexperienced, and not nearly desperate enough, to get anywhere near the point at which suspicion would be justified. In any case, most of our necking was done on her front porch, high above the road but immediately outside the living room windows, while her mother was in

4. CSF-K, 448, 6 June 1945

1130
the house.

My father found it natural to assume that my baser instincts would govern in this matter, just as, so he feared, they would in other fields of life. Perhaps he was also envious of my adolescent sexual capacity, for he remarks, two letters later, “Yesterday I saw John lying on his back daydreaming in the sun — he was wearing shorts too, and you could guess what he was dreaming about because he had a tremendous erection that was very obvious; a prick like a broomstick that one of these days is going to do a girl a lot of good, if it hasn’t already.”

In fact there wasn’t anything particularly unusual about me. I reached adolescence slightly later than the average boy in my grade at school, but then I was one of the younger boys. If anything was remarkable, it was my prickly personality, a curious combination of much information and intellectual zeal contrasted against massive social ignorance and

5. CSF-K, 453, August 1945, also CSF-FP 25 July 1945

1131
a comprehensive collection of misinformation so rationalized that recognizing it for what it was mystified several very clever people for years. In short, I was my father’s son. This similarity made it far more natural for him to believe that other adults would naturally suspect me as he felt he’d been suspected, than for him to realize that the basis of the suspicion was his existing reputation, not his son’s potential one.

To reach the location of our 1945 summer vacation in Little River, George and I cycled up, planning to make two stops on the way. The first was at Dorothy Dale’s house on the Russian River, the second at a ranch near Yorkville in the Mendocino countryside. It was our first long cycle trip, 160 miles with one ferry trip, many hills, and one mountain range, over roads that were comparatively empty because of the war. While swimming at the Russian River I cut my foot and delayed my continuation, sending George on ahead. That enabled me to ride the rest of the route in one day, almost 100
miles. My father drove up in the Cadillac with Ruth and Fluffy the cat, overtaking me on the lonely road between Boonville and Philo.

As on the way up, George and I cycled back from the Little River. George was an unwilling and complaining cyclist and on the second morning he said he was too tired to leave the ranch where we had spent the first night. I went on ahead, riding from there to Berkeley in one day, leaving him to come in later. As a result we were both punished; George for “cowardice and lying and laziness” and me for disobeying my father’s order to look after George. George received three whacks from an arrow-shaft and washed the dishes for a week and washed both cars, while I wrote essays each morning (interesting assignments, such as *The Rise of American Sea Power*) and translated Caesar each afternoon (a task I hated).\(^6\)

Shortly after our return, George and I went by train to spend five weeks with our mother at Sol-

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6. CSF-FP 25 July 1945

1133
vang, near Santa Barbara, where she was working as a milk tester. We took the Coast Daylight train to Santa Barbara and rode our bicycles over San Marcos Pass to Solvang. While we were there we heard the radio report of the dropping of the first atomic bomb, giving its power as 20,000 tons of TNT. I calculated the area destroyed by such a device and decided that this was a real city-flattening bomb. Then we heard of the second bomb, and of the surrender of Japan. The war was over.

Just after we returned to Berkeley, the Hawthorne Terrace house became available and we moved in just before school started. Mrs. Adams was still the housekeeper until superseded by Mrs. Manus in December, 1945. While Mrs. Manus was a moderately competent housekeeper, she was poor at household management and its associated tasks, such as driving cars, and she was easily flustered at the slightest mistake or accident. As housekeeper, she had some authority over George and me in household affairs, but she was unable to exercise that authority in ways that achieved useful results.
Whatever were my father’s opinions of our mother, she had been a leader, and we two were used to good leadership. It is difficult to work under a supervisor who feels inferior and worries about failure. For our father, Mrs. Manus had the other valuable attribute of being a good bridge player, but that mattered not to us.

Still, Cecil was able to arrange that life be equal. Household discipline was based on few rules, strictly enforced. Cecil commented that the most powerful deterrent to crime was not the pain or inhumanity of the punishment, but the certainty with which it would be administered. Therefore, dinner was served at 6:30 exactly. The son who was to set the table had to be present at 6:00 exactly, the other at 6:30 exactly. One minute’s tardiness resulted in the immediate, without question, penalty of washing the dishes alone. It didn’t matter whether either son came to dinner or not, but whoever decided to be absent had to report before 4:30. If you had not reported by then, you had to come to dinner, no excuses accepted.
“Punctuality is politeness,” my father told me at this time, “because it prevents other people from wasting their time in waiting. If you are punctual yourself, others will become punctual with you. You remember how unpunctual your mother was with everyone but me? She learned to be punctual with me, so she could have been punctual with everybody else. She had been unpunctual with me like everybody else, until we were going on holiday together and were to meet at the station. By train time she hadn’t arrived, so I went on holiday without her. She was never unpunctual with me again — that learned her.”

It was in connection with punctuality that I received the only physical punishment I can recall from him. In January, 1946, I started driving, which pleased my father because I would do some of the driving for the household that he had been doing, and pleased me because I could now take my dates by car.

My father issued instructions that I must return from dances no later than 11:30. This is, of
course, the classic American family dilemma, with a few other ramifications. To keep his schedule would mean that I had to take my girl from the dance an hour before it closed and rush her home in a frantic hurry. I wasn’t about to accept the instructions and then deliberately disobey them, so I demurred. His brow came down. “Are you questioning my authority?”

“No, I’m not questioning your authority, but am I to believe you’re always correct?”

Wham! I caught a slap across the face so sudden and so unexpected that I didn’t try to avoid it. It turned out later that, without asking me or anyone I knew, he was operating on the erroneous assumption that high school dances stopped before eleven. I thought that he was determined that I would have no time for sex or liquor. We negotiated over his mistake and set a more reasonable time.

Cecil does not mention this contretemps to Frances, although he describes his feelings while I was out. “On Friday, though, John asked me if he could have the car [the Willys]—he was going to a
dance. So I said yes, although I didn’t want to, and off he went. He was all right, of course, but I lay awake like any anxious mother until he turned up at 12:15, quite a reasonable time as a matter of fact; it is a pity that I know by experience that one can go up a girl and still get home in reasonable time after a function. But I don’t mind how many girls he goes up, of course—what I was worrying about was him and the car.”

Two days later Marjorie, in a driving lesson with my father, drove the Willys into two parked cars. Cecil thought that the time required to get it repaired would ruin any plans I had made for further dates, and he worried that therefore I might feel badly about Marjorie “which is the only thing I worry about.” Certainly, the image of Marjorie as an incompetent did not make me more likely to obey or to humor her.

My father insisted on truthfulness as well as punctuality, as he determined it, and he punished

7. CSF-FP 13 January 1946

1138
even the suspicion of being mistaken. On one occasion I told him that I had done some task or other, but he thought otherwise. “I went for him like hell, lectured him on the nuisance of having a liar in the house and so on, and imposed a pretty stiff punishment. He broke down with some real tears and genuine distress. His defence was that he thought he had done the things he had told me he had done—and which I knew he had not—and it almost seems sincere. In that case there is the possibility that he was lying through carelessness and not to save his skin, but that’s just as bad as the other thing.”

Frances must have questioned Cecil’s reasoning, for the next week he repeated his reasons. “I was quite right about John, dear—he tried to lie to me, and I dealt with him, and there are no hard feelings at all on either side. I don’t think he’ll try again. Not because I punished him but because he was impressed by what I thought about the anti-social nature of the crime. There’s absolutely noth-

8. CSF-FP 9 June 1945
ing to worry about—lying’s foreign to his nature, but he drifted into this muddle.”

Later in the year Cecil described another punishment to Frances. “The little devils only had half an hour ... and managed to work up a full quarrel in that time. They are now writing out impositions. My brutal system is never to ask who is to blame when they quarrel but to punish them both evenly.”

Writing at home for a living has its advantages; in theory one can stay home in peace and quiet when others have their holidays. That is, unless one has family members with normal schedules. In January, 1946, Cecil complained that when George and I had returned from a Christmas spent skiing with Kitty “they have been clinging to me in a way that began to worry me, ever since they got back from the snow, leaving me no time to myself at all.”

9. CSF-FP 15 June 1945
10. CSF-FP 3 December 1945
11. CSF-FP 5 January 1946
February, 1946, Cecil complained about being forced to pay attention to public holidays. “This damn public holiday is just hell. I don’t know why on earth Uncle Abe wanted to have a birthday at all. The kids are crawling all over the house in the damnedest way until I hate the sight of them. The next week will be Washington I suppose. Your damned presidents choose the damndest days to be born in.”

During these events I was progressing through the tenth and eleventh grades of Berkeley High School. I recognized Berkeley’s mix of students with its vocational, business, and college preparatory tracks. Both socially and intellectually I was a college preparatory student. I showed strong ability in subjects like geometry and physics in which my physical visualization of the subject matter and ability to make quick computations made these the easiest subjects of all. In English and history I was

12. CSF-FP 12 February 1946
better than average, but not at the top. Unfortunately, my ability to write convincing essays in my own style hindered my English grades, rather than helped them. Furthermore, because both of these were required subjects, the students in these courses were an average mix from dull to bright, instead of the self-selected bright students in the science classes. Therefore the English and history classes were not challenging.

In English class I wrote a story or an essay every week, and never succeeded in getting better than a grudging B-, mostly Cs and Ds. I wrote about what I liked and thought I understood. One story recounted the thoughts of the driver of a New York subway train as he made his daily travel through the system. True, in these essays there were blue pencilled grammar errors, mostly in punctuation, which I brought home to ask for Father’s opinion. He was as baffled as I was, wondering why the teacher thought that these were errors, and said that he wouldn’t do differently himself. Well, I didn’t feel brave enough to tell my teacher that I had consulted
an author who sold 50,000 copies, and I thought that his opinion of correct writing was preferable to that of a teacher who couldn’t sell ten inches to the local Gas Jet. And Father, of course, would not help me out of this quandary by going to see the teacher. He never did. (Even in the dumbbell mathematics business, when the school first demurred on the grounds that if I passed algebra I would have no need for dumbbell math, he pressured Mother into going down to force his instructions on my advisor.) As well, I may have felt that my teacher did not know that C. S. Forester was my father, and I preferred it that way. So I just stuck to my own guns and said that the way I had written it explained what I had meant, and to do it in her way made the words say something different. That line of reasoning didn’t work.

Only years later did I hear that that teacher believed that my self-confidence was based upon plagiarizing previously published work. It was not until I was reminiscing after college with an old school friend that I heard that that teacher had been
reading my work to her other sections in an attempt to find out whether any other student recognized the source.

In languages, both foreign and ancient, I was a hopeless duffer, because these were based entirely on memory, which I never trained because I worked all other subjects by understanding their basic principles.

I gravitated toward the physical sciences, deciding to become a physicist. In Berkeley this was not an unusual objective, for after all, E. O. Lawrence was just along the hilltop with his massive cyclotron (whose half-finished magnetic structure I had scrambled over with curiosity before the secrecy fence went up). Physicists, now that the Manhattan Project was over, were expected to return to university laboratories, which suited me too, for by far the most interesting of the people I met were the faculty of the University of California. The businessmen I knew were bridge-playing clods, the artists (few in number) were full of impractical theories that my father derided, and the manual workers were too
intellectually limited to be interesting. I was not an intellectual snob, because I didn’t put myself on top, but I had the very definite opinion, reflecting my father’s, you will note, that those people who really mattered thought as I did.

I had a fairly active social and romantic life as well. Cecil always had two cars in the family, because he couldn’t leave the house by any other means and needed a reliable car always on hand. Also, I did a considerable amount of the household driving, including participating in teaching driving to housekeepers. (That was nerve-wracking.) So I had good access to a car without having to plead. This was toward the end of the big band era and before carpets got nailed to the floor. We had big dances with bands in hired halls, but if a group wanted a less formal dance all they had to do was use somebody’s house, push the furniture into a back room, roll up the carpets, and start the phonograph. I dated a succession of nice girls, taking them to dances, sailing at Aquatic Park, and swimming at local beaches. As well, we indulged in the usual
amount of romantic love and necking.

Ever since my early years in Berkeley I had attended a social dance club organized by women at the top of Berkeley’s society. I enjoyed the dances for years, but the time came when I had new friends, particularly girls, who did not belong to the dance club. I told my father in the spring of 1946 that I had decided to drop my membership. He objected and described his objections to Frances. “I have just emerged from a heart to heart talk with John on the subject of women strictly as regards their social aspects–John is trying to drop out of the dance group he has belonged to for four years, because it now has not all the social cachet that the young bastard desires. The woman who runs it is known as the most dangerous woman in Berkeley, and I told him I wouldn’t offend her for a pension, but he’s willing to run the risk.”¹³ As in so many other things, Cecil’s cynicism misled him. I desired to drop the dance club because few of my friends belonged; I did not

¹³. CSF-FP 20 March 1946

1146
give a damn about social cachet.

I had perhaps more than the usual number of social failures, in which I was teased for not having acquired all the knowledge of high-school society that some of the others had. I was certainly somewhat of an intellectual, and probably somewhat of a nerd, and in one respect I lived in a world of my own. I had worn glasses since I was seven, and had had to have the lenses changed from time to time. At this time my eyes had changed far more than anybody recognized. When assigned to playing baseball I was relegated to right field. There, I could not see the ball pitched and hit. I could hear the crack of bat on ball, but until the ball had traveled half-way to me, if that was the way it came, I could not see it. At the dance group, if I chose to dance with Anne who wore a pink dress, I walked across the hall toward the girl in the pink dress. If there were two girls in dresses of a similar color, I had only a fifty percent chance of walking up to the correct one. By the time I was close enough to recognize my error it was too late to turn away. In the same way I did not
recognize people in the hallways or on the street until I was quite close to them. Therefore, I lived in a world of ideas rather than of people.

However, I was also a member of the swim team whose body looked good at the pool and on the swimmers’ float, places where long-range vision was least necessary. That was where I had my social successes.

With this social handicap, and others of course, I was brusque with people. Not being in the habit of recognizing the people who were approaching me, I failed to greet them properly. That habit persisted even when I knew perfectly well who they were, such as meeting Mrs. Manus in the morning. And of course, I really did not like being bossed by someone so incompetent. So my father lectured me and punished me for being rude to the staff. One week my father wrote to Frances that I now said “Good morning” to Mrs. Manus, and a fortnight later he had to punish me for not doing so. “Just finished a long conversation about life and work and jobs and marriage and so forth with John, who is languishing
in confinement to barracks for two weeks—a fearfully severe sentence imposed because of rudeness to the women." ¹⁴ Two weeks later Cecil tried another treatment. “Then in the evening there was another set-to with John. He’s thoughtlessly rude to women—this time it was Marjorie—and as punishment hadn’t done any good I went for him with my tongue in my most blistering fashion and reduced him to tears and I think I did some good. Damn the blasted kids.” ¹⁵

George had the opposite problem, of being suspected of being polite merely because that got him what he wanted. George “is extremely nice to me all the time, but I wish I could be quite certain that it was out of goodness of heart and not out of policy.” ¹⁶

I was looking forward to continuing along the course that I anticipated. We lived in Berkeley, I

¹⁴. CSF-FP 4 April and 21 April 1946
¹⁵. CSF-FP 30 April 1946
¹⁶. CSF-FP 4 April 1946
would graduate from Berkeley High in due time, I would be accepted by the University of California at Berkeley, where I would study physics at an institution that was world famous in that field.

In the spring of 1946 Cecil thought of four short-story plots about American teenagers. The titles of two were *David* and *The Convertible*. Cecil asked George and me to review them, and we provided enough “expert advice” to cause him considerable rewriting. Cecil wrote to Frances that “John is quite worried about these stories; he feels a personal responsibility about them, and apparently he thinks I don’t know what goes on among sixteen year olds and he’s torn between a conscientious desire for realism and a dread in case I should really be realistic.” 17 “I talked with John about them, and relieved his mind a little about his responsibility in the matter. I even induced him to believe that I had once been sixteen and had had a little to do with females

17. CSF-FP 7 May 1946

1150
at that mature age.”

Obviously, my father had once been sixteen, but in a different nation and two world wars and a great depression ago, to say nothing of intervening technological changes. His stories told me that he was very ignorant of the way I and my friends thought and how we arranged our social affairs. I was worried that his stories showed his ignorance and in doing so presented either foolish fecklessness or nasty depravity. Since that is how he described his sons to Frances, and indeed how he remembered his own life, my evaluation was not far from the mark.

As I was well on the way to completing the eleventh grade, in May, 1946, my father called me in for a talk about college. By present standards, this is a little late, but at this time neither faculty nor parents had yet realized the enormous pressure of applicants which would result as returning veterans took

18. CSF-FP 10 May 1946

1151
advantage of the G. I. Bill.

“John, I want you to go to a first-rate Eastern university of good reputation, Harvard for choice. In order to be able to enter you must go to a college preparatory school with a headmaster whose recommendation Harvard trusts. Mr. Brandt’s son (Erd Brandt was my father’s editor at Little, Brown & Co.) went to St. George’s School in Newport, Rhode Island, and has turned out well. Therefore, you will be interviewed in two day’s time by the headmaster of the school, who will decide whether or not to accept you. This headmaster is unusual; he is an engineering graduate of MIT.”

I was surprised because that was the first I had ever heard of that plan. However, the prospect did not appall me in the least. I knew that Harvard was, by and large, the best university in America. In physics it should be as good as Berkeley and, in the other subjects which I knew vaguely one also had to take, Harvard should be lots better. Besides, I had been to private schools in England, wearing a special school uniform and getting a better education
than the public school boys. (Here, I am using private and public in the American sense.) Upon hearing this plan, I thought that attending the most stimulating university in America would be both intellectually beneficial and enjoyable. All I had to do was to catch up to its level from the abysmally low academic status of Berkeley High.

The interview was held in the counselor’s office at Berkeley High and took perhaps half an hour. Mr. Eccles, the headmaster, did not tell me whether or not I was accepted. After he and my father had had a further discussion, possibly by mail, my father told me that I was accepted, so long as I didn’t do any worse in my grades than I had done so far. My father added a few more cautions. “St. George’s, you understand, is run on English lines and is far ahead of Berkeley High School. There will be many things different from here. For one thing, you will find that you really have to work to keep up. I know you nominally have only one more year to go, but you will not be able to complete St. George’s in that time. It will take you two years,
and if you don’t work hard it will take you three.”

This did not surprise me. I had arrived in Berkeley with five years of English schooling and did not have to learn anything new (except California history) for two and a half years. The interval had, from an educational standpoint, been completely wasted, and that delay and more would now have to be caught up. Furthermore, the evidence showed that English private schooling progressed at 150% of the speed of American public schooling. If continued, that would have made the difference even greater by this time, perhaps five years. When one considers the common evaluation that Oxford and Cambridge are far more like American graduate schools than American undergraduate colleges, that did not sound unreasonable.

People who know this story have accused me of being impossibly naive and told me that I should never have believed it. One excuse is that conditions were different, and that is a weak excuse. In those days, many fewer attended universities, and we had just come through all the confusion of the war. Com-
parison of the schools and universities in different nations and in different classes of this nation was not as diffused and as easily available as it is today. More than that, however, I was being told what I took to be facts that matched what I already knew about schooling, and I was being told them by a man who was universally admired for the breadth of his knowledge and was held to be a model of eighteenth-century enlightenment, reason, and judgment. Besides, the plan was sprung on me at very nearly the end of the school year, when I had little time to develop questions about it from my friends or their parents. Should I look up Professor Cook of the zoology department, father of my friends Waldo and Stanton, or Professor Latimer, dean of chemistry, whose daughter Eleanor I had dated, and ask either of them whether or not a prep-school education was required to get into Harvard, and whether or not it would really take me two or three years to get myself up to the standard for acceptance? I could have done so, but of course I didn’t because I didn’t even think of doing it. I believed what I had been
told and I had no suspicion that the plan had been conceived to suit my father’s selfish convenience.

George was three and a half years younger, and was accepted in the Second Form of St. George’s, equivalent to eighth grade. This was both the lowest grade in St. George’s and the grade he would have entered had he remained in Berkeley. For him, not yet really interested in girls, although perhaps less ready to leave home, the prospect of a normal career at St. George’s presented an easier decision and more pleasant prospects. He seemed to look forward to Saint George’s as much as I did, or even considerably more.

With these arrangements made, Cecil looked on himself with approbation and wrote with satisfaction to Kathleen. “My leaving [for England] seems to me to be the end of a very odd and interesting bit of my life. Since the divorce, I have been working steadily to make the boys realize that they still had a home and that I would stand by them, and I wanted to dispel any fears they might have that they had lost something by the divorce — I didn’t want to pack
them off to school at once in case they might form the idea that there was a link between the two things, although I suppose if we have stayed together they would have gone a year ago. [Later, he told me, “You went to St. George’s as soon after the war as possible. Travel was too difficult before then.”] It’s one of the few jobs I’ve done really conscientiously and it’s a bit queer to say, ‘Lord, now may thy servant depart in peace.’ Other people might have done it better, but I did it as well as I could without ever slacking off and I have the feeling now that they haven’t suffered as much from what might have been a bit of a trial to them as could have been the case. Of course, the job is by no means finished. I want to welcome them here once or twice from school so as to give them the chance of knowing that they still have a home, and I’ve got to see them through to manhood, but that’s not the same sort of job as the one just completed. This is really the end of a queer sort of intermediate stage. It’s been a bit like the train journeys from New York to here during the war — I was leaving troubles behind in
New York and I was on my way to trouble in Berkeley, but for the moment, I could shut the world away from me and live in the present. There was the same impermanent happiness I told you about once before. Even the fact that I didn’t know how long these damned legs of mine would hold out contributed to it. Now it’s all over and I start something new and utterly different. I think you were lucky in plunging straightaway into a new life; now you are settled down and permanent and have gone through the initiation troubles, if there were any, while I have still all that to go through, but then on the other hand I have had the last two years, which is a bit more satisfactory than finishing Hornblower and that sort of thing. I wish it wasn’t my habit to make plans for the future — you can’t think how lucky you are to be content with immediacy.

“Sorry, but this must be a most unsatisfactory letter to you, no point to it, like a girl who won’t come however hard you work on her. All I started out to say was in the first paragraph, and then my typewriter ran away with me. Please forgive me. I’ll
give my love to Flo [Kathleen’ mother, in England], if I see her.”

As soon as summer vacation started George and I stayed with our mother. Neil and Mother had now married, and operated a milk testing service for the dairy farmers around Santa Cruz, on the coast south of San Francisco. Mother and Neil owned a trailer parked in a trailer park. They had three guests: George and me, and Shawen Lynch, Neil’s daughter by his first marriage, who was a year older than me and preparing to attend Smith College in the fall. George and Shawen got on very well together, specializing in riding the rides at the boardwalk as long as their money lasted.

In July Mother took us boys on the Sierra Club High Trip for two weeks. This is a hiking trip for about 100 people, fully staffed, with the communal cooking equipment, food, and most of the personal gear carried on mules. We had our prewar English lightweight tents with us, items unknown to Ameri-

19. CSF-K, 491, early June 1946
cans at that date, and that summer it rained for twenty-one out of the twenty-eight days of the High Trip. We were the only family reasonably dry. Because several of the staff became ill, and one was scalded in a cooking accident, I was asked to help for an additional two weeks, so I stayed on while George and Mother returned home as scheduled.

I returned from the mountains about the same time my father returned from England, and shortly afterwards he took George, Marjorie Manus, and me to Fallen Leaf Lake Lodge (now owned by Stanford University) for two weeks. Fallen Leaf Lake, very close to Lake Tahoe, is three miles by two, circled by private homes, some reached by road and others only by water. Some of the homes are small cabins, others are small mansions. For the two weeks there Cecil lived his quiet California life, writing in the mornings on the veranda of his cabin, gently rowing a rented skiff or paddling with me in the double folding kayak in the afternoons, while George and I joined our respective age groups in resort activities. I became quite friendly with Jaque-
line, a girl from San Francisco.

Once we returned to our respective homes, Jaqueline and I dated frequently until I had to leave for St. George’s. I considered this time my last shore leave before starting on a long voyage. I had pretty general use of the Willys and I could drive to and around San Francisco at will.

However, I did have the task of being the licensed driver when Mrs. Manus practiced the driving which she was supposed to have learned. That is when she ran into the guard rail on a turn. Marjorie’s accident put a crimp into my transportation, for the following night, while in San Francisco with Jaqueline, I was stopped by a policeman and ordered to get that headlamp fixed immediately. He turned down my negotiation to have the requirement delayed until I had left town, when the repair could be done when I wouldn’t be using the car.

Then it was time for my father to take us to St. George’s. I remember that trip well, for it was the only trip, except for that hurried flight by rail from Berlin on the eve of war, on which my father took
me. Shawen Lynch traveled with us. With an overload of baggage we went by train on a route new to us, on the Exposition Flyer along the Western Pacific, the Denver Rio Grande Western, and the Burlington Route to Chicago, and then the familiar New York Central to New York. The schedule was designed to give the travellers daylight views of the Sierra Nevada Mountains and of Royal Gorge in the Rockies. The club car had an open observation platform, the last I one I ever rode, and I spent hours looking ahead along the line of coaches, reading the signals, watching the American scene change from wilderness to well established civilization to the first symptoms of urban decay. A year later, my reading of Thomas Wolfe’s anthems to railroad civilization brought back flooding memories of my trips across America, granting a nostalgic immediacy to his works perhaps greater than they deserved, but certainly no greater than he intended. I am one of the youngest of those for whom the swaying, green-curtained corridors of the tourist Pullman, the nighttime flashing past of station lamps, and the harsh
bark of locomotive exhaust echoing along a railroad cutting are the symbols of America, more real than any ensign or anthem.

In New York, my father had to outfit us with a prep-school wardrobe. Not only overcoats heavy enough for Eastern winters, but suits enough for wearing every day, more white shirts and ties than we had ever needed before. Even today, when I have to go to the East Coast in winter, I take that overcoat; that’s about the only use it gets. Just as this shopping was complete, St. George’s notified us that I, because I was entering the Sixth Form (12th grade), should arrive two days early. I left the Gramercy Park Hotel, taxied to Grand Central Station, took the train to Providence and a bus to Newport.

I left in good spirits, but my father thought that I would become unhappy at St. George’s. As he wrote to Kathleen, “I expect John will be quite unhappy during his year at St. George’s, but I am quite sure that it will be worth it to him; George I daresay will be unhappy for a day or two, but he’ll soon enjoy himself enormously — these will be
happy days for him, I think, as he’s naturally gregarious. Of course, none of these arrangements is immutable; if it doesn’t work and the kids are genuinely unhappy, I can do something about it.”

Consider this letter. He expects me to be unhappy, but for my own good. How much unhappiness is conducive to good learning, or to a good education, or to getting into a good university? Unhappiness can easily upset formal education; with luck, it may provide useful psychological toughness much later on, but that is not much use when seeking admission to a very selective university. He says that the arrangement of Eastern schooling may be changed if George and I are unhappy about it. What changes could be made? None that year, obviously; next year, for me, perhaps a different university; for George, a different prep school. Finally, he discloses that he expects me to spend only one year at St. George’s. That is, he believes that I am properly prepared for St. George’s and the “English system”

20. CSF-K, 498, 9 September 1945
on which it is run, despite having told me that it would take me two years, or three if I did not work hard, to reach graduation standard and be ready for Harvard.

However, he made one nice effort. Knowing that I did a lot of cycling, he got special permission for me to have a bicycle at school and permission to ride it in the rural parts of Rhode Island. The first postwar bicycles were becoming available, and at Cecil’s request Frances Phillips bought Raleigh-built postman-model Humber bicycles for George and me at Macy’s in New York and had them shipped to St. George’s in November.  

By September 17, Cecil had taken George to St. George’s and visited with me there.

“My dear,

“I took George to school yesterday; John had gone there two days earlier. George had been a little worked up and excited for a day or two, but he rose to the occasion excellently, and when I left him was,

21. CSF-FP 2 November, 12 November, 1946

1165
as far as I could see, quite pleased with the prospect of the future. I saw John, who introduced me to several of his fellow sixth-formers with whom he had already struck up an acquaintance. He seemed perfectly at home and master of himself, and eager to make a career. In fact, I was quite the saddest of the three of us as I said goodbye to the last of my preceding life and turned back to the new one.

“But I was more favorably impressed than ever with the school. The surroundings are perfectly charming, and from what I saw of the boys there the atmosphere is good. I talked again to several of the staff, and once more got the impression of a group of cultured gentlemen; the attitude of the big boys toward the small ones seemed much more kindly than in my young days, which I suppose is a great advance.

“I have a very strong feeling that the boys are going to be extremely happy at St. George’s and that when they are grown up they will look back there with a lot of affection. All the same, (although I have said nothing to them about this) if at the end of a
year they are really unhappy in the East, I am perfectly prepared to call the whole thing off, and cut our losses and make other plans for them. …

“We had a good week painting New York a delicate shade of pink. They took to the city like a duck to water in a fashion that quite astonished me. After a day or two George took a map in his pocket and made his way by subway to Coney Island, which is a thing I wouldn’t like to do myself even if I could walk. At the end of a week they knew Broadway and 42nd Street and the Village as well as I do, pretty nearly. But don’t be afraid of their becoming sophisticated. They are nicely self-assured. The West has such a strong hold on them that it will be interesting to see if they become Easterners. I doubt it myself.” 22

As Cecil left his sons at St. George’s that question began to be settled. George entered the lowest grade in the school, his class composed of boys all his own age, all equally ignorant of preparatory-

22. CSF-K, 499, 18 September 1946
school life, and each of them with only the vaguest sense of the purpose of attending such a school. I, on the other hand, entered the senior class composed of boys who had been friends for the preceding four years, who were now in charge of running the students’ part of school administration, and whose organization to accomplish this had been set up at the end of the preceding school year. Of course, several other boys also entered the Sixth Form from other schools. Of the five other new boys, four were repeating their Sixth Form year, three because they had failed to enter college from other preparatory schools (they were unkindly thought to be football scholars), and one, Bill Plissner, because he had graduated so young from a country day preparatory school that Harvard felt he should have another year of seasoning before they enrolled him.

The school’s reconstruction program served to reinforce the distinction between old and new Sixth Form boys, for the Sixth Form House was only large enough for the old boys, who had already chosen
their rooms and roommates. Pending completion of the rebuilding of a dormitory in the main building, the new Sixth Formers were housed in the infirmary at the far end of the main row of buildings. By the merest fluke in the sequence of arrival, I was roomed with Bill Plissner, who alone of the new Sixth Formers was properly on course for a first rate university.

By the time that my father brought George to school before classwork started, I had had two days to meet the other Sixth Form boys and to learn my way around the geography of the school. Of course, its social organization was still a complete blank to me. Nothing had yet occurred to dampen my original determination to succeed no matter how many years it might take me. The fact that those boys I most easily met were all repeating the Sixth Form, all but one of them because the study program was too difficult for them, and the other one because my chosen goal, Harvard, had decided that it was too hard for one so young, served only to reinforce both my determination and my impression that Eastern
schooling was several years more advanced than Western schooling. Certainly, in putting me into the Sixth, the school had kept me in my age group, but I had seen the mistakes of that theory in the other direction when I had arrived from England. However, if the school wanted to play that game, I would play my part in a way they didn’t expect. If I were supposed to play the part of a Sixth Former I would actually be a Sixth Former. I would complete the work and try to graduate in one year, no matter what it took. Of course, that determination had to be kept secret, or I would be put back in the Fifth where I belonged. Bill Plissner, whom I met again in our sixties, has told me of the rather strange reserve that they observed in me when I first arrived. With a secret like that, how could I help myself?

Well, I made the usual social mistakes that meant nothing at the time. I was reprimanded by the Senior Prefect (i.e., the senior student officer of the school) for not driving away or reprimanding some younger boys who were crossing a particular patch of grass, which, unknown to me, was named
Sixth Form Terrace. I replied, and that alone might have been accepted, that I did not know that that area was sacred to the Sixth Form, but I added, in a totally unacceptable way, with the egalitarianism of the West and a tone reminiscent of Thorstein Veblen, that, “Since I had not been berated as a young boy for trespassing on that patch of grass I had no antagonism to take out on younger boys who did it.”

Before I had gone to St. George’s, I had been considering a layout of an independent suspension system for a rear-engine, rear-drive car, and I continued with this project while I was there. Although I knew nothing of them at this time, this was a kind of cross between a Porsche and the Alfa Romeo P-3. I thought that this design would alleviate certain difficulties I had read of in such designs, and thought that this would track properly over bumps and when the car rolled on turns, but I was concerned about unsprung mass, spring rates, the degree of damping required, the effect of engine torque, and determin-
ing the proper pivot points for the linkage. Knowing that Mr. Eccles was an engineering graduate of MIT, I sought an interview with him to discuss this. His office was the size of a living room, probably used for staff meetings as well. His discussion centered exclusively on the mechanical efficiency of the gearing, losses which I had already recognized and was ready to accept. I was disgusted. This man, an engineering graduate of MIT, and he knows less about automotive engineering than I do today? What is he, one of those incompetents who go into teaching because they can’t do the real work? When the interview closed, I turned to go. I had almost reached his office door, fifteen feet away, when his voice startled me. “Forester, what is that you are wearing?”

I was wearing grey flannel trousers, white shirt and tie. I was without a tie clip, so to keep my tie from flopping I had tucked it into my shirt front, as was quite common in the Army at the time. In the September heat, most boys were wearing wrinkled seersucker jackets, a garment I had never seen
before or even heard of, which I didn’t possess, and which, if asked, I would not have called a coat at all. Not seeing the full length of my tie had apparently escaped Mr. Eccles’s notice for the ten minutes I was talking to him.

“Forester, you are required to wear a coat at all times except during athletic periods,” and he assigned me demerits or some such penalty. Since Alleyn’s in England, where all boys wore identical uniforms, I had never been to a school with clothing regulations. I had not realized that the wrinkled seersucker jackets were worn to satisfy a regulation of whose existence nobody had thought necessary to inform me in a formal way. Here I was, being punished for not wearing clothing I did not possess, to satisfy a rule I had never heard of, by an incompetent who knew less engineering than I did.

“Since it has taken you ten minutes to discover the difference, sir, it couldn’t be all that important, could it?”

Then I was in real trouble. Certainly I had a chip on my shoulder. I was from the egalitarian
West where a man was a man, come to visit these effete Easterners. The fact that I hadn’t the clothes and social knowledge to ape their sophisticated manners, illogically but understandably, only made the matter more painful. To have his opinions an ill-assorted mixture of Jack London, Mark Twain, and Thorstein Veblen stands a young man very ill.

These faux pas I should have surmounted with time, had not other matters misdirected me. The first hint of these was the realization that I was expected as a matter of course to graduate in June. The school staff knew that I would be ready unless I was unexpectedly much more poorly prepared than my Berkeley record showed. Nobody explicitly told me so — after all, they had no idea that I had ever thought otherwise. Any joy I might have had in such a discovery, or announcement if it had come to that, was preempted by the realization that I would graduate in June because St. George’s academic standards were no higher than those of the college preparatory students at Berkeley High School.

I first thought about this in chemistry, where I
was placed among the unfamiliar Fifth Form boys. Berkeley taught physics before chemistry, while St. George’s used the reverse sequence. Having had physics, I was placed in chemistry with the Fifth Formers. For my four semesters in Berkeley I had had three science teachers, one extremely good one in biology and physics (and both sensible and courageous in sex education, when my girl and I asked his advice), one adequate and interesting in biology, and one poor and uninteresting in physics. By those standards, the St. George’s teacher was mediocre. Demonstrating the proper sequence in diluting sulfuric acid, required because of the danger that the solution might boil up and spatter, he performed the dilution in the handiest container, held up at shoulder height while we crowded around the demonstration sink to observe. The mixture heats up either way, but it doesn’t spatter if you add acid to water, and does if you add water to acid. That handiest container was a thick-walled Borden’s Cheese glass. As the solution heated up, the bottom fell out of the glass, spattering acid upon us. I had been standing
in the front row to learn best. I rinsed drops of acid from the lenses of my eyeglasses, and my jacket later developed so many holes that it had to be thrown away. The moment that the bottom dropped out of the glass, long before I considered what might have happened had I not been wearing eyeglasses, I knew what had happened. I realized the ignorance of the scientist who selected for resistance to thermal shock a thick-walled cheese glass in preference to a thin-walled Pyrex beaker.

This teacher required us to write copious lecture notes, a procedure I had never found necessary in order to learn any subject. Believing that I knew best about how I learned best, I did not take notes. By the time he discovered my negligence, so much of the course had passed that he informed me he couldn’t give me an honor grade even if I started taking notes at that time. He told me that I would have to copy somebody else’s notes to produce a full notebook. That’s plagiarism, and besides, somebody else’s notes might have errors. I wouldn’t do it. I told him that I would earn such high grades in his exam-
inations he wouldn’t be able to flunk me for not hav-
ing notes.

In contrast to my busy life in Berkeley, and even more markedly to my anticipations, there was little to do at St. George’s. The schoolwork was no more demanding that at Berkeley, though for the boys of lesser intelligence (who at Berkeley would not have been college preparatory students) it was a full load. There was no opportunity, no tools, no place to work, no supply of scrap materials, to do the kinds of projects that had occupied so much of my time in Berkeley. Team sports, though derided by the most brilliant of the Sixth Formers, compulso-
riously filled many student’s remaining time. I hadn’t played soccer since I had been nine years old in England, and I had never played tackle football. My sports were swimming, which was an indoor winter sport in the East, and cycling, skiing, and mountaineering, which were not school sports at all. The brilli-
ant students who derided sports successfully resisted all coercion and kept their afternoons
largely for their own activities. To put this time to effective use they had developed the most efficient ways of wasting time I had yet met. They would type a line or two, stop to rummage in their papers, type a word, go out for a coke, come back to add a footnote, then reread aloud what they had written. This didn’t agree at all with my attitude of: “Let’s get on with this job and move on to the next.” They did better work than I did, but not in proportion to the time spent. I should have spent more time rather than being so efficient.

I found it possible, after a fashion, to sleep from seven in the evening to seven in the morning, out of sheer boredom. Later, because my Latin was as bad as it always had been, I was condemned to study hall every afternoon and evening and life became living Hell. I found things to do at my desk in study hall. I started a program of boat design. Performing the calculations disturbed no one, but laying out her hull lines was another matter. I worked at my desk for most of one week with my drafting board and instruments spread out before
me. Then one evening the study hall master, that night an assistant master of short build and uncertain temper, asked me what subject required this work. By this time the lines were noticeable as a boat and not as geometry, but I had never intended to conceal anything. When he found out it was for my own program of education and not St. George’s he flushed in anger, so surprised that he had to tramp back up to the raised desk at the end of the hall and wait ten minutes before coming back to discipline me.

The other enormous discomfort at St. George’s was being isolated from girls. Before experiencing it, I had no idea of how painful that would be. It hurt every day, and the boredom of the place only made the pain worse and harder to bear. I kept up a correspondence with Jaqueline, whom I had met at Fallen Leaf Lake the previous summer; that was all I had. Later on, as I heard the tales that a few of the other boys told about their holidays, I despised them as having the disgusting morals of sailors. I would never have treated a girl that way. Of course
they did. When one weekend ashore every three months is all that one has, one grabs for everything one can reach.

Naturally, I came to the conclusion that attendance at St. George’s, for which I could see no benefits I wouldn’t have received at Berkeley High, was therefore not worth any price, particularly the price I was paying of extreme boredom, social persecution (mostly my own fault, but then I hadn’t been persecuted at Berkeley), and the enforced sexual deprivation. (I didn’t even have the privacy to masturbate in the way to which I had become accustomed.) I derided St. George’s as part of a system that, using money to maintain social prestige unjustified by intellect, not only took third-rate boys and crammed them into second-rate colleges but attempted, and failed, to cram fourth-rate boys into third-rate colleges. The first-rate boys, I averred, could get into first-rate colleges without its help, and the third-rate boys would be better as good machinists than poor teachers.

It is only by a miracle that I completed that one
year by graduating. I broke many disciplinary rules. Waking, restless, in the middle of the night because my body was unable to sleep as many hours as would fill the empty hours, I sneaked out at midnight to ride my bicycle on lonely rides around Rhode Island and among the lonely lights of doubly verboten Newport. On other nights I descended and reascended the cliffs below the school, with the roar of the breakers dark below me and the sting and taste of their salt spray about me. Dangerous, but a life without challenge meant nothing to me. I thought that I was never detected — not that I gave a damn about discovery — until, much later, I heard that several masters knew about the bicycle rides. They were persuaded not to do anything about this by one master who convinced them of the truth of the matter; I needed lonely solace and exercise and I was not visiting the night life of Newport.

However, I came within an ace of getting expelled, relished the opportunity, and was disappointed when it disappeared. For meals, each boy was assigned to a particular table. Each individual
Sixth Former sat sometimes at the head table with the headmaster and visiting guests, and at other times was assigned to be table monitor for a table full of boys from lower forms. The faculty, their families, and staff members also could eat in the dining hall, and were each assigned to particular tables for those times. The table to which I was assigned as table monitor was also that used by Norris Hoyt, the finest teacher I have ever known (more about him later) and Sibley, the worst of the staff, each of whom might also bring his wife. Mrs. Hoyt was a charming and beautiful lady, while Mrs. Sibley looked as though she had been made by a god who had seen the design specifications for a woman but had never before seen one in the flesh. Sibley handled alumni affairs, and talked much about the olden days. His lecture at morning assembly on Columbus Day was pitiful (forty years later, Bill Plissner remembered it as painfully as I did), all about the courage of the men of olden times crossing the ocean with their cranky ships, as if those ships were not what they were used to, and as if
explorers usually were given first-class equipment.

Never having been told the duties of a table monitor, I followed what I considered standard social rules for seating at dinner. If both Hoyt and Sibley appeared, Hoyt sat at the head of the table and Sibley at the foot, in accordance with their social precedence, and I was free to sit anywhere. Each wife, if present, sat next to her husband. If only one of the faculty members arrived, he sat at the head and I sat at the foot. If neither arrived, I sat at the head of the table. Naturally, before people had arrived and started to sit down, I would remain near the head of the table, ready to take over if no faculty arrived, or to sit near Norris Hoyt if both arrived. If only one arrived, I moved to the foot of the table to supervise that end. Certainly, that kept me away from the Sibleys, which did not displease me at all, but it also fit almost perfectly the proper rules of society. The only thing that I did not do was to choose to sit with the Sibleys when the Hoyts were present.

One lunch time, in the long spring term when I
was feeling particularly lonely and desperate, the Sibleys arrived but no Hoyts. I moved to the foot of the table as usual. At the close of lunch, Mr. Sibley commanded me, “Forester, stay behind. I want to talk to you.”

When the dining hall was empty of all but we two, Sibley berated me. “You have been most impolite. You have been rude to my wife by avoiding her at table.” Oh, well, I thought, I have also been following my duty, and he can’t fault me for that. He continued, “If this had been the olden days we would have had our swords with us and gone around the nearest corner to have it out.”

My God, I thought. How wonderful! I can be expelled honorably for fighting a duel after being challenged by a staff member. Nobody could call that a dishonorable expulsion. I didn’t like contact sports and I had never boxed, but I was willing to run any risk to achieve an honorable expulsion that was offered to me. So I replied to his challenge. He was taller than me, so I looked up and answered, “Well, sir, we have our fists.”
Sibley stared at me for a long moment. I might be expelled, but he would never again have a job in academe, not even the crummy job he then had. He turned away from me. I stamped off to my dormitory, angry and cursing that he had offered me this wonderful, dangerous chance and then had been too much of a coward to carry it through.

This highly biased account is as I saw it at the time. Through all of this, for twenty years, I did not detect my father’s hand in creating the situation. I thought at first that society was at fault, that the conflict between West Coast and East Coast was the root of it. Because I overrated the West and underrated the East, in English class I gave a rave review to De Voto’s then latest and mediocre novel, *Mountain Time*, set in the American West. Then later, I realized that I was at fault, but did not realize how complicated the situation was. Even up to my sixties, even as a married man with a job, children, advanced degrees, and low professorial rank obtained as a sideline to my full-time job, I have had recurrent dreams of having to leave my family and

1185
my job, with all the social and financial problems that such a change would entail, in order to return to St. George’s to complete the several years of work which, so my dreams tell me as my father had told me, were necessary to graduate. These dreams are not nightmares, please understand, for I no longer see St. George’s as oppressive. These dreams are simply the refusal of my emotions to recognize the fact that, despite my initial impression that I would have to be there two or three years to catch up from a defective education, I had actually graduated in one year and been accepted by first-class universities.

I was misled in other ways. The headmaster, Willet Eccles, was not an engineering graduate from MIT; the engineer was his brother, and how my father confused the two I don’t know. Willet Eccles had bachelor’s, master’s and doctor’s degrees from Columbia (perhaps some in chemistry, which he had taught at Phillips Andover). He can’t be blamed for not knowing about automotive design. The school had had a very bad time, and Eccles brought it back.
practically from the dead. He sought new students, perhaps controversial ones, and did well by them. One of the new Sixth Form boys who was derided as a football scholar was accepted at Princeton and finished his career in the U.S. State Department as an ambassador. Out of the 33 boys in my class, 20 entered Yale, Harvard, or Princeton, with the majority at Harvard. Like any strong personality, Eccles developed enemies as well as supporters, and finally had to leave, but the changes he wrought were vital. 

(Perhaps I merely came from the West too soon. Nowadays St. George’s is coed, the students wear jeans, they carry their own meal trays, and probably get excellent educations.)

To the complications caused by what I thought was snobbish mediocrity, St. George’s added the attraction of the finest teacher I have ever known, Norris Dresser Hoyt. As he told us, with bachelor’s, master’s and doctor’s degrees in English from Yale he was unqualified for teaching in a public school. He had also: been captain of the Yale swim team two years (when that was the premier swim team in the
U.S.); swum in the Olympics; was world record holder in the 150 meter backstroke; skippered a PT boat during the war, when he had also flown some military airplanes, unofficially and unlicensed; edited material for *Look*; sailed his own cruising sloop, which he paid for by free-lance industrial writing; married a pretty woman, and decorated their upstairs hallway with sketches, his own charcoal nudes of her. He had started out in metallurgy to join the family firm (Dresser woodworking tools) but had switched to English literature because his experiments kept exploding because he read novels while they cooked. That caused him to decide “To stop learning more and more about less and less,” the first time I had heard that phrase that particularly applies to particle physics. He taught several of us the first elements of photographic darkroom work to achieve artistic results. He had the first high-fidelity set we had ever heard, housed in a fine cabinet of his own design and construction. Some of his records were the first vinyl records, still 78 rpm, that astounded us with their clear sound and absence of
hiss and pop. On his set I first heard the Brandenburg Concertos and other pieces that aroused my pleasure in music. Perhaps as a result, Bill Plissner received permission for a second phonograph in our dorm, for playing classical music as opposed to the popular music preferred by the football boys.

Then there was the teaching for which Norris Hoyt had been hired. He had arrived at St. George’s when I had, with the promise that his teaching assignments would include one college-level English class for the Sixth Form. That is commonplace now, but it was a new idea then. It took him two weeks to test and select the students for this class, and I was among those selected. He ordered, and our parents paid for, boxes of paperback modern classics that were on his required reading list. There were some objections; somebody’s parents did not approve of Winesburg, Ohio, an objection at which we jeered, but the list stuck. We read and evaluated these as if we were professional literary critics.

We had to write frequently for Norris, and those who might write for our literary magazine, The
Dragon, were encouraged to write more. One of my stories was about medical euthanasia, a doctor putting out of his misery a man who had chosen to commit suicide by using a slow, painful poison, a subject that is still relevant today. Norris was a vigilant editor. He didn’t mind whether I wrote English or American, but each piece had to be consistent. If I started out in one style, any example of the other was marked down. I started to understand why I had had difficulties with teachers. I first learned from him that I could write. Before that, I had always been confused by the difference between what the teacher said and what my father said or the thought I wanted to convey. Norris Hoyt’s teaching, leadership, and example became extremely important to me, but amid the other agonies of my year at St. George’s it was just one more complication to a life I did not understand.

In 1998, Norris sent me a note regarding my short life of C. S. Forester that had appeared in The American Scholar, and which included an account of what Norris had taught me. After some praise for
the article, Norris wrote: “So thanks for the compliment; what I really taught was not English, but editing. Your gifts were your own, and probably born in you.”

For Thanksgiving vacation I visited with Bill Plissner’s family in New Rochelle, New York, while George visited with the Greely Curtis’s, friends of Frances, in Belmont, near Boston. George’s stay was a disaster. Cecil told me later that George had behaved in a most dissolute manner, getting drunk, coming home late, and so on. George, twenty years after, reported that although he had not got drunk, he had indeed shocked his hosts terribly, not only by his own behavior, which included normal holiday dating and partying, but by telling them of Cecil’s bedroom behavior and attitudes. “They were absolutely horrible people; more of the insipid nothings Cecil had for friends,” he said. They had criticized George’s behavior and asked, rhetorically, what his father would think of such behavior. George replied that his father was a selfish, lying, parsimonious, immoral old man.
At Christmas vacation, George and I had two weeks, time enough to come home to Berkeley. Come indeed we did — by train, half a week each way. Cecil stated that at Christmas time air schedules were too uncertain and flying might mean too much waiting around in airports. I accepted the reasoning as representing practical experience without deducing whose interests were best served. From my point of view a possible 12-hour wait for weather followed by a 12-hour flight was far preferable to a certain 70-hour train journey. From Cecil’s standpoint an arrival by air might involve a 12-hour uncertainty with a 3-hour round trip travel time to the San Francisco airport, while an arrival by train involved almost no uncertainty and a forty-minute round trip to the Berkeley station. My father knew that I considered that my vacation time was precious; what else could he expect under the circumstances? Besides, I had already written to him that I didn’t want to spend any of my time with my mother. 23

23. CSF-FP, 11 December 1946
always, he prevailed by persuading me that the train was better.

Despite having us come by train for his convenience, Cecil was still angered by delays, as he wrote to Frances. “But the boys aren’t here yet, and won’t be until tomorrow; I had a wire from Chicago, not very well expressed, saying that they wouldn’t arrive until then, owing to something mysterious having happened to their train — I strongly fancy that they missed the thing through wandering round the city. If that is so I want to tan their nasty little arses, although I suppose I won’t. It is interesting to discover that I would far rather they were very naughty than slightly silly. I’ll hear their explanation tomorrow; by that time they will have thought up a good one, doubtless.”

The truth was simple. The weather had delayed the train from New York to Chicago, missing the expected connection so that the through coach had to be attached to a later train.

24. CSF - FP, 21 December 1946

1193
standpoint, a plane would have been infinitely bet-
ter.

My father recognized that I was acutely unhappy. For Christmas, he had bought me *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, “It’s a most amusing book although it’s like Freud in the way it rides a promising hobby to death,”\(^\text{26}\) (not knowing that I had read that years earlier in the Keeler Avenue house). However, when he considered my unhappiness he thought that he should have bought me *The Sorrows of Werther* and J. J. Rousseau to suit my mood. Cecil had forwarded to Frances my letters to him. He referred her to those letters in explaining to her the mood he found in me. He was upset about our school reports and spent a whole day and evening discussing our schooling. I expressed some doubt about a career in physics and expressed interest in the wider scope of literature. That horrified him. “The little bastard wants to write!” He gave me

25. CSF - FP, 23 December 1946
26. CSF-FP 14 December 1946
the advice that he had not followed, to get a scientific degree first. “Curse the little bastard. I didn’t wound him or shock him.” Then he brought up the subject of next summer’s vacation, pointing out that if we went to England we would be away from our contacts in California from this Christmas to the next. “They’re philosophic about it but at the same time vaguely resentful. ... We could have a nice summer in California and I could still have two months in England—more than that if I made the right arrangements with Kitty. God damn and blast the whole business. They are the most charming and worthless couple of bastards I’ve ever come across.”

Cecil may have become concerned about the unhappiness I expressed about St. George’s, which tied in with doubts that Nika Standen had earlier expressed. Cecil spoke to Erd Brandt again, and Erd again expressed his enthusiasm about the school, from which his son had graduated a few years

27. Last three from CSF-FP, 30 December 1946
before. So Cecil dismissed any concern he might have had. “Nika’s Cassandra-like sayings seem to have been unjustified.”

During this vacation I spent much time with Jaqueline, the San Francisco girl whom I had met at Fallen Leaf the summer before and to whom I had been writing from St. George’s. We crammed as much as we could into that time, without doing anything that presented any risks.

However, the romantic aspects of that vacation came to an unhappy end. I said that Jaqueline and I took no chances. Perhaps she wanted me to, but if so the appropriate time must have passed by that last evening when I had some inkling that she might

28. Wife of chemist and author Anthony Standen. They lived in New York and were friends of both CSF and FP. I had met Nika when she visited Berkeley, and knew both Nika and Anthony when I lived near New York. Obviously, Nika had prophesied trouble with Cecil’s plans for our schooling.

29. CSF-FP, 18 January 1947
have that feeling. For whatever reason, we had a miserably uncomfortable evening wringing out each other’s feelings and parted, not enemies, but very unhappy former lovers. I started out on the train to St. George’s the next day, feeling utterly lonely, without even the thought of a girl at home.

There was another reason for worry during that train trip beside the return to St. George’s. Before we left, George, who was keeping the railroad tickets, lost the Pullman part of them. Our father believed that George, trying to pull a fast one, had perhaps sold them. As Cecil wrote to Frances, “The kids leave tomorrow. George has managed to lose the tickets of the Pullman reservations. At least he says he has lost them, but I have a strong suspicion (not quite a certainty) that he’s up to something about it. ... I’m putting them on the train anyway, and if they have to walk up and down the corridors

30. Sleeper car travel required two tickets, one for the railroad to carry you, the other for Pullman to accommodate you.
all night I’ll be glad. It seems to me likely that they’ll have to spend a night in New York, and according to George you’ll be sleeping with them, Tuesday night I suppose. You watch your virginity.”

I was a bit upset at the prospect of three days and nights without a bed to sleep in, but the Pullman company was unsympathetic. As Cecil described it to Frances, “I stuck the kids on the train and told them to do what they could, but in the afternoon I had a despairing wire from John asking me to wire him fifty dollars, and so I did at a great personal inconvenience. I ought to have tanned both their arses, but somehow I didn’t. ... I’m really quite angry; I’d far rather the damned kids were naughty than that they were silly — at least that’s what I say when I haven’t any certain knowledge that they have been naughty. Damn their nasty dirty little hides.”

The tickets showed up in the house two weeks

31. CSF to FP, 3 January, 1947
32. CSF - FP 5 January 1947
later. “I haven’t had a single word from the damned kids since they left. I’m going to disinherit them, the little devils. Actually they may be feeling in a spot, for the missing tickets turned up in this house in an obvious spot, and I strongly suspect Bill Underhill of planting them there after the kids left. I shall nail him down and find out what’s behind it all — I just can’t fathom their motives, but there has been a lot of jiggery pokery somewhere. I hope to God they weren’t just trying to get fifty dollars out of me. That would upset me like hell — I can swallow it if it’s just some mysterious manoeuvre activated by some motive beyond my adult comprehension.”

I do not know what happened, but carelessness is a more likely explanation than venality. I think that even George would not have believed that he could have sold the Pullman tickets. So I suffered from my father’s suspicions about George, and in the end my father suffered the “great personal inconvenience” of taking cash to the Western Union

33. CSF - FP 18 January 1947
office to telegraph a money order to a station along the route. All my life I was scrupulously honest with him, down to the penny in financial matters.

At spring vacation George and I were able to fly to and from California. Our grades had come up, but our father did not believe them. "The boys school reports—especially that of George—were amazingly good. I hope not too good to be true, but I’m seething with doubts."

Although my grades had gone up, "John has been so emphatic about disliking the East and dreading the thought of Harvard that after a week of constant agitation and argument I’ve decided, very reluctantly, to let him come home after June and take his degree at California. And that means George too. I can’t have John at home and send George across the continent 3 times a year. ... I’m a good deal disappointed in John for not going through with it."

He never told me of this decision. Further-

34. CSF-FP 15 February 1947
35. CSF-FP 27 March 1947

1200
more, he never told me, nor did anyone, that students at Harvard were not treated like boys at St. George’s. It was not a question of East vs West, but of preparatory school vs university. Although I did not know it, I had only to do reasonably well at St. George’s until June and do very well on the College Board examinations, and I could enjoy Harvard. Because I had no real means of making other plans, I applied to Harvard, took the standard examinations, and had the results sent there.

Sometime in the lonely agony of the second half of my year at St. George’s I decided to write to my very first girl friend, quite possibly because I remembered her address. I had nobody else. She replied with a friendly letter. For the rest of the year we corresponded regularly.

In June, George and I returned from St. George’s. I had been informed, unofficially, that Harvard had accepted me. However, I did not want any more of the kind of life I had been subjected to in the East. I understood St. George’s to be telling me that I had better learn to like it because it was
like Harvard. Certainly, I was ignorant of the characteristics of Eastern universities, but ever since I had had reason to be suspicious about them I had been locked up in St. George’s, unable to discover better information. However, it was obvious that if Harvard was accepting students from a school that was not much better, for determined students, than was Berkeley High, it could not be very much better than the University of California at Berkeley. In any case, I was determined never to have another year like the one I had just been through. With my academic records I walked down to the admissions office at the University of California and was accepted as a freshman in physics. I returned home and wrote a letter of regrets to Harvard, posted it, and waited a full day because I was uncertain about the power my father might have of getting my letter back from the local post office.

The next morning I took my father’s breakfast up to him at eight o’clock sharp and stayed to talk, as I often did.

“Father, I have been thinking about my choice
of university. I have been told unofficially that I have been accepted by Harvard, but I am not going to go there. I have been accepted by UC as a freshman in physics, and for physics I think UC is as good as Harvard. It’s not as high socially, I know, but I am not interested in that. I had enough of that phoniness at St. George’s. They told me, ‘You’d better learn to like us because we’re like Harvard,’ and I’m not having any more of that.” As I spoke, the morning concert from the bells of the campus carillon drifted in through the open window.

My father tried to get me to change my mind, to which I replied that I had already sent a letter of regret to Harvard. “It’s not likely that they’d want me after that, is it?”

“I suppose you realize,” my father harshly replied, “That you have spoilt my plans for George’s education? He enjoyed St. George’s and was doing well there, but I can hardly have one boy on one coast and the other on the other with different vacation schedules.”

I was somewhat astonished that my choice of
university would determine my brother’s prep school; I hadn’t considered a connection at all. Furthermore, even I knew that Harvard and St. George’s had different vacation schedules. However, it was not until I read my father’s letters to my mother, after his death, twenty years later, that I understood his plan for parking George and me at convenient schools while he enjoyed the life he desired. It was only when I read his letters to Frances Phillips and Charlotte Ballard, more than fifteen years later still, that I read his plan in all its bald simplicity. In my love for him, I had simply attributed the peculiar reason he gave to his ignorance of the American educational system, which the events of the year seemed to have amply demonstrated. At the time, I had been astonished, but soon I had accepted his reasoning and had forgiven him his ignorance.

It turned out to be unfortunate that George was not permitted to continue at St. George’s, for he enjoyed his year there and had earned the highest marks in his class. Perhaps from the comparative
isolation of St. George’s, George would have entered college like any freshman, to mature in college away from Cecil’s pressures. As it was, he matured too early in public high school, as much from the pressure of fighting his father as anything, to be forced into college unwillingly at the wrong time, with disastrous results.

Cecil took care to tell me that George’s academic mishaps, as they occurred, were entirely the result of George’s willful disarrangement of his study program at Berkeley High, a situation that would not have been permitted at St. George’s. Naturally, these later events not only discredited George in my eyes, which was Cecil’s motive, but aroused strong guilt feelings in me for my actions which had kept George out of the school that would have done him good.

Even years later, when George’s first wife, Barbara, remarked to Cecil that completing George’s education had been a long haul, Cecil evidently took the remark to be an accusation to be repulsed. “Well, you know, Barbara, that that is not really
George’s fault at all. It was John who upset George’s education. I planned for him to complete St. George’s and be able to enter a first class university, but when John left I could hardly keep George there alone.”

There was no reason why Cecil could not have had George at St. George’s while I was at Berkeley. However, as far as Cecil was concerned, there was no point in sending George there. My decision to attend Berkeley prevented my father from living in the way he had planned, free of responsibility and able to court all the women he met in his travels. There was also the problem that he had a secret marriage with a secret wife who probably wanted a house. Since he would have to stay in Berkeley, there was no point in sending George away; since his motive had not been educational benefits, that consideration did not enter. It is possible, also, that Cecil thought that the world would think well of him if he sent his sons to prestigious universities such as Harvard, and would think less of him if they attended mere Berkeley.
Whatever Cecil felt about this, his feeling may well have been amplified by the similarity between George’s educational mishaps and his own. I do not know, for though Cecil said enough about his past (and in his book, too) in warning me against laziness, bad temper, and self-indulgence to indicate that he was displeased with his past character, he never admitted, in so many words, that his education had been faulty.

Without presentiment of the future, I enthusiastically entered Berkeley in September, 1947, expecting to become a physicist, but partly by choice and partly by meeting the liberal education requirements I maintained an outlook on the less technical sides of life. I did comparatively well, peculiarly enough much better in those courses my associates rated as difficult than in those they rated as easy. Now that I was living in this anteroom to adult life, my father increased my freedom and set greater, long-term rewards before me. Late night deadlines were removed, subject to one restriction, carefully explained. “You may come home when you please. I
trust you have sense enough to know how many late nights will not hurt your classwork. However, if you have one of the cars out all night, you must at least report in by telephone at eight in the morning to say that you are all right. Otherwise, I would worry.” I rarely found myself required to carry out that instruction; if I expected to spend the night elsewhere I walked or bicycled to my destination. Fortunately, Berkeley is a small city. These habits did not really develop for two years, when I entered the company of graduate students, but, true to his implied intent, my father never questioned and only once pronounced advice, the single piece of sexual advice he ever gave me.

“Never, John, enter a girl’s bedroom. You can do anything you like anywhere else, and nobody will believe the worse of you, but enter a girl’s bedroom, no matter how innocently, and everybody will be eager to believe the worst.” Unobservant and unsuspecting of the self-centered realism behind those words, I inferred only an attachment to a naive respectability, naive because our worries were not
whether we fucked, nor who was doing it with whom, but the possibility of illegitimate pregnancy wherein it mattered not whether the child had been conceived prosaically in bed or romantically upon a flowered hillside.

As many another father had done, my father took the occasion of my entering college to train me to manage a greater financial responsibility. Yet the words he used to me carried his own pessimistic overtones.

“You are now at a stage in life when you should start to manage money. I am going to give you an allowance of eighty dollars a month as long as you are in college and living in this house. That sum is a handsome allowance that should more than cover your needs and provide you some entertainment as well. You must allow for seasonal college expenses, buying a new suit, and all other large expenses. I don’t want to be bothered by requests for more, or for advance payments. I have to plan my expenditures carefully, and I expect that you will learn to do
the same, because that is all the free cash I have.

“I warn you especially not to get so used to this level of income that it becomes necessary to you, because once you leave my care, it will be many years, if ever, before you will have as much money to spend upon yourself again. When I was a young man, I had to put cardboard in my shoes to keep my feet from the pavement, and the chances are you will have to, too.”

My father knew enough of human nature to offer rewards for success as well as the spur of doom. “John,” he said, “I allow myself to hope that you will earn a degree at college. If you manage to earn a good degree I will be extremely pleased, and to show you my appreciation, I promise you whatever car I then have as the second car. It may be the DeSoto, or it may be something newer, we’ll just have to wait and see. (The DeSoto in question was a prewar 1941 sedan, bought to replace the Willys that had died as the result of too many housekeepers learning to drive it. Desirable new cars were not readily available for another two years, 1949.)
In the same way, my father added a reward for abstinence to his cautions about drinking. “John, you know how I feel about excessive drinking, and you have seen the trouble I went through when I had to stop smoking because of my legs. The older you are when you start, the less likely it is that you will either drink or smoke to excess. Therefore, I am prepared to offer a substantial reward if you neither drink nor smoke before you are twenty-one. If you don’t, I will buy you your first house. Not a large house, but what you will first need.”

The difference in the rewards may represent the relative importance Cecil attached to the two achievements; it may represent his estimate that he was much more likely to lose the trade-in on a new car than to pay for a house; or it may represent the faith he placed in his promises — payment could not occur for at least four years, and in four years much could be forgotten or evaded. That’s the way it worked out; when I earned the car reward, I already had a car of my own, I had to immediately enter the U.S. Navy (because of the Korean War, an unpredict-
able event), and my father did not have two cars. He legally owned two, but one then belonged to his wife. He made no equivalent offer of any kind, then or later. Some seven years afterward, I reminded my father of the house reward, suggesting that the intent of the reward, to prevent the possibility of immediate drinking or smoking, had been met. I never smoked, and although I had been known to enjoy wine with dinner and had been known to accept a cocktail, I had never, even once, drunk immoderately. The compromise then reached was that my father would lend part of the down payment on my first house, which indeed he did.

My father made one other major promise to me toward the end of my college career. *The African Queen* had been the subject of several film ventures, none of which had matured sufficiently to do more than take out an option and attempt to line up a cast. Finally a screenplay was produced by James Agee, John Collier, and John Huston, and with Huston as producer and Humphrey Bogart, Katherine Hepburn as the stars, the story became blended into
a going venture. The presence of Huston and Hepburn pleased my father greatly, though he was puzzled at the selection of Bogart as he told me at the time. “After many unsuccessful options, *The African Queen* has been sold at last, and I am very pleased. The buyers are friends of mine and for that reason I am sure they will do a good job instead of something like Hornblower. Huston’s a first-rate director, Katie will be superb, and neither of them will let this guy Bogart ruin the show. And there’s good news for you, too. One of the conditions I’ve made is that at the end of the shooting, you are to receive the *African Queen* herself. Mr. Lewis will show you enough to earn an engineer’s license for her, and there’s all the Delta country behind Benicia to run her in.”

When the shooting of the film was complete in 1951, my father remembered his promise to me. The excuse that he told me was, “I’ve seen some of the rushes of *The African Queen* and I’m as pleased as everybody else by Bogart’s acting. Seeing him so good has taken quite a load off my mind, for I was
quite genuinely worried. But you remember that I told you they wouldn’t change the story about to make it a happy ending. They didn’t, and for the final scenes they had to sink the *African Queen*. I’m sorry, John, that I couldn’t keep my promise to you.”

By the time the film was being shown I was in the Navy and I had no chance to see it until after my service. Naturally, the big question in my mind was not the picture itself, but the problem with the final scene and how the special effects man handled it. I decided that had I been in that position, I would have built a dummy of the *African Queen*’s bow for the final scene, because it would be cheaper, surer, and reusable in case a retake was required. The true story remained unknown to me until two years after my father’s death, when a San Francisco restaurateur (and Forester fan) bought as an advertising prop the original *African Queen*, which was then being retired in Nairobi after long service. In effect, my father had made no promise to me that he had ever intended to keep.
During this period Cecil maintained his practice of burning the letters he received, but because of the infrequency of fires inside the house he had to do it outside, more exposed to observation. In the garden was an incinerator, made from a perforated 55-gallon drum with a perforated lid. Although a gardener did all the gardening work, Cecil ordered me to see to the burning of the garden trash. Because of the heat and sparks generated by the incinerator in full combustion, I operated it on a cyclic basis. I filled it first, put on the top, and ignited the charge through one of the bottom holes. The charge burned fiercely, and if the top were opened too soon, flames and sparks spouted around the crack, endangering the garden and me. If I waited until only embers remained, I could refill the incinerator and reclose it before the flames worked their way to the top of the new charge. The more tightly packed the charge, the better the results. My father stood waiting while the initial charge burned, pulling the letters from one jacket pocket after another, tearing them into small pieces which he re-
pocketed with care. Then, satisfied that the incinera-
tor contained a deep bed of glowing coals and that I
had a large pile of trash ready for quick loading, my
father said, “Now then, John.” I opened the incinera-
tor, my father dumped in all the pieces, and made
sure that I quickly loaded in a full charge. My father
stood to watch that charge completely consumed,
using the time to give me the explanation of his
actions.

“You know, John, that I have been entrusted
with state secrets from time to time. During the war
I was informed of many secrets. You know now of
the airborne radar and the proximity fuze secrets,
but there were many more like the timing of the
invasions and the general strategy of the war, in
none of which was I ever remiss. I never had a leak,
and had quite a bit to do with cancelling the effects
of other people’s leaks. Well, even today, many of
my letters contain secret information. Since I don’t
index them, I don’t precisely know which is which,
so I take care to carefully destroy every letter of that
sort.”

1216
The ploy worked, because my father correctly assumed that I was ignorant of the security procedures used in transmitting and safeguarding official secrets. Had I unexpectedly shown familiarity with that subject, my father no doubt would have produced some other ingenious explanation of why some secrets were so unofficially transmitted to him, an explanation which probably would have redounded to his own greater glory.

Save for the unforeseen impediment of George and me living with him, 1947 and early 1948 were years in which Cecil performed his living plan. The winter of 1947-8 saw him in Berkeley working on *The Sky and the Forest*, the spring and early summer saw him in England, late summer found him at Fallen Leaf Lake again, and in the fall he resumed his working routine in Berkeley after his usual trip to New York.

During the fall of 1948, several unforeseen disasters started off a year of trouble. Even before they occurred, Cecil had to continuously fend off
the usual threats to the fiction of his life, and afterwards he had to take some extraordinary measures.

An example of the usual threat was the appearance of the pianist Benno Moseivitch with the San Francisco Symphony. My interest in classical music had been started at St. George’s. This interest continued in college, where I selected a music appreciation course as one of my requirements in liberal arts, and the interest was associated with my girl friend, who was studying piano under one of the well-known Berkeley musicians. I also ushered at symphony performances, which was a free and rather fun way of obtaining admission. My father, seeing this interest, talked several times about “my great friend, Benno Moseivitch, the famous pianist, who was a fellow member of the Savage Club.” That talk impressed me, but since I was in Berkeley and Benno was in London there was little likelihood of discovery. Then Benno made a concert tour through the States with, naturally enough, an appearance with the San Francisco Symphony. Being familiar with the concert schedule, I told my father some
weeks in advance and listened to his answer.

“Well, John, you must realize that Benno is a very busy man. A concert tour is an exhausting thing, almost as exhausting as writing a novel. I don’t think that I should disturb him in the middle of his work.” So it was. I might not agree with his evaluation, but I did not suspect the motivation for his excuse. In all probability the association was merely that Moseivitch was also a member of the Savage Club, but my father had fended off discovery.

Also among those who knew of Cecil’s reputation were two people whose actions became very important to me in those years, but who never told me why they acted as they did. These were the parents of my very first girl, who re-enters the story here.

As I described before, during my loneliness at St. George’s I had started writing to my very first girl friend, possibly only because I knew her address. When I had first known Janet, her parents
had been sufficiently suspicious of my motives to impress my father, who had agreed with their opinion. She and I had not done anything to warrant that suspicion. We had a first love affair between inexperienced middle-class adolescents, progressing as far as kisses on her front porch a dozen feet beyond the watchful eye of her mother. Our affair petered out during summer vacation because of my inexperience in maintaining social contact during absences. I just did not realize that letters were for love’s murmurs as well as transmitting information. With more experience with other girls, with better control of the written word, including the greater sense of its artistic possibilities imparted by Norris Hoyt, and under the agony of St. George’s, I renewed the friendship by letter where it should have continued in 1945. We found much of common current interest in that friendship, and when we met again on my return to Berkeley the early memories and current interests melded and burgeoned into

36. CSF-K, 448, June 1945

1220
new love, a new glory of springlike rebirth. Sometime in my freshman year, we decided to marry when I had completed my education. We had wonderful times together. Neither of us was socially well-known, but we were both physically active, emotionally passionate, intellectually acute, and amateurs of the arts. We swam and skied together, jitterbugged to Lou Waters’s Yerba Buena Jazz Band at Hambone Kelly’s, attended the San Francisco Symphony, and just lay in the sun to read. When she graduated from Berkeley High in February, 1948, she continued studying piano under one of Berkeley’s internationally-known teachers. When my father gave his occasional large cocktail party to satisfy social debts, I was proud of Janet’s presence with me in the society to which he belonged.

With her parents, however, it was different. Her father was the prosperous owner of a medium-sized business. On the outside a typical hard-working American entrepreneur, a type I had not met before, both he and his wife were sensitive individuals torn by the conflicts that assail us all. Success meant a
great deal to them, but to the extent they had obtained it (and a considerable success it was), it proved not easier, but more difficult to live with. They objected strenuously to me. My character, unformed in a social sense, a complete stranger to American business society, yet possessed of unexpected sharp corners and stubbornness in intellectual matters (and particularly in those matters I thought intellectual but which in fact were but an emotional defense of my father’s pseudo-intellectual but anti-highbrow rationalizations), provided a reasonable basis for their objections. My brother agrees that my character should have aroused objections. He later told me that I am “attributing too much to Cecil’s bad reputation. You were an unbearable (unhappy as well) brute at this time.” Unbearable? Maybe, if that is what other people thought. Unhappy? No. I had been very unhappy at St. George’s, but I was very happy at the university.

Janet’s mother had considerable intellectual attainment and charm, with whom we could converse on any subject but ourselves. Being an intellec-
tual, she naturally considered the works of C. S. Forester rather low on her scale of values, and was obviously unimpressed that I was his son. Janet’s parents showed their reluctance to meet my father, which I felt as another personal slight because all other acquaintances of mine were pressing to meet him. All invitations were refused, even to the occasional large, rather impersonal, cocktail parties by which my father satisfied his minor social debts. Whenever there was a possibility of them meeting him, as on the many occasions when they dropped me at my door, they sped away as suddenly as possible.

Janet’s parents were inordinately suspicious of our sexual relationship, and they had a point. Whenever Janet’s mother discovered we had had even a private half an hour together, there was Hell to pay. Naturally, Janet and I felt the strength of our emotions, and planned and took more than half an hour at a time. We knew how we made love, and initially how difficult it was not to take unjustified risks, but just the same we had a gloriously happy adjustment.
Later, when we decided to “go all the way,” we always used the most reliable form of contraception. However, the only possible defense against the charge of “making love” and the non-verbalized fear of its consequences would have been to say that our activities were highly unlikely to make Janet pregnant, and to explain why. At that time, we were too immature and the social times were not ripe to state the facts so baldly. That the suspicion was directed solely at me was shown by her mother’s indifference to Janet’s behavior with previous boy friends and others whom her mother encouraged. Upon learning the next day that Janet had returned from a date with someone else at 3 a.m., her mother only asked, “Well, dear, did you have a good neck?”

Courting my girl under these conditions was a tough road. Everything I did was likely to be wrong and to arouse emotional antagonism from Janet’s parents. However, I was happy with my love for Janet and my university career.

At the very start, long before Janet and I considered our love to be anything but the usual adoles-
cent affair, I had enrolled in the fastest course in calculus, six mornings a week at 8 am, merely to obtain rapidly the knowledge I knew I needed and wanted to learn. The course in physics is a demanding one; students are not allowed to take the easier courses in some sciences that those in other disciplines may choose. I did not find the work easy, but it was very satisfying and I made good grades. When Janet and I decided that we were seriously engaged I pushed ahead a bit faster still by taking some summer courses. In eighteen months, in the spring of 1949, I was doing third-year work.

One afternoon that spring Janet visited me. Sitting beside me on the sofa of the living room of the Hawthorne Terrace house, choosing her words with care, her dark eyes denying her attempt to remain disengaged, she told me she was leaving me.

“`It’s not that I don’t love you, John. I just can’t stand the battle any longer. All the time now, I can’t face my mother’s criticisms. She’s not right, I know she’s not right, but that doesn’t make enough difference. She’s unfair, she demands that I behave differ-
ently with you than with other boys, I don’t know what it is, but I just can’t stand it any longer. Oh, John, I’m sorry about it. I love you, but I’m beaten and I must go.”

Not knowing anything about my father’s evil reputation, I thought that the only reason for this opposition was my own personality and character. In truth, it was quite likely that Janet’s parents knew of my father’s reputation and the story that Dorothy Bathurst’s child had been his and how he had tried to cover that up. The chain of gossip was short: the baby in hospital; Evelyn Lewis, who as a nurses aide looked after babies and knew about this baby; Celia Bissell who ran the nurses aide program, whom my father had described to Frances as the most dangerous woman in Berkeley, \(^{37}\) and who was friendly with Janet’s mother. I knew the links in the chain, but I had no idea of the story that traversed them.

The pain of that parting stayed with me for another eight years. Even now, it remains a scar in

\(^{37}\) CSF-FP 20 March 1946
my psyche, an old wound that brings pain and bitterness as I write these words.

We were not prepared to defy our parents, to marry illegally without means of support, to work our way through college and graduate school without assistance. Perhaps in the prosperity that was just starting we could have done so, but we had vague memories of depression years, we had seen too many GIs struggling through, and had noted their intellectual submissiveness. Neither were we prepared to operate clandestinely. We’d read our Thomas Wolfe — all his novels — and we knew that You Can’t Go Home Again. What’s past is past, our paths would diverge and when, if ever, we met again, we would be different people.

But it was not so for me. For eight years, no matter whom I loved, the sight of her “across a crowded room” kicked my body into alert. Adrenaline flowed, blood pressure rose, my whole being concentrated on how to approach her, to obtain a glance, or, miraculously, a smiling word. For her, too, at times it was not so. She knew that I slept with
the outside door to my bedroom unlocked, often wide open to the garden with its breezes. I would be awakened as she sat down upon my bed. I could not telephone her or visit her, but if she managed to drive one of her parents’ cars on a date, she could visit me afterwards with little fear of discovery. Occasionally she did so, when the grief of parting was upon her. We even managed a skiing weekend together, once, and during our return drive I asked her to marry me, without any way to support her if she accepted. She did not. Occasionally, my father saw Janet when she called at our house, but he misjudged the situation, describing her as the “between-girls girl,”38 thinking that it was I who had asked her over because I had no current girl friend, rather than it was she who came when she needed to and could conceal the visit from her parents.

And yet it was so. We did diverge on different paths, made different friends, and moved in different circles. When one was free, the other wasn’t.

38. CSF-FP 5 September 1951
Those years were terminated by the additional confusion of Korea and the changes that that war forced on all our group. However, our relationship did not terminate until years later, when both of us were unhappily married to others. Then we had a brief affair, meeting in a secluded glade in the woods atop the Berkeley hills. Cecil was lucky that Janet’s parents never told me why they suspected me, so that I thought it was all my own fault. Had they told me, the results would have been unpredictable.

Cecil also had to fear trouble and danger from George. George was now in high school and maturing in ways that Cecil did not like. From the first, George was much less malleable than I was under Cecil’s pressure, although he was much more sensitive to social forces from outside the family. This difference in our responses was at least in part because George recognized that his father did not love him, while I remained convinced that our father was motivated, poorly though he showed it, by love and concern for our welfare. This difference, in turn,
had been developed by the difference in our early years and by our age difference.

When I was an infant, my mother had followed the then-current theory (one that also suited my father's predilections) that children should become used to a regular daily routine of sleeping and feeding and should not be spoiled between feedings by play and cuddling. When George was born, Mother had decided (Had she finally decided, not between theories, but to stand on her own opinion rather than my father's?) that this was a silly theory, and treated George far more naturally. She says that I noticed the difference and was a bit upset, although this could be merely the adjustment to a younger sibling. It may be significant that my earliest memory is of my mother sitting beside the open window on a fine spring morning with the sun haloing her hair, absorbed in the pleasant task of suckling George.

As a result, George was far more affectionate than I was and felt closer to our mother than I did. George also had a winning smile and persuasive
manner that was noticed by our first Danish au pair
girl, Anna, as early as four years of age. George had
probably stolen most of a box of Anna’s chocolates,
but he smiled his way out of any punishment. As
well, George had been pre-adolescent at the time of
our parents’ divorce. I accepted my father’s treat-
ment of me as the appropriate relationship between
two men, thereby delaying my full understanding
for twenty years. George, on the other hand, feeling
the immediate pain of emotional deprivation, whose
true causes were of course hidden from him, devel-
oped open emotional distress and bewilderment,
but through these was impelled into an intensive
examination of his personal situation, of which his
relationship with his father was one part.

In one sense, George and I played the parts
said to be typical by sibling sequence theory. The
first-born is more likely to be serious and responsi-
ble, in which case the second, or the last, is likely to
achieve his ends by working his charm and by being
different.

Both of us in adolescence developed emotional
involvements with other families in compensation for our sense that something was lacking in our own. My involvements were minor and faded away with my growing interest in girls. George’s, on the other hand, because he was a far more socially acceptable and socially interested boy than me, developed in conjunction with his interest in girls. George then had many chances to compare his family with others, to Cecil’s detriment. George was still finding his way, far from being adult, and he couldn’t understand or accept what he felt. He developed emotional storms, defied and condemned his father, and committed, within the family, a series of petty thefts; all in all, a pretty typical reaction to this emotional situation. Cecil abhorred this kind of behavior, as much because George might publicly discredit him as for any other reason. Not enough of Cecil’s private life was exposed to George’s scrutiny for George to have blackmailed Cecil, but it was sufficient to justify George’s suspicions. For instance,

39. CSF-FP 4 March 1950, 28 February 1951
George had observed his father’s habit of burning the letters he had received, and decided that Cecil had secrets, probably concerning his sexual life. George believed, and told a few people, that his father was a selfish, lying, parsimonious, immoral old man. For Cecil, fear of discovery was no idle fear. When George had spent Thanksgiving weekend from St. George’s with people known to Cecil (friends of Frances’s) and probably straight-laced, and had been criticized for his behavior, he had replied with his own opinions about his father’s character and behavior in just those words.

Another source of worry was George’s financial irresponsibility. Cecil had given each of us in high school an allowance of five dollars a week to cover all expenses except clothes. This really was not quite enough for lunches, school supplies, and a date. He allowed us to charge clothes on the family charge accounts. Both George and I recognized the shortage, and asked for permission to work for more. Cecil refused, saying that schoolwork was more important than money. In 1945, I accepted this argu-
ment. George, two or three years later, did not. He said he could handle both, and got a job, but had to quit because his father would not sign a work permit. Cecil also became horrified at George’s charges for clothes, and put him on a fixed allowance for clothes, an allowance sufficient for a clothing policy that Cecil prescribed. George argued his case.

“Look, you give me an allowance that lets me buy a suit a year, but I have no use for a suit except to wear to the functions you require me to attend. What good is an allowance to me unless it lets me buy the clothes I want for the things I want to do?” Cecil was adamant. George felt that the money question was not one of what his father could afford, but one of enforcement and control. He angrily said so, the kind of statement whose truth was most likely to hit Cecil where it hurt most.

George got another job, and again Cecil refused to sign a work permit. So George decided he could more easily evade a business license than a work permit, and set himself up as an independent contractor doing all kinds of odd jobs: tree trim-
ming, house painting, carpentry, gardening. He earned enough for his needs and his wants, buying a fast ‘37 Ford coupe shortly after he left high school. Cecil would never acknowledge that George worked, and to cover the possession of the car, a fact he could not conceal, he told his friends that he had paid most of the purchase price in a deal in which George had attempted to cheat him. Cecil’s description to Frances of these events shows how little he understood of what was really going on; he never knew, for example, that George had been doing odd jobs.

The relations between George and Cecil grew worse and worse. Cecil’s analysis of the situation showed his own feelings of ancestral guilt. “The kid has a horrid bad heredity, of course, and some bad luck in his upbringing; also there isn’t any doubt that I owe a big debt to Nemesis and deserve this.” Cecil determined to send George to a psychiatrist.

40. CSF-FP, letters of March, 1951
41. CSF-FP 4 March 1950
There were other possible motives in addition to considering that the treatment might benefit George. Possibly, Cecil hoped that psychiatric treatment would quieten George down and lessen the probability that George would expose him. Equally possibly, he may have felt that if George would talk too much about him, his words would be less credible if the listener knew George had been undergoing psychiatric treatment. Equally possibly, he might have felt that he could learn much, from discussions with the psychiatrist, about what George actually knew. George suspected this at the time. He told the psychiatrist a few red-herring stories that his father later referred to, satisfying George that indeed some of what he said was passed on to Cecil. If you believe these suppositions to be wild extravagances because they imply an unethical disclosure on the part of the psychiatrist, Cecil informed me of one such disclosure by the psychiatrist. That was in a matter that involved George’s relationship with people outside the family and about which Cecil had to take serious action and in which he needed my cooperation.
George has asked me to provide no further details about that event.

I made a financial request that would cost my father nothing. I had joined a cycling club, riding the bicycle that I had been given while at St. George’s. Over Easter vacation I had cycled with a friend down the California coast to San Simeon and back through Fresno. That ride taught me the difference between my postman’s model bicycle and a proper touring bicycle. I wanted a new bicycle for summer, and I proposed to save money by ordering a custom-made frame from Alvin Drysdale in New York and the other parts directly from Holdsworth in England. Because of the time involved, I needed money early, so I asked for one month’s allowance one month early. My father decided to grant this request, but seized this chance to impress on me the virtue of economy, the fact that he was a poor man unable to grant panhandling requests, and possibly counteract any complaints I might have heard from Mother about the refusal of the farm money.
Besides, father had carelessly used me, when his own movements had been restricted by illness, to go down to the bank to draw out his own "pocket money," and the consequences of that had to be contained. My father’s habitual withdrawal of money to put in his own pocket was $200 a time, which he had explained to me as, "I never feel at ease unless I have enough money in my pocket to go to New York tomorrow, if necessity should demand." In case that explanation had not satiated my curiosity, here was another chance.

“You are very lucky, John, that I am able to do this for you. You see, I have to plan my expenditures very carefully. You many think I earn a lot of money, but what you hear is mostly publicity. Film rights for instance. Nobody in Hollywood has any artistic sense — the only value they have is ‘what does it cost?’ So no film contract is ever accurately reported in publicity, for the more expensive it is said to be, the better it must be. I find that the usual technique is just to add a zero, multiplying the price by ten. Of course, I have been very careful, and you don’t have
to worry about the most disheartening thing that can ever happen to a man — you’ll never have to worry about Dorothy or me running out of money and being forced to live with you. That’s an appalling situation, but as I say, you don’t have to worry. And that is why I don’t have any money to spare at this time. For you see I have used all the money I earned during the war to buy annuities. You know what an annuity is, the opposite of life insurance. They pay as long as you keep living. With my health, nobody will sell me insurance, but they’re only too happy to underwrite my annuity, and this goes for your mother, too. I have arranged to never let her be in want; she’ll be all right no matter what Neil does or doesn’t do.”

Had George listened to such a lecture, he would have considered it lying propaganda; he disbelieved what our father told him, while I believed what he told me. Well, it was lying propaganda. My father had much more money than he admitted, he had investments instead of annuities, and he took no financial care for my mother.
Cecil had one more disaster to handle that spring. I had not recognized how much Janet’s leaving had affected me. I knew the pain, I knew that my emotions looked for every place where she might be seen. You have read of what would happen to us over the years. What I did not realize was how many parts of my being were affected. So far as I know, I treated my schoolwork just as I had always done. I went to class, did my homework and was proceeding as before. With no sense of apprehension I sat down to take a mid-term examination in advanced differential equations and found myself unable to do any one of the five problems. I stood up and walked out, feeling a horrible sense of inward emptiness. I had no idea of what had gone wrong. I later came to the conclusion that my mathematical ability was adequate as long as it could represent physical objects that I could mentally picture operating in space and time, but was much less adequate when dealing with the purely symbolic.

My father wrote to Frances that I had been just
as lazy in school as ever, and just as lazy as he had been. “I am afraid that he has led too idle a life and is quite without self-discipline.” 42 “One of the causes of his troubles is one which must be frankly admitted and faced. This is what an unsympathetic person might call laziness and which at any rate is lack of application and lack of diligence and lack of determination. It’s something I know a good deal about, because I went through exactly the same process myself. You see, dear, with school work in the early years it is perfectly possible for a bright boy to get along without any work at all — I mean without making any conscious effort. In a lot of ways it’s an actual handicap being a bright boy for this very reason. Because then, in practically every branch of study the work grows harder so that learning cannot be achieved merely by being taught, but must be consciously acquired by solitary and determined effort. I don’t think Einstein himself acquired his physics from about the intermediate point onwards

42. CSF-FP 7 April 1949
without really hard work. John has reached this point, and he doesn’t know the first thing about solitary work. He has to learn this, and he has to acquire the necessary habits of solitary work. Not merely this but until he has learned to work he is inclined to think that the job is impossible, simply because he hasn’t acquired the means to do it and doesn’t really know that it can be done.”

Had my father been observing and considering how I had been conducting my life instead of ascribing his weaknesses to me, he might have observed my studying hours from early morning on, and might have considered whether it is possible to do more than two years good work in the physics course at Berkeley without working hard. Cecil here theorized that I was bright enough to do this, but three days earlier his explanation had been, “I know that he’s no genius, and I have doubts as to whether he’s any more intelligent that just above the average.” He also described my temperament as a passionate dis-

43. CSF - FP 25 April 1949
like for the uncongenial and “he can’t argue without being rude and he can’t resent without rebellion—it’s too goddamned awful that I can’t write about a subject close to my heart like this without epigrams sprouting like weeds.” While he used whichever explanation suited the moment, Cecil was genuinely concerned about my future welfare.

“I suppose that when I was his age I was just as hypercritical of others and self-analytical about myself, and God knows I was ever so much wicked, but I had that one talent which showed up in the end and saved me from poverty—I worry about John being poor but I worry just as much about his not having the happiness or satisfaction of success.”

There was no way in the rest of the semester that I could recover from that disaster in calculus and similar results in other subjects. I took a leave of absence, expecting to work over the summer while I

44. This and previous: CSF-FP 22 April 1949
45. CSF-FP 10 May 1949
rethought matters, before returning to school in the fall.

Physics is not engineering; at Berkeley it is part of the College of Letters and Science. To meet the requirements of that college I had had to take some liberal arts courses, and in those I had naturally followed my other interest of literature. When I needed a summer job, I naturally thought of publishing, and so did my father. My father put out real effort to see what might be available among the firms he knew, all on the East Coast. He wrote to Frances “Actually, I’d be very happy to pay his salary myself (through you, and without his knowing about it) because I’m sure he won’t really be worth anything to Morrow. If a miracle were to happen and he were to show a lot of promise and go in for publishing as a career without taking a degree I should be pleased, but I’m afraid that the boy, without being a fool, has no special talent.” 46 That was not necessary. His publishers, Little Brown & Co., had a temporary job

46. CSF - FP 18 April 1949

1244
that required a strong back, clerical skills, and a smattering of literary knowledge: that of seeking out, inventorying, and listing the printing plates of their older books, so that the directors could decide whether to keep or scrap them. I went east and completed the task at a salary of $30 a week.

I found a furnished room with kitchen within walking distance to work, and I awaited delivery of my bicycle parts. They had arrived in Berkeley, and my father reshipped them to me. He shipped them the cheapest way, to the Boston freight station on the far side of town. Bicycle frames and bicycle parts require large boxes. Without money for truck delivery, I maneuvered those boxes through the floor-to-ceiling turnstiles of the Boston subway system, worried that I might get through to one side, unable to retrieve those precious boxes still on the other side. He could have had the boxes delivered to Little, Brown’s bindery in Cambridge, where I worked. At first I believed that he was just plain ignorant, or maybe lazy. Later I understood that he was a selfish miser who always had to do things the cheapest way.
when anyone else was concerned. Only in 1995, after reading his letters to Frances, do I understand that he was trying to teach me lessons that I did not need because he thought that I had all the failings that he had had: financial irresponsibility, laziness, and fecklessness.

Once I had assembled my bicycle in the workshop of the Bicycle Exchange I had the freedom to travel as I pleased. I spent many evenings and most weekends cycling with the mix of students, engineers, and others who made up the cycling population.

While at Cambridge I visited my friends who had gone to Harvard and Radcliffe. There were those from Berkeley High: Stanton and Waldo Cook and Eleanor Latimer; and those from St. George’s: my former roommate, Bill Plissner, and Richard RePass, the smartest boy at school, and others.

With time to think, to read a general selection of currently published books, and to write again a little, I pondered the examples of people I knew. I had seen two different publishing firms at close
range, staffed by far different people from my father’s bridge-playing businessmen. Surely there would be room for me in that field when I had prepared myself. My aptitudes were polarized between words and mechanics — not mathematics, for I had learned in that last semester that my aptitude stopped at the fifth dimension. An abstract problem that I could not visualize I could not solve. I had seen, and looked down upon, the engineering students who filled a large portion of the physics classes. They weren’t interested in knowledge — all they wanted to know was “What’s the formula to get the answer?” a question they had often asked me. And failed engineers, as I was a failed physicist, sank even lower, to the cookbook rote learning of business administration by which those bridge-playing businessmen had been formed. And had not Norris Hoyt started out to be an engineering technologist, but switched to literature because he “did not want to devote [his] life to learning more and more about less and less?” While St. George’s did not seem to be a good example of an educational
institution, Norris Hoyt was an outstanding example of both multi-faceted man and teacher. I, too, felt that there was a far wider range of knowledge that I was missing and I ought to learn about. Literature seemed to me to contain the broadest range of human experience. So I would return to Berkeley and study English literature.

What I did not realize at that time was that studying toward this goal drove me head-on into conflict which I would have difficulty resolving. I looked on it as it developed over the subsequent two years as a conflict between art and craftsmanship, whereas it was more nearly a conflict between my father’s anti-intellectual and self-justifying rationalizations, so bound up with my emotions that I could not let them go, and the intellectual bias of professors. I decided that because professors are rated on the number of thoughts they publish, they base their literary judgements on the number of thoughts, or quantity of discussion, that can be extracted from each work.

My own position in this conflict was all the
harder for me to understand because I had already reduced my father’s image from the child’s perception of a godlike father to a man’s evaluation of another man’s craftsmanship. This was a task difficult enough in the face of the general adulation heaped upon him. I had succeeded, somehow, in setting up my own standards for fiction which were based on a significant story, interestingly told in a prose that carried as much complexity and as many layers of meaning as was possible with clarity. The true mark of the great writer, I thought, was the ability to convey much accurate information about the world in a single clear thought. By these standards, C. S. Forester’s work was not great; it could never be so classified. But by the same standard, the work of many ‘great writers’ could be justly criticized as obscure, ambiguous, or referring to falsity in either fact or metaphysics, a criticism that could never be levelled at Cecil’s work. So he was not among the mighty, but far above the pretenders. Similarly, a comparison of his work with that of his competitors showed the same disparity. He was published by the
Saturday Evening Post — but who could read any other fiction in the Post without nausea? I read his works with pleasure even though I often knew the story in advance, but in the typical Post story, by the time I was fifteen, I had developed the ability to predict the plot after the second paragraph; the whole thing was so transparent. So although he wrote only for money — to please the paying reader, as he put it — he was a lot more than a commercial writer. Having achieved this balanced point of view, I thought I had achieved a mature, practical and complete view of my father. I did not realize in the least, partly because he explicitly denied it and partly because I had no facts, how much of his own character leaked into his work without his admission, without his intent, and without his recognition.

Because of this deficiency, I made my second course of studies much more difficult than it should have been; I excluded some things that the professors taught, and I thought about problems that they never considered. Contrary to most of the better students and the university tradition, I concentrated
more on the craftsmanship, the mechanics of storytelling, the way in which the thoughts were communicated, than the professors did. I also concentrated more on the thoughts that the author intended to communicate than on the thoughts that others attributed to his words. While I delighted in an author who could present several levels of meaning, those levels had to be understandable by the normal, educated reader; meanings that could be understood only through abstruse analysis that the normal reader would not undertake were not part of the aesthetic experience. Understanding such concealed meanings earned credits for professors rather than enjoyment for readers. I also insisted on reasonable agreement with reality, at least as understood at the time of composition, in those works that asserted it. Every work of fiction is a fantasy, but unless that fantasy is based on some aspect of human experience it has no hold on our emotions. Some works are explicitly based on fantastic worlds in which dragons exist, but either the dragons must have some human emotions or they must illuminate
the humanness of the other characters. That’s been true for dragons from Grendel to Smaug. Other works assert that their action occurs in our world and the only fantasy is in the specific characteristics and actions of the characters, who have been created to illuminate the real world and to arouse our emotions about our situation in the real world. The typical novel is such a work and, indeed, professors explicitly assert this claim of accuracy for such novels. For such novels to succeed, the author must persuade the reader that the milieu in which his characters play is indeed the real world. In short, I required a reality check for this type of novel.

This set of principles drove me into direct conflict with the prevailing theory of academic literary criticism. This was called The New Criticism, which in those years was a growing force. It concentrated on only the actual text of the work, practically ignoring the author’s knowledge and the society in which he lived. (Like many such movements, The New Criticism had valuable features, including the abandonment of excessive consideration of background
over actual text. However, to my mind, it was also the start of the descent to absurdities such as deconstructionism, in which all reference to real meaning has been lost.)

Although the professors claimed to examine only the text, they did not do so. That is impossible, as deconstructionism has shown us. Thoughts, and the words that convey them, must be considered in their social context. Therefore, because they ignored the world in which the author wrote, the professors substituted whatever theories of the world they happened to believe in: Marxism, Freudianism, Alienated mankind, or whatever. Naturally, I had only a crude understanding of the nature of the conflict at the time; these words are the result of considerable reading and reflection since then. However, even at the time I thought that I had good reason for the beliefs I held, and the professors did not advance arguments for their system that were sufficient to persuade me otherwise. I had grown up observing my father’s opinions and practices about literature, and had an emotional attachment to them, but I had
also developed them into a coherent system that both suited the practices of literature (both writing and publishing) and permitted an accurate picture of the world. This was influenced by both my past in the hard sciences and by my study, both by prior reading and in the university, of the theory of knowledge. I had a very empirical view of the world, as contrasted with the supernatural view that, in philosophy, is misnamed realism.

I write prose; my poetry, on the occasions I have attempted it, is very poor. Yet I found myself in the bewildering position of earning A’s in criticism of romantic poetry and D’s in courses on modern novelists. From the craftsmanship standpoint, I discussed with enthusiasm and ability the progress Keats made as he amended the manuscript of *Ode to a Nightingale*, while I rejected D. H. Lawrence as a significant modern author. There were many reasons why I rated Lawrence much lower than my professor did. If Lawrence actually intended to communicate all the things my professor asserted that Lawrence wrote into his novels, he was a poor
craftsman because he wrote so obscurely and misguidedly. Lawrence failed in one of the novelist’s primary duties, that of showing how his characters develop over time. He asserted that they changed according to his own psycho-social theories, but he never described the social and personal interactions that would make the reader believe that the changes were taking place. Lawrence’s stories were based on many incorrect assumptions. For example, one of Lawrence’s main characters has inherited profitable coal mines. In 1912, during a visit to Switzerland, he kills himself by walking out into a blizzard, largely because Lawrence thought that people in his position were alienated from real life. The professor praised this as a marvelous illustration of the alienation inherent in modern life. I countered by writing that I had never heard of an epidemic of suicide.

47. At the time I failed to recognize the source of this method of suicide. It is copied from that of Captain Oates during Scott’s mismanaged and fatal, but tremendously glorified, journey to the South Pole.
among the British moneyed classes before World War I; that indeed, from what I had read, most con-
sidered that a very happy time. If Lawrence’s plot required suicide, then Lawrence ought to have pro-
vided a more persuasive personal motivation for it instead of a general theory that was inaccurate and, frankly, incredible. I thought that professors were supposed to evaluate seminar papers on the quality of the argument, not their own beliefs, but that pro-
fessor gave me a D.

I took the paper and my perplexity to my father, and he, for the first time, gave me just that advice that he really followed, but which I had been brought up by him to detest. “You are too sensitive to the rights and the wrongs of the matter, when it is not as important as all that. You must write toward your professors’ interests. Find out what each one wants, and write in accordance. And don’t take it all too seriously; remember that they are teachers, and ‘those who can, do; those who can’t, teach.’” That was strange advice from one who prated so much about the difficulty of intellectual work and the
Having to give advice on his own subject was not the only change in my father’s life brought about by my change to English literature. I met friends who were in English, architecture, anthropology, history, biological sciences, and biochemistry. More than half of these were graduate students in their middle twenties or older. Classified differently, about half of my friends were foreign students, while several of the Americans were veterans of the war. Many of them were members of the International House at Berkeley, some resident and some nonresident as was I. I was the only one among them who had a house in Berkeley, a house moreover in which an English tea was served nearly every afternoon. About once a week one or more of my friends came with me to tea, to meet the Great Man and Dorothy and spend a pleasant hour. The most attractive entertainment I could offer my friends was a buffet dinner, for even the wealthier students who lived at International House became tired of institutional

1257
food, and a few of the others were reduced to eating beans and dog food by the end of the month. I once bought the largest standing rib roast I could fit into the oven; when my turn came last as host to serve myself, I had to pick the bones. But they were happy parties. We talked and played charades and danced — and talked some more, as graduate students will. In addition, of course, my father came to my parties as an honored guest, and the girls loved him. Some men admired him, one or two thought his combination of history and literature might be useful to them, but the girls openly adored him. He always had something of his own to read, or other entertainment to offer. A sofa was saved for him, even when the carpets were rolled up for dancing, so he could put his legs up “like Madame Recamier,” as he used to say. The girls collected cushions and sat on the floor before him. I never asked him to do this, but I was not averse, for my guests enjoyed it. If he had a novel or story in work he would ask if they wanted to hear some of that, and was greeted by universal acceptance. If he had no current work he
would offer something else, or a commentary about his working habits, techniques of plot construction, or his sources of information, much like the *Personal Note* section of *The Hornblower Companion*. He would never outstay the interest of his listeners. Half an hour or so, and he would complete his public presentation to return to a conversational mode with one or two of the most attractive girls.

All of his performances were successful except one, and my evaluation of that is biased by the personal discomfort it caused me rather than the pleasure it gave my guests. It was at my twentieth birthday party in October, 1949. Cecil described it to Frances, “about a dozen men and women mostly older than him—I was very gratified indeed to see how really nice they were. And John was a good host (I was only a guest) and managed things really well. The toothless old lion had to emit one last feeble roar—by request I read The Bedchamber Mystery (reading time 5 minutes, 35 seconds).”

48. CSF-FP 8 October 1949

1259
“You young men and pretty girls are mature enough to be exposed to anything,” he remarked to my guests. “Would you like me to read to you one of my really filthy stories?”

“Oooh, yes,” said all the girls.

“Very well, then.” He walked to the bookshelf, making a few more precautionary remarks about the limited distribution of these stories, and returned with a copy of *The Bedchamber Mystery*. He put on a great show of shyness and diffidence, asking to be excused for referring to improprieties which we all know of but didn’t usually put into writing and certainly didn’t read aloud. As his audience became eager for him to begin, he started to read. As I recall, he read both *The Bedchamber Mystery* and *The Eleven Deck Chairs*. This brought me acute embarrassment, not because of the effect of the stories, which my friends looked on only as a parody of Victorian genre writing, but because of the twin effects of his absurd Victorian coyness upon them and of the contrast between that pose and his long shelf of hardcore pornography which I had long before read
from end to end. The fool was alienating my friends by exposing himself to their jeers, in defense of what he should have had sense to recognize, through his extensive knowledge of real pornography, was only an absurd pose. Though I thought this, I could not bring myself to say so, but sat in shame and humiliation while he read. Fortunately, my friends knew less than I did about his real opinions, and his acting apparently was accepted as no worse than just a little bit of a parody.

A year later I gave two parties, the first in September to celebrate the return to school of my friends, the second in October for my twenty-first birthday. At the first, my father read the as yet unpublished story of Hornblower and the chest with the secret compartment. After the party, my father worried about my deportment and future. “It was a relief to me to see John with [the guests]. I’m afraid in case he grows up intolerably brusque and self-important. I’m afraid I haven’t kicked his arse enough and it will be more painful when and if the world does it. On the other hand George came in
and turned the charm tap on and made me realize that I haven’t kicked his arse enough either. God help them both—but I think it would be better if He saved it up and applied it to helping their wives who will need it even more.”

My twenty-first birthday party went well. “John’s birthday party went off all right. He had a dozen nice friends here after all, and we had some champagne ... John was a very good and efficient and unobtrusive host; I was quite and pleasantly surprised.”

One would not expect that my father would develop sufficient contact with any of my friends that he would need to lie to them for any serious purpose. However, as previously told, he mislead one young woman about the Latvian language for no reason except the pleasure of misleading her. He also developed relationships with several others. As scholars will, several of my friends remained at the

49. CSF-FP 18 September 1950
50. CSF-FP 11 October 1950
University long after I had gone. Imagine my surprise to find, years later, that Cecil had continued to maintain relationships with several—in particular the attractive girls—relationships that warranted bequests in his will.

Several incidents of this period illustrate Cecil’s feelings about race and about society’s prejudices, specifically those of Berkeley society. The first concerns only me, but illustrates Berkeley society. I had become a writer for the *Pelican*, the campus humor magazine. Magazines don’t exist on their own merits; we encouraged sales by including photographs of scantily-clad co-eds, getting as risque as we could without being condemned by the university administration. Of course, sometimes we crossed the line, and were shut down for the next month. All of us, including our editor, who was an older undergraduate, a war veteran, wished to do better, and, that year, I think that we were as good as Harvard’s comparable magazine, the *Lampoon*. Once we had earned enough cash to risk an issue with more litera-
tire and without cheesecake, we did so. The day after publication, we were hauled into the office of a furious university dean. He had received extremely angry telephone calls all evening and half the night, all about our current issue. We were nonplussed. We had no naked women in this issue, but we had never seen him so angry. Our cover celebrated the height of football season. It showed a stained glass picture of a saint carrying, as is traditional, the implements of his martyrdom. Our saint carried his football. That simultaneously and synergetically infuriated the worshippers of two religions, even in Berkeley.

When George was a senior at Berkeley High, his current girlfriend had had a long-standing date for the senior prom with someone else. As this was discussed in his group of smart students, it turned out that a black girl had no date. George asked her, and was accepted. For the important evening of the senior prom, Cecil offered George the keys to the Cadillac, something that he had never done before. As George describes the evening, when he and his date arrived at the hall, a noticeable number of cou-
ples left, both white and black. Those who stayed, danced. At that time, when one took a date to a dance, one generally danced only with her. However, a boy who was dancing with another girl whom George knew well, asked to switch partners. Soon everybody was mixing partners, and the dance went extremely well. Some time after this, Betty Brown told George that, once it had become known that white George would be taking a colored girl to the senior prom, Cecil had received many threats, both telephoned and written. Cecil’s answer to this was to ensure that George drove Cecil’s prestigious car that evening.

Our neighbor to the north was one of the well-known top financial officials of the Chinese national government. Of an evening, I often heard Chinese radio music drifting across the way. Betty Brown told George that Cecil had received hate mail trying to develop forces to drive the Chinese out of this respectable part of Berkeley, and that Cecil became angry at this racial prejudice. Of course, Cecil, being a foreign immigrant himself, could say noth-
ing either way on this subject.

George told me another story about Cecil and race. George recalled that, several times, when the two of them were in restaurants, Cecil had looked across the room and remarked that, over there, there were Jews. George typically found himself unable to identify these suspect persons, but Cecil thought that he, himself, had an eye for this. 51 One is reminded of Cecil’s early remarks about the prevalence of Jews in the Chelsea artistic set and other groups. 52 This does not mean at all that Cecil was anti-Semitic. Cecil was friendly with the Jewish refugees from Hitler’s Germany, both then and later, and consider Cecil’s horrifying stories about the Nazi persecution of the Jews. Cecil’s attention merely meant that Jewish appearance was a subject about which he was sensitive, probably because his middle-eastern appearance had led others to think that he was a Jew, although he probably thought

51. Oral communications
52. CSF-K, 195, 28 October 1926

1266
that it demonstrated the Egyptian father that he thought he had.

The natural termination of this period in Cecil’s life would be the departure of George and me from his house. I would graduate from university and enter adult life at about the time George would graduate from high school and prepare to enter college. Unfortunately, things did not work out so neatly. For me, one reason was the Korean war that had started in the summer of 1950 and required the services of many young men. For George, it was more the idea that because he didn’t want to go to college he worked out a strategy that would prevent it. Cecil was adamant: George must go to college. George made very high scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test, but had a spotty grade history that prevented his acceptance at some universities, for example, UC Berkeley, but unfortunately allowed, from George’s viewpoint, acceptance at others. To accomplish his desire to avoid college, which would naturally frustrate Cecil’s desire that he attend col-
lege, George searched out the highest-level college to which he could reasonably apply but which, because it rejected the highest proportion of applicants, would be most likely to reject his application.

Cecil, for his part, attempted to negotiate for the college that would make George work hardest. George’s present opinion is that “CSF did not want me to do anything in college which might threaten his ‘control’ or intellectual superiority—it was never suggested that I go to Swarthmore, Pomona, MIT or Reed—or that I take any kind of scientific course. CSF wanted me out of the way with a nothing education—no threat to him, yet someone [about whom] he could point to and say ‘CSF did his duty.’”53

While I knew that these discussions were going on, George didn’t share them with me. All that I heard then was our father’s exasperation at this situation, which found release in his complaints to me that George had deliberately sabotaged his high school career so that he was now incapable of entering a

53. Letter 29 Mar 2000

1268
good university. After much talk and anguish, they agreed upon the Cornell University School of Hotel Management, which was a professional school with very high reject and flunk ratios, for which it was probably admired as “Keeping up the university’s standards, even in the plebeian field of innkeeping.” Wonder of wonders, George was accepted. He left his father’s house immediately after graduating from high school in February and supported himself until time to leave for Cornell at the end of summer. For some time he was a hotel bellhop. Though his heart wasn’t in innkeeping, he packed his fast Ford and headed East to make the best of a bad job.

If I had completed a conventional course of study I would have graduated in June, 1951. However, I had lost a whole semester and made a radical change in major, and I didn’t expect to graduate on schedule. My father was furious. He described his anger to Frances.

“Gawd, the family troubles! (Don’t read on if you don’t want to). It’s John now. He’s been a fool while the other one’s been a knave. The biggest
damndest curssedest blasted idiot that ever walked this earth. It suddenly appeared last week that he hasn’t attended enough classes at the university to get his degree this term. He says he was misin-formed by the university authorities, and George Stewart tells me that that is possible when it’s a question of a trifling amount, but John is short a whole term’s work and the only explanation of that is carelessness verging on the criminal. ... I’m extremely angry, and having spent an hour dressing the wretched kid down and telling him just what I thought of him I find that the very pleasant relationship that has existed between us up to now has been seriously impaired, which is a painful loss. ... It’s a good thing I didn’t have three sons — I suppose the third one would be a chronic invalid or something; that’s one thing we can say about the first two and that is that even though they have neither brains nor morals they enjoy good health and I hope they fry in hell. Not that I wish them any harm. I think it would have been better both for them and for everybody else if when they were small they had had their faces
immersed in a few inches of water for just a few minutes.”

This expression of Cecil’s feelings about his sons was typical, and went back to their births. Once, when I had commented that George and I had no middle names, he replied that he wanted the simplest and least distinguished names available. I learned only much later that two years before he had named me John, he had made his autobiographical character, Cecil Trevor, note that “John as a christian name for babies has reached the over-ripeness of its popularity. It was *vieux feu*. About it there clung (to me at least) a flavor of the distinctly ordinary, even of vulgarity.” What kind of man chooses to give his sons names that he considers ordinary and vulgar?

The year before the delay in my graduation, when he had been worried about his work, he had written, “I’m in the vilest bad temper and I hope

54. CSF -FP 26 March 1951
55. In *Love Lies Dreaming*
John or George does something naughty within my reach soon while it lasts because then I’ll sock him or them in the jaw or jaws and do them and me a hell of a lot of good. Time it was done.”\textsuperscript{56} A week later he commented that “This damned household of mine might in fact provide a fair basis for a novel.”\textsuperscript{57}

My fault was not in having my graduation delayed; although I had taken a full load every semester that I had attended, after losing one semester and changing majors I could not reasonably have received my degree any earlier than September. I was in the university to learn and I enjoyed learning; taking less than a full load in any semester would have used up my lifetime without commensurate reward. Certainly, I had some responsibility in the affair, because I had assumed that the English Department, part of the College of Letters and Science, coordinated its requirements with the College

\textsuperscript{56}. CSF-FP 16 August 1950
\textsuperscript{57}. CSF-FP 21 August 1950
and the University of which it was a part. In February, I presented to my advisor my proposed course of study for the Spring Semester, and I was told that that would complete the requirements for my degree in June. I was surprised, but I believed him and told my father of the expected schedule. What my advisor in the English Department did not tell me was that his statement applied only to the department’s own requirements, and that I still had to determine for myself whether or not I would meet all the other College and University requirements. Therefore, when I applied for a degree to be granted in June, I was told I was short nine units of study, to be acquired in any field of study whatsoever. My fault was in raising my father’s expectations by telling him in February that I expected to graduate in June, and then in March dashing his expectations. Therefore, I took my tongue lashing as merely one further example of my father’s ignorance of the American educational system, instead of being evidence of his character.

As a result, I attended summer sessions and
took twelve units of upper division courses in anthropology. I had always had an interest in the subject, going back to the descent of man and outward to the differences between societies, and over the previous two years I had become friends with several graduate students in the subject and had listened to their discussions. It was a risk, because I had to talk my way into courses for which I had not taken the normal prerequisites, but my grades turned out to be fine.

Yet, as if to emphasize that I must leave home, my father threw me out of the house when he went to England in June. During previous summers I had stayed in the house alone, with never a criticism of my actions or the state of the house when he returned. The first time he had insisted that I buy my meals at a boardinghouse, but that was so distasteful that I cancelled the arrangement in a week and ever after ate much better from my own cooking. This year, though, I had to pack my clothes, equipment, and some furniture, acquire some utensils, and move out. I found a furnished room and
kitchen up in the Berkeley hills, and settled in for the summer, riding my bicycle down the hill to class as in the old days at Berkeley High. I was enjoyably interested in the classes that I took, did well, and graduated in September.

When my father returned to Berkeley I moved back in again. I speculated that my being forced to move out was motivated by my father’s horror that I might turn into a panhandler and never leave home. However, I dismissed that idea as ridiculous. I wanted a life of my own as soon as I had the credentials to earn one. I did not expect to work in Berkeley or San Francisco, and, in any case, the moment I graduated I was subject to military service in Korea. One explanation for my father forcing me to move out and then move back in again is that that action had concealed from Berkeley eyes the significance of George’s moving out because he didn’t want to live with my father any longer. Another is that my father was really horrified at the thought that his sons were so despicable that they, or at least me, would panhandle from him as he had done from his own fam-

1275
ily for so many years and had subsequently gone to such trouble to conceal. Since that fact had been successfu-
ly concealed, that explanation didn’t cross my mind at the time.

In entering military service I suffered from the illusion that the knowledge that I then had about boat handling, naval history, and methods could be put to better use, and would serve me better, in the Navy than in the Army. This was not a question of fear. Several military hospitals were near Berkeley. Once, while my father and I were lunching at Spenger’s Fish Grotto, our neighbors at the next table were half a dozen one-legged wounded, probably being given some civilian experience while recovering, and under the escort of two nurses or volunteers. I remarked, in philosophic tones, “Well, if I come home like that I’ll be close to home and luckier than most in that you’ll be able to take me out instead of leaving me to a nurse.”  

58. CSF-FP 9 January 1951

1276
With my small boat experience I could easily find myself in one of the most dangerous operations in wartime, steering a landing craft into a fortified enemy beach. Most experts had predicted disaster for the Inchon landing; what saved that one was that the enemy was so sure that it was impossibly dangerous that he had not developed his defenses as he should have. There was also the problem of becoming an American citizen; the Navy would not take me until I became a citizen. I had followed the procedure normal for young immigrants, which entailed paperwork between one’s twenty-first and twenty-second birthdays. All in all, I hung about Berkeley, doing odd jobs, without having any idea of whether I would be inducted this week or next. I was finally inducted just before Christmas, 1951.

While hanging in limbo in Berkeley, I was still at home for George’s next adventure. My father wrote it all to my mother.

“My dear,

“This is a letter full of serious trouble; I’m sorry to inflict it on you, but I think you had better
know all about it. Some time about the 7th of this month [November] I had the happiest letter possible from George, written on the 5th. I suppose you had heard I had visited him at Cornell the weekend before that and came away feeling that he was all right — I lunched and dined at his fraternity and thought they were a nice bunch of lads (although I thought I wouldn’t live that sort of life myself for a million a week) and George seemed really happier than I had ever known him, and he talked more freely to me than I had ever known him to do, either. Then there was this very happy letter (I’d seen him in New York, too, and bought him his dinner jacket and so on, and he seemed radiant then, too). Well, on Friday 9th, I had a wire from the Dean of Men saying that George had run away. He knew of no reason, and when I wired the fraternity they knew of no reason either, although they were genuinely sympathetic and said that they regretted George had left and hoped they would have him back again. So then I just sat and waited — couldn’t do anything else. On the night of Monday last (12th) there came a wire
from His Lordship, saying that he was at Wendover — 700 miles from here, where Utah and Nevada join — with a broken down car and needed $100 for repairs. He called himself my prodigal son. So on Tuesday morning I got into my car and drove there — the passes were covered with ice and I only got there on the afternoon of Wednesday. Of course, I was very angry with the little so-and-so (I can’t call him a bastard because he’s so like me at my most exasperating moments) and I was quite ready to turn round straightaway and leave him there to freeze and start his new life in Wendover. I said so and he listened to reason to a certain extent — at any rate he agreed to go back to Cornell; I think I frightened him a little. [From my father’s description of the incident to me, and my knowledge of Wendover, the place also frightened George. Wendover is between the Salt Lake Salt Flats and the desert mountains, merely two gasoline stations and four bars beside the highway, and there was a howling norther blowing all of George’s time there. Not a place to be stuck without means of transportation.]
Then I listened to his troubles. He said he wasn’t happy. Also that he was afraid that Cornell was altering his precious personality. Also that he wanted to write. He showed me a short story and some verse he had written (apparently while waiting for me). They were not intolerably bad, but they were hardly better than that. Of course, talent in that way simply does not show up before about 23 or so [Is this referring to his fiction that he wrote *Payment Deferred* when he was 23?] — there are hardly any exceptions to that (I am not talking about genius). Then he said he wanted to marry [his first girl] and I said what I’d said before — that if he approached me again about it in two year’s time, I’d at least listen to him with sympathy — you may remember what I said to you on the same lines. He didn’t confess to any major sins at all; of course I’m sorry to have to say that doesn’t mean he hasn’t committed any. I’m keeping an open mind on that, but I said nothing like that to George, didn’t even hint as much. One thing that really frightened me was finding a nearly empty bottle of whiskey in his car; he
told me that he needed it to keep him warm and to help him over the passes — damn it, I’d just driven over passes just as bad.”

Nothing excuses drinking and driving, but George’s father had driven only 700 miles in a nearly new Cadillac with automatically controlled cabin heating, while George had driven 2,000 miles in a hot-rodded ‘37 Ford that leaked drafts at every seam. My father told me that George’s engine had seized up because George had been driving while drunk and hadn’t noticed that the water jacket had boiled dry. My father didn’t know enough about engines to know what happened. George told me that he threw a rod or ran a rod bearing. The letter goes on.

“I told him he must cut that out at once, but I don’t expect he listened. He also told me (what he has said so often before) that his life up to now had been unhappy and that I wasn’t a loving or understanding parent. He may be right about me in that way, but I don’t think so myself, of course. He and I used to play and joke together happily, as you may
remember. At any rate, I spent the night with him and next morning put him on the train for Cornell; this was Thursday morning (15th) and he was due to arrive there on Sunday, today. I haven’t heard yet that he did and I only hope so. As soon as I got home here I wrote him the nicest possible letter to try and cheer him up, but I also had to preach to him on the subject of drink; I don’t know how you feel about that, but I have the greatest anxiety about it for a lad like George. I also wrote the necessary letters to the university authorities excusing the boy and asking them to forgive him and so on.”

There are two paragraphs about the car and about possible future arrangements, in which Cecil offered a reward to George if he graduated from college, and was a bit put out when George did not seem impressed. Probably George had made some estimate of the value of his father’s promises. Cecil continues.

“The point is that this last ridiculous behavior had brought my patience to an end, really and truly. I won’t stand for anything more from him. He has
caused me a great deal of anxiety, to say nothing of putting an end to my work at the moment just when it is vitally important that I should get a great deal done. I suppose it is as much your business as it is mine when I say that he has reached the end of his rope. It is a dreadful thing for a father to have to say, but I shall refuse to have anything more to do with him if there is any more serious trouble. You probably don’t agree with me, but the impression I have of myself is of a very patient man who when he reaches the limit of his patience makes a drastic decision and then sticks to it. It would be very painful to me but I think that I shall never again come to his help if he is in trouble. I will find that very irksome, of course; George is quite wrong when he says that I have no love for him. And apart from that, I would not like to abandon a job which I started, but I think I will if I have to. ... It doesn’t put his case in any better light to say that he is just like me at the same age; that’s nearly true, but not quite, and it doesn’t help anyway.”

In writing, “to say that he is just like me at the
same age,” Cecil is not answering a comment from Kathleen — she was neither in a position to talk to Cecil nor did she hold that opinion. Cecil is inadvertently confessing his own fears that his children would be as bad as he had been and as he thought his family had been.

Cecil wrote more coldly to Frances: “I hope they will fry in hell, but unless they start soon it won’t be any satisfaction to me. They are like any other kind of cross breed, and have inherited the worst qualities of both their parents.”\textsuperscript{60}

What our father did not understand was that treating his children as his fears dictated neither made us perfectly rational men (as was his stated goal) nor left us naive fools (as he thought us). We were just somewhat different personalities who lacked the terrible insecurity that afflicted him.

The trouble that Cecil feared wasn’t long in

\textsuperscript{59} CSF-K, 532, 18 November 1951
\textsuperscript{60} CSF-FP, 10 November 1951

1284
coming. George returned to Berkeley for Christmas vacation. During his stay, Cecil’s literary agent in New York submitted his year-end accounts. Cecil had instructed his agent to send George $90 allowance for his first month in college, because Cecil had not been home to do it. Inadvertently, the agent had repeated this each month, although Cecil had sent allowance checks for the succeeding months himself. George had accepted and spent both sets of checks. Cecil, so he says, confronted George with his dishonesty, which George denied. “But when I realized that he must have had the money he showed no shame at all — it was as though he had been doing something clever. It is that which makes me worry particularly about him; the lying in those circumstances was useless and somewhat morbid — pathological.

“But as it was, I was so deeply hurt and upset that I told him that he was through as far as I was concerned; that I never wanted to see him again, and he could leave home and I would pay him $10 a week as long as I never set eyes on him ... He is out
now and I don’t know if he will return. I was going to suggest to you that I hand over the management of the boy’s affairs to you, if you would take them on and if he’s agreeable. I would pay you personally a monthly sum (I haven’t worked out yet how much) which would just cover his keep on a cheap scale at Cornell, and his fees and some small allowance and you could pay these things for him, and if you could make a profit out of the deal, no one would be more pleased than I would be...”

I was away in the Navy at this time. I heard the story later from Betty Brown, who described the row between George and his father as she could piece it together. She did not mention that Cecil was hurt by George’ lying, which corroborates George’s statement that he didn’t lie about receiving the money (the evidence was clear) even in the heat of argument. She told me that what hurt Cecil most was George’s defense of his behavior as normal, particularly when compared to his father’s own expendi-

61. CSF-K, 532.3, 29 December 1951

1286
tures. George writes that he had “received the extra money very close to CSF’s visit [to George at Cornell], and initially thought that the money had something to do with CSF’s visit to college. When Betty asked George about the money, George very openly admitted getting two checks. This response astounded Betty, as she was expecting a denial of some sort. CSF then made bitter attacks against George, accusing him of lying, which George did not [do], and this got George’s dander up, and so the [following] argument then ensued.”

“Of course I cashed my checks. What would you expect me to do, return my father’s check? Would I ask you if you really meant me to have the money? If it was really next month’s allowance, then I’ve had it now and won’t have it then. What difference does that make?”

“But you took two month’s allowance in one month. That’s dishonest conduct that I won’t tolerate.”

“Dishonest conduct? You have the cancelled checks don’t you? You know how much I’ve had—there’s no way for me to hide that. Is it so important to you that you’ve paid out $150 three weeks earlier than you need?”

“Of course it is. Each month you are at school you receive your allowance, but not before. That is good management. I’m not made of money; I have to watch things, too.”

“You’re a fraud, mouthing blue-nosed sentiments, a fake Puritan. $150 doesn’t matter a damn to you, and you well know it. You make sure you carry $200 in your pocket at all times, and what’s that for but to spend? You tell everybody you’re so great, but you know yourself to be nothing but a lecherous old fraud who’s had good publicity. I’m not taken in.”

To me, Betty added the illustrative note that when she went to file one of George’s cancelled checks, it fitted in sequence very neatly between two others for approximately $3,000; one to pay for Dorothy’s mink coat, the other to pay for some other
woman’s similar coat.

Cecil’s greatest fear was of being found out, and George’s words had shown that he had sized his father up pretty accurately. Cecil’s habit when people started to learn too much was to drop them from his social circle and discredit their opinions. He liked to separate his friends according to what they knew about him, and to keep each group in its own watertight compartment. He often told different stories in different compartments. Whenever someone from one group showed signs of learning too much, or learning what people in another compartment knew, Cecil dropped that person cold. I was never told that George had been forbidden to see our father again. I simply assumed that George had other things to do on the days when I saw our father.

The postwar years had been a time of pain and trouble for Cecil. He had faced George’s hostility over bastardy, working, college, and character, a hostility which to the perceptive eye still smouldered. He had had his lifestyle plan overturned by
my refusal to attend Harvard. He had borne the pain, fear, and expense of his heart attack, whose long-term effects might still be serious. He had barely evaded the social exposure threatened by the inconveniently timed revelation of his marriage. He had broken up with the woman who meant most to him. After the four-year delay caused by my intransigence in attending the wrong university, and by Cecil’s treatment of his son George as his own father had not treated him under similar circumstances, Cecil was now able to take up the type of life that he most desired, or as much as he could with Dorothy, his wife, beside him much of the time.
With the household running to his satisfaction, Cecil took up his old social life. He had three groups of Berkeley friends: U.C. faculty, visitors military and naval, and bridge players. Marjorie Manus fit right in with the last, with whom Cecil had the most frequent and permanent contacts. These most prominent of his friends were complete nonentities. There was a stockbroker and the man who managed the list of the names of all telephone exchanges, allocating new names so their numerical codes wouldn’t duplicate any other exchange with an entirely different spelling. (This was after the adoption of the dial sys-
tem and before the adoption of all-number dialing.) And their wives, of course, who were no more interesting. Cecil and Marjorie played with this group several times each week, about once a week in his own house.

The military and naval visitors were a mixed lot — some of them pompous travelers, others intelligent and articulate exponents of modern warfare. Inevitably, the conversation turned to military history, recent or ancient, and the literary use that Cecil made of it. These were, of course, the most fascinating visitors. Obviously, these men admired Cecil, admitting that in this part of their field he was as good as they, and in his own, much better. Their admiration was one more of the influences which maintained Cecil’s reputation in my own eyes.

The faculty friends were quieter, though not entirely without glamor. George Stewart had senior standing, having been a friend since 1940, and as the author of Ordeal by Hunger and Storm was known beyond academe. The others were, by and large, professors of average attainment (average for a uni-
versity with the reputation of U.C. Berkeley) in non-quantitative liberal arts fields, each of them the epitome of the fictional university professor.

One of the one-time visitors was Somerset Maugham. “Perfectly delightful. He had read the General and liked it, and the Ship as well. I don’t think he’d read Hornblower, or if so he didn’t like it. He said to me that he wished he knew a lot about everything like that, and I told him (and meant it) that it is better to feel than to know. I called him sir and gave him all the deference that I owed him, which seemed to startle him. He’s naturally a very modest man, and not a bit waspish or Voltairean, as I thought he might become. He isn’t even very cynical—in fact he’s a very sweet intellectual old gentleman.”

1. CSF-FP 4 August 1945

I do not list all the times that Cecil sent Frances his work in progress, but his letters show that, at least for the period of the letters, and presumably

1. CSF-FP 4 August 1945

1293
from the start of their friendship, he sent her all his work in progress and frequently asked her opinion of it and her advice about it. In some cases he remarks on her opinion and sometimes he mentions the changes that he made as a result. I list those that seem significant. For some years after their love affair had had its first crash, Frances considered their relationship merely professional, one of author and editor. What she considered it later is not known.  

The book published in the year before the end of the war was *The Bedchamber Mystery*, a small book containing three short stories with sexual plots. The first is *The Bedchamber Mystery*, the other two stories are *The Eleven Deck Chairs* and *Modernity and Maternity*. This book was published merely because Saunders, Cecil’s Canadian publisher, had a small allowance of paper (paper was allocated because it was short during the war) which he wanted to use lest he be assigned a smaller amount next year.

2. CSF-FP 12 March 1950
Cecil had thought up three plots with sexual themes appropriate to different centuries. The first concerned Victorian prudishness, the second concerned sex in the present time with birth control to avoid producing children, the third, in the future, about producing children without sexual activity. In the first story, a supposed Forester great-aunt, one of three spinster sisters, breaks her chamber pot as she was using it, and the sharp edges cut her buttocks. The plot concerns the efforts of the lady to get her wounds treated by the village doctor, with whom she and her three sisters play bridge once a week, without revealing which sister had suffered the injury. The second story is set in the then current war after France had been conquered by the Germans and French opinion divided into those who acquiesced and those who continued resistance. Somewhere in the rest of the world, the wives of eleven French colonial officials are being transferred in a ship whose captain is a member of the opposite political faction. Each evening the captain uses his authority to prevail upon the group of ladies to choose one of their
number to sleep with him. The selection is by seniority, the wife of the most junior official first. During the subsequent days, the group sits in their deck chairs, divided between those who have and those who have not, and on the eleventh day only the wife of the governor has not. She feels lonely as the other eleven have much to talk about while she feels properly aloof, even ignored. However, during that day a British destroyer comes in sight and orders the ship into the nearest port. Upon arrival, the wife of the governor resumes her rightful place in the pecking order and sweeps off the ship in front of those who had been ignoring her. The third story is set in the 1950s, although supposedly recounted in the next century. Lady Decima Hayes is another spinster, but a forceful and harddriving one. After serving in the women’s army during the war, she set about restoring the agricultural productivity of the family estate, using all modern techniques and equipment, such as helicopters, weed eradicators, and even a robot chef in the kitchen. Now nearer forty than thirty, with nobody likely to marry her,
she becomes pregnant. Given everything else about her character, it must have been by artificial insemination. One day, after her pregnancy has become obvious, many of the machines, even the robot chef, give trouble. She ends the day cooking dinner herself, after which her guests hear her murmur to herself, “Take it all in all, and there is a good deal to say in favour of old-fashioned methods.”

These are comedies. The most salacious passage (if you can call it that) is the captain’s proper expression of gratitude, to the assembled ladies, for the nighttime company that they have been providing him. These stories might have been considered risque in Cecil’s childhood milieu, but nowhere else. Intellectually, he certainly knew better, although emotionally he might have feared otherwise. (I had read through much of his hidden pornographic library; pretty poor, unattractive, stuff, much about buttock smacking. Only *The Chinese Room*, openly on the living-room bookshelves, and *Chin P’ing Mei*, the Chinese classic, hidden upstairs, had any literary merit.) Presumably, he felt that his pretense that his
stories were salacious provided a cover of responsibility for his actual thoughts and deeds.

Just as the war was ending, the day after the dropping of the second atomic bomb, Cecil predicted the technology of nuclear war. “It’s the combination of atomic bombs and V-2s [the first ballistic missiles, used by Germany] that make the outlook so hellish depressing.” 3 He thinks the outlook so frightening that the world will insist in keeping the peace, except for the threat of “desperate adventurers,” giving Hitler as a recent example.

In April, 1946, the Saturday Evening Post published I Can’t Walk, Cecil’s article about his illness. As a result, for months he was deluged by letters from quacks and madmen telling of miraculous treatments and cures.

In the spring of 1946, Cecil wrote Lord Hornblower, the book that he intended to describe the end of Hornblower’s career. Cecil was writing in a world newly come to peace; Lord Hornblower would tell of

3. CSF-fP 10 August 1945

1298
the end of Napoleon’s empire and the end of Hornblower’s career in fighting him. It is a quirk of history that Napoleon had to be conquered twice. His armies were beaten by Russians, Prussians, and British, and he was forced to abdicate and retire to the island of Elba in the Mediterranean Sea. The French old regime returned to power and misgovernment. One year later, Napoleon escaped from Elba, landed in France, and rallied the French armies around him. Only the British and the Prussian armies were able to concentrate in time. Napoleon attacked the British (led by Wellington, of whom Lady Barbara was the fictional sister) at Waterloo, the British withstood his attack, the Prussians arrived late in the afternoon, and Napoleon was finished. He was imprisoned on the lonely British island of Saint Helena in the middle of the South Atlantic.

Cecil set himself the task of winding up Hornblower’s career and settling his emotional life. The career will end with the ending of the war; Cecil’s problem is how to settle Hornblower’s emotions in
the way that satisfies Cecil’s aesthetic sense as Cecil’s emotions lead it. The naval war is practically over; nothing but blockade duty remains. The final events of the war occur on land. Hornblower, just recovered from sick leave, is happy with Barbara but bored with social ceremonial. From that he is plunged into minor naval adventures on the French coast that put him in position to encourage French coastal cities to switch allegiance from Napoleon to the old French king. In these actions, Hornblower’s oldest companion, Captain Bush, is killed. He is blown to pieces by the explosion of a shipload of gunpowder at a great distance from Hornblower; even the emotional release of mourning over his friend’s body is denied Hornblower. Hornblower’s actions provide the royalists a beachhead, and Barbara sails over with the ceremonial figures. Once Napoleon has abdicated, Hornblower and Barbara travel to Paris with the new French government and Hornblower is compelled to participate in the social cum political affairs. He hates these and feels that he is a naval officer out of water but Barbara is of
course in her element. Furthermore, her brother Wellington, first the brilliant British general who smashed Napoleon, then the British ambassador to France, and then the British representative to the peace conference in Vienna, is a bachelor who needs his sister to be his hostess for his social functions. At one of the social functions Hornblower and Barbara meet the Comte de Gracay and his widowed daughter-in-law Marie, the two people who had made possible Hornblower’s escape from France three years before. Hornblower reflects on the difference in his feelings for the two women, “the woman whom he had publicly chosen and the one he had privately loved.”

Psychological distance grows between Hornblower and Barbara as he feels out of place while she takes great pleasure in fulfilling her duties at the top of the social ladder. They politely quarrel as Hornblower says that he will not go to Vienna but she may go. After rusticating at his estate of Smallbridge while Barbara is in Vienna, Hornblower

4. Lord Hornblower p 161

1301
accepts an invitation to stay with the Gracays, and inevitably renews his affair with Marie. While he is there, Napoleon returns from Elba. Both the Comte and Hornblower will be killed if Napoleon’s forces find them, but rather than escaping to England they kindle a guerrilla resistance movement, in which Marie joins. Their movement ties up a considerable number of Napoleon’s troops, who would have been extremely useful at Waterloo, but their group is beaten. In the final engagement as the last few hungry and worn out guerrillas are overcome by French dragoons, Marie is killed and Hornblower and the Comte are taken prisoner. These two are condemned to death by a military court, under a general who is not unsympathetic but must follow orders. On the night before the executions, word comes that Napoleon has been beaten at Waterloo, and the general decides that it will be better to delay the executions until the political situation is determined. Hornblower is left with his thoughts; he has brought death to all of his companions, his greatest love has been killed, his wife is a great lady living at
a level of society in which he is uncomfortable, his duty has finished. Hornblower is alone again, to face his own personal demons, an ending entirely in character for Cecil’s works.

To make this story believable, Cecil has to emphasize the characteristics that he has always attributed to Hornblower: self doubt, intellectual cynicism, memories of years of poverty, shyness, and dislike of ceremony. Hornblower is a basically kindly man whom the exigencies of war and his own shyness have forced into playing the parts of a bloodthirsty warrior and a stern disciplinarian. Cecil describes the psychological distance between Hornblower and Barbara as the result of their pride. “He was always guarded with himself, guarded with the world. And she—she knew those moods of his, knew them even while her pride resented them. Her stoic English upbringing had schooled her into distrusting emotion and into contempt for any exhibition of emotion. She was as proud as he was; she could resent being dependent on him for her life’s fulfillment just as he could resent feeling incomplete

1303
without her love. They were two proud people who had made, for one reason or another, self-centred self-sufficiency a standard of perfection, to abandon which called for more sacrifice than they were often prepared to make.”

Unlike Barbara, Marie, who was not born to the nobility, provides an intimate love that understands Hornblower’s moods but is not affected by them, and that produces in Hornblower the love for another that supersedes doubts about the self. However, Cecil cannot allow Hornblower to desert Barbara for Marie. Therefore, Marie must die and Hornblower must be left alone. Cecil always described his major novels as those about the man alone. Hornblower started as the man alone, and ends as one again. Creating this ending for Hornblower aroused Cecil’s emotions. “Meanwhile H is drawing to his horrible close—it’s as well that I have it to do because as a matter of fact it engages so much of my thoughts and attention and leaves me

5. Lord Hornblower p20
so weary that I’ve nothing to spare to fret over the present situation. [The arrangements for Cecil’s trip to Japan for the Navy were being disarranged from day to day.] I don’t know it is a good thing to be deeply stirred by a book when one is writing it; it doesn’t happen very often, not often enough to lay down a general rule, but I mistrust it. You are likely to lose sight of the necessary mechanisms and produce something unbalanced. There’s about 65,000 words finished and I suppose it will run another 5,000—short but I can pad earlier if necessary. I think it will be long enough anyway.”

Cecil portrays Hornblower as irascible with his staff, sometimes because he is weary and overburdened with cares, but at other times merely for the pleasure of shaking them up. Cecil has Hornblower pretending to be a blood-thirsty warrior to achieve an effect, but then relenting once the effect has been achieved. In many respects, Lord Hornblower presents the most complete description of Hornblower’s psy-

6. CSF-FP 14 September 1945

1305
Achieving these effects required both reference to the past and present mental effort. “For this part of Lord H. I’ve had to read Captain Horatio over very carefully (he’s with the Gracays now and I don’t want to make mistakes) and the more I read it the less I like it. Christ knows what’s the matter with that book, but there is something, definitely. It’s too late to remedy it now, and I must keep the end of it in the same vein. Thank God I made Marie a nice girl that a man could fall in love with—the plot would have been hellish difficult otherwise. In its general layout the book is a sort of mirror image, backwards, in all respects, of the General.”

Cecil felt the strain, perhaps the more because he had to create a more intimate psychological portrait that was so close to his own. As he wrote to Frances, “I’m getting more and more convinced that a life of constant mental stimulation (or irritation) is what is necessary to make me work, but what is

7. CSF-FP 30 August 1945

1306
more I haven’t the least intention of hunting up any stimulation—and especially no irritation—and I don’t care if I do any work and Hornblower can stay in the Bay of the Seine for the rest of my life for all I care.”

Cecil’s fascination with Hornblower came not only because of Cecil’s familiarity with the Napoleonic period and naval warfare of that time, but because Hornblower was Cecil’s image of himself as he wished to be, had he the courage to be so. As Hornblower was at bottom a kindly but realistic man forced by the exigencies of the time to pretend to be cynically cruel, so Cecil was a self-centered cynic who concealed his character behind a facade of magnanimity, consideration, and reasonability.

The proofs of *Lord Hornblower* arrived in early February, 1946. Cecil had just been reading the second and third volumes of Freeman’s *Lee’s Lieutenants* and thought them pretentious. “When a man writes a deliberately pedestrian book like that he might as well make sure he is understood. I can’t imagine why he holds such a high place in American esteem. He can’t for a single moment compared with Motley,
for instance. I honestly prefer Fletcher Pratt, which just shows you what I think of Freeman.”

Although Cecil discussed reading *Lee’s Lieutenants*, two letters and ten days later he excused his purchase of pornographic books by saying that he had fallen out of the habit of reading and needed something to rejuvenate his habit. He had ordered a large shipment of pornographic books by mail, writing to Frances, “I’ve always liked dirty books and I thought that (as well) I might get back into the habit of reading if there was a little jam around the first pill. But all my experience with pornography so far is that it’s far better in anticipation than in actuality. [The mail order firm] didn’t advertise Frank Harris’ *My Life and Loves*, which I’ve always heard a lot about and never read. Have you ever come across it dear? And if so, is it any good?” Frances marked the margin of that letter next to that title, to remind her to buy Cecil a copy.

8. CSF-FP 27 January 1946
9. CSF-FP 7 February 1946

1308
Save for the unforeseen impediment of George and me living with him, 1947 and early 1948 were years in which Cecil carried out his living plan. The winter of 1947-8 saw him in Berkeley working on *The Sky and the Forest*, the spring and early summer saw him in England, late summer found him at Fallen Leaf Lake again, and in the fall he resumed his working routine in Berkeley after his usual trip to New York. He had plenty of money for this life. At the end of May, 1946, his income for the year to date had been $60,000, of which he had saved $14,000 and been charged $27,000 for taxes. He had evidently spent the rest.\(^\text{10}\)

In *Lord Hornblower* Cecil had finished Hornblower off; he thought there would be no more. However, he received many fan letters asking for more. “Most of them clamour for books about his youth—anyone would think that it was a conspiracy.

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10. CSF-FP 31 May 1946

1309
... Of course, without much effort I could write twenty short stories of 4000 words each about the early Hornblower. At three thousand apiece that would be 60,000 dollars. Have any of the book clubs ever taken a volume of short stories, dear? I’m all for breaking precedent if they haven’t. It would be the easiest way of working and of making money that I know–of course I must admit that I’m tempted to it by the thought that it would postpone the evil hour when I shall have to buckle down and work like a dog on War and Peace.”

The first intimation of the final Hornblower story, *The Last Encounter*, set in 1848, occurs in the next week, when Cecil thinks that it would serve to help revitalize the dying *Strand* magazine in London. Whenever Cecil did write that story, it was not published in the *Strand* but was put away for publication after his death. It became one of the two addi-

11. CSF-FP 20 July 1946. War and Peace was Cecil’s joking working title for a novel that he contemplated but never started.
tions to the final, and unfinished, novel, *Hornblower and the Crisis*. In this story, Hornblower is an old gentleman retired to his estate, which is between London and Dover. One stormy night an elegant but bedraggled man comes to his front door with the request to be driven some miles to the next railway station, because the storm has washed out the nearby track. It is very urgent, he must reach Paris very quickly. The stranger turns out to be Louis Napoleon, the nephew of the man Hornblower spent his life fighting, on his way to be elected the next king of France.

The plot of *The Sky and the Forest* came to Cecil in November, 1946 and he described the sensation to Frances. “Very interesting this morning; some odd symptoms have been showing up for the first time for several years—I think the last time was on the deck of a ship going round England at the time of George VI’s coronation when I thought out the final plot of Flying Colours—no, it was Ship of the Line. Anyway, there was the old heart beating fast
and the respiration quickened and so on. Something like a plot was coming to me. It’s something about a woman in Central Africa (not the African Queen, which it sounds like) in the middle 1800’s and a black military empire–Ashanti or something like that. Not too straight at present; I have the feeling that it’s like some other plots–half of it is here and I’ve got to find the other half and stick the two together. The black empire is the vital thing–the woman will only be used to display it, if you understand me.”

“It will be an all-black story, if you can imagine that. The story of a man who sincerely and truly believes himself to be a god–born like it, king & god of an isolated area in Africa. His psychology ought to be interesting as well as difficult; he had never of course, been touched by Western culture or methods of thought. He will never speculate about things or doubt them. Not a Hornblower at all, a big lusty nigger of 25, loving his kids, enjoying a good screw,

12. CSF-FP 24 November 1946

1312
or a succulent dish of goat’s tripe, and yet quite certain he’s a god until circumstances prove he’s not. Conversation will be tricky—you can’t speculate much in Buganda language, so to speak, nor discuss elaborate social usages. It ought to be fun. Some blood will be shed, I expect, & there’ll be some adventures; & there’ll be a lot of atmosphere, I hope, especially the two contrasting atmospheres, the forest—with no sky and no distances at all, & the river—where you can see the frightening sky and long distances. They have caused a conflict in my god’s mind without his knowing it all his life. The sky, he knows, is a rival god, hostile to his divinity—and it’s down the river that the Arab slave raiders come who destroy his kingdom. Any sense?”

Unfortunately, the break between Frances and Cecil closed off any further descriptions of writing *The Sky and the Forest*. In December, Cecil informed Alfred McIntyre of Little, Brown that he would not write the big war novel but would deliver *The Sky and the Forest*.

13. CSF-FP 29 November 1946
instead. The next mention is when Cecil rather diffidently, in the letter that Frances designated as the reconciliation letter, asks her if she wants to read the almost-finished work.

Loa, the main character of *The Sky and the Forest*, is a tribal chieftain shaken out of his primitive culture by temporary capture by modern slave traders. Escaping, he returns to his old territory bearing new ideas of methods to dominate and command his tribe, and of new objectives of tribal power and security. The power of his new order is in its turn overthrown by the advent of Europeans with their breechloading firearms and steamboat transport.

Cecil was very proud when an anthropologist wrote to him to ask his source for some piece of cultural description, because, so wrote the anthropologist, he had long suspected that such was true, but had never seen a field report of it. Cecil wrote back honestly, saying that most of his cultural description

14. CSF-FP 7 December 1946
15. CSF-FP 20 August 1947
had been assembled from traveler’s tales, but organized into a description of Loa’s culture by his own inventive powers, and that the matter in question was a literary invention necessary to substantiate some other items he wanted to include. Never having been put into the position where his knowledge of African culture was necessary to substantiate his personal propaganda, Cecil was quite ready to admit he invented the spurious reality that was his stock in trade—more, he was proud to be able to say that as a novelist he invented something out of whole cloth that was so near the truth that even the experts accepted it. The extent of his research had been to send Betty Brown down to the Berkeley Public Library to withdraw all the books on Africa, about ten at a time. Cecil leafed through them all, rejecting some but reading others completely as one would read a work of fiction, without taking notes. Having the idea of the plot already, he remembered bits and pieces of the material that might be useful, and synthesized later a description of tribal life that fit the plot.
Some measure of the realism of his version of African culture is the subsequent history of these African states after the era of colonialism, much of which follows the path foreshadowed by Cecil’s story. However, it is one thing to be proud of creating a believable but fictional world, but another to admit to using the same technique when writing history. Probably, he had done just that when writing *Victor Emmanuel and the Unification of Italy*, which was why he wrote such an argumentative letter\(^{16}\) to Methuen’s editor when the publisher’s reader had detected an error. He certainly did this later with *The Age of Fighting Sail*, because I saw him do it, and he answered similarly when Doubleday’s reader questioned his accuracy.

Although Cecil thought out much of *The Sky and the Forest* in November, 1946, and promised to deliver it as his next novel, he was delayed by writing a play called *The Furies*,\(^{17}\) at the request of

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1316
A. D. Peters, his English agent. The first version was complete by Christmas, and Cecil’s Christmas guests, including George and I, read it aloud for him. I don’t remember it, although Cecil told Frances “John liked the play enormously and said some nice things about it. In the November copy of his school magazine there’s a really good story by him.”

This was only the first draft; Cecil had to do considerable further work to bring each act to the appropriate length; he compared that task to building a card castle.

Once I started attending the University of California, I participated in Cecil’s lunchtime discussions of his own current work from the standpoint of a craftsman. I was more often than not home for lunch between classes. At lunch would be my father, me, Dorothy, and Betty Brown, all of us entertained

17. CSF-FP 3 December 1946
18. CSF-FP 26 December 1946
19. CSF-FP 14 December 1946
by his account of the difficulties of thinking up incidents that best carried the story forward in the direction he wanted without adding extraneous matters that required additional explanation elsewhere, or were incompatible with what had already been written. I heard a lot about The Sky and the Forest, although much of that had been completed before I returned from St. George’s. Mr. Midshipman Hornblower, written at this time, was a particularly relevant example. The first-written Hornblower stories carried hints of the past events that had formed Hornblower’s character and career. The newly written stories of Hornblower’s youth had to encompass these details, provide other development of his character, and be interesting in themselves. These points my father went over as he described the creation of The Even Chance and The Cargo of Rice. As my father had written to Frances, writing short stories about Hornblower was both easy and profitable. The volume titled Mr. Midshipman Hornblower is a collection of short stories that were initially published in the Saturday Evening Post, the highest paying publica-
tion in the world. The Saturday Evening Post had a stable of authors, many of whom had developed a caste of characters for their stories, such as Alexander Botts of the Earthworm Tractor Company, and whose tales were tiresomely repetitive. While Cecil’s Hornblower stories were about a consistent character, they were good enough to form a novel as well. I think that the collection of Cecil’s work was the best of any of the Saturday Evening Post’s many authors. Cecil wondered whether the publisher of his books would later publish these stories in book form, and whether any book club would adopt such a book.

It became evident that Hornblower was almost as interesting to Cecil as Cecil was to himself. Cecil did not deliberately apply himself to inventing Hornblower stories; he probably could not prevent his thoughts from starting along that path, although working out the details required mental effort. The process that had turned Cecil’s self-fantasy into a viable fictional character had attracted a great deal

20. CSF-FP 1 July 1949

1319
of Cecil’s interest. In the present world Cecil had to explain away his selfishness, fictionalize his disapproved actions, and be very circumspect in building up his image, but in Hornblower’s world, freed from the possibility of discovery, he had only to present what he wished he really were. My personal impression is that Hornblower becomes, in the sequence of the writing rather than the sequence of his life, somewhat less uncertain, self-distrustful, and pessimistic. The heartfelt “crossgrainedness” of The Happy Return becomes, to my mind, less immediate, more an intentionally inserted gimmick, in those books written after Lord Hornblower. Whether this is because Cecil’s own life improved, or whether he became increasingly familiar with this shade of himself presented as a hero, is an interesting question. In many respects my father did not act as if he felt his life had improved — he didn’t give up counterfeiting his life, for instance — so one is tempted to say that with Hornblower’s successes came a satisfaction with Hornblower as a portrait of himself that replaced my father’s own doubts and fears whenever
he thought of Hornblower.

Cecil did not consider the stories about Midshipman Hornblower among his better work. Frances read and criticized some of them, being particularly critical of *Hornblower and the Penalty of Failure*. Cecil admitted his faults. “A lot of your criticism about the last one was perfectly well founded. I’m always liable to lapse into amateurishness and I did then.”  

Cecil completed the final Midshipman story, *The Duchess and the Devil*, at the end of June, 1949, and sent it to Frances for reading before sending it on to his agent.

After *Mr. Midshipman* there came a respite from Hornblower with a novel about a different character and a television history. This novel was a modern story, *Randall and the River of Time*, a pretentiously titled account of the life of a one of Cecil’s near contemporaries. Randall, two years older than Cecil, served in World War I, and the story continues for the first two postwar years. Randall had grown up in

21. CSF-FP 19 December 1947

1321
the same circumstances and location as Cecil had, but was as naive as Cecil was experienced. His father taught mathematics at a school like Alleyn’s, which naturally Randall attended. The story tells of the actions of inscrutable chance in human life, and thereby illustrates Cecil’s own thought. Randall was buffeted by chance, sometimes favorably, sometimes unfavorably, and the ups and downs of his life were intended to be an interesting story. However, mere chance does not produce an interesting story; Cecil contrived that every time that chance brought Randall to a peak experience, it immediately dropped him off a cliff. That contrast, rather than mere chance, better illustrates Cecil’s typical preference for actions that are inherently useless.

In order to let chance operate, Randall had to be a rather naive and planless person, but he also had to be able to achieve dramatic ups and downs in life. He could not be a financier – or a confidence man – for these implied too strong a character. Cecil decided that Randall would be an inventor.

The story opens with Randall as a nineteen-
year-old first lieutenant in the trenches of the Western Front in 1917. He and his second lieutenant are going up the communication trench to take their posts for the pre-dawn stand to. One post is a bit more comfortable than the other, and today the second lieutenant decides to turn toward it. Randall, who could have objected and taken that post himself, lets him get away with his presumption and turns in the opposite direction to the less comfortable post. Thirty minutes later, the second lieutenant is dead, his post crushed under a German barrage and front-line dawn raid. Turning right instead of left, or left instead of right, means the difference between life and death, without any means of predicting the actions of blind chance. After wondering whether going to the latrine now, or later, will make the difference between life and death, Randall sometimes worries that putting on his right sock before his left might have the same effect.

For individual soldiers in a war, no matter how competent each one may be, blind chance plays an enormous part. The particular timing of the reload-
ing motions of a German gun crew five miles away, firing by map coordinates at a target they cannot see, will determine whether the next shell they fire will arrive just when you reach the crossroads, or just after you have left it. More than half of the novel concerns Randall’s wartime career in which chance played such a part.

Trench warfare in World War I was probably the most horrible method of warfare ever endured. Cecil describes the horrors of the front line, the surged upon relief, the fear of returning, and the irregular but consistent actions of defense and offense by which both sides sought to wear out the other. In these actions Randall shows his basic intelligence by becoming a competent infantry officer.

Randall receives a week’s leave during which two chance events change his life. In the tram on the way from the railway station to his home, he sits down next to a woman he does not know, Muriel, the wife of another officer at the front, and walks her to her home, not far from his father’s. When he reaches home, he finds that his father has a guest,
Graham, a patent attorney. In the conversation about the war, Randall says that the parachutes of the pistol-fired flares that they use to illuminate the area in front of them often fail to open, particularly when the flare is fired at the angle for maximum range. He remarks that it would be easy to redesign the flare to be more reliable, and so Randall’s modification to the Phillips flare comes to be. Graham makes sure that Randall gets a royalty on the improvement.

Muriel, five years older than Randall, whose married life has been merely a series of her husband’s leaves, during which he tended to get drunk, intends to play with Randall. Only chance prevents her from seducing him. One of the several chance actions is when they enter her house one night, with Muriel intending to seduce the naive Randall, only to find under the front-door mail slot the telegram announcing her husband’s death. Chance has ensured that Randall does not notice Muriel’s adulterous proclivities, either with himself or with others. Another of Muriel’s friends is Massey, the
former star cricketer, first as a last-year student at Randall’s school when Randall had just entered, and then for the county, now a one-legged ex-soldier. Randall returns to the front, but later is ordered back to England to participate in the tests of the improved flare (Graham pulled strings for this).

Randall sees Muriel again, she discovers that this naive schoolboy turned infantry officer has received a preliminary award equivalent to several year’s salary in their social circle and will probably receive more later, and accepts his offer of marriage. Their wedding night, supposedly a high point in any man’s life, is marred by the news that the big German breakthrough of 1918 has smashed right through Randall’s unit. Chance has ensured that Randall is alive and newly married instead of dead, but chance has also ensured that the pleasure is, and will be, well diminished. Randall is recalled immediately and assigned to a newly-formed unit in the desperate attempt to stop the Germans, who are gambling all on a victory push before the American army can become effective.
The German push failed, and the Allied armies gained the offensive, pushing back the Germans as the Germans had advanced in the first days of the war, before the horrible stagnation of trench warfare. Randall does his part as a captain, getting his new company into fighting shape at the front, pursuing the retreating Germans and killing as many as possible. When the armistice is arranged, there is a wild night of revelry in the village where the unit is, a village whose men had been absent since the beginning of the war. Randall is taken to bed by the wife of the village smith, an event whose memory later becomes one of adulterous guilt.

When Randall is demobilized, he returns to the house that was now his and Muriel’s, and for which he had paid off the mortgage with part of his award, arriving in government-supplied civilian clothes a day earlier than he had been expected. He waits for Muriel to arrive from work at the tram stop, and greets her as she descends, another high spot in a man’s life. She sees this callow youth in peculiar clothes trying to interest her and turns
away, but just in time realizes that this is her husband.

The next scenes are two years later, with Randall a student in physics at the University of London. His earnings for the improved flare will be sufficient for his undergraduate and some graduate studies, but he has another invention in progress. As Graham handed him the final installment of payments for the flare, he mentioned that his American associate is trying to find a method of sorting peas before canning, selecting out the wrinkled ones. He persuades Randall to think about this problem. Randall thinks of a method of doing the sorting cheaply and, through Graham, arranges that he builds and tests the prototype in the workshop, and with the assistance, of Phillips, with whom he had worked on the improved flare.

Muriel had gone through a stage of sexual indifference but has now, for the last month or so, recovered and become passionate. One day she tells Randall that she has unintentionally become pregnant. Randall gets used to the idea very quickly and
is very pleased. That day he has an appointment with Phillips to make what may be the final tests of the pea sorter. The tests are very satisfactory, showing that the machine needs only detailed development, and with his prospective fatherhood Randall is on top of the world. He tells Phillips and Phillips’s wife, who immediately invite Muriel for a celebratory lunch. Not having a telephone yet, Randall takes the tram home to collect Muriel. He finds Muriel making passionate love with Massey, the one-legged ex-star cricketer, ex-soldier, now unemployed, who, Randall realizes, is probably the father of the forthcoming child. From the height of anticipation, Randall plunges to the depths of bitter disillusion.

When writing this last section of Randall, Cecil discovered the difficulty that it was no use to say, as he had in his mental outline, “At this time Randall invents something which makes him well-to-do for five years.” To have Randall invent something which the reader knew perfectly well had been invented by somebody else — say Alexander Graham Bell —
would destroy the illusion. So Cecil had to re-invent a plausible invention that had been forgotten — and that invention had to be plausible enough in the important aspect, for it had to accomplish a task for which people would pay good money, enough to provide a distinct crest in Randall’s career. In the same way that more than half of most great scientific discoveries is in inventing and designing the right question, so more than half an invention is finding a particular unsatisfied need. My father spent some days in puzzlement, not bringing the solution for lunchtime discussion as was his usual habit, but bringing the problem. We all helped with crazy ideas, which were evaluated by my father’s acute criticism, such as this machine had been done by somebody else, and that machine would be so useful that it would still be used. My father invented the idea of the pea sorting machine, but we all conjured up its details in a lunch-time conference.

The scene where Randall finds his wife in bed with Massey is typical of my father’s predilections. As Randall crested his wave, he had to fall into the
trough of complete catastrophe. Money gone, wife estranged, if possible Randall should not only lose his material possessions, but should be in danger of losing life itself. An adventurous gamble, as when H. G. Wells sent George Ponderevo to Mordet Island for the load of Quap, would not, even in failure, carry the despondent note required. (I use H. G. Wells in this comparison because I think that my father was consciously following that author in his construction of Randall. In an early letter to my mother he remarks that “Mr. Polly is very nearly among the best novels ever written,” and in several novels Wells also treated the actions of chance.) Randall’s situation would have to be illness or trouble with the law. It would have to be a capital offense, murder or almost murder, with both uncertainty and sense of guilt. No question about who did it — Randall had to do it to feel guilty, so the only question could be whether or not it was murder. And if the victim were his wife’s lover the story would achieve a satisfactory unity, satisfying Occam’s Razor, so to speak, but using a common
incident to account for both his wife’s estrangement and the fear of death.

The event would have to be something done in the anger of discovery, something in which Randall would know he had gone too far (as Cecil thought of the angers of his own youth), which would not normally kill, but did in this instance. There’s the victim with the weak heart, or the inadvertent fall against the fireplace grate, or all the other traditions of the mystery novel. What crippling weakness in the victim would make his death inadvertently easy? For Cecil, a cripple was one with trouble in his legs, had been so ever since he had described General Curzon, or before. Therefore, Randall unexpectedly discovers his wife in bed with another man who, emerging naked from the bed, is found to be one-legged, with his false leg leaning against the dressing table. Obviously, the scene before Cecil’s cinematographic mind, though for publication he underwrote it considerably, limiting his description to the mere word obscene (which is indicative enough), combined Randall’s mad rage at the cir-
cumstances with a picturesque victim, attempting to avoid his attacker by grotesque hops, his extended genitals flapping at every move. Then the anti-climax with the struggle near the window and the victim overbalancing over the window sill to fall headfirst upon the steps below. Cecil spent two or more lunchtimes talking about that scene, as if he had to defend himself for thinking of it.

I do not think that my description exaggerates my father’s thoughts; I had long known of his hidden pornographic library, and this is just the kind of image that that material might produce when combined with his imagination. There was considerable material about flagellation, also, very crudely done and utterly uninteresting to one without that fetish.

Randall is tried for manslaughter. Muriel first empties his bank account and then testifies to harm his case. Cecil describes the evidence and phrases the arguments of prosecution and defense in such a way that any possible verdict appears as reasonable as any other. Randall has received letters both accusatory and sympathetic, and has heard angry shouts
and yells outside the courthouse. He faces life in prison, or release, or anything between. The verdict, reached almost immediately, is not guilty.

Upon release, Graham suggests that Randall could go to America to work for the firm that will make the Randall-Phillips pea sorter, and offers to lend money for the passage.

Throughout the novel, Graham has been a guiding genius. His twin sons had been killed early in the war, and his concern for Randall is therefore rather fatherly. In this, he contradicts Cecil’s thesis that the story is one of blind chance. True, it was pure chance that Randall came home on leave the night that Graham visited Randall’s father, but from then on he performs purposeful actions vital to the story.

In one other respect, I think that Cecil failed to explain all. We know, as Cecil’s own correspondence documented, that the condom was the only effective contraceptive equipment available to those of their social circle. However, to explain Muriel’s unexpected pregnancy, Cecil states that Randall
and Muriel left contraception to her responsibility, in the way not appropriate, in England at least, for another ten or more years.

Cecil started *Randall* in the summer of 1949, but disliked what he had done. He felt that the emphasis was wrong and would determine a course that he did not like. He abandoned that work and restarted it at the end of September, 1949. By the end of November he had completed ten thousand words of *Randall*, but he was very worried whether his work was any good, and he sent Frances the first part for her judgement on 20 December. Cecil found it harder work than his earlier writing. “On Christmas eve for the first time with this book I didn’t get my day’s ration finished before lunch, and had to drive myself back to work after it as in my youthful days when I used to write three thousand words a day. It’s hard when you can’t do a thousand

22. CSF-FP 27 September 1949
23. CSF-FP 28 November, 6 December, 20 December 1949
words in a morning.”

On January 5, 1950 he was still worried that *Randall* would be trivial and dull, and on January 25 he apologizes to Frances. “I might be some damned beginner writing his damned first novel, and I’m sorry to inflict it all on your, dear.”

By February 25 he was dissatisfied with his design for *Randall*. Originally he had thought of the book in two halves, the first part occurring in England and the second in a wider cosmopolitan world, reflecting his own life story. At this time he discarded the second part, saving it for a second volume, if he ever wrote one. Certainly, the concept of a life with many peaks and valleys, and growing from provincial to cosmopolitan, fit the pattern of Cecil’s life, but it also fit the pattern of partially successful response to the random acts of fate. Cecil thought of his own life as the result of random acts of fate; he wrote as much in an apologetic letter to Frances in

24. CSF-FP 27 December 1949
25. CSF-FP 25 January 1950
which he said that he would have been condemned to poverty except for his fortuitous ability to tell stories.\textsuperscript{26} Accepting that the universe is unplanned (contingent in the technical jargon) is the scientific view. The fact that Cecil held it for both Randall’s life and his own does not mean that he equated them; it merely means that he understood them to both exist in the real universe.

By the middle of March, Frances had told Cecil that she liked \textit{Randall}, but he was still dissatisfied. “In one way I’m worried about it and in another I’m so fed up with the whole damned thing that I don’t care what happens to it.”\textsuperscript{27} He finished \textit{Randall} at the end of March.\textsuperscript{28}

While he was working on \textit{Randall}, Cecil had thought of three other plots. One was for a novel about the commander of a convoy escort in World War II, the other two were Hornblower adventures,

\begin{flushleft}
26. Date to be ascertained  
27. CSF-FP 15 March 1950  
28. CSF-FP 31 March 1950
\end{flushleft}
one about using red hot shot, the other about a secret concealed by a poem that describes an anagram. Erd Brandt, the editor of Little, Brown, was wildly enthusiastic about the convoy novel when Cecil told him about it in early March, and at the end of March Cecil wrote Frances that he really wanted to write the two Hornblower stories.29

Cecil first wrote the story of Hornblower, as a lieutenant, and McCool’s chest, titling the story *Hornblower’s Temptation*. McCool was an Irishman who sought French aid for an Irish rebellion and was caught at sea. Before he is hanged, he requests that his chest of clothes and his last poem be sent to his widow in Dublin. His chest has a thick lid carved with McCool’s name. Hornblower realizes that McCool’s last poem, filled with weird images, is the clue to moving the letters of the carved name to release a secret compartment in the lid, uncovering McCool’s money and plans. By April 20 Cecil has asked Frances for her opinion of the story. Cecil

29. CSF-FP 25 March 1950

1338
read this story at one of my parties, but because it did not fit with the other stories in *Lieutenant Hornblower* it was not published in book form until it was added to the final, unfinished, *Hornblower and the Crisis*.

At the same time the loyalty oath question was shaking the universities. “I spent yesterday evening with George Stewart discussing (of course) the oath which is shaking this town to its foundations. Everybody is thoroughly upset about it.” The purpose of the oath was to ensure that no professors believed in Marxism, and therefore would not teach its subversive tenets to naive students. However, like all of these attempts, it merely made professors (and other officials) subject to legal persecution for their political beliefs, thus denying academic freedom and jeopardizing tenure. “It interested me to see George scared about the possibility of having to earn his living by his pen alone. He could, easily, if he set his mind to it.” By June, George Stewart’s *Year of the*  

30. CSF-FP 9 March 1950

1339
Oath was accepted by Doubleday. As a student at the time, I considered transferring to Harvard if the Berkeley campus became disrupted by discharge of some professors and quitting by others.

Cecil, as a British subject, had to avoid participating in American politics, but he deplored the oath as much as any other liberal. At first he merely thought it silly, but once he appreciated the despicable uses to which it could be put he despised it, although he could not publicly say so. Four years later he was investigated for his part in liberal affairs. Each time he left the United States he had to get a re-entry permit, which required that he pay his taxes up to date before leaving, and similar matters. In January, 1954, the investigator asked why, in 1944, he had contributed $66 to a refugee committee and had judged a short story competition for People’s World, and why he was a member of the Screenwriters’ Guild. “‘Can’t work for Hollywood unless I do.’ ‘Who got you into it?’ ‘Haven’t the least idea.’ ‘How much have you contributed?’ ‘I don’t know. One percent of my Hollywood earnings.’”31
Cecil was upset by minor irritations also. The postal delivery changed from early morning to midday. “The damned new postal arrangements here are maddening–often the mail doesn’t come until lunch time when I’m so set on my afternoon nap that I don’t want to answer it. And it’s irritating to sit and write letters, as I’m doing now, with the thought at the back of one’s mind that maybe in an hour’s time a letter will be delivered calling for a supplementary letter or making the present one unnecessary.”

Cecil decided that his next novel would be the one about the religious-minded captain of a U.S. Navy convoy escort in World War II, which both his book publishers and The Saturday Evening Post wanted. Its title of *The Good Shepherd* provided the proper Biblical connection. Cecil wanted some cooperation from the U.S. Navy about technical

31. CSF-FP 3 January 1954
32. CSF-FP 5 July 1950

1341
information, but the Navy would not supply without a synopsis of the book. “Condensation/Is vexation,/Excerpts are as bad./To tell a plot/Is tommyrot,/Synopses drive me mad,” was his complaint to Frances. Still, the Navy obliged by arranging for a captain to assist Cecil, starting on August 13. However, the Korean War had started and The Saturday Evening Post decided that it no longer wanted The Good Shepherd; such a subject would be outmoded if the Korean War developed into World War III. Nine months later The Saturday Evening Post changed its mind because the Korean War had not spread, but by then Cecil was working on other projects.

“Of course I could write the damned novel and publish it just as a novel, but that means simply throwing away $30,000 in serial rights, and the thought of that irks me. But I was all set (as set as ever I can be at the thought of work) to start the damned thing and now I’ve got to reorient myself

33. CSF-FP 23 June 1950
34. CSF-FP 26 March 1951
and I wish I was dead, or were dead if you insist in the subjunctive. I’ll have to write that damned Lieutenant Hornblower I suppose and I haven’t got it quite ready mentally yet and I resent having to like hell and I wish I had a million dollars and parsimonious habits.”

“I feel extremely disgruntled about it all. It’s beginning to look as if I shall be compelled to do the Lieutenant and dammit and you know what compulsion does to me. I wish Lieutenant Bush was frying in hell and I simply cannot make myself do the very small amount of constructive thinking necessary to get that plot straightened out.”

By September 5, Cecil had worked out the plot for the first story about Hornblower as told by Lieutenant Bush. A week later Cecil was complaining that Lieutenant Hornblower was “revolting hard work. Quite beastly,” and in another week he described “Horatio H. Dracula is sucking my

35. CSF-FP 9 August 1950
36. CSF-FP 11 August 1950
blood.” He finished the book by January 9, 1951, and sent the final part of his manuscript to Frances. She read it and disliked it.

“I’m sorry you didn’t like Hornblower. There’s a reason why H. appears so much of a Mr. Fixit in this book—a reason without an excuse. And that is because of writing it from Bush’s point of view—Bush sees only the results (being Bush) without guessing at the internal conflicts—if I’d been clever I’d have conveyed the impression of those internal conflicts but I couldn’t do it without making Bush superhuman too. I had hoped that I’d take the curse off that situation by making H. act like such an idiot in the Maria affair and by making half crowns important to him for a period, but it seems that I didn’t succeed. I’m very sorry dear—the public be damned; it was you that I wanted to like it. There’s only one minor point about the whole business, and that is that if anyone in the future ever goes to the trouble of reading the thing through in chronological order (not the order they were written in) it might happen that having seen H. as marvellous in this one the
impact of knowing about his internal workings as revealed in the later ones might be all the greater. But that’s only a comfort to me, not to anyone else. I ought to have been more subtle. Now let’s forget it.”

Cecil told *Lieutenant Hornblower* from Bush’s viewpoint for two reasons. This is a another book of short stories that combine into a single plot, a technique that paid off when the Saturday Evening Post paid $45,000 for the serial rights. The first story involved the ship’s officers’ method of dealing with a schizophrenic captain, in which Hornblower is probably the ringleader but must not be specifically so described. The last story tells of Hornblower’s courtship and wedding, and it is difficult to describe the emotions by which a sensitive and self-analytical character gets himself into what is obviously a foolish marriage to an unattractive woman. For the first story, Cecil obtained information about the appro-

37. CSF-FP 18 January 1951
38. CSF-FP 6 December 1950

1345
priate mental condition from the psychiatrist whom his son George had been seeing. The captain, investigating what he fears is mutiny, in the dark of night on the lower deck, trips over the coaming of the main hatchway to land headfirst in the hold. He survives, both physically and mentally injured. The senior lieutenant takes temporary command, and is pushed by Hornblower’s advice to carry out the ship’s orders. Bush sees only the results; there is some suspicion that Hornblower pushed the captain, but nobody knows and Hornblower naturally does not tell.

Because Cecil had decided to tell Lieutenant Hornblower from Bush’s point of view, he had to discard the story that he had written about Hornblower and McCool’s chest, titled *Hornblower’s Temptation*. That story could be told only through Hornblower’s eyes because it involved the imagination that perceived the hidden message in McCool’s weirdly impressionistic poem. *Hornblower’s Temptation* was published as an addition to the final unfinished volume, *Hornblower and the Crisis*, in 1967,
along with *The Final Encounter*.

One of the actions into which Hornblower’s very tactful advice steers the new commander concerns the use of red-hot shot. This is the second of the stories that Cecil itched to write in the spring. An iron ball sufficiently hot to ignite wood, that is fired into the structure of a wooden ship, is a fearsome weapon, but too dangerous for use by wooden ships. Only harbor-protection forts used it. Cecil had written of the use of red-hot shot, for example by the forts that protected Rosas Bay when Hornblower’s admiral finished off the French squadron in a night action after Hornblower had disabled its ships.

However, Cecil had not described the technique of using such shot. In the late 1940s, he had found the instruction manual for preparing, loading, and shooting red-hot shot. He pored over the text and illustrations, showing them to George and me, with great interest that naturally developed into the desire to write about this technique. Since the weapon was used against ships, its story fit the Hornblower niche. That is, it would if Hornblower
fired the red-hot shot instead of merely receiving them. So Cecil devised a story in which the ship in which Hornblower is serving is first endangered by receiving red-hot shot, to inform the readers of the danger. Then, Hornblower’s tactful advice puts him in charge of storming the battery and turning its guns, with their red-hot shot, on the ships in the harbor that the battery was designed to protect. Hornblower has to deduce enough from the captured equipment, furnaces, tongs, carriers, and the like, to devise safe and effective methods of firing red-hot shot. Cecil was as fascinated by military gadgets as by the brilliant military mind. However, Cecil, as so often, was tripped up by his assumption of technical knowledge. Trying to get the iron shot hot enough, Hornblower gets them so hot that they partially melt and become misshapen. Cecil’s error is that the shot are held in the furnace on an iron grid. The grid would heat faster than the shot, and would weaken at the same temperature. Before the shot became soft enough to lose their shape, the grid would have bent under the load of shot and dumped
Towards the end of the book Hornblower is rewarded for his leadership in the adventures by being given command of a sloop of war, but the peace of Amiens occurs before his rank is confirmed in England. Both Bush and Hornblower are unemployed lieutenants during the peace. Hornblower remains in Portsmouth, supporting himself by playing whist with those who are still employed or have money of their own, colonels and admirals among them. He lodges with Mrs. Mason and her daughter Maria, not-very attractive but adoring and deserving of kindliness. When war again comes, Hornblower’s appointment as commander is confirmed, he has a ship, and marriage to Maria is foreseen.

While writing Lieutenant Hornblower, Cecil sent the usual round of complaints about work, fatigue, length, and the days remaining. He had also particular complaints caused by his plan for the book. “It was a nice bright idea to write this volume from Bush’s point of view but there are the hell of a lot of mechanical difficulties in consequence—Bush
must always be there and the motives must always be explained in conversation and not just stated, and they just get me down and I couldn’t imagine how I was going to continue.”

Frances probably remarked about Cecil’s visit to the psychiatrist, prompting Cecil to reply. “Of course I went and saw one to get some information about delusion or insanity but I’d no more discuss my own problems with him than I’d trust George with my bank account. Although of course I’ve always said that the day I have enough money to live on I shall go to a psychiatrist and get myself analyzed and found out about the mechanics of plot construction. That’s something I’ve always wanted to know about but daren’t examine for fear it won’t work again.”

As the Korean War developed, Cecil took no part in it and gave it little consideration. It was a

39. CSF-FP 19 November 1950
40. CSF-FP 11 October 1950

1350
ground war with only two minor naval aspects: the use of carrier-based aircraft to attack ground targets, and the amphibious landing at Inchon. Likewise, while British forces were involved, they were ground troops and Cecil was physically unfit to be an observer. The strategic musings in Cecil’s letters to Frances are minor and not very accurate. He wondered whether the Russians were behind the war and thought that the U.S. had an easier supply route by sea, with plenty of ships available, than the Russians did with the trans-Siberian railroad. He predicted that “Chinese & Russian interests are going to diverge, just as Hitler’s and Stalin’s did, or Stalin’s and Tito’s, for that matter,” but he gave no date. However, he referred to a prediction that he had made in 1941, that in the event of war between the U.S. and Russia the first thing would be to rearm Germany and Japan. “That’s the best prediction I’ve ever made.”

41. CSF-FP 5 September 1950
42. CSF-FP 30 November 1950
Frances evidently liked James Jones’s novel *From Here To Eternity*, but Cecil disliked it on several grounds, one personal, others objective. He felt that the personality of its hero was too similar to his own. “The hero’s mental quirks are sometimes faintly irritating—maybe it’s because it’s too close to home to read about a man who consciously does the wrong thing because it is the wrong thing.”44 While praising some of James Jones’s observations and his sensitivity to mood, Cecil deplored many other characteristics. “It’s a complaining book. The man has grievances and is bitter about them and pretty nearly whines about them. ... A book bursting with moral indignation can be pretty good (vide *The Jungle*) but I have the feeling it ought to be objective and disinterested at the same time. ... The obiter dicta about the wicked world and the naughty capitalists are quite puerile. So is a lot of the vocabulary

43. CSF-FP 3 January 1951
44. CSF-FP 10 March 1951
and the English construction. ... Soldiers (and sailors) say those words all the time, and with constant use they lose all force of impact. ... But they make a much deeper impression on the lay reader when seen in print, which brings about a falsity of atmosphere. And when the sergeant says a dirty thing that really does hurt (as can happen) it doesn’t record as easily on the reader’s mind. That’s the penalty of not being selective. ... That vocabulary. It’s a symphony composed for a deaf audience which an audience with a sensitive ear has to listen to.”

Cecil was still interested in pornographic material. For his 51st birthday present from Frances he suggested “If you can’t think what to buy for me I’d like a really dirty pornographic book–I haven’t seen anything really dirty for a million years.”

Styles had been changing. Two years after writ-

45. CSF-FP 21 March 1951
46. CSF-FP 11 August 1950

1353
ing *The Bedchamber Mystery*, Cecil commented that in Edmund Wilson’s *Memoirs of Hecate County* “there are some passages of incredible dirtiness, stuff that would highlight a deliberately pornographic book. If that gets by there need never be any limits again in fiction. The book itself as far as I’ve got is pretty good; a seducer recounting the facts of seduction. ... He’s got a good style.” On the other hand, Cecil disapproved of material that he thought merely obscene. “Two of Henry Miller’s books have just been held obscene in a court case here. I’m not surprised, because they really are obscene. And nothing else either. I’ve no use for that guy.”

Cecil still had doubts about how professors rated literature. In celebration of Balzac’s centenary, Cecil was one of a panel, the others being professors of French language and literature at UC Berkeley. “It was all right except they knew the subject and I didn’t, and they knew nothing about writing novels

47. CSF-FP 11 April 1946
48. CSF-FP 5 September 1950
and I did.”

In 1956 Cecil listened to George Stewart’s account of an experiment in literary analysis. Stewart set some of his students the task of analyzing the story line of Faulkner’s novel *The Sound and the Fury*. “I read their notes quite entranced. It makes perfect sense, and a quite consecutive narrative if it’s worked on a damned sight harder than I was prepared to work on it when I read it—I’ve a much higher opinion of the book now, curiously. But I simply can’t make up my mind if Faulkner wrote it that way or wrote it straight and then muddled it up afterwards. In either case he must have the hell of an all-embracing mind.”

Cecil liked two films that he saw in this period. He wrote enviously about *Kind Hearts and Coronets*: “some of the bits of Guiness’ acting are really fine. ... The whole thing is one of the few examples of the

49. CSF-FP 15 March 1950
50. CSF-FP 13 August 1956
grotesque coming off—I wish I’d thought of it.”

The other film was a revival of *The Blue Angel*. “I was even more impressed than before by that performance of Jannings’—a tour de force of the highest order, almost great art. The same with the story; a tour de force with some very good moments indeed. Those legs of the Dietrich are lovely, but her acting doesn’t compare with Jannings’. But it’s one of the best pictures ever made.”

Fame had its annoyances. Inside the engine compartment of his new Cadillac, the dealer had placed a card with his name, probably a normal service for that make that most owners liked. “I’ve had to cover it over because every damned service station man when I buy gas asks me if I write those stories in the SEP.”

Cecil was in London for the Royal Premiere of *Captain Horatio Hornblower* on April 15, 1951. “The

51. CSF-FP 5 September 1950
52. CSF-FP 19 February 1951
film isn’t too good. Bad in spots, especially when they diverged from CSF. Peck does a very good job, really good, and all the acting is good. Mayo acts excellently—she’s miscast, but she makes the best of an unpleasant situation. ...

“The premiere was fantastic; as Peck wasn’t there I was the only big noise they could scrape up. Admirals in dozens. Mountbatten escorted the Princess [Margaret Rose], & stopped & talked to me a long time. After the show the Princess passed me on the way out & said it was a fine picture! Fine for a 20 year old, ma’am, I says, internally.” Cecil’s car was allowed to go directly to the door, and he was told specifically that if he became tired he could sit down, which were otherwise regal prerogatives. “It could have been a worse evening, like the film, but not much worse.”

54

53. CSF-FP 15 April 1950. In those days the gas station attendant opened the hood and checked the oil level every time, hoping to sell a quart of oil, which those engines frequently needed.
The media attention attracted cousins and former employees. “I’m reminded of Napoleon’s return to Ajaccio [his birthplace on Corsica] when it rained cousins! ... My dear, it’s been awful. I had 6 of my family to dinner yesterday & several others at different times & they fought over my body like vultures and the same with some of my friends. I don’t think I’ve had a single pleasant evening since I got here. ... The vultures–the ghouls–have picked the bones of the corpse and I hope I’ve alienated the affections of a large section of the family by my emphatic refusal to get them free tickets for the film.”

At the same time, his English publisher, Michael Joseph, was “just starting the damned collected edition; he can’t understand why it hurts me–not a milestone but a tombstone.”

After a spell of touring around England in a Jaguar sportscar, Cecil spoke at the Royal Naval

54. CSF-FP 16 April 1951
55. CSF-FP 19 April & 22 April 1951
56. CSF-FP 16 June 1951

1358
College in Greenwich, and “I was wheeled round
the naval museum which I knew of old–used to go
there in the early Hornblower days to look at ship
models so as to get the idea in 3 dimensions and ste-
reoscopically so to speak.”\textsuperscript{57} His letters say that the
Hornblower film was breaking all records. Oscar
Hammerstein was thinking of making a musical ver-
sion. Cecil lunched with Churchill on June 20, and
by July 9 he had returned to Berkeley.\textsuperscript{58}

At this period, with one set of Hornblower sto-
ries appearing in The Saturday Evening Post and
with a new film production of the original Horn-
blower book filling movie houses after a royal pre-
miere, Cecil reached the height of his fame. A
generation later he was remembered for the film ver-
sion of \textit{The African Queen}, which kept being revived;
at this time Hornblower made his fame.

Then occurred the curious fiasco of \textit{Victory at

\textsuperscript{57} CSF-FP 16 May 1951
\textsuperscript{58} CSF-FP 16 June 1951

1359
Sea. In 1950 television was crossing a watershed; no longer a commercial experiment (it had ceased being a technical experiment by 1946), it was in a position to blanket the country with programs, provided suitable sponsors and programs could be acquired. To continue to be a fragmented local affair with local talent and local advertisers would leave the networks out in the cold. What they needed were national advertisers advertising on national networks, not necessarily simultaneously, because the transcontinental coaxial cable system was not complete. To initiate this trend a program of undoubted national recognition was required. Somebody at NBC thought up the idea that would fulfill these needs. A recent naval history, written by C. S. Forester, the most stirring of naval writers, not acted but real living history of World War II recorded by the U.S. Navy itself without regard for the dramatist’s limitations of expense and casualties, and with background music by Richard Rogers himself, would arouse the interest of the public and the advertisers and, moreover, some firm with an
interest in naval affairs, say U.S. Steel, could well be persuaded to pay for it. Of course, the crucial point was the Navy’s attitude. It wouldn’t be selling its contribution. Would it let its films be used for commercial gain in this manner? It was under no obligation to do so. Only if the resulting publicity would be favorable would the Navy be interested in releasing its films. Here, Cecil was the key ingredient. Whatever he would be likely to do would place the Navy in a favorable view. As a result the interested parties formed a coalition: U.S. Steel provided a lot of money for creating the series from the raw material that existed; the U.S. Navy provided these raw materials, the invaluable films; NBC placed in charge the writer that the Navy trusted, a composer of repute, and a staff experienced in TV production. One more small ingredient was required; somebody to sort out the films, which were in a completely disorganized state. Three ex-signalmen, U.S.N., chosen because signalmen were stationed topside and were adept at recognizing ships, were hired to sort out and index the films.
Cecil accepted the assignment only reluctantly, and against Frances’s advice, adding, “I expect I’ll regret it.”59 After reading several histories of the naval war, whose quality surprised him, Cecil thought “I might produce some stuff to please both [the producers] and the American public.”60 At this time Cecil had not seen television. He had a set installed and examined the programming. “It’s awful! Awful! Reproduction isn’t bad, sound quite good, but the content is unspeakable, although several times I’ve been impressed by the excellence, technically, of the acting. It’s nice to think that it won’t be hard to do better than that.”61

Although Cecil talked much about the project and verbally relished the fifty thousand dollars he would earn, he would commit himself for only a half-time effort. He had, so he said, other things to write. This stipulation was agreed to. I cannot iden-

59. CSF-FP 16 June 1951  
60. CSF-FP 9 July 1951  
61. CSF-FP 17 September 1951
tify which work, if any, Cecil considered more important at the time than *Victory at Sea*, but consider how this stipulation suited Cecil’s other desires. He could always take off for the pleasant things of life, and he could stay away from the organizational and administrative chores which he hated, but which were inevitable in an effort such as this. Of course, he did not have to supervise the team, for NBC had appointed an executive assistant to handle all business affairs, Henry Salomon. However, Cecil would have to direct Salomon’s efforts.

The question in Cecil’s mind was not what to do; he had that at his fingertips. The question was how to do it. He said that a job like this had never been done before, so nobody knew how to do it. There was an enormous mass of disorganized film available, principally because some enthusiastic amateur (by and large, this is an accurate description of most naval photographers during the war) had pointed a Navy camera at some event in battle. Contrariwise, there was almost no chance of shooting any more if you wished to include a scene that
hadn’t been shot. Approaching the task from one end, Cecil could sit at home, writing descriptions of important events or phases of the war, hoping that somewhere in the mass of films were scenes of these events, and hoping, too, that these scenes could be found. Or, instead, approaching the job from the other end, the films could be viewed, indexed, and appropriate scenes assembled into twenty-two minute segments for which Cecil could write the commentary. Cecil did not know which to do. In either case, the films had to be sorted and indexed, so Salomon rented an empty tailor’s shop on the West Side of New York, converted it into a film warehouse and projection room, and installed the three ex-signalmen. Cecil interviewed and instructed them to index the film, and left saying he would be back in six months to see the results.

Meanwhile, he wrote scripts for several twenty-two minute segments, which he first showed to me, then sent to New York. The first segment covered the Battle of the Atlantic up to the time of Pearl Harbor in the Pacific. Cecil had great difficulty in con-
densing the material into 25 minutes, and presenting the statistical results without the statistics. “It’s the difference between writing a sermon and a book of theology. ... If I were twenty years younger no doubt I would be learning a lot and benefiting by this exercise in a new medium.” 62 “I’m approaching the end of number III, but I know I’m laying up more and more trouble for myself in the future as regards synchronization. I’m not paying enough attention to the screen and that’ll mean a lot of hard work when I’m in N.Y.” 63 He also found great difficulty in finding time for both the history and the human stories. “My stuff isn’t human enough even now and if I cut it the human stuff will be reduced even more (to be human you must be discursive) and it won’t suit the audience. I have even a horrid fear that I’ll have to start all over again with a different method, and just take twenty-six episodes, individual actions, and write them up

62. CSF-FP 5 September 1951
63. CSF-FP 11 September 1951
and trust to compressed sort of synopses to do something to fill up the gaps.”

Salomon’s staff attempted to fit film to the scripts without success. In return, Salomon attempted to list the contents of various film scenes to give Cecil something to work from, but Cecil decided that nothing Salomon did this way suited his own objectives.

To discuss the difficulties, Salomon came to Berkeley, where I met him at lunch and participated, without saying much, in part of their discussions. It was quite evident that the project was not going to work in the way that Cecil intended. The ex-signal-men might, if pushed, get the films indexed, but they had no ability to select suitable scenes because they couldn’t synthesize the treatment of a subject. Salomon seemed to be an educated man, but somewhat diffident, not a man one would expect to be the modern equivalent of a film producer. Of course, he was only an assistant, but still, somehow,
his heart didn’t seem to be in it. After he had left, I offered my services to my father.

“Salomon doesn’t seem to be doing it. You don’t want to go to New York to find out what they are doing; I could go as your deputy to find out what’s really been done, so you can know what steps to take. There’s miles of film, I know, but it can’t be as difficult as all that to find out what’s in it. Besides, I know how you think, and I’ll be able to select good stuff for you. If I go, I’ll lose this semester or more, but the results would be well worth it.”

My father looked at me with a harsh and hardening face. “No, I will not have you doing anything like that.” He turned his back on me, on Victory at Sea, and on the fifty thousand dollars. Because Salomon had a schedule to keep, he hired a writer at the first of the year. “Letter from Salomon this morning telling me that Hanser started working for me; a little bitterly. He also goes on, quite modestly, about the objective of making one every two weeks. ... One of these days when I’m striking the harp with the angels and the angels with the harp I’ll sit down
amidst the hosannas and turn on my celestial television set and see the first production of Victory at Sea.” 65 NBC may have felt that it really needed Cecil to do the work in New York. Alternatively, NBC may have felt that the team of Salomon and Hanser was doing such a good job it could risk, or even desire, to do without Cecil. Whichever it was, NBC demanded that Cecil work full time in New York. Cecil refused and his contract was terminated. Cecil had sufficient pride to think that it would be a bad series without his work. 66

I have told this story so far from Cecil’s perspective, but there was a fundamental difference in view between him and Salomon. No matter how Salomon deferred to Cecil when in his presence, Salomon was the official producer of Victory at Sea, the biggest TV project up to that time. He was determined that his name would be inextricably linked with its success, a determination that grated some-

65. CSF-FP 7 January 1952
66. CSF-FP 1 March 1952

1368
what upon his staff. He was not going to allow the project to be delayed while CSF tried to figure out, in Berkeley, how to put together *Victory at Sea* from films in New York and Washington. The project required a writer on the spot to modify the “plot” and the words to fit the films that were available. That I had recognized, and suggested a method of alleviating the difficulty. In the end, that problem was solved in another way also. The episode on the battle of Midway is superb, but Donald R. Morris, who was in a position to know, says that there were no films taken at Midway. Planes taking off from a carrier look much the same as long as the date is not too far wrong; one Japanese carrier seen through a dive-bomber’s sight looks much like another. The episode was pieced together from films that looked right, even if they were wrong. Salomon took the normal course, for a studio producer, of hiring a

67. For the view from the other perspective, I am indebted to Donald R. Morris, who was the assistant USN liaison officer to the project.

1369
writer to be on the set full time. He offered the position to Cecil, perhaps hoping that Cecil would refuse, and on Cecil’s refusal hired someone he could trust.

I think that he was correct. Cecil, at this time in his life, and probably always, was temperamentally unsuited to working in a team. While he talked of working on the set in Hollywood, revising scripts to better fit the action (and to work around stars of the silent screen who couldn’t speak their lines properly in talkies), this was just another of his lies. He had to have things his own way or not at all.

In offering to assist my father in this effort, I was a young man, a very immature young man, offering to bite off a hell of a lot more than I could chew. But how else does one succeed? And, selfishly, it looked like one way of getting experience in my chosen field. Knowing what I now know about organizing work and about myself, I’d now take such a job with confidence. After all, it was only doing what historians have always had to do, modified somewhat because scanning the material took so
long. Editors of documentary films had been doing it for thirty years. This was just bigger. Cecil should have known this if he had any professional experience as an historian, instead of the slapdash methods he practiced when writing history. He was scared, doubly scared. He was afraid of his own professional incompetence and his inability to handle a commonplace task that required only patience, work, and direction of subordinates, and he feared as well that discovery of his inability, or having it shown up by his loyal son, would destroy his sacred image. Not even fifty thousand dollars could tempt that avaricious man to risk discovery of his true self.

My father’s letters show that he thought I didn’t have the intelligence, determination, or leadership to do the job. That may have entered into his thoughts, but even if so he wasn’t risking anything beyond a small amount of travel money. If I tried and failed, he was no worse off, while if I tried and succeeded he had a work to bring him fame and fifty thousand dollars.

Cecil was also bothered by two other thoughts.
Not only did he hate the work and worry about it, but other plots kept coming to his mind. “I’m having terrible trouble with my work. I’ve never felt, except after finishing a job, as weary (or as lazy, maybe) as I do at present. ... I’m worried about it. And I keep on being troubled by extraneous plots and notions, not quite good enough to work on even if I could. One of my favorite definitions of temperament is a ‘strong dislike for uncongenial work’ don’t know if the work’s uncongenial but at the moment there can’t be any doubt about the strong dislike.”

At the end of April the Herald Tribune ran an unfavorable article about Cecil’s quitting Victory at Sea. Cecil requested his New York agent to take action to get the article corrected, but his agent advised against that.

Cecil was rueful when Victory at Sea earned good notices. “I was genuinely upset when I read them–I’m afraid I wanted that thing never to reach

68. CSF-FP 27 November 1951
69. CSF-FP 3 May & 21 May 1952
completion without me and when it did I wanted it to be poor. Just about the bitterest professional jealousy I’ve ever experienced, and all my own fault, which doesn’t help in the least.” Pearl Harbor “wasn’t at all bad but it wasn’t absolutely first rate—it wasn’t as good as I had visualized and I don’t think it was as good as I could have done it.” The Battle of the Atlantic “wasn’t at all bad, being very nearly as I had left it. Meow. The narrator is poor, and some of the wording is dreadful.”

One final note: as you see this work, which is still going strong forty years later, the first two episodes are largely from C. S. Forester, but his strongest contribution is the title itself, *Victory at Sea*. The rest of the writing is by Henry Salomon and Richard Hanser. Salomon made this program a stepping-stone to a successful career as a television producer. I cannot answer, myself, with what foresight he planned his own success in that first step.

70. CSF-FP 16 October, 12 November, 20 November 1952
22 Later Writing

Among the public, both at large and in private, Cecil continued to be popular. His novels continued to be moderate successes, his historical work was accepted at the popular level at which he wrote it, and his personality had some news and entertainment value.

Immediately after being relieved of his responsibility for Victory at Sea, Cecil started work on Hornblower and the Atropos. By March of 1952, Cecil has “Hornblower still waiting with a drunken bargee at the mouth of Sapperton Tunnel.”¹ This novel almost

¹. CSF-FP 22 March 1952

1374
closes the gaps in Hornblower’s career before the first-written Hornblower novel, *The Happy Return*. Therefore, Cecil needed to invent stories that accounted for two characteristics that Hornblower possessed in *The Happy Return*. These are his possession of a sword of fifty guineas value presented by the Patriotic Fund for his part in capturing the Castilla, six years before the time of *The Happy Return*\(^2\), and the fact that his two children had died of smallpox. However, these are only minor incidents in the events of the novel. Hornblower must be shown as a man with a family, which implies adventures in England. Cecil’s interest in canals causes one of these adventures to be the Hornblower family crossing England by canal boat en route to Hornblower’s new ship, *Atropos*, that is at London. The location of the canal shows that the cause of the canal episode is not an organic part of the Hornblower story. To

\(^2\) As stated in *The Happy Return*, although only three years of actual time separate the historic events that are the background.
travel by the Thames and Severn Canal, with its Sapperton Tunnel through the ridge of the Cotswolds, the Hornblowers would have had to go far north of their way from Portsmouth to London, crossing the more convenient Kennet and Avon Canal on the way. Hornblower’s freedom was limited. With his limited means, he could hardly have been returning from a family holiday; Maria’s family lived in Portsmouth; Hornblower’s parents never enter the story and their location is unknown. Therefore, because Cecil wanted to write about the method of getting a canal barge through the Sapperton Tunnel, he pretended that the Thames and Severn Canal was a convenient route from Portsmouth to London.

That trip would be dull reading, so things go wrong and Hornblower has to learn canal-boating skills. Cecil also uses this opportunity to show Maria’s lower-middle-class social insecurity; she complains that her husband is demeaning himself by doing such work. Upon arrival in London, Hornblower is hurriedly put in charge of planning and
commanding the parade of boats that will convey Admiral Nelson’s body and its escort of the nation’s dignitaries from the naval port of Greenwich to burial in St. Paul’s Cathedral. Accidents occur that require Hornblower’s quick thinking. Only after sufficient adventures to allow description of the parlous state of Hornblower’s marriage, does the main story open. Hornblower is placed in charge of a diving expedition to recover the gold in a ship sunk off the coast of Turkey. The diving master and his Ceylonese divers should do the difficult work, leaving Hornblower merely supporting them. To liven up the story, Cecil again makes things go wrong; the diving master is seriously injured in a duel, so that Hornblower has to manage the operation under instructions taken at the diving master’s bedside. On the way home with the gold, Hornblower’s ship and its escort are attacked by the Spanish frigate Castilla, and Hornblower leads the boarding party that captures her. Once Hornblower reaches home, he finds his children in the first stages of smallpox, and he realizes that he will have to comfort Maria
for the rest of their lives.

Cecil struggled along with Hornblower and the Atropos, while making the usual complaints. “This morning I got to halfway through the minimum length. ... Fifty more hard working days and it’ll be maximum length.”³ “I’m going through the hell of a time with the novel as a result of my own weaknesses; one or two minor ideas bobbed up and I started to use them without properly digesting them with the result I’ve wasted days and days of work and lost several tempers. But now it’s two-thirds finished. ... [Cecil mentions the Hornblower broadcasts] They may catch on and then I’ll never have to work again. I wish I could be sure before I toil through to the end of the current novel.”⁴

Cecil then did a history for young readers about the American Navy and the Barbary pirates, which was started at the end of September and finished by the end of November.⁵

³. CSF-FP 4 August 1952
⁴. CSF-FP 26 August 1952
The next work that Cecil did was a complete contrast in subject, style, and working method to everything else he ever did. To one who has become accustomed to his continual complaints about how he hated writing and wrote only for money, this new enthusiasm for the project, his literal inability to prevent himself from writing it, presents a strong contrast. “I’ve noticed before ... that the more serene my life the duller my work gets–it’s when there are stresses and pressures that it gets lighthearted.”

Well, lighthearted is not quite the right word for the project that drove him then; he is writing the most horrible stories of his life. The unrelieved horror of Payment Deferred was cold, almost objective; these stories are of ghastly events in horrible lives in a horrible system.

However, the first one he wrote, but the latest in time and given last place in the collection, is a fantasy. Cecil wrote The Wandering Gentile “for the

5. CSF-FP 26 September 1952, 20 November 1952
6. CSF-FP 2 December 1952

1379
unbelievable reason I couldn’t be idle.” Cecil himself was the protagonist, driving back to San Francisco from Los Angeles in 1952. When making a stop on the way, he is persuaded to give a ride to an elderly couple, probably German. The man, who walks with a limp and has slurred speech, wants to reach Washington and demands in querulous tones to know their progress and that of General Wenck, who is supposed to meet them there, while the woman calms him with assurances as one would a baby, even though they are not on the route to Washington. Cecil’s car has a flat tire, and while he is changing the wheel the couple flag down another car and go on their way. The conversation while driving, before the couple go their way, has left sufficient hints that the couple are Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun.

Cecil had seen the films of the Nazi death camps when they were liberated by the Allied armies in 1945. Even in those times, people were

7. CSF-FP 22 December 1952

1380
entirely unready for the horror of the camps. Cecil returned, shaken, from some governmental showing of the films, and told me that those films should be compulsory viewing every five years, lest we forget and let such cruelty exist again. Cecil had also listened to Hildegard Quandt’s horror stories of the last days of Berlin. By 1952 the first real histories of the Nazi period were coming out. Cecil carefully read Bullock’s *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny*. “It’s a nightmare, but it’s excellent just the same. ... The result is that the short stories will be nightmares too, and I don’t know if I’ll find a market for them.” 8 A year later, when he was still working on the stories, 9 he read Wheeler-Bennett’s *Nemesis of Power*. “Gloomy as hell of course. ... The real tragedy of the book—very impressive—is the woolliness and incompetence (or criminality) of the people Hitler had to deal with, whether it was Chamberlain or Goerdeler. Rommel

8. CSF-FP 22 December 1952
9. His first idea for *The Unbelievable* appears in his letter of 17 November, 1953
was as bad as any of them.”

He concluded that there had been too much debate—they should have killed Hitler first and then worked out the consequences, instead of debating what kind of Germany they wanted while Hitler killed them.

Cecil started the series because the stories kept coming to him. “It’s quite fantastic that I’ve been struggling against a frightful urge to work, and unsuccessfully until today. Not only did I finish The Wandering Gentile but I also started and finished another story, Miriam’s Miracle ... the plots along the related theme are simply surging up. There are three more short stories waiting to be written, and I actually had to take hold of myself today to stop myself starting on another. I’m in a state of really desperate overwork, no doubt about it at all, sleeping badly and not feeling too well. ... Poor old Matson will die a hundred deaths faced with the necessity of finding a market for a series of perfectly horrible short stories about Nazi officials. Queer

10. CSF-FP 1 December 1953

1382
turns my mind takes—sometimes I even surprise myself. Two months ago I had no idea of doing anything of the kind.”

“I’m sorry you don’t like the Nazi stories, dear. I just don’t know what to do about it. I’ve got 4 more all ready to write, & they are harassing me so that I can’t think about anything else. I think I’ll have to write them—maybe in the end they’ll be suppressed as one of CSF’s little lapses, like The Furies.”

The other nine of the ten stories in The Nightmare are about Nazi horrors during World War II, as experienced by either the victims or the perpetrators. One aspect that increases the horror is that it is often difficult to separate the perpetrators from the victims; perpetrators become victims of other perpetrators as the crimes unfold. The first story, Evidence, is that of the healthy young German who is unjustly condemned to a concentration camp, but is then one of those given Polish uniforms to act in the

11. CSF-FP 29 December 1952
12. CSF-FP 8 January 1953
mock attack at the Polish border that served as Hitler’s pretext for starting World War II. Naturally, because dead men tell no tales, they are all killed on the spot, to be the evidence presented to the world’s press. *The Bower of Roses* tells of the sequence of murders by which a country house, owned by the Nazi Party, changes hands with the tides of politics. *Miriam’s Miracle* tells of the religious hallucination that afflicts a poorly-educated Jewish girl as she is gassed to death. *The Physiology of Fear* tells of experiments measuring the effects of increasing fear of death, in which each subject knows that when his compulsory operation of a roulette wheel produces a particular lengthy sequence he will be killed. The experimenter measures their physiological changes as the sequences progress; however, the experimenter himself is condemned to the death camp because his results show that Germans become just as frightened as Jews or Gypsies. *Indecision* is the story of the officer of the General Staff who controls the movement of trains throughout Germany. On July 19, 1944, he hesitates to follow the suggestion of one of
his brother officers to route an armored division, commanded by a general they both know and trust, through Berlin, because he might have to answer for the extra fuel consumed, and because he fears that the request might be considered suspicious. Yet he is slow to order an SS division that would otherwise use that train. For neither aiding his friends nor betraying them when the plot to blow up Hitler merely injures him, the officer is shot anyway. *The Head and the Feet* tells of the elderly doctor who is the medical officer at a camp where the inmates are worked to death. One special prisoner is brought in alone, to be executed by beheading, and the doctor has to certify the death. When the blow is struck, the head bounces across the floor and lodges between the doctor’s feet. Hallucinations of heads rolling across office and living-room floors to lodge and contaminate his feet cause the doctor to act in ways that arouse the suspicion of the camp officials; in terror of what they will do to him he hangs himself. *The Unbelievable* tells of the tragedy of the crowds from East Prussia who tried to escape the Russians.
by sea; hundreds of thousands drowned in the wintry seas. *The Hostage* tells of the retired German general who is recalled to command an inadequately fortified area to resist uselessly to the last man. Both he and his wife know that if he surrenders to save his men, his wife will be killed by the Nazis. She writes to tell him that her doctor has diagnosed terminal cancer and she will not live long in any case; of course, the letter is a lie. *To Be Given To God* is the story of the trial of the commandant of a death camp. He believes that he will be found innocent because his every action was in accordance with orders and the precepts of the master race. Even when sentenced to death, he fails to understand why, and concludes that it is because of some primitive superstition from Anglo-Saxon history.

None of these stories is a true account of any person, yet every one of them illustrates the actual horrors of the Nazi reign over Germany; the parallel incidents are numerous. Arthur Turner, my college friend and later professor of history at the University of California at Riverside, recalls Cecil saying that
he felt that he had a moral duty to write these stories, so that they would influence our future policy. I think that other factors are of greater importance, and that Cecil’s statement of a moral duty should be considered equal to his usual statements about truth and morality.

The horror of the Nazi regime appealed to Cecil’s dark side in the same way as Suetonius’s history of the Roman Caesars had appealed to him when a child. “Suetonius, of course, ... exactly suited certain moods of mine. The fantasies of a child, especially a lonely child, centre frequently about omnipotent power. The maddest freaks of the Caesars roused neither horror nor surprise in my mind. They had my fullest approval and sympathy. The kind of thing they did when they found themselves (as no mortal has found himself since) at the head of the civilized world with absolutely no check, moral or political or religious, upon their actions, was just the sort of thing I had already considered doing were I ever to find myself (as I described it to myself) ‘with no policemen and no God.’ Caligula in one
direction, and Vitellius in another, and Nero in another, as Suetonius represents them, are very good presentments of children freed from control.”¹³

The Nazis almost achieved the position of Roman emperors. They had created both gods and religion to suit themselves, they controlled the police, and for a few years no one on earth could touch them. While Cecil recognized the role of proper society in preventing any one from achieving the power to act as a Roman emperor or a Nazi dictator, he remained fascinated by the possibilities. While he publicly paid his obeisance to the tenets of society, as the more successful Roman emperors did to the prerogatives of the Roman Senate, he privately had decided that he could get away with considerable violation of those tenets. Since he recognized the authority of society to limit his actions in ways he personally did not like, he chose to exercise the level of authority that remained to

13. LBF 16

1388
him in an equally arbitrary manner. While he publicly maintained the appearance of a just man happy in a just society, he deviated from that facade to the extent that he found possible. Cecil felt the strength of the uncontrolled passions, and realized the horrors that could result if society did not exert as much control as it had done over him. He was fascinated by the horror of the outcome when the darkest parts of the mind, as he understood it from personal experience, were released from social control.

After finishing the last revisions to *The Nightmare* in January, 1954, Cecil made a lengthy trip to England, where he attended a cocktail party at the American embassy and was also entertained in the office of the First Lord of the Admiralty. On his return to Berkeley in July, he started work on the convoy novel, *The Good Shepherd*. This is the story of Commander Krause, USN, captain of a destroyer escorting a convoy to Britain at the height of the U-Boat battle. Because Cecil was not sure of American naval phrasing and procedures, he arranged, for a
fee of $1,000, that the retired American submarine admiral, Ralph Christie, who lived in San Francisco, would advise him and correct his errors. Christie was “really patient ... [with] trifling details ... like the actual wording of a report or an order; he’s a bit puzzled that I can deal with strategy and tactics without any help from him.”

“The admiral approves—he’s quite interested and each morning over the telephone we fight terrific battles, destroyer versus submarine.”

“He’s as interested in watching a novel being composed as I am watching a destroyer being handled.”

As the book progressed, Christie brought Cecil genuine plotting sheets with the destroyer’s tracks all plotted out as the battle progressed. “His heart just bleeds for Krause—he shook his head sadly over him yesterday and said ‘That poor guy’s in a mess.’”

14. CSF-FP 29 July 1954
15. CSF-FP 5 August 1954
16. CSF-FP 16 August 1954
17. CSF-FP 21 September 1954
However, Cecil had returned to his standard complaining mode that had left him as he was writing *The Nightmare*. “Sixty more days.”\(^{18}\) “Fifty two more working days. They go on and on. ... The damn thing may run as high as 100,000 words. It’s all right from one point of view; if the action compels that length well and good ... I believe a longer book sells better than a shorter book—and similarly if all the action can be crammed into a shorter length well and good too. But damn me if I like the idea of three more working weeks, which it would look like. Hell.”\(^{19}\) “Forty four more damned dreary days of work.”\(^{20}\)

Shortly after Cecil started *The Good Shepherd*, it became more likely that *The Gun* would be filmed, offering Cecil release from his misery. “It will be just too bad if I finish work on the Good Shepherd and find that I needn’t have done it after all because

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18. CSF-FP 29 July 1954  
19. CSF-FP 9 August 1954  
20. CSF-FP 16 August 1954
these film rights have made me rich for life. I’m tempted to tear up what I’ve done and wait and see.”

21. CSF-FP 29 July 1954

When the film contract was signed in September, “If I hadn’t signed that damned contract for 1812 [a history of the War of 1812] I could retire this minute and leave the Good Shepherd unfinished which would intrigue my biographers. A great temptation.”

22. CSF-FP 27 September 1954

“I’m really thoroughly tired. Me and Krause. I don’t think anyone who hasn’t endured it can appreciate the particular kind of flatness and fatigue—there’s nothing else like it. Late nights spent playing bridge or sitting up with a sick child don’t compare with it.”

23. CSF-FP 28 September 1954

Commander Krause of The Good Shepherd was an ingenious mixture of Cecil’s previous military characters, a blend which could have resulted in his finest characterization, but which, to my mind, did not. Krause had the single-minded devotion to his

21. CSF-FP 29 July 1954
22. CSF-FP 27 September 1954
23. CSF-FP 28 September 1954

1392
service of Rifleman Dodd and Leading Seaman Brown, the professional doubts of the early Horn-blower, the conquered but well-remembered temper of Captain the Honorable Miles Ernest Troughton-Harrington-Yorke, and he had survived a passionate awakening like Rose Sayers’s with more than a trace of General Curzon’s prudery and Hornblower’s detachment. To this was added one great advantage — he started this mixture as the son of a loving, compassionate, religious and respected father, an entirely new figure in Cecil’s works (but who appears only in Krause’s memories). Instead of the complex, fascinating character that could be made from these materials, Krause is a dull man who finds his competence in the self-bounded, unlimited agony of war, and his peace in utter weariness, face down, spread-armed, only half undressed and half in bed, at the close of his duty. This creative talent that started these half-men fifteen and twenty years before was now only strong enough to mix their parts without synthesizing a whole man.

Cecil and the admiral finished revising The
*Good Shepherd* in the second week of October. Commander John Dale Hodapp, whom Cecil had met as first lieutenant in the destroyer *Abner Reed* in 1943, had recently retired to be the financial officer of the San Francisco Episcopal diocese; he took one carbon copy of the completed manuscript home to read. He telephoned Cecil to say that the book used submarine language rather than surface ship language and required several hundred changes. “All the technical orders and bearings and ranges have to be changed.”24 Finally, Cecil had to transfer Hodapp’s corrections to the publisher’s typescripts while between planes in New York. There were still further corrections to be made in January, despite Little, Brown’s hurry to skip proof reading. “We’ll all look like fools if [the changes] don’t [go in]. I’d rather cancel the contracts.”25

Part of the reason for hurry was that *Life* paid $20,000 for a 30,000 word condensation for their

24. CSF-FP 18 October 1954
25. CSF-FP 24 December 1954
Washington’s Birthday issue. In August, 1955, Columbia Pictures bought the film rights for $75,000$^{26}$, with the intention of starring Humphrey Bogart as Commander Krause. Harry Cohn, of Columbia, used the promise of that role, when he recovered from cancer, to comfort Bogart in his last year of life.$^{27}$ In May, 1956, Admiral Christie threatened to sue Cecil for $20,000, on the argument that he had contributed far more to the story than had originally been planned. Hodapp offered to testify that Christie had not done a good job, describing the number of Christie’s errors he had had to correct.$^{28}$ Contractually, Cecil was correct; Christie had agreed to a fee of $1,000 for vetting the orders and procedures, and he had vetted the orders badly. Equitably, Cecil’s own letters demonstrate that Christie had contributed far more to the story, and

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26. CSF-FP 18 August 1955
27. Stephen Bogart; Bogart: In Search of my Father; Dutton, New York, 1995
28. CSF-FP 10 May 1956, 15 June 1956
had probably provided a realistic battle sequence and avoided the errors and contradictions that would otherwise have existed in Cecil’s account. Eight years after assisting with *The Good Shepherd*, Hodapp became Cecil’s secretary, calling himself literary assistant.

The next work after *The Good Shepherd* was *The Sinking of the Bismarck*, a light-weight film treatment with stereotyped characters who were never meant to be shown in depth. Yet, because of its austerity, it made a good movie that had the air of a documentary. I remember with pride taking my son, Geoffrey, to see it, and his surprised pleasure at first reading his own surname among the credits. That was his realization of Grandpa Cecil’s profession.

*The Age of Fighting Sail: A Naval History of the War of 1812* (1956), was the last of Cecil’s historical works; like the first, commissioned by its publisher and written with the same work habits. He read first, digested, and wrote without notes and few references. He complained to Frances that “each day’s work takes much longer than usual because of hav-
ing to look up references all the time.” He worried that the subject might warrant more than the contracted minimum length. “I don’t want to write that extra ten thousand—it will also interfere with my planned pleasures.” At one point he had to name the captain of a particular ship at a particular time. He did so, and the editors who read the manuscript, recognizing it was of dubious validity, asked him to verify the point. He told me that he wrote back giving the list of books he had read and saying that the information was somewhere in there and the editor could find it out for himself. This was, in 1956, the same sort of reply that he had addressed in 1927 to Methuen’s editor about the errors in *Victor Emmanuel and the Unification of Italy*. It was also the sin to which he had confessed in 1944 when writing to Basil Liddell Hart. “I’m not, and never will be, a critical historian like you; if I ever tried to write serious history on any large scale I don’t think I could resist the

29. CSF-FP 5 October 1955
30. CSF-FP 19 October 1955
temptation of sticking a bit of Forester in. I haven’t the sort of rigid virtue that the job calls for.”

In 1953 *Holiday* magazine commissioned a short account of Cecil’s early life in London, which appeared as *Hornblower’s London*, in August, 1955. He refers to his first home in London on Shenley Road, padding out the article by writing about its proximity to the Surrey Commercial Canal and the Surrey Docks, although those had no part in Cecil’s boyhood. Kathleen’s comments about the article were obviously cool, because Cecil excused his choices to her: “It seems to me you didn’t like my childhood article although you were nice about it. Like my selection, it could really only suit the taste of the selector himself, and in this case it hardly suited even mine, as I didn’t want, for obvious reasons, to discuss the very formative years of our married life and early acquaintance.”

31. CSF-Basil Liddell Hart, 19 January 1944, Liddell Hart Archive 292/73
32. CSF-K, 572, 5 September 1955

1398
refer to their decision to marry, made while making love on the grounds of the Crystal Palace.

Cecil apparently put no outright lies in this article, but both the article and his comments to Kathleen reveal his inability to disassociate himself from the subject of *Hornblower’s London*.

He recognized the connection, for he asked Frances whether he should allow it to be published. “My London finished today. ... It’s horribly egotistical; please tell me quite for sure if you think it’s too much so—I don’t mean for publication but I mean for good taste which will decide me about publication.”

Holiday is a travel magazine, his title was *Hornblower’s London*. Yet there is no direct connection between anything in that article and Hornblower’s career. (Not even the canal — Cecil developed his interest in canals, that resulted in Hornblower’s canal voyage, on different canals, at a much later time.) Cecil instead writes about his childhood without much reference to the interests of present-day

33. CSF-FP 17 November 1953

1399
travelers. The article is almost useless as a piece in *Holiday*, and equally useless as autobiography. Cecil’s name and reputation were sufficient to carry it. In the *Saturday Evening Post* Cecil wrote *The Trouble With Travel*, humorously describing problems he had met when traveling. Most of the situations are simple traveler’s troubles, but two are uniquely his. He often chose to conceal his identity, traveling once as a manufacturer of hairbrushes but inadvertently meeting the most important man in that field. More important, he repeats the lies about crossing the Atlantic frequently to work in Hollywood and frequently crossing in the German ships *Bremen* and *Europa* to use blocked German marks.

He considered the plots of two other novels which never came to fruition. One he referred to as his *War and Peace* novel, which he apparently never started. The other he referred to as *Big Ben*.

34. 28 November 1959
35. See the chapters Hollywood and Coming of War for the facts
In May, 1956, while Cecil was on his annual visit to England, he traveled to Madrid to watch some of the scenes for the film of *The Gun*, which was eventually released under the title *The Pride and the Passion*, with an adapted version in *The Reader’s Digest* that earned $12,000 more. “Here I am, & doing pretty well, with one ghastly exception. (Confidential–don’t tell anyone yet). The plot for the film starts off with a ridiculous piece of nonsense–self-evident nonsense. Too late to do anything about it now. ...

“I’ve had a good deal to do with the film, as a spectator. Saw some good sequences shot. Cary Grant and Sinatra are a good deal nicer than the general run of actors. I’ve seen and talked to the beautiful Sophia Lauren, but haven’t made much contact. She really is an artist–she has everything, really, as far as I can see.”36 Cecil renewed, from England, his objections to the starting sequences.

36. CSF-FP 1 May 1956

1401
“Kramer is at last listening to my objections to his plot, & it’s possible I’ll win my point–at that rate the film ought to be pretty good.”

Cecil went to the opening showing of *The Pride and the Passion* in June, 1957. He described it to Frances as “very nearly GOOD–the gun itself is a sort of demoniac thing.”

In 1956 some film people tried to put together a production of *Rifleman Dodd*, first considering Cary Grant and then considering Richard Burton, who asked $200,000 for playing the role. In one group, Niven Busch, Cecil’s first associate in the film business, would have been the producer. None of these projects came to anything.

Cecil wrote two more Hornblower novels during these years, and part of a third. As well, he wrote *The Hornblower Companion*, an account of writing the Hornblower novels. Cecil and Dorothy had toured in the West Indies, a region Cecil had first visited and written about in 1938. *Admiral Horn-

37. CSF-FP 23 May 1956
38. CSF-FP 28 June 1957

1402
**blower in the West Indies** (1957) consists of five stories that were first published in the *Saturday Evening Post*, some of them resulting from Cecil’s new experiences in this region, the rest from his knowledge of history. Hornblower is now an admiral, appointed to the West Indies station after some years of peacetime retirement as captain. Although England is at peace, the slave trade and piracy are to be suppressed, South America is aflame with rebellion against Spain, and Napoleon is incarcerated on the island of St. Helena in the South Atlantic.

The spark for the series was not the touring in the West Indies (Cecil had been there in 1938 and had written about that area in *Lord Nelson, The Earthly Paradise*, and *Lieutenant Hornblower*) but Cecil’s reading of at least a plan, possibly some action, by Napoleonic loyalists to rescue Napoleon from St. Helena and bring him back in glory to France, just as from Elba the first time. The plan was based in Mexico, which meant that the action had to be between the Caribbean and St. Helena. The plot practically required that Hornblower be
the senior naval officer present, so Cecil made Hornblower the Admiral Commanding the West Indies Station, somewhat in advance of normal historical sequence.

In the first story, Hornblower visits New Orleans. To reach that city, his ship is towed upstream by a steam tug, a new experience for Hornblower. Had Cecil known it, this would have given Hornblower a chance to speculate on the sorry end of his distant relative, Jonathan Carter Hornblower, inventor of the compound steam engine, which unfortunately was judged to infringe on Watt’s original patent for the condensing steam engine. In New Orleans, Hornblower discovers a plan to use Napoleon’s former soldiers unhappily settled in Mexico to rescue Napoleon from imprisonment on the Atlantic island of Saint Helena and put him again on the French throne. Unable to collect his big ships in time, Hornblower thwarts this scheme by intercepting the ship full of soldiers with only a sloop and lying, on his honour as a British admiral, to the French general that Napoleon has died. The year is 1821 and, in
fact, Napoleon has just died although the news has not yet reached the participants. In the story, this saves Hornblower’s honour; he thought that he had lied but he had inadvertently told the truth. This is one more example of Cecil’s use of the brilliant action that produced no historical result, thereby preserving history while writing a dramatic story. Had Hornblower been able to use the ships of his command to overpower the soldiers’ ship in the normal way, there would have been little suspense and no conflict between the different conceptions of honor.

The second story tells of capturing a slave-carrying vessel even though that vessel is faster than any of Hornblower’s ships. While the slaver is protected in the Spanish-controlled port of Porto Rico, Hornblower directs a swimming seaman to secure to her rudder a sea anchor (a parachute-shaped device) that will open when the slaver sets full sail at sea. Because Cecil felt that he had need of

39. Porto Rico: official name until 1932
expert advice about ocean racing, he sent a letter to the Saint Francis Yacht Club inquiring for an informant. The yacht club did not reply, but Cecil obtained sufficient information from a naval officer.

The third story tells of Hornblower exterminating pirates who have lost their ship and are hiding on a shelf, sixty feet up a cliff, overlooking a jungle river. The governor could besiege them with soldiers, safe enough except for the threat of malaria and yellow fever, but Hornblower forces them out quickly by using a boat mortar to shell their shelf. Cecil originally intended that Hornblower was to be kidnapped and then escape by jumping off the shelf into the eight-foot deep river, but on reflection Cecil decided that a younger man had to do that. As he wrote to Frances, “I’m a little doubtful about some

40. CSF-FP 27 August, 5 September 1956
41. CSF-FP 13 September 1956
42. That is where the plot shows its strain. Cecil could not quite provide adequate motivation for the change.
of the engineering and shan’t send it off until John [Forester] has read it for me. Actually, I have a faintly guilty conscience. Even if John were to approve I suspect that I could strengthen considerably the parts that I think he might not approve of, and I feel I ought to do it but at the same time I feel as if I haven’t the strength or the moral courage to toil through the damn thing again re-writing although I think it would only be a day’s work. Maybe I will, but today anyway I doubt it.”

Had he actually asked me, I would have had some criticism. His 15 seconds for the mortar shell’s time of flight is probably too long. That means that the shell rose 900 feet before descending to hit the narrow target 60 feet up. It would probably be better to use a flatter trajectory. Jumping from sixty feet into only eight feet of water is definitely not safe; the jumper would likely hit the bottom and be injured.

The fourth story introduces a wealthy young Briton who is playing at yachting with a war-surplus

43. CSF-FP 2 April 1957

1407
Navy brig, and who charms the island society. However, the Briton, whose mother was Venezuelan, carries out his secret plan of capturing the ship that is carrying the Spanish army’s field guns. He delivers them to Bolivar’s army just in time for Bolivar to use them to win the decisive battle of Carabobo. These actions entangle Hornblower into the possibility of naval battles with Spanish and Dutch ships, the actualities of international intrigue, and the final scenes as Bolivar’s army, accompanied by the new guns and the now-wounded Briton, chases the Spanish into their last stand, but he extricates himself with honor.

The fifth and final Hornblower story (excepting the one when Hornblower is 72 years old) is something exceptional. Cecil wrote to Frances: “It’s been a very complex story—my future biographer, if any, will use it perhaps as an example of my technical virtuosity (good expression, that, but I mean the way I’ve had to keep half a dozen balls in the air at once all through the story. It is quite an ordeal.)”

The outline of the story is deceptively simple.
Hornblower will be relieved from his final duty station at the normal time to return to England and retirement. Lady Barbara had sailed out to meet him and to return with him to England. On the return passage their ship encounters a hurricane, during which Hornblower saves their lives and the ship.

Just another Hornblower adventure? No. Cecil’s intent is to get Hornblower happily retired. The first retirement, at the end of the Napoleonic wars, left Hornblower still the victim of his doubts, unsuited to a civilian life, saddened by his responsibility in the deaths of his longest companion and of the woman with whom he had shared his most intimate sexual love, and only sometimes in love with his wife, when their prides did not come between them. Hornblower meant so much to Cecil, was so much a part of him, that I can understand the desire for a happy prospect, which was partly artistic and partly personal. Hornblower had to be happily

44. CSF-FP 18 July 1957

1409
retired, just as Cecil felt himself to be. Scenes of bucolic ease at home in Smallbridge would not do; they would not interest the readers, and they are not what Hornblower, with his crossgrained personality, would consider happiness. He would be forever wondering what evil lurked in his heaven, torturing himself with worry as to whether he had really won Barbara’s heart. No, Hornblower has to have a naval adventure that both fascinates the readers and convinces Hornblower (and those readers) that he need have no worries, an adventure that quiets those ghostly thoughts that have always troubled him. Both Hornblower and Barbara have to worry about each other, about how the other really feels about them, not only in the sense of physical safety during a storm at sea but in the deepest psychological way as well. They have to weather both storms to reach a happy conclusion, the point of rest which will assure the reader (and Cecil too,) that all ends well.

To carry out this purpose Cecil must devise some action that will make Barbara feel guilty in Hornblower’s eyes, but which he, and the readers,
would think admirable. That rules out something as common as adultery; it requires a matter of princple. Furthermore, this action must fit into the circumstances of the main story and the personalities of its main characters. Having devised this action, Cecil must work it into the fabric of the story without disclosing its denouement and while carefully hiding its purpose. He must also describe all the actions of the story while writing sufficiently often, but not too often, of Hornblower’s self doubts and self-consciousness to make the reader aware that all is not well within him without raising the suspicion that this is either unbelievable (Do successful admirals with wealthy and beautiful wives really doubt themselves?) or some forcing of the plot. Also, Cecil must be writing a love story, for that is what it takes to settle Hornblower’s doubts, a task that Cecil had not undertaken since his twenties.

Several of the women who knew Cecil told me, quite of their own initiative, that he just didn’t know how to write a love story, or even write about believable women. In his twenties he had written two nov-
els about love, *Love Lies Dreaming* and *The Wonderful Week*, but those are pitiabley shallow. The only previous love story in his mature work is that of Rose and Allnutt in *The African Queen*, and that is told largely at a wary distance with little expectation of future happiness. Except for those two early novels, nearly all of his writing about the relationships of men and women described them in cynical terms; murder, adultery, disease, and grim endurance. True, Hornblower had had two romantic episodes with Marie de Gracay, but Cecil’s lady friends deplored the literary style of both of those, a judgment with which I agree.

Therefore Cecil had to balance the emphasis of each of these themes so that the story came out right, leaving the reader in some suspense until the very end and then settling all questions. The deceitful action he invented for Lady Barbara was to organize and pay for (with Hornblower’s money but without his knowledge of its purpose) the escape of a very young, but very talented, military trumpeter who was going to be hung for disobeying the order
to play a piece of music in a style that he felt was inappropriate. This consideration is singularly unappealing to Hornblower, although appealing to Lady Barbara. Remember, back in the first Hornblower novel Cecil wanted to describe Hornblower as understanding mathematics, but ability at mathematics and a flair for music often go together. Furthermore, Lady Barbara’s family was not only ducal but musical. Therefore, Cecil had to make Hornblower tone deaf so that he and Lady Barbara would not be able to have a common interest in music. Reminding the reader of Hornblower’s tone-deafness without giving the plot away is another of Cecil’s problems in writing the story. Barbara fears that if her husband discovered her criminal actions, he would at least think very ill of her, and might have to take official action, even against her.

When, on the return passage, the waves blown by the hurricane are sweeping over their crippled ship and the two of them might be swept away at any moment, Barbara takes the time to tell Hornblower what she needed to. “Dearest, I’ve always loved you.
I’ve loved no one but you in all my life. I had another husband once. I couldn’t say this before because it would have been disloyal. But now—I’ve never loved anyone but you. Never. Only you, darling.” Once the storm is over they persuade the crippled ship to drift to Porto Rico and rescue, where they are naturally received as distinguished visitors by the Spanish governor, who had met Hornblower when he was still on active service. They are serenaded by the governor’s band, among whom is a very young, very talented trumpeter. Barbara has used her charm and Hornblower’s money to spirit him from death in Jamaica to life in Porto Rico. However, Hornblower, who always desired that the navy maintain its needed discipline by less harsh methods than it was then using, knows that he can trust Barbara to always do the right thing, and they are fully reconciled in mutual admiration.

Getting all that together in a believable manner, “keep[ing] half a dozen balls in the air at once all through the story,” is one part of Cecil’s skill. The other part is that for the first time in his career
he writes an endearing love story.

He did not maintain that style. The only later novel that he finished was *Hornblower and the Hotspur*. (1962) The relationship between men and women described in a few pages of that novel was that of Hornblower’s ill-considered marriage to Maria. That is not a subject for romance although Hornblower has to come ashore again at the time to start the second of the two children he had had in the first novel.

*Hornblower and the Hotspur* contains Cecil’s most detailed description of seamanship. It is appropriate to analyze that description to evaluate Cecil’s knowledge of seamanship, knowledge on which a substantial part of his reputation has been based. The next eleven paragraphs are technical. While very few people today understand how to handle a square-rigged ship, those who have sailed small boats will readily understand.

The sloop *Hotspur* is Hornblower’s first command, when he has the rank of commander and is given a ship as tensions rise immediately before
Napoleon breaks the short peace of 1803 to 1804. Hornblower’s officers are Lieutenant Bush, acting master Prowse, and four master’s mates, one named Cargill. *Hotspur* was written when Cecil was at the peak of his knowledge of seamanship, having had read all the books he had on that subject. In chapter three of *Hotspur* he wrote the most detailed description of ship handling in any of his books. *Hotspur* was newly recommissioned after being laid up, and the crew was new, although composed of experienced men. Hornblower needs to test how well the ship handles and the crew responds. As soon as they have cleared the land, he orders the officer of the deck, master’s mate Cargill, to tack the ship.

At the start of the tacking maneuver the ship is sailing as close to the wind as possible (in this example with the wind on the starboard (right) bow). The ship is turned toward the wind (to the right), directly

45. Among them Lever’s *Young Officer’s Sheet Anchor* and the 30 volumes of the *Naval Chronicle*
into the wind, and then the turn is continued until the ship can sail as close as possible to the wind with the wind from the port (left) side. Because the ship cannot sail any closer to the wind than she has been, she cannot sail through the maneuver. Indeed, with a square rigged ship the sails hold her back as she comes into the wind. She has to be initially moving fast enough to keep moving through the turn, and she has to be coaxed around by handling the sails properly. Tacking requires about six sets of orders, given in the proper sequence and with the appropriate timing. With a square-rigged three-masted ship, the maneuver starts with the sails turned as far as they will go (braced up) in one direction (so the ship can sail close to the wind), and during the turn they must be rotated as far as they will go in the other direction to suit the new angle to the wind. However, the sails are not all swung at the same time. Those on the main and mizzen masts (the aftersails) are swung as the ship points almost directly at the wind with the command “Mainsail haul.” However, the sails on the foremast (the headsails) are not swung
until later because, in the original position, once the ship points nearly to the wind their angle to the wind pushes the bow of the ship sideways to complete the turn. Once the ship has turned away from the wind and the sails on the main and mizzen can fill with wind, the foremast sails are swung to the proper angle with the command “Haul taut. Let go and haul.”

A bad ship, or one badly handled, may not turn all the way into the wind and get ‘caught in stays.’ That is, to turn almost to the wind but not far enough for the headsails to force the bow round, moving too slowly to steer round, or even moving backwards, with the sails holding her back instead of driving her forward. She must be returned to the original course for another try. Therefore, if the officer in charge has any doubt about whether the ship will complete the turn, he delays the command “Mainsail haul” until he is sure that the ship is going round, because all the sails will be required in the original position to pick up speed for the next attempt. 46
On Cargill’s first attempt to tack *Hotspur*, she misses stays. Cecil writes “*Hotspur* was coming round into the wind, rising to an even keel. She was coming round, coming round—now was she going to hang in stays?

“‘Haul, mains’l! Haul!’

“This was the crucial moment. The hands knew their business; the port-side bowlines and braces were cast off smartly, and the hands tailed onto the starboard side ones. Round came the yards, but the Hotspur failed to answer. She balked. She hung right in the eye of the wind, and then fell off again two points to port, with every sail a-shiver and every yard of way lost. She was in irons, helpless until further action should be taken.”

This description has many errors. The bowlines\(^{47}\) that needed to be cast off were the starboard

\[\text{46. The alternative to tacking is wearing, turning away from the wind. This drives the ship downwind, losing precious distance that the ship had struggled to get upwind.}\]
ones, not the port ones. The braces are the lines attached to the ends of the yards that control the angle the yards make with the keel. The fore and main braces run aft, the fore braces to the main mast and the main braces to the ship’s side near the quarters. However, the mizzen braces must run forwards, to the main mast, because there is insufficient structure behind the mizzen mast to run them to. Therefore, when tacking from the starboard tack to the port tack, the braces to be hauled (with the opposite ones cast off) at “Mainsail haul” are the main starboard and the mizzen port braces, and the braces to be hauled at “Haul taut. Let go and haul” are the fore starboard braces.  

Cecil fails to distinguish between swinging the aftersails and swinging the headsails, and he assumed that swinging the sails pushed the ship through the turn. On the con-

47. Bowlines: lines attached to each edge of a square sail, used when sailing close to the wind, that pulled the windward edge forward so it would not fold up and let the wind get on its forward side.
trary, had the crew obeyed the orders he had given the ship would have been forced back onto the old course and stopped dead in the water.

Difficulty in tacking is caused by having the center of lateral resistance of the hull too far astern of the center of effort of the sails; this makes the ship want to turn away from the wind. A ship is ardent if she wants to turn up into the wind, she is slack if she wants to turn away from the wind. The condition can be observed when sailing normally, depending on which way the rudder has to be turned to keep her on a straight course. The ship needs to be adjusted so that she has a slight tendency to turn into the wind. Sailing a newly recommissioned ship for the first time, Hornblower and his officers surely had observed the rudder angle necessary to keep her on course, they would have concluded whether

48. The main and mizzen braces are hauled just enough to get their yards at the proper angle, assuming that they were not set to the exact angle in the hurry of making the tack.
Hotspur was ardent or slack, and would have made some adjustments to the sails to bring the ship into a better balance, all before trying the first tack at sea. And when that tack was tried, recognizing that it might fail, the command “Mainsail haul” would have been delayed until it was certain that the ship would complete the turn.

After the first tack has been made on the second try, Cecil makes Hornblower correct the condition by moving weights (guns) aft. The correct trim of the ship and the balance between lateral resistance and the sails were not new subjects for Cecil. At page ten of *The Happy Return*, Cecil has Hornblower considering the trim of the *Lydia* and moving a gun to achieve a better trim, and at page 120, in the battle with the *Natividad*, Hornblower is adjusting the balance of the sails to correct for battle damage.

However, the correction that Cecil makes

Hornblower order for the *Hotspur* is the opposite of what is required. Making the stern deeper and raising the bow moves the hull’s center of lateral resistance further aft, increasing the tendency to turn away from the wind and reducing the ability to turn into the wind.  

Cecil makes this mistake because he assumes that *Hotspur* missed stays because she easily turned up into the wind and then would not turn away from the wind on the new tack. Actually, a ship that turns

50. Adjusting the sails is easier than moving weights, but any book on sailing seamanship or naval design will consider this point. A modern one that pertains specifically to the Napoleonic period is: Harland, John; *Seamanship in the Age of Sail*; p56-7; U.S. Naval Institute Press; 1984. A new printing of an old standby is the photolithographic reproduction, 1963, by Edward Sweetman Co., New York, of Lever, Darcy; *A Young Sea Officer’s Sheet Anchor, as a Key to the Leading of Rigging and to Practical Seamanship*, originally published in 1819.
easily into the wind has sufficient momentum to continue the turn, and in any case, once at that angle to the wind, the headsails force her to turn. Once the foremast sails are braced round for the new tack, she will need a large rudder angle to keep her on course, just as on the other tack. Missing stays is caused by a ship that, because it resists turning into the wind, takes too long to do it and loses the momentum that would carry it through.

This has been a long explanation that is not as exciting as is required in a work of fiction. Cecil needed only to describe, not to explain (unless he thought that the explanation would interest the reader). Condensing the action to suit the fictional need is perfectly acceptable, so long as what is said is correct. However, Cecil made elementary mistakes in what he chose to write, mistakes that show that he did not understand the significance of what he was writing. So far as I know, and he did teach me the very elementary parts of seamanship, he never handled any boat more complicated than a catboat, a boat with only one sail on one mast. I am
no great seaman, but I have had many times the sailing experience that Cecil ever had, and on many more types of boat. I think that it is reasonable to conclude that Cecil had no better knowledge of practical seamanship than the little that he taught me, and that the rest of his knowledge was not merely theoretical but much of it was misunderstood. He was merely familiar with the words without understanding more than the most elementary of the principles. A similar conclusion can be drawn about Cecil’s knowledge of scientific and mechanical subjects.

The rest of the book tells of adventures as Hotspur sails close to shore while blockading the French fleet at Brest. At the end, when the British fleet is laying in wait for the Spanish treasure fleet from Mexico, Hornblower takes Hotspur into action against a French frigate, a much stronger ship, to prevent it from carrying the news of war to the Spanish fleet. Hornblower knew that this would prevent him from being in sight when the treasure
ships were captured, thereby losing his share of the immense prize money, but he carried on with his duty.\textsuperscript{51} Cecil repeats to Frances his standard complaint about length and work: “Maybe there’s twelve thousand words done now. Twelve day’s work in sixteen damned working days. At this rate I won’t get the accursed thing finished before the end of October.”\textsuperscript{52} When October came around, he was worried that it will be too long; he had estimated 90,000 words, but he is now worried that it will be 110,000 words instead. “I’m tired of the thing.”\textsuperscript{53}

The book closes with Hornblower still in command of the \textit{Hotspur}. His leaving that ship, which is still on blockade duty, is the opening scene in \textit{Hornblower and the Crisis}, the unfinished novel that would have closed the last gap in Hornblower’s career.

\begin{flushright}
51. The prize money was never awarded; the treasure went straight to the Crown.
52. CSF-FP 18 July 1961
53. CSF-FP Monday, early October, 1961
\end{flushright}
In December, 1962, Little, Brown & Co. asked Cecil to work on “a volume of maps for the Hornblower stories, with a general introduction, and I suppose I shall do it.” Having recently hired John Dale Hodapp, Cecil added, “At that rate it’s just possible that Hodapp will earn his keep. Query. If I pay him (as I shall) ordinary secretary’s wages am I justified in using his expert knowledge?”

After a vacation in Hawaii with Dorothy, during which he met Arthur Marder, the naval historian, Cecil started on *The Hornblower Companion*. “I’m writing the accursed introduction which is really causing me a lot of trouble—there are so many hurdles to take and pitfalls to avoid.” As he worked he worried also about good taste. “I’ve come across some perfectly dreadful photographs of me in 1924. It might be amusing to have on the jacket of the new book one of those side by side with a present day one. Will you give me your opinion? At

54. CSF-FP 11 December 1962
55. CSF-FP 24 January 1963
every step–I mean at every line–of the present job I’m having to make decisions about whether something is in good taste or not; I’ve never written anything before that has had to balance on such a knife edge.”

The pitfalls that he worried about surely were not his writing habits or the way he constructed plots; he had publicly discussed those for years. I remember him more than ten years before, telling my university friends, possibly reading from a manuscript, how plots developed in his unconscious mind, which is the opening of the *Personal Notes* section of *The Hornblower Companion*. The pitfalls concerned his personal life, to which he referred three times: the circumstances of the origin of *Hornblower*, the relationship between *The Commodore* and his disability, and the relationship between his heart attack and *Hornblower and the Even Chance*. The heart attack story was no pitfall; anyone can tell without shame of having a heart attack and embellishing the

56. CSF-FP 8 February 1963
story with an even chance of recovery. In saying that composing *The Commodore* diverted him from the misery of being semi-crippled, he was stretching the truth a little, because for two years he had tried to find time to write that book. The real pitfall was telling how he came to be sailing into the Gulf of Fonseca aboard the *Margaret Johnson* in the spring of 1936. The truth behind the account that he wrote in 1963 has been told in the chapter on Hollywood.

Louis Untermyer\(^{57}\) visited Cecil when Cecil had done about a month’s work on the *Hornblower Companion*. Cecil wrote to Frances that Untermyer thought the *Companion* was a masterpiece.\(^{58}\) Having started on January 19, 1963\(^{59}\), Cecil finished on March 2, adding a postscript one year later when the maps and notes had been prepared.

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57. Literary critic, active with the Book of the Month Club
58. CSF-FP 14 February 1963
59. CSF-FP 18 January 1963

1429
During the fall of 1963, Cecil worked on *Big Ben*. He had 10,000 words done by the end of September, by the first week of October he reached “the final crisis of decision” about *Big Ben*, in the next week he sent his work to date to Frances, asking her opinion of whether he should tell his publisher about it or bury it. By the second week of November he was still wondering whether to continue with it, even though he has never worked out the end of the plot. “It’s quite the silliest way of writing a novel with a plot that there is, and I really don’t think that I’ve EVER done it.”

Obviously, nothing came of this, and he started work on the novel that would close the final gap in Hornblower’s career, the summer of 1805 and the autumn of the battle of Trafalgar.

Hornblower, commanding the sloop *Hotspur*, had been the close-in watchman of the British fleet that was blockading the French Atlantic fleet in

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60. CSF-FP 13 September, 28 September, 7 October, 12 November 1963
Brest, the port at the western opening of the Channel. Napoleon wanted to invade England with his Grand Army that was camped within sight of England, near the ports at the narrow eastern end of the Channel, but the British fleet would pounce on his small boats filled with infantrymen. “Those far distant, storm-beaten ships, upon which the Grand Army never looked, stood between it and the dominion of the world.”

Napoleon planned a grand strategy that would unite his Atlantic and Mediterranean fleets with that of his Spanish ally, decoy the British out of the way, beat those British that remained, and invade England while his small boats were protected by his fleet. Nelson chased the French Mediterranean fleet and the Spanish fleet across the Atlantic and back, breaking the nerve of the French admiral, Villeneuve, in the process. Instead of joining the French Atlantic fleet, which was still in Brest, Villeneuve

61. A. T. Mahan in *The Influence of Sea Power upon the French Revolution and Empire, 1793-1812.*
was chased, after a futile encounter with the British Admiral Calder, into the isolated Spanish port of Ferrol, across the Bay of Biscay. The British wanted to lure him out and destroy him. In history, he does sail out, but instead of sailing northeast for Brest, being fearful of meeting the British fleet again, he sails south for Spanish Cadiz. Napoleon’s strategy is wrecked.

Remember Forester’s description of Napoleon’s strategy, as described in *Lord Nelson*. “But Napoleon was a tyro in the matter of naval warfare. He was pitting his inexperienced brains against those of men, not as great mentally, perhaps, who had spent their lives on the sea and who could estimate chances far more accurately than he. All Napoleon’s plans in the end were landsman’s plans.”

Three months later, when Napoleon has to fight Austria and Russia, he orders Villeneuve to sail to the Mediterranean to protect his flank, or be superseded by another admiral. Villeneuve sails, but is met and beaten by Nelson at the battle of Trafalgar. For the war at sea, that battle was decisive; at no
subsequent time did Napoleon have sufficient battleships to challenge British control of the sea, control that lasted until World War II.

Here is Hornblower’s part in this history. In a boarding action between small ships at the mouth of the Channel, Hornblower captures what are obviously secret documents. Hornblower is ordered to carry these to the Admiralty in London, arriving at the same time as the news of Calder’s futile attempt to defeat Villeneuve and of Villeneuve’s escape into Ferrol. The secret orders, opened at the Admiralty, prove to be Napoleon’s orders to Martinique, orders that bear Napoleon’s new seal and style of Emperor.

Because Hornblower had been imprisoned in Ferrol and knew just how difficult it would be to blockade, he suggests that forged orders, using the new seal and style, be sent to order Villeneuve to sail out. Hornblower is given the field command, supported by experts in forgery and intelligence. That is as far as Cecil got with this novel.

The rest of the story would have been as follows. Before the plot can be worked out, word is
received that Villeneuve has sailed, after only one week in Ferrol. Later, he is discovered in the Spanish port of Cadiz. However, the problem still remains: how to get him to come out and fight, and be beaten. Therefore, the plot is transferred to the communication route between Paris and Cadiz, and carried out.

This plot had many requirements. Hornblower had to capture the real orders at sea in a way that would not arouse French suspicion but would demonstrate the authenticity of them, be conveyed to London, become available for the exploit, and be seen to be the one best suited to carry it out, all before the actual story could begin. There was one great advantage: both real history and Hornblower’s previous stories matched the required events practically exactly. Cecil told Frances that he started working out this plot in March, 1964. “And the construction is still going along very satisfactorily. It’s amazing that so far I haven’t had to contemplate any liberties at all with history or geography or even with the other H. books, and it’s just as fantastic that
there are dozens of little trifles in actual history at that time which come to reinforce the story—coincidence after coincidence to give verisimilitude in a quite uncanny way. If I let myself go I could come to believe that it all really happened.”

Cecil started *Hornblower During the Crisis* about May 1, 1964, working while staying at the Savoy Hotel in London after taking a cruise to the Greek Islands. However, the opening bothered him. “I’m a bit shaken by the Crisis—have a feeling that the start is too slow and suspect uneasily that for the first time in my life I’ll have to cut or edit the finished version—at least if you won’t do it for me, dear.” After ten thousand words he commented, “Not a damned thing has happened so far.”

Cecil returned from Europe by a ship that called at Long Beach, near where I worked and

62. CSF-FP 17 March 1964  
63. CSF-FP 4 May 1964  
64. CSF-FP 21 May 1964  
65. CSF-FP 29 May 1964
taught. My department wrote specifications for a wide variety of military and space equipment. The members, being largely engineers and scientists who described their products in writing, were just the kind of people who greatly admired Cecil’s writing. We all took a half-day off to have Cecil to lunch and talk about writing, and I, of course, had more time with him later. He told me the plot of the new book and how it was progressing.

By the time he had returned to Berkeley, after writing a lot on the ship, he decided that he must rewrite. “There’s been a terrible upheaval about the work. The suspicion I think I voiced to you about it being too wordy turned out to be correct. I had a bright idea to save words and space and I’ve put it into action, but that means that the whole card castle of construction has collapsed and has had to be rebuilt, which has meant an awful lot of rewriting; the later sections have had to be recast with a slightly different flavour or different mechanics so that they can’t be used bodily and my poor old hand has to rewrite every word. It’s much more satisfac-
tory in the new form, though. I’ve hardly had a thought for anything else ever since I landed; luckily I made the decision promptly.”  

By the end of July nearly all the changes were done. “The damned novel is struggling along. It’s a bit different possibly (or perhaps it’s me) and I really don’t know what to think of it.”  

In writing *Hornblower and the Crisis*, Cecil reached the point at which Hornblower was given the field command, supported by experts in forgery and intelligence, in anticipation of forging Napoleon’s order to Villeneuve. While writing the next words, on August 8, 1964, sitting at his writing desk in the lower floor of his house, Cecil was felled by the debilitating stroke that ended his career, to be discovered when he didn’t come up the stairs for lunch.

After his death in 1966, the completed portion of *Hornblower and the Crisis* was published, along with *Hornblower’s Temptation* (the story of Lieutenant

66. CSF-FP 14 July 1964
67. CSF-FP 30 July 1964
Hornblower and McCool’s chest) and *The Final Encounter*. 
By the time that Cecil’s sons were living their own lives, Cecil was fifty-two years old. For the remaining fourteen years of his life, he lived the novel that he had created before. It was, as he was heard to remark, a life far happier than he had expected. With later evidence for his frame of mind, that phrase might have been the public form of the thought that these years were far happier than he deserved, for he neither created anew nor mellowed. Having driven himself in his youth, with his societal position and his misery in it as an excuse, into desperate expedi-ents of lies and deception to create a new character
for himself, he was now satisfied with the lying and deceptive character he had become. Achieving the social success and comfortable life he had sought did not impel him to change the habits that had brought those to him. Neither, apparently, did moral considerations modify his actions now that the self-induced motivation had passed. You may believe his lies and deceptions were useful to him in some ways. By deceiving Dorothy one could suppose he was enabled to have affairs with other women. But since he carried on these affairs right before her nose, and his women were encouraged to write directly to him where Dorothy picked up the letters at the front door, it doesn’t seem that he was deceiving her. If there was deceit involved, in that matter she was deceiving herself.

By maintaining his pose that his current life cost as much as he was currently earning, he prevented his relatives from begging for money, but rather than give his time or his talents to please his friends he habitually, but secretly, wrote them checks. That’s all his friends were worth, apparently
— money. By his pose of poverty he persuaded me to use my time and talents to perform tasks for him that, considering his wealth, saved him so small an amount that it was not worth considering. Finally, in preparation for the time when his life would be over and he would have no personal use for his money, he disinherited his sons in bitter clauses.

Of course he was still The Great Man, and he bolstered that position, as if it needed it, by putting in writing, again, his lies about himself, but in doing so he provided the information that proved him a liar. He wrote another ‘history,’ out of whose errors he had to lie, exactly as he had with Victor Emmanuel in 1927. Finally, when his life was nearly over he and Dorothy were very nearly separated from his secret hoard, a position from which they were rescued, ironically, by their own victims.

That is the outline of Cecil’s declining years. The importance of the incidents, unlike those told of before, is not in the way they affected Cecil’s life and work, but in the way they illustrate what he had become and how he affected others. A necessary
part of this conclusion is the account of the discovery of these incidents, both to support the truth of the assertions and because their discovery was in itself one traumatic consequence of Cecil’s life.

In 1950 John Huston completed arrangements to film *The African Queen* with Kathleen Hepburn and Humphrey Bogart. Cecil was initially dubious about Bogart but thought that Huston and Hepburn would make a good film. He told me that Huston was a friend of his, but he had not met Hepburn. In January, 1951, Katherine Hepburn played in *As You Like It* in San Francisco, a production that Cecil disliked, and Cecil met her after the show, as he wrote Frances. “Then I had supper with her (you were wrong about my wife — I was having a little time by myself) and we talked about the African Queen and it seems likely it will be done; she’s a very highbrow woman indeed but without any brains at all. Next day I’d planned to see the Italian picture Bitter Rice, and she invited herself — just literally — to come with me and it was awful. Don’t waste your money
on seeing it. Just appalling. I said a hurried farewell to K.H. sitting in her car outside her hotel, and since then I’ve had a rather crabbed thank you note from her (writing worse than mine) and now she’s left town.”

Shooting was complete in 1951 and my father told me his reaction to the film as far as it had progressed. “I’ve seen some of the rushes of The African Queen and I’m as pleased as everybody else by Bogart’s acting. Seeing him so good has taken quite a load off my mind, for I was quite genuinely worried.”

His statement contrasts against his opinion of the film, as written to Frances. “Anyway I went down to Hollywood by the night train last Saturday and went to the preview of The African Queen on the night of the 23rd. There was the hell of a party afterwards. It’s hard to be definite about the film. It’s a fine corpse, so to speak, except for the end, where corruption has already set in so that it stinks. Up to

1. CSF - FP 15 January 1951

1443
the end they followed the book quite slavishly, even in minute detail, so that it’s exactly like the book except that it’s as dead as mutton, and I can’t think why — the humour is quite good, and the love story is quite convincing, and Bogart and Hepburn do real good jobs, but the soul of the thing just isn’t there — but other people may not notice its absence. A lot of people said they liked it, to me, but in the usual Hollywood fashion they were probably telling everybody else how awful it was. The technicolor’s not bad, and some of the river scenery is fine. There’s an abundance of lions and crocodiles and things, some of which have a bearing on the story, and the leeches are really magnificent. Bogart is supposed to be a Canadian, which gets over the Cockney problem. Hepburn is really quite convincing. God knows why the picture is a decaying corpse, but I think it is.”

A few weeks later Katherine Hepburn confirmed Cecil’s opinion of her intellect by suggesting

2. CSF - FP 26 December 1951
the plot for a sequel to *The African Queen*. “On yellow foolscap paper just like my ms. paper, 3-½ pages of indecipherable pencil scribble, with some of her suggestions for a sequel to the African Queen, including the discovery of a diamond mine by her and Humphrey Bogart. It ends with his being knighted and buying a yacht. Well, well, well.”³

The film has notable defects. As the *African Queen* is running downriver past the fort at Shona, under rifle fire, a rifle bullet completely parts the main steam line. When cannon balls parted main steam lines in American Civil War gunboats, the engine-room crews were boiled alive. Aboard the *African Queen*, Bogart holds the broken ends of the pipe together and makes the repair with rags and friction tape, an act that would be barely possible with a toy steam engine. The end of the film is utter nonsense. In the novel Rose and Allnutt attempt to use the explosive-laden *African Queen* to sink the *Konigin Luise* at its nighttime moorings on the lake, but

³. CSF-FP 22 January 1952
the *African Queen* is caught in a storm and sinks. Allnutt is first discovered by the Germans on the island that they use as a storage depot, and is condemned to death as a spy or saboteur. Rose is then discovered on another island, their story comes out, and, very ill with malaria, they are sent under flag of truce to the British port at the end of the lake. In the last chapter, which has a historical basis, the British get high-speed motor gunboats to the lake and sink the *Konigin Luise*, thus securing the best transportation route in that part of Africa. As in other Forester novels, the protagonists perform heroic deeds but have no effect on history.

In the film, after the *African Queen* is overwhelmed in the storm on the lake, Rose and Allnutt are both condemned to death. They are on the deck of the *Konigin Luise* with the nooses round their necks, when the *Konigin Luise* steams into the still-floating capsized hulk of the *African Queen*, setting off the explosives and sinking herself. Rose and Allnutt swim away from the wreck, cheering.

That ending is completely against the Forester
inclination. It is physically impossible (the *African Queen* would have sunk), entirely improbable (the chances of hitting a half-submerged hulk in a lake large enough to justify a steam gunboat are extremely small), and completely against the pessimistic Forester attitude that his heroes must not succeed.

However, Cecil thought the film was a decaying corpse before seeing its end. While much of the dialogue of the film copies the book very closely, it is played with a humor that Cecil had not written into it. More than that, the balance between Rose and Allnutt was more equal in the film than in the novel. The novel concerns the growth of a rigidly religious, small-town, small-shopkeeper, circumscribed woman approaching old-maidenhood into a determined and competent executive with the added bonus of sexual awakening. A considerable part of

4. There is much additional dialogue to explain situations that in the novel are told by the impersonal narrator.
the novel discusses how the hierarchical family relationships in which Rose had grown up fitted her, almost unconsciously, for the task of sinking the Konigin Luise. In that respect, the story of Rose is very similar to that of Able Seaman Brown in Brown on Resolution, and somewhat similar to that of Rifleman Dodd in Death to the French. The Allnutt of the novel is a far weaker man than that of the film, one who has drifted because he has no plan for his life. He is directed by Rose, but enjoys being directed and also enjoys the maternal overtones of Rose’s sexual love for him because that is his character. These concerns are the core of the book that Cecil had written but that he did not see in the film. In the film Cecil saw a happy, cooperative couple between whom humor was possible and for whom a happy future was likely, just the characteristics that did not fit the Forester scheme of life.

Cecil dealt with his personal business in ways that frequently showed little understanding. He replaced the 1939 Cadillac 60 Special with a 1949
Cadillac, which was the first new car he had ever bought. That suffered from being driven off the road in Mexico, and he replaced it with a 1955 Ford Fairlane. While a low-priced car, it was a pretty good car; it served him, then me, and then my stepdaughter Carolyn. However, it did not really satisfy him; he wished that he had a finer car, more along the lines of the Jaguar that he had driven in England. In April, 1958, the Cadillac distributor came to his house to persuade him to buy a new Cadillac Eldorado, but that luxury was not quite what he wanted. Besides, there was another complication; I lived not far away. “I made a bargain with myself that if I write and sell that story I’ll buy a new Jaguar. I’m so tired of the Ford – quite American of me, because I’m sure there’s at least another two years of first rate service in it. Having John living just round the corner from me keeps me from innumerable extravagances. If he lived in Louisiana or somewhere I’d have a third car, one of these nippy little sports jobs

5. CSF-FP 7 April 1958

1449
only fit for young men to drive and really quite useless to me, but I just can’t do it while he has to be careful with his grocery bills, curse him.”6 A year before, Cecil had concealed his loan to his secretary, Priscilla, to buy a new car, for fear that I would feel deprived if I knew that he made such loans to others.7

His hesitation lasted less than a week. “I think the Jaguar is just arriving.”8

That Jaguar was an outstanding car of the time, the smaller sedan body powered by the big

6. CSF-FP 11 August 1958. My father had already told me not to expect to inherit much money. It was foolish of him to think that I would harbor a grudge against him for buying a Jaguar, when I knew that his travels must cost far more. He was afraid that I would come begging from him with the argument that he couldn’t be short of money since he bought Jaguars for cash.
7. CSF-FP 2 April 1957
8. CSF-FP 18 August 1958

1450
engine, with disc brakes all round, then very much a novelty. Because Cecil’s legs did not have enough endurance to push the clutch pedal for long in heavy traffic, this was fitted with the automatic transmission. With an extra switch within finger reach of the steering wheel to provide a controlled downshift to third gear, this was a lovely car to drive over the Berkeley hills, as I did for an afternoon or two. But Cecil’s ownership came to an untimely end. The car would not stay parked. It twice ran away when parked on hills, the second time from George Stewart’s house on the hill above Codornices Reservoir. The car demolished a hundred feet of fence in front of George’s neighbor’s house before it stopped, and that, as far as Cecil was concerned, was that. But Cecil could not find a garage to fix the problem. The dealer would not, probably because Cecil demanded that he do it at no charge, and Cecil could find no one else who could. He was so upset that he sold the car immediately, barely broken in, at a heavy loss, to some lucky buyer before he had even considered a replacement. The repairs would
have been simple. Those cars had separate parking-brake pads that were used for nothing else; Cecil had probably glazed them by driving with the hand-brake applied. The parking pawl in the automatic transmission, if it were defective, could be easily replaced without taking the transmission out of the car. Cecil replaced the Jaguar with a Dodge Lancer, a really undistinguished attempt at a compact car.

Later on, Dorothy had a 1959 Riley 1.5 liter, a strange hybrid consisting of a Morris chassis, MG engine and transmission, and a BMC medium-sized body. Neither thermometer nor gasoline gauge worked when it was delivered, and Cecil was unable to persuade the dealer to repair them. Dorothy carried a gallon can of gasoline for years, just in case she might run out, and filled up every time before venturing out of town. Years later, when that car was given to my stepdaughter Carolyn, as a wedding present, I flew up from Fullerton to Berkeley to drive it south and was given the warnings. Once back to my own house and toolbox, it took me only an afternoon and a dollar’s worth of parts to repair
It is inaccurate to describe Cecil as a miser. He did not covet money or valuables like Dickens’s Fagin, keeping a secret hoard to gloat over in private. Neither did he covet ostentation, spending his money to show he had it to spend. It is most accurate to say he coveted his ease and freedom, the ability to do anything he pleased without a care in the world. That is exactly what he did; he took pleasure in telling people, and in writing, that he had the most pleasant life in the world.

Of course living that kind of life required money. Most people who live like that have lots of money; a few who do not are spendthrifts living in luxury on the edge of poverty. Cecil felt he had to explain away his extravagant life-style, traveling Cunard first class and staying at the Savoy, while concealing his wealth. He pretended that he was on the edge of poverty by saying that his life-style indeed took all his current earnings. He pretended that he was not a spendthrift by saying that he had
put his past earnings into annuities, so that he could spend all his current earnings without jeopardizing his old age. By presenting to me a pose of penury and miserliness, he both obtained my willing help in maintaining his ease and dissuaded me from begging from him. By presenting to Kathleen the picture of Atlas with the cares of the world upon his shoulders, he both persuaded her that he had provided security for their children and justified his refusals of her requests. As far as the Jaguar went, I saw the forced sale as being done for foolish reasons, but that was only a car. I did not extend my inference to the sale of the house at Hawthorne Terrace.

For the three years after George and I left his house, Cecil and Dorothy occupied Hawthorne Terrace alone. They then talked, for about a year, of moving from this five-bedroom (only three in the main part, two in the basement) thirty-year-old house, and finally found a house to rent at 1066 Park Hills Road, on the fashionable top of the Berkeley Hills. My father told me he had two intents. First, to get back his capital so he could use
it more profitably than merely avoiding the payment of rent and taxes, and second to save the expenses of Hawthorne Terrace, which required some repairs. Standard financial advice is to buy your house; you save more than the capital would earn in most investments, and that was particularly true with the high income taxes of the time. The new house, as I saw later, had only three bedrooms but was just as large and was probably more valuable and with higher taxes.

The real reason for moving out of Hawthorne Terrace was that Cecil didn’t want to be distracted by petty cares that he had to take care of himself; “I do not want to buy a house again & I want to rent one.” 9 “I shall regret leaving Hawthorne Terrace, but it’s far too big and inconvenient, and also a great deal of work has to be done on it and I don’t want the trouble and responsibility of it.” 10 “I am tired of the details of ownership.” He was so tired of these

9. CSF-FP 5 October 1955  
10. CSF-FP 6 December 1955
details that he set a price for Hawthorne Terrace that sold it “only an hour after I put it up for sale!”

“Selling this house was a silly business—the man came just at dusk ... and his wife came later ... they paid the deposit that very evening. I’ve made about ten thousand dollars gross, five thousand net profit.”

Hawthorne Terrace had cost $19,000, which was little more than the pre-war value. The seller had been the director of the Pacific School of Religion, who thought that he should not be a war-time profiteer. Therefore, Cecil sold the house for about $29,000, and paid about $5,000 in income tax (no house appreciation exemption those days).

1066 Park Hills Road was on a triangular lot between two roads. The front faced the lower road, and was reached by thirty-nine steps. Two coincidences: 1066 was the date of the Norman Conquest, and The Thirty-Nine Steps was the title of a spy novel

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12. CSF-FP 12 December 1955
by John Buchan. My father could not manage the front steps, but the main floor of the house, with the garage, was level with the upper road. The main floor had spacious rooms, with a small office as well. The main rooms looked over the trees of Tilden Park. The lower floor had a very large room, probably a game room, which my father used as his library and writing room. This room had wide view windows below which was space for a series of book cases. I made book cases to fit the space. My father thought that the office space and the writing room space would be wasted. “It’s almost a pity that I’m never going to do any more work—in addition to the office there’s a rumpus room quite ideal to work in; I’ve never had more than a corner of the table in a bedroom to work on since I started A Pawn Among Kings. My future biographer will, I hope, extract all the obvious irony from the situation.”

The situation presented more irony than he recognized. “John has been really helpful regarding

13. CSF-FP 6 December 1955

1457
this move—which is now completed one might say—but it dawned upon me that my living in this house is causing some heart burnings. It has all the earmarks of expense and opulence in a way that Hawthorne Terrace had not. I don’t mean that John is particularly jealous, but a lot of people are frankly envious. This house has the stamp of money about it—silly of me not to realize it before.”

The Hawthorne Terrace house was California Spanish, built initially by a professor of Spanish, who decorated the walls of the main rooms with pictorial tiles. The tiles of one room showed the adventures of Don Quixote, the tiles of another displayed the arms of the divisions of Spain, and the beamed ceiling of the dining room was painted in intricate floral patterns. The main rooms were well designed in their somewhat rococo style and their windows looked out through the Golden Gate. Beside which, the house was on a double width lot and looked over a beautiful garden. (The new owners sold that lot;
the side windows now look at another house.) That house would be extremely expensive to reproduce today, but it looked classic, not opulent. In contrast, 1066 Park Hills Road was an utterly characterless builder’s speculation house, built to no particular style but whose size, materials (at least to the extent they were visible), and landscaping demonstrated that money had been spent on it.

The owner of the house that Cecil rented was a professional contractor who had built it and lived in it for a few years. He, too, felt that capital was better invested in his business than in the house, so that once the initial two-year lease had expired, he refused to renew it. That presented Cecil with the unpleasant prospect of either moving again or buying the house at the stated price, $40,000. Moving again was too much of a burden for him. He bought. The $16,000 additional expense, not counting the

15. CSF-FP 11 December 1957
16. +$29000 sale price, -$5000 tax on sale, -$40000 new house

1459
rent paid, was a lesson that he should have foreseen.

One would think that my father would have enjoyed the modern games of strategy. His youthful games of strategy, his participation in the Armchair Strategists, his interest in bridge, and his playing of an arithmetical puzzle game that he might have invented, all suggested his interest. I bought him a adult board game in which two armies maneuver over a map with the outcome decided, as in real life, by a combination of skill and luck. It is no more difficult than bridge, but it is much slower. While an evening of bridge involves many hands, an evening of Tactics completes only one war. Cecil never mastered Tactics — more than that, he rejected it utterly. I don’t know why.

Cecil told Frances of his travels in considerable detail, except for concealing a few items. His letters written during his Mexican trip in the winter of 1954-5, when he drove the Cadillac off the road, contain no hint that Dorothy accompanied him,
although she did. His letters written during his voyage to England in the spring of 1956, through the Panama Canal, say nothing at all about Dorothy although they say that the Clarkes joined the ship at Curacao. Only when Cecil writes that he will fly from Antwerp to England, leaving his luggage on the ship “for Dorothy to bring on,” is there even a hint of her presence. Nearly always he wrote “I” did such and such, never “we” did it, even when Dorothy must have been beside him. When the ship transited the Panama Canal, Cecil was treated as an honored guest, dining with the commanding admiral and being driven across the Isthmus to see the other sights on the way.

When planning that trip, Cecil had had to apologize to Frances in quite abject terms for not traveling through New York to see her. He complained that Frances had cooled her customary salutation (which we do not know): “I found I was only your dear Cecil again.”\(^17\)

\(^17\) CSF-FP 7 February 1956
About this time, Cecil found that his endurance was no longer sufficient for him to accept days at sea with the Navy. In September, 1956, he spent a day at sea on the trials of a new type of ship, an assault-helicopter carrier, rebuilt from a former light carrier. The Navy looked after him very well, more kindly than it did the generals and admirals who were also observing the trials (he was the only visitor allowed on the bridge and he was given a chair to sit in), but he found the day too tiring and decided that this was the last time he could accept such an invitation.18

Cecil continued his principle of maximum ease when travelling. After Gordon Williams died, Cecil’s nephew Stephen Troughton-Smith, one of Hugh’s sons, took over Gordon’s prior task of making the arrangements for Cecil’s stays in England. Stephen was an RAF officer who was able to arrange his leave time to suit Cecil’s schedule. I had met him twice in this period, once when he visited

18. CSF-FP 13 September 1956
San Francisco while passing through on duty and once when I was in England in 1962.

One facet of his careful arrangements was Cecil’s care for secrecy. This care was of two kinds: with strangers who could see him but did not know him, a care that he not be recognized; with those who knew him, a care to conceal his schedule.

One of Cecil’s long-deferred dreams was a tour of the Greek islands. He used to tell me that he and a seagoing friend, Negley Farson, had planned to do this starting in 1940. They had a Thames spritsail barge selected for conversion into a cruising yacht and my father pointed out to me such barges on the Thames. The whole family would sail it across the North Sea, up the Rhine and the Main, by canal to the Danube, down the Danube, across the Black Sea, through the Dardanelles, around the Aegean Sea and the Greek islands, across the Mediterranean to Egypt, and up the Nile in a voyage lasting a year. Since it would take so long, George and I would have to study while on board. “Unfortunately,
Hitler spoiled our plan. We were just one year too late.” Actually, he was thirty years too early. When I looked the canal up in the *Britannica*, it said that the canal was not opened until 1968. But that’s not the whole story.

Cecil related to Frances a somewhat different story about Negley Farson, writing that the two of them had planned a raft trip down the Volga in the 1930s. Cecil made two speculations about that plan: had they done it he might well have been pushed overboard by a drunken Farson, and had he survived the trip, by 1952 the Congressional Un-American Activities Committee would have been questioning his politics for having done so.\(^\text{19}\)

Although I believed Cecil’s story when he told it to me, I now think that neither story was true. Negley Farson was an American-born adventurer, salesman, pilot in World War I, foreign correspondent, and amateur yachtsman. His autobiography, *Life of a Transgressor*, was published\(^\text{20}\) in December,

19. CSF-FP 29 January 1952

1464
1935, went through seven printings in a year, the seventh for Christmas, 1936, illustrated with snapshot photographs. I have a copy of the seventh printing, partially burned when Kitty’s house burned, in which is written the name of Kitty’s mother, Florence Belcher, obviously its first owner.

In 1924, Farson and his wife sailed a small yacht across Europe on Cecil’s desired route. Farson published his account as *Sailing Across Europe*, and, shortened, in his autobiography. There actually was a canal between the headwaters of the Rhine and the headwaters of the Danube, but in 1924 it had been practically abandoned. Farson writes that it was choked with weeds and he had to pull his two-and-a-half ton yacht through, taking three weeks for 107 miles. Its replacement, a canal for large barges, was not opened until 1968. The typical Thames wooden spritsail coasting barge was capable of carrying 150-180 tons, the river barges somewhat less.

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20. London, Victor Gollancz
21. London, Jonathan Cape
22. London, Victor Gollancz
So here is Cecil blithely talking about sailing a vessel weighing 100 tons or so through a canal through which his proposed companion had with difficulty pulled a 2½ ton yacht sixteen years before. Farson would know that the larger craft could not get through. Cecil may have met him, but he would not be involved in such a plan, which was just another of Cecil’s stories to make people admire him. More probably, Cecil had read *Sailing Across Europe* when he was planning the voyage that he and Kitty took in Annie Marble in 1928, and the idea stayed with him, to be resurrected when desired. The fact that the copy of Farson’s autobiography that Kitty owned was the seventh printing and had been originally owned by her mother suggests that at the end of 1936 Cecil was not close enough to Farson to be planning such a voyage.

However, Cecil managed a tour of some Greek islands in the winter of 1958-9, by participating in a


1466
cruise chartered by the Classical Society. This society is very academic and provides expert lecturers for all the places visited within the classical area. Cecil told me that he traveled disguised as “Scott Forester, a manufacturer of ballpoint pens from San Francisco,” ostensibly to eliminate the adulation which otherwise would have been heaped upon him. He wrote to Frances that he traveled as C. Forrest, retired publisher’s assistant, who had handled the West Coast area for Little Brown and Company.\textsuperscript{23} Traveling in disguise also reduced the likelihood of developing the notoriety which afflicted his tour of the West Indies in 1938. He explicitly told me that the participants were entirely highbrow teachers of dowdy appearance, a trinity of characteristics he knew I believed he detested, but I am now inclined to look on that as one more piece of cover. He said that his own cover was blown when, near the end of the cruise, the ship touched somewhere in Sicily.

Sicily has an odd history. It had been a major

\textsuperscript{23} CSF-FP 13 January 1959
part of the Greek world before the rise of Rome and its city of Syracuse had been the home of Archimedes the mathematician. It had classical antiquities of great interest and connections with classical cultures which not even the rise of Christianity completely obliterated. However, this Mediterranean culture had been conquered by the Normans, who only two generations earlier had been Northmen, or Vikings, plundering and conquering parts of the coast of Northern France. In Sicily they built with a mixture of Romanesque, Byzantine, and Muslim styles that were, so my father told me, outside the expertise of the classical scholars aboard. He found himself explaining the intricacies of this eclectic architecture to an interested crowd. Having given his little lecture and seen the approval of the scholars, he suddenly feared that they would suspect that somebody else was hiding within the character of Scott Forester, manufacturer of ballpoint pens. In fear of discovery, he withdrew from the group, sat silently with face averted all the way back to the ship, and locked himself in his cabin. He stayed there, quaking with
fear at every knock on the door, for the two nights and a day of the passage to Marseilles.

His disguise was more effective, or less necessary, on his last trip to the Greek islands in 1964. “There weren’t any highbrows on board, & I needn’t have used my nom de voyage, I think, and H.H.’s name wasn’t mentioned once.” 24

When he went to England, masquerading as somebody else would risk discovery. Therefore, he concealed his presence in England, letting only those know whom he desired to visit, or, if his stay was lengthy, he concealed his schedule. For instance, in both of his birthday letters to Kathleen of 1953 25 and 1959 26 he tells her he is soon going to England. In the first he had to tell her because he promised to bring back her clock (an electric pendulum clock that had been left behind in 1940). His cautions in the two letters are almost identical; that in the sec-

24. CSF-FP 26 April 1964
25. CSF-K, 555, September 1953
26. CSF-K, 596, September 1959

1469
ond one is, “but please don’t mention it if you write there — I don’t want it to become public.” Then there was the time he wrote to two women he wanted to see again — and who wanted to see him again — to make dates in London. He wrote simultaneously four months in advance, requesting of each one (Or should I say assigning each one?), an afternoon and an evening with about a week between the dates. There was no question of whether those dates would be convenient for the women, or of disclosing over what period he would be in London. Those were days he had assigned and that was that.  

He got away with it, for the acceptances were enthusiastic, but I would guess that neither woman knew that Cecil would be in London on the other week seeing the other woman.

One success of Cecil’s secrecy is shown by an interchange between Kathleen and Charlotte Bal-

27. CSF-K, 635, 636, see later description of my finding these letters.
lard. One Christmas, probably in the 1950s, Kathleen sent Nancy Ballard a present and a card, to which Charlotte Ballard replied that her sister Nancy had been dead for 18 months. Charlotte was puzzled that Kathleen had not heard, for she had been sure that either Dorothy or Marian would have told Kathleen. When Kathleen replied that Dorothy would never tell her anything, and that Marian had been a stranger since 1936, Charlotte answered that learning that fact answered a lot of questions. At that moment, Charlotte had started to understand how Cecil had been manipulating the truth as long as she had known him, certainly for the twenty years since 1936. So Charlotte then replied to Kathleen, “Isn’t it nice that now you and I can understand each other again before I die?”

One of the women Cecil wanted to meet again was Kathleen’s friend Beatrice Shave, but he didn’t know her address. For his 1955 visit to England he asked Kathleen for her address, but a British Rail strike prevented her from coming to London. In
1956 Cecil planned to visit her, but I don’t know whether he succeeded. In 1957 he visited her at her home in Halifax, Yorkshire. “I went and visited Beatrice and family in Halifax — they’re very happy, obviously, and I am so delighted that Beatrice hasn’t lost her looks. If there were a bar in Heaven (if you repeat this to her I’ll be very upset) she’d be there pulling the handles — she’d make the most angelic barmaid anyone could imagine.”

Another woman he saw was the former Marian Sefang, who had married and divorced but retained her married name of Pridham. Marian had been another of Kathleen’s English friends, but had ostensibly parted company with the Foresters for being late for marionette rehearsals. But evidently she did not part from Cecil, who was the Forester who had publicly rebuked her for unpunctuality. The rest of the group did not recognize that Marian had parted from Kathleen but not from Cecil and that Cecil was concealing from Kathleen his rela-

28. L587, December 1957
tionship with Marian. The others expected that information would continue to flow between Marian and Kathleen, without realizing the consequences of Cecil’s intervention.

Cecil continued to see and to pose before some of my college friends. Bob Whately, an English biochemist, had married Jean Bowie, a Scottish horticulturist, and taught at Berkeley for some years before returning to Oxford. After having Thanksgiving dinner at the Whately’s in 1960, Cecil described Jean Whately to Frances. She “is as tough as they come. Luckily she hasn’t yet penetrated my facade and is still terrified of me. Not as much as I am of her, though.”

Another of my friends had been Arthur Turner, a historian from Glasgow in Berkeley on a Commonwealth Fund scholarship. In Berkeley, in Cecil’s living room, he had married Netty Konopka, a refugee Polish baroness with a small daughter, Nadine. I had been best man at their wedding. Like

29. CSF-FP 1 December 1960

1473
so many visitors, Arthur liked California and over the years he worked to return, finally becoming a professor at the University of California at Riverside. As historians, academic and practical, Arthur and Cecil had much in common. Besides, the author of Hornblower, *The General*, and *The African Queen* was an item of interest to contemporary historians. My father remarked to me that he thought that Arthur, without openly saying so, intended to write a biography of him. My father was more explicit when, in 1954, he described Arthur Turner to Frances. “He’s the brilliant young professor of history who wanted to write ‘Conversations in Hawthorne Terrace’ until I said I’d never speak to him again if he did. Now he’s got a very eminent position at a branch of U.C. at Riverside. I haven’t any doubt at all that he intends to write my biography; I’m under the microscope all the time I’m with him and I’m sure he writes down every word at the first opportunity. After I’m dead I want you to get hold of him and supply him with some really juicy stuff.”  

A year later, Cecil admitted that he put on an act for
Arthur. “I’m quite worn out with maintaining the pose before my future biographer; he’s a very charming chap but the attitude is a little exhausting. I prefer the utterly blind admiration of the daughter.” Having admitted to playing a false part, Cecil then admitted telling Arthur some of the “juicy stuff” himself. “Last night I gave Arthur Turner some succulent details for one of those future chapters – I suffered a second seduction in telling him about my first! He lapped it all up; maybe part of the hell I’m going to will be reading what people write about me.”

Arthur recently told me that he never had any intention of writing a biography of Cecil. Arthur’s intentions are immaterial to this story. Because Cecil thought he was the subject of a biography he spent considerable effort, exhausting he called it, to present the false picture of himself that he called his pose. Cecil’s belief about Arthur’s intent compares

30. CSF-FP 16 August 1954
31. CSF - FP 18 June 1956
with his own intent about Basil Liddell Hart, whose biography he had wanted to write after they had met only once.\footnote{CSF-BLH 14 March 1937, LH Arch. 292/26}

During the early part of these years, Cecil developed a very special relationship with Nadine (Konopka) Turner that was hidden from me; I did not learn about it until 1995. Nadine’s Polish parents had been separated by the war. Her father, a cavalry officer, escaped to England before she was born, while she and her mother stayed in Poland. The marriage was not renewed after the war and ended in divorce. As a result, Nadine barely knew her father, and what she knew appeared mysterious. In psychological terms, Nadine searched for a father while Cecil much preferred girls to boys and did not like responsibility. Therefore, Cecil became Nadine’s honorary favorite uncle. Nadine visited Cecil and Dorothy on weekends away from her boarding school. She and Cecil shared many conversations. Nadine told me that Cecil treated every lady
as a gentleman should, making them feel as if they were grand and as if Cecil was in charge of things for them and always had some interesting or exciting story to tell them. “He always had a twinkle in his eye which one might think either mischievous or flirtatious. His logic made sense to him; he was a grand dictator in his own world.”

When one of Cecil’s nieces, Patsy Troughton-Smith, visited from England, Cecil took both girls for a vacation at Fallen Leaf Lake, near Lake Tahoe. On the way, driving the 1955 Ford, Cecil told them to keep a good watch for police cars while they saw what speed that car would do. Nadine said the speedometer indicated 120 m.p.h., and the girls were both excited and nervous. When Nadine stayed at 1066 Park Hills Road, she would be awakened by Cecil playing the recorder for half an hour or so before breakfast. When the recorder stopped, Dorothy, remarking “That’s my cue,” served breakfast.

Cecil told Nadine some stories about his family, and some of them were true. He told these stories as if he were telling Nadine confidences, and if
anyone else entered the room he started talking about an entirely different subject. In these confidences, Cecil told Nadine that his parents were teachers, something that he concealed in print and did not tell others who had not already known him as a child. He said that he had been born in Egypt, which was public knowledge in the form that he was the son of an Englishman active in the government of Egypt. However, to Nadine he added to that story the part that he had always hidden in England and would have been ashamed had it been known there. That is, that he was of Egyptian blood. He held out his arm, saying “How else do you think I received this brown skin?” He pointed to his brown eyes and asked the same rhetorical question. He turned to show his profile, saying “Look at my nose. Can’t you see that it is exactly like those on the Egyptian statues?”

I did not hear Nadine’s account until 1995, 25 years after I had concluded, but few others believed, that two of my father’s prime motivations were the fear of having his bastard status discovered and his
fantasies comparing his real father with the one he had to accept.

Another incident while I was away at St. George’s showed Cecil’s inclination regarding young girls. The wife of Cecil’s English agent, with her daughter, arrived in Berkeley somewhat in advance of her husband, who was conducting business along the way. The daughter, Hilary, was seven, and Cecil described her as “extremely self contained and well behaved and obviously crying out for love—from the way she snuggled up to me she didn’t seem to have been petted for weeks.”

Once or twice a year Cecil put on a very large Sunday afternoon cocktail party with the purpose of inviting everyone to whom he had a social obligation. All his regular Berkeley friends attended, as did people from the fringes of his circle. While an adolescent, I started officiating as butler, and later graduated to guest with the privilege of inviting a

33. CSF-FP 8 November 1946

1479
few of my friends. My first girl came when we were going together, later some other college friends attended, finally my wife; but I always had duties to perform as well, not merely in preparation for the party, but during and after. Cecil was very concerned lest any of his guests have a drop too much to drink, and I was annually instructed to take care of any who did, by persuading their spouses to remove them quietly or to do it myself. Such things hardly ever happened. Once in a while a wife would see that she drove on the way home, but that was all, except once. At a party near the end of the 1950s, Cecil’s then secretary, Priscilla Dean, got incapacitatingly drunk. She was a statuesque woman, once a dancer in revues, whose size made her hard to carry. Cecil was so disgusted that he would not allow her to remain, not even dumped into the spare bedroom. He instructed me to get someone to help me get her out of the house immediately and take her home. Ruth’s second husband, Douglas Millar, helped me. We got Priscilla into the back seat of my car, drove down the hill, bundled her into her apart-
ment, and returned.

On the way back, Doug rambled on in a long discourse, telling me what a bastard my father was. I hadn’t expected Doug to be drunk, too, but I listened patiently as he started to talk, prepared to give soothing answers and forget whatever he said. He started off by saying that Cecil’s effrontery in ordering him to remove the secretary showed Cecil’s egocentricity, his habit of thinking everybody should serve him. I hadn’t realized that Doug felt he had been ordered, but certainly I had recognized in my father’s sharp and vehement voice his horror of drunkenness, which someone else could easily take to be an order. Doug, in a roundabout but bitter way, referred to Cecil’s assault on Ruth’s virginity, which of course was not only long in the past, but must have been before her first marriage. “Look, Doug,” I said, “something as long ago as that shouldn’t bother you. Ruth was a personable girl. For that matter, I was a kid of fifteen when I made a pass at her, which she laughingly deflected.” Doug looked at me and said very little more.
Doug had been intending to tell me more about the events of that afternoon. Doug and Ruth arrived by invitation early from their home in Calistoga. During the party preparations Ruth and Dorothy had been busy in the kitchen and Cecil had asked Doug to come into his office room. Cecil asked Doug to sit on the lounge, sat beside him, placed his hand tenderly on Doug’s thigh, and attempted to use his verbal fluency to obtain Doug’s assent to homosexual seduction. He explained that in his line of work he had to know lots of different things and this would be just another experience that would increase his breadth of understanding. Doug had refused, but was sufficiently upset that a normally moderate amount of alcohol and Cecil’s prudish appearance of disgust at the more usual vice of drunkenness had incautiously loosened his tongue at the first available opportunity. I heard the full story years later, in the course of asking Ruth about other aspects of her relationship with my father.

Cecil probably frequently used his ploy of ask-
ing others to provide experience useful for his work. He certainly used it on Kathleen shortly after. He told her that he had a great novel in mind, along the lines of *War and Peace*. While he was confident on his abilities concerning the grand historical panorama and the characterization of the men involved, he recognized his own limitations in not fully understanding the emotions of women in love, which would naturally form a part of the book. He wanted Kathleen to supply descriptions of how women really felt about, or during, coitus. He was sure she had the ability to supply such descriptions, for which, in written form, he was prepared to pay at handsome rates. Kathleen just didn’t believe his story. She knew him better than to believe he could write as well as Tolstoy. Rather than believe that he merely wanted another chapter of pornography, she felt he was encouraging her to develop her writing skills. In the end she wrote three scenes: the first true, the second partly true, the third complete fiction. They pleased Cecil but he didn’t pay her as he had promised, and it came to an end. After the first, he wrote,
“Thank you for your contribution to history. It was very well done indeed, quite excellently, and it has gone a long way towards clearing up my doubts on that particular point. I’ll add to that I would have written it up differently, but then I’m a different person from you! ... I hope you’ll continue the series.”

Cecil maintained his interest in pornography over these years. He often asked Frances Phillips to send him books, and some of the requests obviously refer to pornographic ones, such as those listed in *Pornography and the Law*. I had long known his pornographic library, some of which was extremely crude. But he had decided opinions about books with sexual references. When he read *Peyton Place* (a best-selling novel about the scandalous doings in a small New England industrial town, by Grace Metallious) he described it to Frances as “shockingly bad, absurdly dirty and shallow, however pretentious she tries to be.” Not an inaccurate

34. CSF-K, 596, February 1959
35. CSF-FP 30 December 1959

1484
description, but surprising from one who kept worse stuff on his private shelves. A few months later he was asked to be an expert witness for the defense of the bookseller being prosecuted in San Francisco for obscenity for selling *Howl*[^37] and *The Statement of Erica Keith*. He refused by dodging the subject.

“15 August 1957, 1066 Park Hills Rd, Berkeley 8, California

“Dear Mr. Speiser:

“I have received HOWL and THE STATEMENT OF ERIKA KEITH which you sent me, and I have now read them. I am sorry to say that I do not think that they have sufficient literary merit to justify their publication, and if I were to give evidence in court I should state that as my opinion.

“I presume that as a result you will not ask me to give evidence.

[^36]: CSF-FP 2 April 1957
[^37]: Poem by Alan Ginsberg, the leading San Francisco beat poet, still quoted today
C. S. Forester

“Mr. Lawrence Speiser
690 Market St. Rm 625
San Francisco, Calif.”

Cecil wrote to Frances that these works were “no worse than Peyton Place, but none of the three has any literary merit,” and he closes that letter with another of his repeated promises to spank Frances when he next sees her.

Cecil’s assessment that Howl lacked enough literary merit to warrant publication disagreed with those of the literary and academic worlds that were filed with the court. William Hogan, the literary editor of the San Francisco Chronicle, wrote: “the work of a sincere, growing and dedicated literary talent, a talent provocative and stimulating enough to inter-

38. CSF-FP 15 August 1957

1486
est and excite admiration in serious critics and observers of the literary craftsmanship of our time.” Herbert Blau, assistant professor of language arts at San Francisco State University, wrote: “It is a literature which has brought to the American scene a devastating analysis, conducted imaginistically and metaphysically, out of the deepest concern for what the poet considers the broken promise and the lost values of a culture, and culminating in an exasperated scream of disenchantment, redeemed only by its pitch and intensity, and its pity.”

Eugene Burdick, professor of political science at Berkeley, wrote: “The poem, HOWL, strikes me as an impressionistic, broadly gauged, almost surrealistic attempt to catch the movement, color, drama, and inevitable disappointment of life in a complex, modern society. HOWL is a pessimistic, and indeed, almost tragic view of life.

“In my opinion there are substantial technical imperfections in the poem. However, there can be no doubt that the poem is well conceived, intelligently presented and written in all sincerity.”
Mark Schorer, professor of English at Berkeley, wrote: “I wish to attest that I find nothing obscene in either *Howl and Other Poems* by Allen Ginsberg or in *The Miscellaneous Man, Number 11-12*, by Gil Orowitz.” He added that were he teaching a course in contemporary American literature, he would have to refer to the movement that produced such writings and that *Howl* would be representative of the works that he would assign for reading.

Peculiarly enough, I had disagreed with Professor Schorer about the relative values of different works of D. H. Lawrence, and received both a D for my term paper and the reprimand of my father that I was a fool for not writing whatever Schorer believed.

*Howl* was found to be not obscene, and is quoted today as one of the best works of the Beat Poets.

When Mary McCarthy’s book *The Group* was published in 1963, Cecil borrowed it from Evelyn Lewis. “She only lent it to me on my promise to tell no one she had it and to return it at once. She said
she’d only read 20 pages, and last night when I read those 20 pages in bed I could understand just what was the matter. They revolted even me and I don’t know that I’ll finish the book either. I’ve liked a lot of McCarthy, but this isn’t good McCarthy. I feel positively Victorian–is it selling?’”

Cecil thought well of *Lolita*, the novel by Nabokov that is a black comedy of a middle-aged man who is obsessed with pubescent girls like his tragically dead first lover. He described his feelings to Frances: “I’ve just read Lolita, and that has affected me more deeply than most books. That flowery style somehow suits the tension of the book. It’s not the actual substance of the book—the seduction of a teenage girl (sub-teen, in fact) that’s so upsetting, but the sight of the hero, whom you can’t help liking despite his queer tastes and the fact that he isn’t sane, going along to an inevitable doom for something, and somebody, who is utterly worthless—as even he knows. It’s really a distressing book.”

39. CSP-FP 7 October 1963

1489
Cecil sent his brother Geoff a copy. Geoff sent a stiff reply that illustrates the difference that still existed between Cecil (and many more of us today) and those who were raised in the older tradition. “It certainly describes thoughts that probably are or have been in the minds of many men, but the vast majority can control them and dismiss them just as we learn to control impulses to thieve or to murder.”

Of course, Cecil’s opinion of Lolita might have been biased by both his partiality to girls and his understanding of the dark aspects of our desires.

A year later Cecil read half a dozen Orwell novels in a row, and described his reaction to Frances. “I’ve been quite drunk over them. And smug. I’ve been able to tell myself that I can write novels better than Orwell could—N.B. that doesn’t mean the same as saying that I can write better novels. Some of his technique isn’t so good, especially when he’s handling plants for conversation. He has the

40. CSF-FP 2 September 1958
41. CSF-FP 9 November 1958
clarity of mind, and so on, but he hasn’t the low cunning.”

Cecil thought ill of many of his relations. He despised his parents and wished he had had better ones. He despised his sister Grace for being too much like himself but without his brains. He remarked that the pain between them was both of long standing and intense, a situation not aided by her intrusion into the French canoeing trip of 1938. Having hurriedly married a Canadian soldier during WW I, by 1924 she had returned from Canada as a divorced woman with an infant son. She later married another Canadian, Anglin Johnson and returned to Canada, but was again divorced. She remained close to the rest of the family, for both Geoff Foster Smith and George Smith mention her letters and packages sent during the war. The only time that Cecil saw her was during his American trip in 1938. One would think that Cecil would have

42. CSF-FP 19 October 1959

1491
looked her up once he came to America in 1939 and spent so much time in New York, but he never did. I have been told that Grace never knew why she was dropped from his circle. It is obvious that Cecil disliked her; possibly she was not very likeable.

When Jean and I went to England in 1962, my father expected that I would see my Uncle Geoff, but he never suggested that I see the only other one of his generation still alive, my Aunt Marjorie. I saw her because Geoff asked me to and gave me her address.

Cecil often told me that when he went to England he was surrounded by a band of beggars. I thought he meant strangers and leeches such as Gordon Williams, but they may have been relatives as well. Apparently Cecil paid an allowance to his brother Hugh, the banker, starting in 1936. Hugh died in 1944 of tuberculous meningitis. I do not recall his being sick and unable to work when I left England in 1940; in fact I remember playing with my cousins and their toy live-steam train in a very
nice house. Whatever the facts, in December, 1962, Cecil wrote to Frances that Hugh’s widow had died just after he had written his Christmas letters. “So I had to write them [his Christmas letters] all over again. Inconsiderate as ever. So now my sister Marjorie has succeeded to the allowance that I paid to Dolly (for 26 years!) [i.e., since 1936] and I’m reminded of the days of Louis the 14th when as soon as a courtier died the survivors rushed round to get his rooms and place and pension.”43 I do not know why Cecil paid an allowance to his siblings. Perhaps it was in repayment for the trouble that he had caused them while he was living on the family’s charity in the 1920s. This may be the meaning of his brother Geoff’s remark about Cecil’s cheating him by accepting his money while not attending Guy’s Medical School. Geoff wrote, “I had little hope of any return although as will be seen the day would come when it was all repaid and more besides.”44

43. CSF-FP 11 December 1962
44. GFS p 185
Cecil had a reputation even among the unliterary. Some knew of Hornblower, others knew of the film version of *The African Queen*. Groucho Marx thought enough of Cecil’s appeal to request his appearance on Groucho’s television quiz show. Cecil finally consented, in the fall of 1957, by obtaining a particular concession, that Groucho promise that he could make a statement for, and give his winnings to, the Navy Relief Society. Groucho, I am sure, didn’t quite realize that he had obtained in Cecil not only a popular figure, but one capable of deflating him. Groucho’s show was broadcast live on radio, and with advance knowledge of the time we all listened in. Cecil gave Groucho back as good as the guff that Groucho handed out. Presumably with deliberate intent, Groucho asserted that Horatio Alger was a very good book. Cecil came back with “I wish I could say as much for Das Kapital,

45. Navy Relief assists the families of enlisted personnel when the service cannot take official action.
Mr. Marx.” In the version broadcast on television six weeks later, Groucho had edited out all the places where his victim scored off him. The whole thing was on the level you would expect. Groucho asked Cecil a question so elementary that Cecil would have been ashamed to ask it of us at lunch-time for a one-raisin reward. For giving the right answer, Cecil earned $2,000 which, in accordance with the agreement, Cecil announced he had won on behalf of the Navy Relief Society. At the time, I took it only as a public-spirited gesture, without realizing how it also fitted the public image that Cecil was maintaining, and I suffered the consequences as they occurred. For so they did. At the time I was working for a small firm with a very informal salary schedule, and it seemed that everybody in the place watched Groucho Marx. I was told that since my family could give away money like that, it was obvious that others needed raises more than I did. They never gave me another one. Nowadays I can laugh at the experience, but at the time that was a little hard to do.
After appearing on Groucho’s show, Cecil remained in Hollywood to have a discussion with Cecil B. deMille. Having just completed *The Ten Commandments*, deMille was looking for his next project and was considering Hitler and Stalin. The discussions came to nothing. Cecil knew he could write about Hitler, but he knew little about Stalin and, besides, Marxism wasn’t dramatic.\(^{46}\)

Even private persons came to pay their respects to Cecil. One morning, a professor of naval history from an out-of-the-way university telephoned to pay his respects to Cecil. Cecil replied off-handledly, “Why don’t you come along at tea time? I’ll expect you at four.” Two traveling women whom Cecil knew showed up for tea as well, and in fact tea time was quite devoted to hearing of their shopping trip to San Francisco. The professor was quiet, quite the academic type, and Cecil just let him be that way. In forty minutes, he rose to go, and Cecil escorted him

\(^{46}\). CSF-FP 24 September 1956
to the front door, starting a conversation on the way.
   “You said you are from …?”
   “The University of Singapore.”
   “Oh, yes. Do you find much interest in naval history there?”
   “Yes, we have quite a good history department, but I don’t specialize in naval affairs.”
   “I’m sorry to hear that, and I’m sorry you have to leave so soon.”
   “It’s been nice meeting you, Mr. Forester. Goodbye.”
   “Goodbye, professor. I hope we meet again. Your name is ...?”
   “Parkinson,” replied the professor as he turned his back to Cecil, who stood there unable to say anything in reply, remembering that Professor C. Northcote Parkinson of the University of Singapore had recently made quite a name for himself as the author of Parkinson’s Law.47

47. An analysis of bureaucracy: work expands to fill the time allotted to it.
In May of 1959 Professor Parkinson sent Cecil a copy of his *Life of Pellew*\(^48\) that was inscribed “To C. S. Forester/from the biographer of the man who taught Hornblower his trade,/With kind regards, C. Northcote Parkinson/May, 1959.” However, Cecil did not notice the inscription and failed to thank the Professor at the time. He corrected that mistake in July and wrote an apology “for yet another misunderstanding. Fate seems to come between Forester and Parkinson.”\(^49\)

Ever since the war, Cecil’s secretary had been Betty Brown. This had always been a part-time job, and Betty, being married, had liked it that way and acted as though she were working more for the pleasure of it than for the money. That changed when her husband died in June, 1953. He had already lost

\(^{48}\) Pellew was a British naval officer whose exploits were part of Cecil’s initial concept of Hornblower, and under whom Hornblower served as midshipman.

\(^{49}\) CSF-FP 3 July 1959

1498
one eye, and when told that the same disease would take his other eye he jumped out of his office window. Cecil wrote, less than three days after, with his usual sympathy for bereaved people, “Betty is just trouble at present. She’s jumpy and hysterical & full of self pity & she talks incessantly. Dorothy endures it like the saint she is (she gets more of it than I do) but it’s a lot of strain. But I can’t think what on earth to do–I can’t fire her, of course, at least at present.”

Over the next two years Cecil became more dissatisfied with Betty’s poor control of her emotions. By October, 1954, he had had enough and fired her. “Things grew quite impossible & I couldn’t stand it any longer. She was too difficult for anything all the time I was struggling with the novel [The Good Shepherd], & I made up my mind about this without saying a word to anyone at all.” However, he gave her two month’s notice (he would be in Mex-

50. CSF-FP 30 June 1953
51. CSF-FP 22 October 1954
After he returned from Mexico, a woman who had worked for him in Hollywood in 1939 telephoned him for a job. Priscilla Dean had left secretarial work to dance in Earl White’s *Scandals*, had then worked for the U.S. government in Paris, London and Tokyo, then again in Hollywood, and had been married and divorced. “She might fit the bill.”  

In three week’s time he had decided that she did. “I can shout and scream at her—I do it all day long—without worrying her in the slightest.” Priscilla was eminently competent as long as she was sober, but she sometimes had too much to drink, as has been told earlier. After eight years with Cecil, her drinking problem worsened.

During 1962 Priscilla’s bouts of drunkenness became more of a problem. She inconvenienced Cecil by breaking her shoulder blade in a fall that

52. CSF-FP 13 February 1955
53. CSF-FP 5 March 1955
was probably caused by inebriation. Cecil had to hire a local girl to handle packages and perform similar tasks, and to rehire a temporary typist who had never been really satisfactory. He disliked having a local person in the house: “I don’t want some local kid butting into my private business more than necessary.”  

54. CSF-FP 2 August 1962

Although Priscilla was treated for alcoholism, the effects did not last. After another drunken episode, she was finally fired at the end of August.  

Over the next month Cecil considered how he should replace Priscilla, who had been more an executive secretary than a plain typist. John Dale Hodapp promised to be even more. He had literary ambitions, he knew American naval affairs and modern seamanship, he obviously could manage Cecil’s affairs, a task that Cecil disliked, and he didn’t mind that typing was part of the job. Cecil was not so concerned with what John Dale would do, or how much it would cost, but with how it

55. CSF-FP 30 August 1962

1501
would look. The question was important enough for Cecil to ask Ruth Millar about it. “Do you think people would wonder about me if I hired John Dale? It’s not often now that a man hires a male secretary.” Cecil was sufficiently concerned about homosexuality to worry about that appearance; besides, he might have worried whether Doug had told his wife (Ruth) about Cecil’s attempt to seduce him, and whether that had become common knowledge that would lead those in the know to suspect his relationship with John Dale Hodapp. Ruth assured him that people would not raise the question as he had raised it, and John Dale Hodapp was hired.

John Dale, as he was known, became Cecil’s executive assistant, in charge of all arrangements for Cecil’s comfort. He and his wife moved to an apartment or small house near Cecil’s former house on Hawthorne Terrace. He kept the accounts, looked after the cars, saw the house was maintained when Cecil and Dorothy were away, made sure there were sufficient supplies on hand, and typed literary work, letters, and other documents. Cecil knew that he
was asking a lot of John Dale, for he questioned Frances: “If I pay him (as I shall) ordinary secretary’s wages, am I justified in using his expert knowledge?”

John Dale knew that he was being asked for more, for he had personal cards printed which described him as “literary assistant to C. S. Forester,” for which I don’t think he was ever reprimanded. He was a large, heavy, red-faced man who smoked a pipe and wore a small moustache and an engaging smile. His voice carried confident assurance in low tones, and on hearing him, one felt that all was in safe hands.

Not all people had heard of Hornblower. In the summer of 1946 my mother, George, and I planned to run the Yakima River, in Washington, in our flobots. We unloaded the gear beside the river about two miles from the village of Cle Ellum, named by the Welsh miners who originally mined coal in that area. I drove the car into Cle Ellum for oil change and lubrication, and as a place to keep it until we

56. CSF-FP 11 December 1962
returned three or four days later, and started to walk back to where Mother and George were assembling the canoes. I was picked up by the town cop, who thought I had run away from home and was abandoning the car. The idea that people came with folding canoes to run the river was completely outside his universe. I told him I had no reason to run away, for I lived in a happy home with sufficient money.

“What does your father do, son?”

“He writes stories.”

“Pretty tough, not having enough money at home, isn’t it?”

I talked about C. S. Forester, about Hornblower, the *Saturday Evening Post*, the Hornblower film, but he appeared ignorant of all and convinced that nobody who wrote stories could earn a living. He would not drive up to where I said my mother was, and he would not let me go. I was stuck for forty minutes until he decided I was harmless.

Some who knew of Hornblower were not so pleased. When Cecil and Dorothy traveled around the world in the winter of 1961-62, they crossed the
Indian Ocean in the P & O ship *Orsova*. “We’ve managed to spend 2 weeks so far in this ship without saying a word to anyone beyond politenesses—even with His Grace the Duke of Wellington on board! (He isn’t enthusiastic about the great-grand-aunt I gave him.)”\(^57\) That was Hornblower’s Lady Barbara, who was said to be a sister of the great duke.

The subject of memoirs came up twice in these last years, one in which he might be mentioned, one he wrote about himself. During his visit to England in the summer of 1963, he visited Basil Liddell Hart and was horrified. “I had a hell of a shock; he’s never destroyed a letter in his life and he showed me two fat files full of my letters, all the way back to 1934. I can’t help thinking it’s anti-social to do things like that, especially when you write memoirs. He had a copy of the notes I made for the War Office when I got back from Franco’s war, which he wanted to quote. I didn’t argue about it – it wouldn’t

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57. CSF-FP 28 January 1962

1505
have been any good if I had – and if what I wrote was nonsense I’ll have to put up with it.”\textsuperscript{58} There was more to worry Cecil than his prewar evaluations. We now know that the correspondence disclosed his lies about the literary cooperation on \textit{The General}; he might well worry about other facts, ones that he could not now remember, that would disclose his other lies to other people.

In the last year before his debilitating stroke, Cecil took to writing the second part of his memoirs – in a way. \textit{The Hornblower Companion} not only contains battle charts and summaries of Hornblower’s actions, but his creator’s exposition of how each Hornblower story came to be written. That required considerable care to tell a story that sounded like the truth but actually concealed it. In January 1963 he mentioned his difficulties to Frances: “I’m writing the accursed introduction which is really causing me a lot of trouble–there are so many hurdles to take and pitfalls to avoid.”\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{58} CSF-FP 12 July 1963

\textsuperscript{59}
In the process he had to ask Kathleen to jog his memory. The interrelationship of these themes shows in his letters to her.

“A delightful surprise came through the mail today, unexpected and pleasant and very informative. Thank you for going to the trouble, dear. And you cleared up at least half a dozen mysteries about yourself that had often puzzled me. You quite made my day for me. ...

“I’ve become involved in writing a small portion of my memoirs — just literary ones and highly respectable. But there’s a part of 1937 which has completely escaped me. I don’t expect you have any recollections of my work at the time, but you might perhaps help me to recall the state of affairs. It isn’t important, though; I’ve no objection to saying that I don’t remember.

“Still, it would be nice if we could meet — I could drive out to the country, perhaps.”

59. CSF-FP 25 January 1963
60. CSF-K, 625, 29 January 1963

1507
Kathleen was also somewhat annoyed at the latest Hornblower book, *Hornblower and the Hotspur*, that told of Hornblower’s early married life. She knew that Hornblower was Cecil’s surrogate, so it was natural to believe that Maria, Mrs. Hornblower, represented herself and that Hornblower’s feelings toward Maria represented those that Cecil had had for her. Additionally, with her evaluation of Cecil’s female characters and love scenes as not merely repressed, but lacking in all the understanding that might, had he possessed it, have required suppression in Cecil’s Victorian code of literature, she attributed that which was lacking not to the requirements of the plot but to Cecil’s personal inadequacies in describing himself and herself. She was right in considering the original Hornblower written in 1937, but not nearly so correct in criticizing the final Hornblower of 1963, whose development had to produce the character of 1937, within an historical context. She was certainly correct at least in this: Cecil selected a way of developing Hornblower that was congenial to his own habits of thought. That is my
opinion. Cecil had time, in the last long letter that he ever wrote to Kathleen, to phrase it differently.

“My dear,

“I’m very sorry indeed that your feelings have been hurt. Here are a few dates that may make you feel easier about [it] dear. You know I started writing Hornblower in 1936, when we were still happily married. I made Hornblower married, and unsuitably married at that time so that he could get himself in an emotional difficulty with Lady Barbara, and once that was done, it had to go on. When I came to write Hotspur in 1961 (or 1962?), I had to put forward a reasonable explanation of how he had come to get married like that — 35 years after we were married and 17 years after the divorce! Also (it sounds complicated) I was now writing about H. in 1803, having started him in 1808 all those 25 years earlier. In the last chapter of Lieutenant Hornblower, I had him engaged, and now I had to display his marriage. The steps were all logical and I hope credible, but you must not believe that I gave one single thought to any relationship between you and
me. Remember that Maria, poor soul, died happily still with her illusions. And because H. felt in certain ways and did certain things, you shouldn’t think that I did or do. I’ve written about drunkards and poets and avaricious people and idealists and I’ve never been any of those, have I, dear? I’ll very readily admit that I was (am) as much an idiot as Hornblower, but in entirely different ways. Entirely different. And I know perfectly well that if I’d been a man of better character and acuter perceptions, our marriage would have remained a success; linked with this is the fact that I was very late in maturing; even if I have by now, I certainly hadn’t during our married life. So I can explain without excusing the hurts I occasioned you, and all I can say besides is what I started this letter with, and that is that I am very sorry indeed that you were hurt. And of course (do I have to say this?) I have never once intentionally hurt you, never once.”

Had my father been able to invent a more cred-

61. CSF-K, 630, 8 January 1964

1510
ible set of characteristics to deny, I might have believed him, but to read his denial of a series of characteristics that all, save idealist, either fit him or were major concerns of his, is to wonder to what extent he finally believed his own creation.
As has been told in the last chapter, Cecil’s professional and social lives from 1951 to 1964 were no more troublesome to him than he made them. As he entered 1952, he could also reasonably look forward to living his own life with no further responsibility for his sons. However, events did not work out as easily as that. I was of age and was in the Navy for a four-year hitch. George, although underage and hence Cecil’s legal responsibility, had been shucked off on Kathleen. As George writes: “I was on my own financially from that day forward [the day of the argument over the double allowance payment]. He
had already paid for the year’s tuition at Cornell, so [he] couldn’t reneg on that, and I had a return train ticket. From then on, I paid for everything. It meant that when I returned to Cornell I had to work (about 40 hours a week) in order to stay in school. It was difficult, and due to circumstances beyond my control, I had to leave Cornell before completing the second semester.”¹

As far as Cornell was concerned, Cecil was still responsible for George. Therefore, it was Cecil that Cornell’s officials called when they learned that George had married unlawfully, in March, 1952,² by overstating his age, for George was a minor although his bride was not. One can hardly excuse this action without being drawn into the debate over the validity of the concept ‘age of consent’ (which concept may be all wrong in this context), but the circumstances are just those which would predispose a young couple to elope. George did not marry his

¹. Letter, 6 April 2000
². CSF-FP 15 March 1952
first love, with whom he had maintained some form of relationship until the Christmas of three months before, when she had broken it off.

George writes: “The best answer I have ever found for marrying Barbara at this time is this: Under the circumstances of our lives at the time, we decided to marry after knowing each other for 7 days. The event that made us each decide to marry was the acceptance of the other to the idea. We both thought ‘Wow, if this other person can make this kind of decision, we will probably lead an exciting life.’ So we married because the other said ‘Yes’”.

To that statement, I add my own thoughts. Hurt by the double rejection, by his girl and by his father, which probably only confirmed with hard fact the feeling that he had long been rejected, George was ripe for whatever comfort his amatory desires would bring him. Barbara was equally ready. She was under pressure from her parents to marry a man she did not like, because he had a promising

3. Letter, 6 April 2000
start in life. George and she met and their situations fitted like lock and key.

It was within Cecil’s power as George’s father to have the marriage annulled, but in this he deferred to Barbara’s parents, acting somewhat more circumspectly than he had before. Their choice was against annulment; so the chance passed. For the next five years until George and his family got on their feet, Cecil bore a continuous strain of one sort or another. He would not reject them completely; he could not continue the arrangement of paying Kathleen to keep them out of his sight; simply paying their support conflicted with his notions of fair play, social justice, and proper child raising. The situation is common enough, though always difficult, but Cecil handled it in his own inimitable manner: worrying the problem to death, complaining always, paying sometimes, setting conditions as if he were living their life; seeing Barbara though he would not see George; gaining social credit by lying about his own magnanimity, and using the situation to drive another wedge between George and me.
Unrecognized at the time, it was as if the wellspring of his actions was the fear that George would live off his charity as he had done to his own father.

As George writes of these times: “I do not believe that [CSF] paid Kathleen anything. And we certainly didn’t want to be in his sight—he was not the sort person one wanted to be around—and certainly not the sort of person one wanted as a father. ...CSF never paid me a penny after Xmas 1952, and only a smidgin ($200 twice) to Barbara for graduate school tuition”

I saw my father’s first reactions to George’s marriage because I had come home on my first leave at the end of March. Cecil had written in January that he had turned George over to our mother’s supervision, but I quickly forgot that fact in the stress of boot camp and the picture my father presented to me in March. He was exasperated and upset, but showed to me no sign that he had ‘disowned’ George. He accepted all of George’s troubles

4. Letter, 6 April 2000
as his own, giving the impression that he, himself, would have to bear the consequences.

Although I did not marry until, some years later, I was supposedly in a position to do so, my marriage was unfortunate and unhappy. Therefore, my father was also then burdened by his worries about me. Many fathers and many mothers carry such burdens; like many others, in my life I have also. However, it was not in Cecil’s nature to accept such burdens gracefully as natural consequences of parentage. He foresaw the worst outcomes, he attributed the worst motives to people, he intrigued, he amplified his worries and unhappiness, and he complained; those complaints exist in his letters to Frances. Much of this was directly caused by his character; it was in his nature to complain and feel ill-used when events did not suit him. Some more of this was indirectly caused by his own character; his two sons modelled their different behaviors on their understandings of different aspects of his character, and Cecil complained and felt ill-used when those
To return to the time of my first leave from the Navy, I spent much of the two weeks leave with Jean Labada Clough Nicholson, an English woman I had met the year before through International House. Toward the end of my leave, we two and Jean’s daughter, Carolyn, took my father off on a picnic at Tomales Bay, in Marin County some forty miles north of San Francisco. On the dirt road down to the beach we got the car stuck and had to work very hard to get it moving again. “A good time was had by all,” is how Cecil told Frances, but he did not tell her what I considered the more important news. At lunch, Jean and I informed him that once I had completed military service and became self-sufficient, I would probably ask Jean to marry me. I hoped that until then he would, in case of need, stand by Jean because she had no family in the United States. He accepted this minor responsibility

5. CSF-FP 22 March 1952
without a murmur. In fact, he carried it well. For the next eighteen months, I was away most of the time. In this time, as long as he was in Berkeley, he invited Jean to dinner or to tea about twice a month and made sure that her situation was satisfactory. Of course it was, so he did not have to do anything beyond inquiring.

I did not serve a full hitch. It was the end of the Korean War and the Navy didn’t have great need for the recruits already in the training pipeline. In that situation, the Navy figured my eyesight was too bad for a line officer and I hadn’t gone far enough in physics to be an engineering officer, so I was stuck as a recruit. Because its tests showed that I was pretty smart, the Navy rushed me off to gunfire control school to learn how to operate, calibrate and repair the complicated systems that enable moving and rolling ships to point their guns to hit another moving ship as much as twenty miles away. The school was at Anacostia, just across the river from Washington, DC.

It was the usual bureaucratic tangle. Every

1519
week a new class opened, but every week there were men sent from ships, and coming from ships they had a higher priority than me. For five months I waited for a space in a class. I wanted to get ahead, I needed to get ahead, but here I was wasting my life being compelled to do nothing at all, for no useful purpose now that the war was over. During my time in the Navy I got more sea time yachting on weekend liberties than on Navy ships. If you can hand, reef, and steer, and are willing to do your share of the dirty work that is always necessary around a boat, many yachtsmen love an extra hand. Aside from weekend liberties, I was even more bored than at St. George’s, and a few times I had bad dreams of Navy surgeons amputating my penis.

I found a place under the outside stairs of an auditorium where I could keep my bicycle and asked my father to send it to me. He shipped it in a large cardboard box that was handed out to me at mail call. I reassembled it and stored it under the stairs. On my next liberty I put my cycling clothes under my white uniform (we were not allowed to
leave the base in civilian clothes), rode my bicycle out of the gate, and removed my uniform. After the ride, I returned to the base. The guard wouldn’t let my bicycle inside. “But I had it inside just three hours ago, and rode it out of this gate!” No way. “No bicycles allowed on this base.” Fortunately, I had a little cable lock and the street outside was planted with trees that I could wrap the cable around. So I locked the bicycle to the tree nearest the guard shack, hoping that nobody would think of stealing my bicycle that was in sight of guards twenty-fours a day. After that, whenever I went on liberty I changed my clothes on the sidewalk outside the gate. If the Navy thought that was a little odd, and possibly poor public relations, it had brought that problem on itself.

After five months, there was a space in a class for me. Half the day we studied from books and lectures, the other half we did laboratory work. The pace was slow. Very soon I was reprimanded by the petty officer instructor for studying the advanced books before he had got very far in the first book, so
I couldn’t even study to pass the time when I was supposed to be studying. As soon as we were supposed to have learned some very basic electronics we were told to build a simple amplifier from a circuit diagram and a box of parts. No problem; I knew how it worked and I’d done such work before in my high-fi sets and in physics lab. I was first finished and first past the operational test. I showed the petty officer instructor that it operated properly.

“What the Hell do you mean by bringing me this box of shit!” he roared at me with a long string of obscenities. I was flabbergasted; the amplifier did what it was supposed to do and looked like any piece of electronic gear I had ever seen. I was angry in my turn, and I thought that if this hadn’t been the Navy and this oaf my superior officer I would bust him on the nose and brave the subsequent beating. Rather than argue with him, I turned away from him and reported to sick bay that I had nearly struck my superior officer. I was told not to return to class and to report back to sick bay the next morning. The medical officer I saw the next day gave me the very
broad hint that if I did the right things I would be given an honorable medical discharge. Had it been wartime the Navy would have wanted me, I would have wanted to do my duty, and my duty would have had at least the prospect of being exciting, although possibly dangerous. So I did the appropriate things to get out honorably.

I was puzzled at how things had come to this final confrontation, but I wasn’t going to let my puzzlement interfere with getting out. I learned what had happened ten years later, and then only by chance. Once the Navy had decided that with poor eyesight and no engineering degree it would not consider me for a commission, it decided that I was so intelligent that it would immediately send me to learn the enlisted skill that required the highest degree of intelligence, that of (gun)fire-control technician. I may have been the only man in years who had been sent directly to that school from boot camp; certainly I was the only one in months. The petty officer instructor assumed that I had already been apprenticed to the skill aboard ship, just like
all his other students. Ten years later, when I was working on the problems of properly manufacturing military electronics gear, the Ships Inertial Navigation System used on nuclear submarines and the inertial guidance system used on the Minuteman ICBM, I understood his frustration. For very good reasons, military electronics gear has all its wires positioned very neatly and carefully in rigid patterns, while I had just strung wires from point to point in the most convenient manner, as is done for laboratory and consumer electronics gear. When I had presented my amplifier to the instructor, he probably thought that I was playing some game upon him or the service. Whatever he thought, the actual situation did not come to his mind. He simply exploded in rage that may have been either real or simulated for my benefit. Such simple mistakes may change many lives.

They first sent me off to the Naval Medical Center at Bethesda, MD, a bus ride away. Because the psychologically questionable patients that NMC was used to receiving tended to be incompetent,
angry, combative rebels with disciplinary problems, I was put in the padded ward with no metal objects and no shoe laces until they had a chance to evaluate me. The next morning, I was placed in the normal open psycho ward with beds for about twenty enlisted men. Eighteen of them were angry, rebellious incompetents who at best could get a "convenience of government" discharge. The nineteenth was a Marine tank instructor who had suffered head injuries when his student driver had made mistakes. He was upset because he thought that the Marines were trying to give him a psycho discharge without pension instead of a medical discharge with pension.

At the rear of the ward was a private room where the patient was a medium-level officer in the Navy Nursing Corps. I do not know what her condition was, but she was the only other patient in the place with anything more than elementary education.

I also had obvious symptoms that were unknown to me at the time. Two days after my
admission to Bethesda, my father was traveling through New York on his way from England to Berkeley. I asked for liberty to see him in New York, and it was given without question; they knew that I was not a problem case. He later told me that when I arrived in New York I was stuttering as badly as I ever had as a small child. Stutterers do not know that they are stuttering; it is as if time stops for them. I had not known that I had stuttered as a small child, and I did not know that I was stuttering then in 1952. My father described my condition to Frances once he had returned to Berkeley. “Quite straight, I think they have reason to keep him under observation. That nervous tic of his face & his general restlessness are far more marked & at times his expression was one of the most frightful despair. I’m upset and worried. I enclose his latest letter to me–I’ve just answered it. Please don’t tell people about this–especially Betty, who is wild to know what is wrong & wants to gloat over the fall of her rival.”

6. CSF-FP 15 July 1952

1526
Cecil’s unusual words show that he believed that Betty regarded me as a rival for Cecil’s affection or regard. In all my relations with Betty over many years she showed normal friendship to me without any sign of jealousy. Cecil’s words merely show his egotism.

On my return from New York, the psychoanalysts examined me. One examination required me to compose stories based on a series of psychologically meaningful pictures; another required me to draw pictures of my own and then tell stories about them, so they could discover my troubles. The test based on presented pictures is called the Thematic Apperception Test. Rather than just telling the stories extemporaneously, as is normal, I managed to write them instead. That saved the analyst’s time, but gave me more time to invent. I wrote a series of fantastic tales, every one designed to point out that I was competent and ambitious but was being held back by the slow speed of the peacetime Navy.

One of those pictures for which I had to compose a story was of a man, possibly dressed in his
pajamas, escaping from captivity by climbing down a rope. I turned this one completely around, modeling the man after Halliburton, the teller of popular traveler’s tales, having him climbing the rope in the darkness of a magic cavern inside the Himalayas in search of his Creator. As in the Hindu rope trick, where a rope magically extends itself upward from the ground without any means of support, he found that this rope stopped in midair, and balanced on its top were all the pieces of equipment that made Halliburton an explorer. I think that that was the best one, but I wrote about a dozen of these. I don’t know what the psychoanalysts made of them, but in six weeks I had an honorable medical discharge.

Upon discharge I returned to Berkeley for a month, long enough to get my car, my 1931 Packard phaeton (touring car), into shape for a transcontinental trip. I had had all the required machining done while I was in the Navy, so I had to reassemble it. I then loaded all my belongings aboard and drove to New York to seek my fortune in publishing. My father was glad to see me go. As he wrote to my
mother, “I hope he’ll be all right. I’d be glad to know that I wasn’t going to see him for a year!” 7

My father wrote to Frances that Salmen, of Little, Brown & Co. in Boston, had arranged another warehouse job for me with the promise of a professional opening when one was available. 8 I do not remember being told of this. Even if I had known of the promise, I had the choice of going to a warehousing job in Boston or of going to New York, the center of the publishing industry, to look for a starting editorial job. I went to New York. Once there, I went to the publishing houses on the usual round of telephone calls, inquiries, applications, waiting, interviews, more waiting, and the rest. I found no openings to compete for, no information that any beginning professional was hired while I was there. I earned some money by reading and reporting on manuscripts from slush piles, but of course it was not enough. I lived in a furnished room with stove in

7. CSF-K, 545, September 1952
8. CSF-FP 26 August 1952
East Orange and commuted to New York by rail and ferry; I could park my car for nothing and I was closer to the cycling area where I had cheap recreation.

Cecil had no sympathy for a young man trying to start in a profession. He wrote to Frances that he suspected that I was in New York because I hoped that Jean would move from Berkeley to live with me there but I feared she would not live with me in Boston.9 “Give him a kick in the arse if you think it will do him any good, please, dear.”10 A month later he repeated his thought that a “kick in the arse” would get me a job in publishing.11 As I remember it, I was then told of the warehousing job at Little, Brown, and with my experience that professional publishing jobs were very hard to get, and money running low,

9. This is an invented suspicion. Had Jean and I decided to live together we would not have cared whether we lived in Boston or New York.
10. CSF-FP 12 November 1952
11. CSF-FP 16 December 1952
I took it.

I started in the warehouse, but by spring there was an opening as salesman for the north Atlantic region, which did not include the big assignment of New York City. I would have preferred an editorial assignment, but I took what was available as a start.

I was surprised at how unprofitable many bookstores appeared to be, and at how many people in publishing appeared to have outside incomes. That was the year that TV hit publishing very hard, and many people in the business found it very difficult and they worried about the future of the book business. I wasn’t a very good salesman, either; I was very conservative in my recommendations to book buyers, wanting to develop a reputation for reliable information instead of unreliable puffery. Book sales for the industry were off 10% that year, but off 20% in my area.

During this year Cecil tried to discourage Jean by lying to her with the same lie he had used on me some years before. “She dined with me last week and I let slip the information (I regret to admit that
it was all a damned lie) that all my savings had been sunk in annuities which would end with my death. The information was absorbed without comment, but it may have had some effect.”\textsuperscript{12}

In a year, I took my two week’s vacation to fly to Berkeley so that Jean and I could decide whether we really wanted to get married. We did, and made arrangements. I don’t think that Jean and I were upset by the uncertainty, but Cecil certainly was. “If there’s a wedding it will have to be a makeshift affair with telephoned invitations and announcements sent out later and a million complications. What can a man do when he has to deal with people like that?”\textsuperscript{13}

However, the day after Jean said yes I was informed by telephone that I was laid off and had no job to return to. Since Jean’s job was in Oakland, we decided that we should live in California where her job was and that I should look for a new job nearby,

\textsuperscript{12} CSF-FP 17 February 1953
\textsuperscript{13} CSF-FP 22 September 1953
in whatever profession I could find, after retrieving my car and goods from the East. I had known that she had taken up with a rather fundamentalist church group, but that didn’t concern me as long as I anticipated that after we married we would be living in Boston. Now I, a not-very-earnest atheist, was stuck with her church friends, a problem from time to time. Since George and Barbara had come to Berkeley also, that meant that Cecil would have his sons living near him again.

My father offered his house for the ceremony. Jean and I were married in the living room of Hawthorne Terrace, and departed for our honeymoon in a car borrowed from my father. When we returned the car, it was evening and my father and Dorothy were playing bridge with the Van Courts. The Van Courts were pleased to see us, and Mrs. Van Court had something else to be proud of. She said to us, “Go up to the guest bedroom and take a look.” We did so, to find a three-month baby in a bassinet, obviously Mrs. Van Court’s first grandchild. We came downstairs again and said the usual congratu-
relations.

“Don’t let yourselves believe that this forms any kind of precedent,” my father said, turning to us with a forbidding look, “there’ll be no babysitting done in this house.” He took care to add at the first convenient moment that there would be no invitations to dinner at Hawthorne Terrace either, “because Dorothy was so overworked.” Dorothy kept house for the two of them with the aid of Eleanora, who had been the Forester’s half-day maid since 1940.

I found a job in industry as shipping clerk for a steel fabricating firm on the grounds that I knew how to type a bill of lading. So I said, for I could type after a fashion and I was cursorily familiar with the bills of lading used when shipping books and publishing supplies. Offered the job on Friday, I went straight to the library to find out before Monday what I had to do. For getting a job of this minute caliber I was obliged to accept a rate of pay ten percent more than what I had been earning with a responsible position in publishing.
During the next years, Jean and I saw my father and Dorothy about once a week, often at a quarter to twelve before the Sunday lunch rush at Spenger’s Fish Grotto. Jean and I would pick them up, drive them to the front door of Spenger’s, and let them out so I could find a parking slot. Spenger’s was an old Berkeley institution, across the street from the old railroad station and a quarter mile from the Berkeley pier, staffed entirely by men. My father had a favorite table and waiter, but never insisted on that place. Spenger’s staff knew who he was, but never made him conscious of the fact. Later, as children joined us (Jean had been married before and had two children), we appeared quite a happy family gathering. However, George and Barbara never came. I accepted their absence as evidence of the rupture between our father and George, but I did not suspect that a formal prohibition had been issued.

Barbara was earning her secondary teaching credential at Berkeley, while George was working as a cabinetmaker’s apprentice. That opportunity was
in part due to Henry Sammett’s training of ten years before. Henry was still a friend of George’s and Cecil’s and, like most teachers, looked for jobs to do during vacation time. George’s work was sometimes sporadic as well, and he could always use a bit more money. Cecil contracted with Henry to perform repair work and painting at Hawthorne Terrace during one of Henry’s vacations. Henry proposed to employ George as assistant, but was opposed by Dorothy, who told Henry “Oh, we couldn’t let George into this house — he would steal everything.”

Much later, in discussing this incident and others, Henry’s wife, Etta, added the comment that my father got away with so much “because he had such an enormous capacity for making you want to please him.” It was true. My father had the gall to ask others to put themselves out for him in a non-business way far more than he would for them, but he asked it in such a way that people were pleased to help him. To accomplish this, he had no hesitation about telling lies which asserted how much he was already helping others and which isolated his victims so they
felt that crosschecking his stories would be gross impoliteness.

During this time my father told me that he was supporting George and Barbara. “Because George and Barbara need the money now in order to live, it would be the grossest kind of unkindness to deny them now only to give them something when I die and they no longer are in such need. Therefore, I am supporting them now. Not in luxury, as you can see, because I haven’t much money and your inheritances won’t be very large in any case, but what I am giving George now is in lieu of any inheritance, however large that might have been. You, who do not need the money now, I am sure will be content to wait until it comes to you in the usual way.”

I could see from their style of living that the support that my father was providing to George and Barbara was not large, but I accepted his implied assertion that it was a substantial part of his excess money. Therefore, I, like others, tended to admire my father and to discount any complaints that might arise from the supposed beneficiary. Equally,
I could not with propriety discuss the subject involving inheritance with George.

George and Barbara told me later that our father did not provide much support. He contributed $200 for each of two months, and thereafter $50 was as much of his money they ever saw in any month, and that didn’t last long. At any rate, so they say, when Barbara was pregnant with her first child they were forced to hitch-hike to Kathleen’s house in Vacaville each weekend to get a decent meal, while they subsisted on one meal a day during the week. Since they felt very keenly about this subject they may have exaggerated a bit, but the general tenor of the story so well fits Cecil’s character as I now know it that I accept it. As always, there is some doubt. A friend whom I had made at UC was also friendly with George, for they played chess together. He says, now, after retiring from a responsible career in the State Department, that Barbara had told him, not in George’s presence, that Cecil was continuing to make payments. Whatever the truth, not long after their first child was born, George and Barbara had a
new Volkswagen bug. As George writes of this, “Yes we did. I worked for 30 of 31 days a month for 18 months to save money for college tuition, and I was receiving good pay as a journeyman cabinetmaker by this time. We were able to buy a car other than the 1928 $50 Chevrolet which we had before.

“These stories of CSF’s about how he supported us certainly explains why so many people thought we were careless with money. Little did they know!” 14

At this time I was starting on my new career. I first worked for a steel fabricating firm that built bridges, tanks for holding many different materials, reactor vessels, enormous airplane hangars, industrial buildings, parts for gigantic dam projects, and the like. No two jobs were the same. Because I was particularly competent in relating the parts to their design drawings, I was soon given the task of inspecting the outgoing parts of buildings to see that

14. Letter 6 April 2000
we were shipping the correct number and orientation of pieces. Then I was given the responsible task of laying out the steel material so that when cut and welded according to my marks the finished piece was what the designer had ordered. If many similar parts were required, as is often the case with bridges, I built the jigs and set up the production line to make these. In the course of this work I realized that I had a natural ability in industrial and manufacturing engineering and my physics studies provided a good academic base for these subjects. So I returned to the University of California at Berkeley, largely at night but sometimes for day classes when I had to. I completed these studies and became an industrial engineer, with state registration when California decided that registration was necessary.

The time came when Jean and I needed a house. We found an almost finished small house in Berkeley whose builder had gone bankrupt. With enough cash we could buy it from his creditors. We had $3,000 but that was not enough. I remembered that I had not earned the promised reward of my
first house, for I had started drinking alcohol before I was 21, but had never been drunk, and I had never smoked. I asked my father whether indeed my behavior merited not the full gift, but a loan of the remaining down payment. He assented and provided a loan of $5,000. It was a favor for which I was grateful. I didn’t talk about it, but he did. He told several people, including Frances Phillips, that he had given me not only this house but the next one Jean and I built when we moved to Southern California seven years later.\(^{15}\) Naturally, since those people did not talk to me about how generous my father was, I did not know what they believed and had no chance to correct their false beliefs.

Over the next few years I was short of money twice, unexpected car repairs largely, and my father lent me small sums, which I repaid. Originally, I had been cycling to work, having again the thousand-foot descent from home to work that I had had

\(^{15}\) As I remember, I repaid the initial loan when we sold the first house.
in high school, and the evening climb. However, one morning, down on the flats in Richmond, a car coming the other way turned left across my path, into an industrial driveway. I turned away, but I was caught in the driveway and my bicycle was demolished. After that, because cycling was frowned upon by later employers for anyone above the lowest level, for some years I felt I could not afford another bicycle as luxury sporting equipment and depended on two cars. They were often two old ones that needed care and repairs, most of which I did myself.

Over this time, my father had good reason to worry about the state of my marriage; I was very worried myself. I was in a difficult situation; I needed a new job, I needed a new career, I had a new wife who already had two children. Despite the normal precautions (diaphragm with spermicide), in a few months Jean became pregnant. Jean rightly felt very insecure, and she turned out to be a person for whom insecurity was very painful. She frequently threatened she would go back to England or
would kill herself. When I was a shipping clerk I naturally used the telephone a lot, for both incoming and outgoing calls. Several times I received a call from Jean saying that she would be dead before I came home. My father’s evaluation was probably reasonable: “she’s a bad tempered person & would taunt him [John] with anything that occurred to her ... she’s a bad-disposed person and something of a phoney too.”16 However, in the same letter he jumped to the misguided conclusion that Jean had become pregnant through foolishly relying on the rhythm method, as if she (and I) were not well enough educated to know better.

Geoffrey’s premature birth in June, 1954 was also a worrying time; he was so small that you could hold him in the palm of one hand, and it was six weeks before he was mature enough to leave the hospital. However, I was much happier, as my father remarked to Frances, “During the evening I spent with [John] I didn’t see one tic nor hear one stam-

16. CSF-FP 15 December 1953

1543
mer. He’s happy apparently though God knows why.”\textsuperscript{17} However, a year later he thought the “stammer a good deal worse, but not the tic.”\textsuperscript{18} One reason for my father’s doubt was his evaluation of the friends that Jean had acquired during my time in the Navy and Boston. He described the adult section of the birthday party for Jean’s son Johnny: “About fourteen of them on a very hot night in a tiny room and each of them more repulsive than the other thirteen put together—mostly Jean’s church friends.”\textsuperscript{19} Later he thought that the problem was more on my part. “I am still very puzzled and worried about that family, partly because I can’t imagine tolerating for long John’s still overbearing and intolerant manner (reminds me of Kitty) which is still quite pronounced—but Jean knew about that when they got married.”\textsuperscript{20} Over the next two years my father

\textsuperscript{17. CSF-FP 12 July 1954}
\textsuperscript{18. CSF-FP 30 July 1955}
\textsuperscript{19. CSF-FP 16 July 1954}
\textsuperscript{20. CSF-FP 30 September 1954}
learned of periodic quarrels between Jean and me. One problem was that my cars were not reliable and Jean was unable to reach town without one, but there were other problems.

My father did not ask for my advice or assistance in important matters, but in small matters, as long as I lived in Berkeley, my father would ask me to advise him. When a set of tires was getting smooth he would say, “John, you know I’m going to England next month. Would you do me the favor next time you are here of looking at the Ford’s tires to see if I need to buy a new set before I leave? If possible, I would rather defer spending the money until after I return.” So I would make a special trip to inspect his car’s tires and tell him how long I thought they would last. In the same way, he requested me to clean the leaves out of the gutters of his house, and to repair door latches and plumbing fixtures. I, knowing how much such services were likely to cost if he paid for them, was always willing to oblige. I should have seen the bitter humor of the
situation. I was pressed for both time and money. Having small earning power, I was working 40 hours a week, then attending university classes to improve my professional skills, attempting to complete my house and garden, and to keep two ragged cars operating. He earned enough by working three hours a day for six months a year to pay for twelve month’s expenses and six months of expensive holiday, yet here was I sacrificing my time to save his money.

Sometime in this period he chartered a yacht to sail the Caribbean, an activity of which he never told me. I didn’t expect my father to tell me everything, but I would have been very interested in this activity and would have offered to hand, reef, and steer, which is probably why I was never told. At this time, I used to believe that my father had really no idea of the difficulties of junior employees in scheduling their vacations. Once scheduled in between their senior’s vacations, the juniors can hardly

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21. LBF p 238

1546
reschedule in ways that would upset their seniors. My father would ask me to join him on his trips. Very nice invitations they were too, but always offered for sometime other than my scheduled vacation or after I had used up all my vacation time for the year. My father then expressed great regret. This happened year after year.

The prime example of this subterfuge about vacations was somewhat more painful still. I remarked earlier that my father maintained friendships with some of my college friends long after we had finished our educations. Many of these friends were widely dispersed; my father could travel, I could not. Naturally, most of these friends were, or became, married. Although my father maintained contact with married couples, I think that in several cases he was interested in the wife. In one American couple the husband had been a naval officer in World War II and met his wife while both attended Berkeley. She wrote me a very nice letter in January, 1961, surprising both in occasion and in content. She wrote that she and her husband were very grate-
ful for the marvelous trip round the Hawaiian Islands on which my father and Dorothy had taken them. Since they had substituted for Jean and me after the unfortunate deferral of our plans to travel with my father and Dorothy, she thought it proper to say that they had enjoyed the trip as much as we would have done had we been able to go. This was the first that Jean and I had heard of that trip. Jean had long wanted to see Hawaii; had we been asked we would have tried very hard to make vacation arrangements to suit. In planning this trip, Cecil wrote to Frances that he would have to put in considerable work on Churchill’s young life, but this couple would look after Dorothy. After this trip, Cecil visited them again, and later in the month they sent him Satcheverel Sitwell’s book on Madeira and Portugal as planning material for a subsequent trip.22

The couple who went to Hawaii instead of Jean and me have since divorced. The husband told me in 1969 that he had had to firmly put an end to

22. CSF-FP 2 and 10 February 1961

1548
Cecil’s attempts to seduce his wife, and to warn her of the consequences if she succumbed to Cecil’s blandishments.

George told me that he had to prohibit his father from visiting his wife when he was not present and from giving her personal presents without anything for the children or himself. Also, it was in discussion of Cecil’s habit of paying for young women’s vacations with him that Frances Phillips told him, “Your children should all have been girls, for you would have known how to treat them.” Frances told me that story herself.

When Barbara had earned her teaching credential, they were free to move and George attended Reed while she taught school. He chose Reed “because they were one of the top liberal arts schools in the country, I could get an excellent general education, and they were the best bet geographically for our working family to be able to earn enough to get through college. I worked as a journeyman union carpenter during most of my breaks during college for two different contractors, who
each always found work for me when I was free. During this time, college costs were 50% of our income each of the next three years. During 1958, my junior year (I was now a Mathematics major), Barbara again became pregnant, and in those days, schools did not employ pregnant women, so I had to leave school in June and found a good job in Portland. A year later, I taught school and needed to get my teaching credential, so I attended (full time night school) Portland State College for two additional years.

“In 1958 my mother, Kitty, lent us $4000 for a down payment on a house; Kitty lent us money sometimes during college years when we were really broke, and we always repaid it fairly promptly, except for the house down payment. We never seemed to be able to recover that kind of money. We lived pretty comfortably once I was out of college, but used credit to buy a house and cars. “23

Cecil’s stories about these times are rather dif-

23. Letter 6 April 2000

1550
ferent. When George intended to start at Reed, Cecil wrote to Frances that George was “not at all sure what it is he’s going to major in; thinks it’s the humanities. I can’t imagine George getting to pass standard in Latin & Greek—he wriggled out of Latin at High School after 1 year & never succeeded in learning any Spanish. As a matter of fact, his letter, unlike the preceding, is full of the usual Georgian hot air and not nearly as impressive.”24 Later on he wrote to Frances that George had been thrown out of Reed in 1958 and transferred to Portland City College.25

By the end of the nineteen-fifties, which were Cecil’s fifties also, George and I were on our feet financially and beyond his concern for our welfare. He no longer wished to Kathleen, “I wish I’d pulled it out sooner,” and I no longer heard his serio-comic refrain “I wish I’d been born a childless bachelor!”

24. CSF-FP 15 May 1955
25. CSF-FP 9 August 1958
My father had observed that George was turning into a “true highbrow.” It was not my father’s turn of mind, as he himself said, but he liked to see it in George. At the next holiday dinner at my father’s house, in addition to the usual guests, I found George and Barbara. Not knowing that they had been banned from the house for six years, I merely greeted them as when I’d last seen them at their own house, instead of as returned exiles. Not knowing that I was ignorant of their exile, they concluded that I wasn’t happy that they had been restored.

Yet my father’s basic feelings appear to have remained, and even extended to his grandchildren. In addition to Geoffrey Richard, Jean and I had a daughter, Pamela, in 1958. For their Christmas presents my father ordered imported junk from a mail-order house in New York, unsuitable both in quality and maturity. Geoffrey said to me one Christmas, having opened his grandfather’s gift of a crude doll that balanced on a string, “Does Grandpa Cecil think I’m still a baby, giving me something like that?” Ever after I told my father what his gift to
Geoffrey would be, purchased and wrapped it myself, and billed him. And I excused him to myself by saying that he just didn’t realize how fast children grew up.

That this was not merely absent-mindedness was known to Charlotte Knight. Charlotte was a long-term family acquaintance, whom we’d first met about 1941. Her husband, Max, was a German Jew who had escaped Hitler by going east, through Austria, Hungary, Russia, China, and across the Pacific. He had lived with us after Ruth married, and tried to teach George and me German, until he found a position as editor with the University Press. Charlotte attempted to earn some extra money by selling encyclopedias and approached my father to suggest that two sets would be good gifts to his two families of grandchildren. This is just the sort of approach that would upset my father, who would take it as a form of panhandling, but his words went far beyond that. He looked at Charlotte, frowned first, then gave a derisive laugh, saying, “My grandchildren? For all I care they can rot in Hell!” His
outburst took Charlotte by surprise, driving her from the room in tears. This is just another of those events that one isn’t told until one shows that one already knows a lot of the truth, the implication being that the teller then will not have to bear the responsibility for causing pain.

When Pamela’s birth was imminent, Jean’s parents came from England to visit with us. Jean’s father had been headmaster of a moderately well-known school, and was also known for having played for England in both rugby and cricket. One of their sons had become a doctor, the other two had become teachers, while Jean was a nurse with a specialty in midwifery.26 In short, they were people similar to those among whom Cecil had been raised, although somewhat more successful. When Cecil

26. In England, and Europe generally, most births were at home under care of a registered nurse-midwife, who was supported by a system of fully equipped and staffed mobile operating rooms available in case of need.
met Jean’s parents, he decided to despise them. Although he thought that they disapproved of him, as he despised them, he invited them to his house and put on the charm. “They are remarkably dull people and I don’t think they’ve ever met one man before [who lives] on his wits. I have the gravest doubts as to whether they can read or write.”

Cecil thought ill of both of his sons, although he concealed from me his opinions about me. In partial justification, George had caused problems for Cecil that would tax any parent. In partial justification on the other side, George was partly motivated by understanding both his father’s opinion of him and his father’s character. That was the real problem; George saw through Cecil and understood his character. A large part of Cecil’s complaints concerned problems that he had invented out of his own imagination. Particularly, Cecil thought ill of anyone who could see through him, and did his best to discredit that person. Hence his particular nasti-

27. CSF-FP 24 March 1958

1555
ness about George.

Cecil certainly thought that I would do badly in school, partly from laziness and partly from lack of intelligence. He also saw me as stubborn and ignorant of the way the world works, characteristics that I prefer to call idealistic. Certainly I had upset his planned lifestyle by enrolling in the University of California and refusing to go to Harvard, but I had no reason at all to think that by doing so I was upsetting either George’s education or my father’s plan for his own life. I always treated him fairly, I never lied to him and I never stole from him. For my part, I still loved the man.

Cecil deplored the character of his grandson Geoffrey, who had been born at six months. Geoffrey spent a lengthy stay in an incubator, being fed through a nasal tube, and went down to less than two pounds before starting to gain. However, he was active; when I first saw this tiny child in his incubator, he was trying to stand on his head. When he came home, he was fed every three hours around
the clock, a task which he strenuously resisted and which required more than an hour. I decided on my own responsibility to put him on a normal schedule, which he immediately preferred and slept through until morning. Probably as a result of this initial experience, Geoffrey was always a reluctant eater, and, perhaps, if he hadn’t been so stubborn he would not have survived at all. Cecil describes him as “Geoffrey is a very naughty child indeed and of course utterly spoiled. Table manners and everything else are quite appalling, and J & J dote on him, of course, & are proud of these things—boast about his ‘stubbornness’ and his refusal to eat what’s put in front of him & so on. I’d like to be 20 years younger & have the job (& no other!) of training that kid again. It might shorten my life, though. Or his.”

At the end of 1958 I moved to Southern California because the machine building industries in which I worked were leaving the San Francisco Bay

28. CSF-FP 24 November 1962
Area, and the new ones that later created Silicon Valley were only just starting. Once I had moved south, I was no longer near enough to provide the little assistances I had before, but I started to fulfill my father’s request for a model naval diorama. I have described his larger ship and artillery models, which he kept on the main floor. However, the long range of low bookcases that I had built below the windows of his writing room called for something on their tops. We considered what naval actions might be suited to that long narrow space, and decided that the Battle of the Dogger Bank was the only one that would. In that battle, five British battlecruisers pursued four German ones at full speed, sinking one German, whose capsized hull, her bottom painted with red lead paint, floated briefly between the squadrons. I promised to build the British squadron and the seascape, which I would have painted by an artist friend of mine. We couldn’t be completely accurate about scale, but adopted a scale of 100 feet/inch for the British ships and hoped to compress the diorama’s length by foreshortening, as
in a painting. The ships were then between six and seven inches long. I borrowed my father’s copy of British Battleships by Oscar Parkes and started model making. On almost every trip back to Berkeley in 1962 and 1963 I carried a new model, carefully wrapped in cotton wool.

I did not appreciate the meaning of the events of the early 1960s, but those which would first convert my idealistic illusion to one of bitter ugliness were about to happen. Without their information, I would never have unraveled this report of events long past.

In the summer of 1963, Marian Pridham’s son, Geoffrey, traveled from England to some project associated with Reed College in Portland, Oregon. My brother George, who lived in Portland and had some connection with Reed, knew of his visit. For his return trip before his university restarted, Geoffrey visited my father in Berkeley, who then sent him on to me in Southern California. “Young Geoffrey Pridham is staying here, and I suppose part of the
explanation [for the title of his letter, Happy Days in Hell] is that I don’t know because he doesn’t know; he’s rather a vague lad anyway, and his vague plans were upset by the simple fact that he didn’t know there was such a thing as Labor Day or a Labor Day weekend, so it’s likely he’ll be here until Tuesday.”

Geoffrey was a student of international relations preparing for a career in the British Foreign Service. I twitted him for choosing to start such a career with a declining power, to which he answered suavely, “Now that England’s international position is no longer resting on the might of the Empire, she has more need than ever of skillful diplomacy, and a young man entering the Foreign Office may be in a position of great worth.” I found him an impressive young man. So did Jean, who compared his English poise, mannerisms and speech habits too favorably with my own, from which, to English eyes and ears, all English traits had disappeared.

My father passed Geoffrey on to me in Fuller-

29. CSP-FP 29 August 1963

1560
ton with the request that I show him Southern California. Even better, Jean’s daughter, Carolyn, was of an age to both drive a car and be interesting. She showed him the local sights, Disneyland and orange groves. Afterwards, Geoffrey went on a side trip to the Grand Canyon, then returned in preparation for his return to England, so we saw him for several days. Geoff got on very well with both Jean and Carolyn. Both of them had been born in England and had traveled back and forth often enough to retain quite English sympathies.

“Why,” Jean asked, when Geoff had departed, “haven’t you retained your English poise and speech? How manly and effective they are, instead of the cowboy impression that you give. Geoffrey Pridham will succeed in life while you will remain an uncouth employee. It’s nothing you can’t do, for your father is a perfect model. All you have to do is to copy him; that’s not hard. All you have to do is try. Why, Geoff looks, talks and carries himself more like your father than you do.” That memory came back to me when I read my father’s will and
realized that Marian and Geoffrey received as much from my father’s will as I did. What we did not know until years later was that when Geoffrey was in Portland he was describing himself as the son of C. S. Forester.  

Geoffrey was followed by Ann Meynell, the daughter of literary acquaintances of Cecil in London. When Ann arrived in Berkeley, Cecil described her to Frances. “Ann’s an odd girl. She’s strangely apathetic, inclined just to drifting and apparently without a wish or a plan in the world. I don’t understand her at all; she seems quite happy, though.”  

In a few weeks, Cecil sent Ann to visit me and be shown Southern California. I remember her as appearing sweet on the outside but cold and selfish within.

Cecil’s accommodation to these young visiting people was rather different from his accommodation to Jean’s daughter, Carolyn. In the summer of

30. Kitty tape, 10 Nov 1984
31. CSF-FP 28 September 1963
1963 Carolyn had met and became very friendly with Robert Mackintosh, a boy who was visiting from San Francisco and who shared our interest in skin diving. Shortly after his return to San Francisco in September, he developed a perforated appendix and was rushed to hospital. That used to be absolutely fatal, but by 1963 there was some hope of survival. Carolyn was very upset, so we sent her to San Francisco to spend the weekend at Robert’s bedside. Cecil was scornful. “Idiotic business with John’s step-daughter Caroline. She’s 17 and a month ago acquired a boy friend of 17 who lives in S.F. and perforated his appendix last week and is in St. Lukes Hospital there. So poor little Caroline MUST come up to see him by the earliest plane after school today and go back by the last plane on Sunday, and of course stay with us.”32 Carolyn saw Robert and paid close attention to his recovery. That cemented their relationship; they later married and are still married. Cecil’s reaction is similar to that he expressed

32. CSF-FP 13 September 1963

1563
about Kathleen’s care for her first love, who was dying of tuberculosis.

In the spring of 1962 our daughter, Pamela, died just after her fourth birthday. At dusk one evening she and I were in the garden. I was laying stepping stones, while she was jumping from one to another, telling me if I was placing them the right distance apart. An idyllic memory without care or concern, yet within her body the bacillus Staphylococcus aureus lurked unknown, and it killed her the following dawn. Cecil was in England when he received the news. Unlike the laconic way he had reported the news of the death of his father, he was genuinely upset by Pamela’s death and expressed his concern to Frances. “Pamela was a dear little thing and very important to John. ... She was a dear little girl and I feel my own loss a lot.”33 However, when Cecil later learned that Jean and I were considering having another child, Cecil remarked to

33. CSF-FP 13 April and 18 April 1962

1564
Frances, “If there was any chance of the next one being like Geoffrey they’d better decide on perpetual chastity.”

Cecil really liked girls while, at the best, he tolerated boys, but more generally he disliked them.

That summer Jean and I had been planning the first mountain trip upon which Pamela could go, but understandably we decided to do something entirely different. I had never returned to England. I had explicit memories of Uncle Geoff and Aunt Molly (who had visited California), of my Cousin Bridget, Uncle Jack and Aunt Audrey, and vague memories of other relatives whose connection I had not understood and had never since been told. Besides, I had new connections among Jean’s family, whom, except for her parents who had visited California, I had never met. With Pamela dead, saving for children’s welfare seemed meaningless. Hang the savings account, we’d go to England. Jean, Carolyn and Geoffrey went for all summer. I went for the

34. CSF-FP 29 November 1962

1565
month I could take. It would be a hurried month, so we planned to buy a European car in order to have freedom from train timetables, and to use as a second car when we returned. After my family had left, but before I had to get ready myself, I spent one weekend with father and Dorothy in Berkeley. At a time when he was sure Dorothy would not interrupt us, my father asked me, “John, do you have sufficient money?”

Bearing within me my emulatory illusion of him, so carefully fostered from his first words to Mr. Foster on the day of my birth, I could only reply, “I have planned nothing for which I haven’t the money — we’ll manage all right.” “But when you are traveling something extra always makes the difference between existence and enjoyment. I want you to accept a thousand dollars just to make sure this trip will do you all the good it should.” His gift was kind and surprisingly generous. Furthermore, his friends and family in England, since I was already committed to going there, would both see his son’s gratitude, be

1566
impressed with his generosity, and would not notice any appearance of penury.

That month in England was, I believe, the happiest to that time since my adolescence. I wanted to see my family again, to meet Jean’s for the first time, and to see England, part of it again and part of it for the first time. The itinerary I worked out was pronounced impossible by Jean’s three brothers, but indeed by sticking fairly closely to it we accomplished those objectives.

You will recall that my father’s eldest brother, Geoffrey Foster-Smith, and his wife Molly were two of my favorite relatives. The only relatives I had seen since leaving England were my maternal grandmother, Florence Belcher, and Geoff and Molly. Geoff was now the leader of the family and the keeper of the family tree. I knew that he had retained his doctor’s office at his house at 8 Valkyrie Road, Southend-on-Sea, but that he and Molly now lived in the hotel which he and my father owned and which was operated by my supposedly illegitimate second cousin, Geoffrey Senior. (Actually, Cecil and
Geoff did not own it. They had leased it because Geoffrey Senior’s skill in hotel management made that an attractive proposition.) I could not afford staying at London hotels, but Southend was just at the end of one of London’s commuting railways. We stayed with Geoff and Molly at their hotel. From Southend for three days we four commuted to London as tourists, returning to Geoff and Molly in the evenings as visiting relatives. The last day, Jean, Carolyn and I planned an adult day and an evening at the theatre, seeing *My Fair Lady*, leaving our son Geoffrey with the great uncle for whom he had been named. Both Geoffreys enjoyed that, for Geoffrey Foster-Smith had always been and was still a remarkable man in all the respects in which his youngest brother was not.

Earlier that day, before we left for London, my uncle Geoffrey offered me a pile of typescript. “You have spoken of your ignorance of our family. Before you leave England, please go to see your Aunt Marjorie, who is the only other one of our generation still in England. I know your father did not encour-
age you to go, but Marjorie would be greatly pleased to see you. And you also owe it to yourself; she lives on your way, I have written her address here.

“I think perhaps you have heard that I have written something of a family history. Would you like to read this before you go? I can’t let you take it with you, for this manuscript is my only copy, but I would like you to read what you can.”35

I said that I would read it upon returning from London that evening. Unfortunately, that evening our train broke down and we arrived at Southend station after 1:30 A.M.

So, from two to four, I read the first version of Geoff’s autobiography. I immediately understood that this was the work that my father had referred to as being entirely unsuitable for inclusion in his own autobiography, or for publication of any sort. “There’s all the difference in the world between a professional writer [like himself] and the amateur. Geoff’s effort, which I requested of him, was all very

35. Personal recollection, of course
well and accurate as far as it went, but it was so pedestrianly dull that nobody would read it. Just impossible.”

Cecil had seen part of Geoff’s work in 1959, for he wrote to Frances that Geoff was doing more work while returning to England by ship. Geoff’s memoirs “aren’t any good at all, judging by what I saw.”

I found Geoff’s work fascinating for it was at complete variance with all my father had told me of his early life. Furthermore, Geoff had no motive in lying. His description of their early life as one of degradation and misery was certainly not boasting of his antecedents, neither was it boasting of his own achievements in rising above them, for he was far more modest about his own education and career than the inflated boasts which my father talked and wrote about him. This version was certainly different from that which I now possess, which his daughter Kate typed for him in Australia a year or two

36. So CSF told me, personal recollection
37. CSF-FP 26 January 1960
later.

Unlike the later version, this earlier version contained no apologies for deletions on which someone else had insisted, and it told, among other things, of the final illness and death of Kathleen’s fiance, A. G. West. There is no other source from which I could have obtained that information at this time, for it was on the basis of Geoff’s account that I inquired of my mother the relevant details, which naturally enough, she had never mentioned to me on her own initiative.

However, when reading this in 1962, I had been a London tourist for four strenuous days, followed by a play and a railway breakdown. Somewhere about four o’clock, I fell asleep with my head across the pages, pressing my glasses between the paper and my nose, to leave a sore patch the following morning.

We went to see Aunt Marjorie, her husband and son, living in suburban poverty but declining to be abject. Their house was a detached Victorian, red-brick and gloomy, standing in an otherwise
empty lot — or one at least empty of anything man-made except a battered homebuilt car. It was as if Mexican poverty had invaded suburban London. Inside, the upholstered furniture was full of holes and loose springs to trap the unwary, not one teacup was without a chip or brown-stained crack.

Majorie’s husband Haskell was a heart disease invalid. Marjorie supported them all as a part-time teacher. Marjorie had worked in a government office back in the time when working wives were not allowed. She had married a man who worked in the same office, but at a lower salary than hers, and been forced to leave her job. That cut their paired income to one-third of its former value. Health, the economic agony of England between the wars, and age had exacted their toll. Marjorie’s one son had been born late in her life, and was now a young man, a practical engineer under Colin Chapman of Lotus Cars, and engaged to be married. They were a smiling, happy family who greeted us with real pleasure, who served tea out of their dilapidated crockery as if from Royal Doulton, and who discussed
their life and projects with enthusiasm.

In the exhaustion and turmoil of that year, those thoughts with which I would otherwise have struggled simply invaded my memory without raising alarm. By the time I had returned to Fullerton to reflect upon my journey to England, my thoughts were far more of the living than the dead past, even though the living were as enshrined as the dead in the tourist’s collection of movie film that consumed my attention.

Sufficient also to distract my attention was the discrepancy between my remembered English information and the actual presence of my father. That discrepancy should have alerted my suspicions, but it had the opposite effect. My father seemed to be the same person as before, the father whom I loved. The information from my uncle should have changed my perception of him, but that information did not sink into my emotions, for several reasons. I had learned it under difficult circumstances: soon after Pamela’s death, in a hurry while tired at night, and during travels that involved many other items.
My Uncle Geoff had introduced his account as merely a family story, not as the bombshell that it should have been to me. Furthermore, for the first time my father began to be pleased with me and proud of my achievements. One mark of maturity is a toleration of perceptual ambivalence, but I was immature still, stunted by his spellbinding. Not only was he a fascinating and persuasive man in his own interest, but his enormous public reputation amplified one’s perception of him as wise, well informed, truthful, and decent. It is generally accepted that it is difficult to be the son of a famous man; I understand why that is so. Probably for these reasons I unconsciously put aside the derogatory information that I had learned about him. That information stayed at the back of my mind with no attention being paid to it, until the events following his death demanded an explanation.

In 1962 I was working full time and taking six semester units of graduate work. One of my courses was statistical decision theory, meeting one evening
a week for three hours. One afternoon at work when there were no immediate troubles to demand my attention, the professor teaching the course telephoned me to say that he was ill and could not meet the class that night. I agreed to collect the homework and to post the next week’s assignment. I thought we ought to discuss the homework problems, and he agreed to that. He kept on talking to me, as if he had something more to say but was hesitant. So I screwed up my courage to ask whether he would like me to give the lecture that I thought he would be giving. I received an enthusiastic acceptance. I had three or four hours to prepare a three-hour lecture. At the start of the next semester I was an assistant professor in charge of that class. That is the kind of challenge that one does not refuse. In the spring of 1963 I worked forty hours a week, took six units, and taught three. I was never so glad as when the semester ended in June.

My father noted the strain in a letter to my mother. “I went down to visit John and Jean last weekend. It was marvelous weather — 85° in L.A.
and 80° at John’s; he took me out tearing around the country in his beloved TR4. They are all well, except that John looked a little drawn and tired, but the strain on him will ease up at the end of the scholastic year — I hope he keeps in good health until then. I met a good many of his neighbors, and sang for my supper as sweetly as I could.”

During my father’s visit to me, I showed him round Southern California by car, on a warm, clear day when eighty and ninety miles an hour in an open car seemed not too fast. We had a small party for him, to which my new friends came, engineers mostly, and a clergyman who wrote on the side (and is now a professor of psychology), and some old college friends of his and mine, like the Turners, who came from Riverside where Arthur was now a professor of history. As my father said, he sang for his supper as sweetly as he could, by reading large portions of his *Personal Notes*. The scene reminded me of the parties of fifteen years before.

38. CSF-K, 626, 3 March 1963
During that visit my father boasted about my accomplishments; that was the first time that I can remember him complimenting me either to others or to myself. He came to visit more than ever before, and I felt the quality of our relationship had returned to that of my college days, before (to use anachronistic thoughts) his snobbery and avariciousness had been inflamed by my poor start in adult life.

In June, 1963, my father had suddenly to return to London without Dorothy, who was on a previously planned motoring trip with Audrey Railton.\(^{39}\) He decided to stay again three days with me before flying from Los Angeles. After writing to me about his schedule, he continued about his plans for London.

“\textbf{I’m going to deal once more with the Hornblower TV series. There’s still a hope of keeping it alive, and the invitation fits in well (after a suggested change by me) with Dorothy’s absence from}\)

\(^{39}\) Wife of the automotive engineer, friends of Cecil’s
home. But as I shall only be in London for a few days, I shan’t be able to see everybody and I don’t want to hurt any feelings, so I must ask you not to tell anybody in England that I’m going. I’ll try to see my brother, Geoff, but if I can’t, I would much rather that he didn’t know I am there, and the same goes for everybody else. This trip is one more thing added to all the numerous jobs I find I have to do.”

Now that I had renewed connections with people in England, my father now felt that he needed to tell me to conceal his travels. This was nothing new for him, but as it was the first time I had seen those words, I thought it merely a peculiarity of this hurried visit.

Cecil continued to be pleased as I progressed toward my M.S. and was invited to continue lecturing. “[John] is getting steadily better balanced and really seems happy. ... He was rather amusing when he said that one advantage of being a professor

40. CSF-K, 627.1, CSF-JF 5 June 1963

1578
while living in a place like Fullerton was that it excused his eccentricities in the eyes of his neighbors.”

The last time he visited me was in the course of a passage by freighter from England to San Francisco, in July, 1964. My family were away for the summer, Jean and Carolyn in England, Geoffrey in the mountains with Kathleen, and I was alone with my job and a landscaping task. I received an unexpected letter sent from my father aboard a ship sailing from Rotterdam, saying that he had planned to be on a different ship whose schedule had been changed. However, since this ship was scheduled to stop at Wilmington for two or three days, that “would be a splendid chance to see you.” He also mentioned having started his latest novel in England and his intention of continuing with it

41. CSF-FP 29 November 1963
42. CSF-K, 633, 6 June 1964
during the voyage. This novel was *Hornblower During the Crisis*. The final note was that this letter would be mailed from Plymouth because this ship also had engine trouble that required a short stop.

In preparation for his arrival, I requested time off to meet his ship. I then worked for the Autonetics Division (inertial guidance and radar) of North American Aviation in a department devoted to a combination of engineering and writing. Engineering is not all calculating and drafting — words are required as well. This department provided all the words and some of the calculations. Naturally, those of the staff who did not consider themselves engineers thought of themselves as writers, and the word that C. S. Forester was coming to town struck a most responsive chord.

This was another confirmation of what I have long suspected: Forester fans were to be found inhabiting the borderline between technology and liberal arts. Both genuine engineers and genuine artists set higher standards for their work, but those readers who knew some engineering thought he was
a good writer, while those readers who knew some literature thought he provided technical accuracy in his work. I consider myself qualified to judge both of these evaluations, considering my education and experience. For this arrival, it was not so much a question of my asking the favor of time off, but of my providing the favor of bringing C. S. F. in for lunch so everybody could meet him.

His ship arrived at night, and I went aboard early the next morning, July 2, 1964. The local press was already there interviewing my father. I listened for a while, observing that for one who always told people he hated publicity he gave a flawless performance. He talked of Hornblower, and of writing *Hornblower and the Crisis* in his cabin, much as he had written to me, and he mentioned that this was the next to the last Hornblower story. The last, he said, had been written, but was locked in a safe in London, to be published after his death as a kind of legacy to Dorothy, George, and me.

Then, I was given a tour of the ship by the third engineer, another Hornblower fan. Naturally,
it was an engineering tour, and to me very interesting. I learned much about operating and repairing the ship’s engines and associated equipment. More than that, my memory of the tour confirms my feeling that, given a willing instructor, such as those who were so happy to instruct my father, such information is easy to learn if one wishes to do so and has a modicum of mechanical aptitude.

The press interviews over, I took my father ashore and drove him to the office luncheon party. He was in top form, keeping everybody interested by apparently just being himself. Lunch broke up somewhat late, after which I took him to my house for his afternoon nap while I returned to work. We had that evening and the next day together before he had to return to his ship. As usual, we discussed what we were doing. I was preparing to build a wrought-iron fence around my garden, for which I had a ton and a half of steel bars and a pile of ornamental castings in the driveway and a welder and cutting set in the garage. He listened to my description of my task with interest.
He was getting on well with *Hornblower and the Crisis*, of which up to that time I had heard only that it was about forged dispatches. He told me the plot at length as far as he had written, and sketched out the goal towards which he was working. Just as in the old days we talked long enough to work out the details of the plot, how exactly the dispatches would be substituted and actions like that. I don’t say I contributed a lot, but in the process of talking together my father settled the details in the way in which he liked best.

I had saved until last a small surprise for him, the model of the British battlecruiser *New Zealand* for the diorama in his writing room, which he could take home himself. I returned him and *New Zealand* to his ship with the promise that I would see him in five weeks time when I was to meet Jean at San Francisco airport on her return from England. The ship sailed in the evening, to arrive in San Francisco the next evening. So C. S. Forester sailed the last leg of his last voyage as he had so often before, in the stateroom of a freighter from Wilmington to San
Francisco. I wouldn’t have been surprised to learn later that he had been on the ship’s bridge watching the Golden Gate Bridge slide overhead as the *Loch Loyal* came up the channel and headed southeast to the pier.

After arrival he wrote to me.

“The Loch Loyal made it as far as San Francisco without further incident — we arrived at 9 P.M. on the 4th and steamed past all the municipal fireworks, viewing them from the best possible position. Dorothy and Hodapp came to meet me. ... (By the way, HMS New Zealand was much admired when I exhibited her and boasted about her in the Loch Loyal.) It was a great pleasure to see you and to spend so much time with you in Fullerton. I hope you won’t be too lonely until Jean returns. Please give her my love when you write to her and tell her that if I were writing I’d report favorably on you. Dorothy sends her love to you along with mine.

“Your affectionate, [signature] Father”

43. CSF-K, 634, 6 July 1964
That was the end of my father’s period of easy living. Whatever premonitions I might have had were completely obscured by both my original love for him and by the affection that he, in this last year, obviously appeared to have for me.
On Friday evening, 7 August, 1964, I caught Pacific Southwest Airlines to San Francisco. John Dale Hodapp and his wife, Claire, gave me their round, cheery greeting at the airport. As we drove across the Bay Bridge, we talked of their choir concerts and the entertainments at the Treasure Island Officers’ Club and, most likely, a little bit about gourmet cooking.

In Berkeley, Father and Dorothy greeted me at the door. All was well. Dorothy had kept some dinner for me, and we talked as I ate. Every evening and every weekend since I had last seen Father I had been working on my ornamental iron fence, and I
fully explained my production techniques; too fully, probably, for their entertainment. For his part, Father told me he had reached the point in *The Crisis* where Hornblower had to transfer the forged orders to the courier’s saddlebags. It was late, and we parted for bed shortly thereafter.

On Saturday morning, I talked to Father as he breakfasted in bed, then left him to his work and went to meet Geoffrey who was returning from his mountain trip with his grandmother Kathleen. In the afternoon, Father took his usual nap, after which he went for a drive in Tilden Park, adjacent to his house. On Sunday morning, I talked again with Father during his breakfast. He got dressed and went down as usual to his writing room (not the “office” upstairs), while Geoffrey and I walked to visit some old Berkeley friends, the Merrimans, who lived nearby and had children Geoffrey’s age. We returned in time to prepare for the traditional Sunday lunch at Spenger’s Fish Grotto. Father detested being late at any time, particularly at this time, since Spenger’s filled up shortly after twelve. Just as Geoff
and I returned, Dorothy went down to warn Father that it was time to go, and found him lying on the floor, barely conscious and unable to move or make a loud noise. Her cries brought me downstairs. She thought it was his heart, but I realized that his inability to speak probably indicated a stroke. I made sure his false teeth weren’t choking him, sent Dorothy to first call Dr. Stratton and then bring a blanket to keep Father warm. He knew me; his left eye followed my movements, but the right did not as I covered him with the blanket. Geoffrey, of course, came down, but we sent him upstairs again. Dorothy told me that Stratton had called an ambulance, so I decided to meet them at the corner to direct them to the lower street from which it was easier to enter the downstairs side door. I told Geoff that because Grandpa was very ill, he should walk back to the Merriman’s to stay there until he heard from me.

Dorothy went with Father in the ambulance. I made sure the house was secure and drove her car down the hill. On the way, I stopped at the Hodapp’s house to leave a message. They weren’t
home, but their front porch was half dismantled in a rebuilding operation. I had forgotten paper, so I wrote on their doorstep using a piece of broken plaster as chalk.

At the hospital, it appeared to be mostly a question of getting Father comfortable until the magnitude of the stroke could be assessed, with injections of anti-clotting agent to reduce the probability of another stroke at this time.

Very quickly, it was time to meet Jean’s plane from England. She knew as she saw me that something terrible had happened, guessing that Geoffrey was involved.

“No, no, Geoffrey is at Merriman’s and is quite all right. Father’s had a stroke. He’s not unconscious, but he can’t move or say anything. We got him to Alta Bates before I drove here.”

“How is he?”

“I don’t know; I understand that major strokes make you unconscious, which he’s not, but I don’t think he had only a minor one. We’ll have to wait and see. Do you have any other baggage for me to
pick up?”

We made a silent trip back to Berkeley. We had planned, of course, for the three of us to depart for home shortly after Jean had arrived, but quite obviously I couldn’t go now. One consolation of having a famous father, I realized, was that I did not have to locate my boss to say I wouldn’t be at work on Monday. I tuned to a news broadcast and there already was the word that C. S. Forester had been hospitalized for a stroke.

In Berkeley we saw Father again for a minute. He was somnolent, but his good eye smiled at Jean and he grunted a welcome. We rejoined Dorothy, picked up Geoffrey, had a very quiet dinner, and went to sleepless beds.

On Monday, I heard Dr. Stratton’s advice and prognostications. He said that Father was in little greater danger now than he was before, that the only course of action was to let him recover from the immediate physiological effects of having part of his brain die, and after that see how badly his mind had been damaged and start retraining as soon as possi-
ble. My presence would be of much greater use later on, so I decided to return home alone. Jean had decided that, as a nurse, she should remain, and Geoffrey would remain with her. I went in to tell Father this. It was hard to tell how much he understood. I explained that I was leaving for work, that Jean would stay for a while, at which he gurgled a reply. I added that I would be back in one week or two, depending on how he was, and received another gurgle. He tried to say something, producing several grunts, then forced his head back in a gesture of frustration and closed his eyes.

I had one duty before leaving. Once I had packed my clothes I steered Dorothy into the dining room and sat at the table with pen and my pocket note book.

“Dorothy, I must return to Fullerton now. I will come up whenever you want me, depending on Father’s condition. Jean will stay as long as you need her. Now, what would you like me to do, or what arrangements would you like me to make?”

“I really don’t know, it’s such a sudden change.
Nobody seems to know how long it will take, and I can’t think about things now.”

“It will take a long time; these things do. Do you have enough money to pay the bills as they come in?”

“Oh, yes, I expect we have.”

“Are you sure, Dorothy? I can raise money in Los Angeles before I return. I don’t have to return, you understand, just to bring it. I can mail it to you at any time, provided you let me know in advance.”

“No, it’s not necessary. We have enough for quite some time, and a bit more will come in before the end of the year.”

With this assurance, I could return to work knowing I was prepared to do all that had to be done and was not neglecting a present need.

My father was in hospital for quite some time. Jean and Geoffrey returned home in about a week. I flew up to see him about twice a month. He appeared to recover fast from the immediate effects, adapting himself to using his left arm instead of the paralyzed right, and developing different sounds for
“yes” and “no.” By this means, he communicated his dislike for hospital and his desire to return home. Dr. Stratton agreed, once Cecil could, with assistance, get in and out of a wheelchair, and provided he had a competent nurse at home. He learned to manage the transition from hospital bed to hospital chair, using his good leg as a pivot and leaning on the nurse’s shoulder. With the immediate prospect of his homecoming, I re-inspected the wheelchair he had had since his legs first failed in 1944. It required guards to keep his jacket and his paralyzed right arm away from the wheels, and it needed brakes so it wouldn’t creep away as he staggered in or out of it. I measured it for new parts. Henry Sammett came up to the house and prepared to build a sloping ramp over the front steps.

I called one Saturday afternoon at John Dale Hodapp’s house in answer to his request. John was very solicitous, really more like Colonel Blimp than ever.

“I have reason to be grateful to your father, John,” he told me. “Now that this terrible thing has
happened to him, I can repay my debt by looking after him as well as I can. He’s like a father to me. Just as I am sure you are, I am only concerned for his welfare, to see that he is comfortable and without any worries that I can bear for him. You needn’t worry that he will find life unnecessarily difficult here, for I will make it as easy for him as I can. You see, I feel myself to be in the position of son to him.”

It seemed unnecessarily tactless for this outsider to be telling the eldest son that he felt himself to be the responsible son. He was, like all of us, overwrought by the recent events. The presumption in his words I passed over, excusing it as merely a poorly worded expression of his kindly intent.

Shortly after this interview, I was informed that Dorothy and John Dale were applying to the court for a conservatorship of Cecil’s property, with John Dale appointed conservator. The first stage went through satisfactorily, with John Dale appointed temporary conservator, the appointment to be ratified by a judge at a later date. Dorothy herself told me that she and Cecil wished this done because she
couldn’t handle Cecil’s affairs alone. I did live four hundred miles away, but as the eldest son, with a master’s degree in management subjects, holding a responsible position in industry and in a university, I did feel a little put out, as if I were not to be trusted. Still, if Dorothy and my father wanted things that way, what right had I to object?

George called me then, concerned about the conservatorship. “I’ve spoken to Father about it. It’s hard to tell what he wants, but it’s easy to tell if he approves or disapproves a particular suggestion. I asked him if the conservatorship was what he wanted, and he gave me just a shrug of one shoulder and an ‘I don’t care’ kind of rolling of his head. You know his expression when he doesn’t give a damn about something. I asked him if he agreed just to save Dorothy the trouble and worry. He just tried to tell me something else by holding up two left fingers close together and trying desperately to talk, then ended up by nodding his head. I think that that is as close to his reasons as we’ll get, but it’s obvious the conservatorship was not started because of his
wishes. I’ve also heard that John Dale is making himself obnoxious about it. Why the hell should he be in it, anyway?

“I know the lawyer who practically rewrote the California Probate Code, and I want to retain him to fight this. Will you share expenses with me?”

I temporized; George’s intent of fighting John Dale and Dorothy sounded too much as if he wanted something, although he said not. After discussion, we agreed to obtain legal advice on the meaning of conservatorship and the legal processes for establishing and dissolving one.

I heard more about John Dale’s behavior before long. Dorothy called me for a tearful discussion on one Thursday evening, asking me what could be done about him. Jean and I agreed to drive up on Friday night to settle things as best we could.

We learned that John Dale had informed all parties with financial dealings with Cecil that he himself, as Cecil’s conservator, was now the person who authorized any expenditure, paid the bills, and would receive any income. As the conservator, this
was entirely correct procedure. He had also gone around to the houses of Dorothy’s friends, informing them that he was CSF’s conservator, had charge of all of CSF’s money, and that Dorothy couldn’t spend a penny without requesting and receiving his permission. Her friends didn’t hear this pompous announcement with equanimity. Evelyn Lewis was quite shocked. Charlotte Jackson, widow of Cecil’s friend Joseph Henry Jackson, dismissed him from her house immediately; Dorothy, of course, heard of both these events soon after.

“He’s terrible. He acts as if he can order me around, my friends can’t stand him, I’m supposed to do nothing but what he lets me, and everyone in Berkeley knows all about it. I realize I have to have a conservator, but why should he be like this?”

Jean and I had a nerve-wracking night after the long drive up, trying to calm Dorothy down. Our sleep afterwards wasn’t much better, but in the morning I was able to find out the background.

“Dorothy, you say you must have a conservator. What for?”
"I can’t handle Father’s affairs, I don’t know the first thing about business, I wouldn’t know what to do!"

“What has to be done? Does Matson or Peters have a big deal going? Is there anything for which they require Father’s permission?"

“Of course not. You know he left all of that business to them. He trusted them implicitly and never worried about it.”

“Do you have to sell property to pay the bills? Is it a question of deciding to sell this stock or that stock?”

“No, it isn’t. Anyway, Wood, Walker\(^1\) always took care of all of that for him. He has very good advisors, you know.”

“That’s what I thought. He never concerned himself with these details, so what reason is there for you to have to? Why do you need a conservator? More particularly, why do you need him in such a hurry when Father is getting better?”

\(^1\) Stockbrokers
“There’s the taxes to pay. On October 15, we must pay the income tax.”

“Income tax? Is this a payment against last year’s taxes?”

“No, you know we have to pay each quarter, and whenever we go abroad. It’s the income tax.”

“Then it’s the regular quarterly payment of estimated income tax. Mrs. Bernal handles that. Has anything happened to change Father’s income? His illness wouldn’t affect that yet.”

“No. We have to pay it, and all the money is in Father’s account. My housekeeping account has run out, and I can’t get my English money soon enough. Father’s right hand is helpless. He’s trying to sign with his left hand but it looks all wrong. John Dale said that the obvious thing was to have a conservator to look after all these things and see they were properly and exactly paid. And Mrs. Bernal agreed. After all, she’s his lawyer, and she should know. It is the only thing to do.”

“You’re sure there’s enough money in the account to cover your needs?”
“Oh, yes, but I can’t get it out!”
“You’re his wife. If he didn’t trust you he’d be in a pretty pickle, wouldn’t he? Turn it into a joint account. Then the two of you look after yourselves. You’ve already got literary agents, an investment counselor, and a lawyer to take care of the problems.”

“But it can’t be that simple. Father can’t sign his name! And John Dale and Mrs. Bernal agreed it should be a conservatorship.”

“Look, he doesn’t have to sign his name. All he has to do is say what he wants. It’s his account, the bank will do whatever he directs and there’s no magic in the signature itself. They’ll probably send up a man to be a witness so they know that’s what he wants, but then they’ll do it.”

Mrs. Bernal had apparently acted under the impression that her client was totally unconscious, unable to move, perceive, or think. The results of my investigation gave no indication that she had ever visited her client to determine whether he needed a conservator or could express a choice of
conservator. I told my father of this, and asked if he would have Dorothy as joint holder of his account. He smiled one-sidedly and nodded vigorously.

That settled it. I told Dorothy that there was either unprofessional negligence or criminal conduct somewhere in the conservatorship business. I recommended she arrange the joint account in any way the bank would accept, that she withdraw her approval from the request for conservatorship, and that she make it quite clear that if the temporary conservatorship was not terminated she would call for an investigation. At about this time, the attorney whom George had engaged telephoned the judge who supervised the conservatorship, and the conservatorship was terminated. Mrs. Bernal told Dorothy that this was unwise; John Dale became sullen and antagonistic.

The next time we saw her, Dorothy kept Jean and me awake for another night, this time berating me for causing John Dale to be so annoyed that she had had to fire him.

“You don’t know what it was like with him
around. His eyes drilled through me. I felt that he was watching everything I did, that he didn’t feel trusted anymore. I couldn’t stand him glaring at me. And all because you butted in and made things nasty for him. And now I’ve had to let him go. Why did you?”

Soon, Cecil was ready to return from the hospital. I flew up to see him transferred safely, bringing my suitcase full of wheelchair parts, electric drill and hand tools. He was tired by the transfer, but obviously pleased to be home. Once I had installed the brakes, he successfully moved from bed to wheelchair with only a little help. His left eye shone as I wheeled him through his house again.

Each weekend that I saw him, he was more capable. Obviously he could not regain the use of his right hand, nor much use of his right leg, but those handicaps he was learning to overcome. He still could not speak clearly except in brief flashes, when for a syllable or two he sounded as well as ever. He gradually learned to write his name left-handedly, except that he could not manage the mid-
dle “e,” making himself “C. S. Forster.” He still read avidly, his consumption two or three books a day. He went down to the hospital for physical therapy several times a week. On the advice of Dr. Stratton, he tried a live-in retraining treatment in which several patients lived together in one hospital ward, but this forced association with cripples, and its goal of maximum possible self-reliance, distressed him. He demanded to be let out the second day. So he lived with a nurse to help him, and Dorothy drove him to his treatments. Dr. Stratton expressed satisfaction at his progress, then recommended that Cecil be stimulated to do as much as he could as rapidly as possible.

His most basic impediment was his inability to communicate. All his life he had depended on the spoken and written word to express himself, provide his entertainment, and earn his living. He could now neither speak nor write. Yet his avid reading and the intelligence with which he answered questions about it, or any other subject, revealed that his basic understanding was still there. Of course, con-
versing with him was an exacting task. It was like being a lawyer in court with a hostile witness who is supposed to answer only “yes” or “no.” With skill, it can be done. I satisfied myself that Cecil understood the same kinds of books that he had read before — history, military theory, novels. Dorothy did not agree. She believed that he read as a child might read, or a dull student listen to a lecture, with the words flowing past him without leaving any permanent impression. Neither did she succeed in conversing with him as Jean and I did. Several times Jean passed on to Dorothy the things that Cecil had told to her. Dorothy was much surprised, yet she didn’t herself learn to converse with him, only to talk to him.

Believing that establishing communication was only overcoming the mechanical difficulties of paralyzed muscles, we tried several other methods. I placed his typewriter before his left hand, but he merely fiddled. Kathleen came to observe him, and returned with an easel and a set of phrase cards from which Cecil could select, but that was never
given a proper trial. Dorothy would never let Kathleen instruct Cecil alone; her hostility was evident and her interruptions continuous. Kathleen left the equipment when she went, hoping that Dorothy would attempt to use it. Finally, Barbara retrieved it for Kathleen.

Cecil remained able to receive but not to transmit. His left hand would form symbols, trying to trace the shape of the object of his thought, or trying to provide a concrete visualization of an abstract concept, until he leaned back with a gesture of frustration at our inability to understand, and demanded with an imperious gesture that he be taken back to his room.

Throughout this period, I remembered very carefully the unwritten part of *Hornblower During the Crisis*. Here at least were ideas that both Cecil and I knew. Knowing the message, I could devote my attention to re-establishing the method of sending it. Once Cecil started to communicate in words, however transmitted, I would have the knowledge to ask leading questions, to elicit particular words and
phrases, to help him build them into sentences and paragraphs. It would be a difficult task, but it had been done for other stroke victims before. The greatest hindrance, I was warned, would be the typical despair that afflicts such patients; the task seems too difficult, long, and onerous to them. Cecil’s case presented the additional difficulty that he had been a professional. Would amateur English satisfy him now? More professional quality literary output was beyond my wildest expectations. I intended that my program of working with him in writing some more of *Hornblower During the Crisis* would teach him to communicate with his friends. That would have been ample satisfaction to me, and I believe that, achieving as much if no more, he would have realized that half-a-loaf was better than none at all.

It took a year for me to realize that the difficulty was one of creating words. My father appeared to think by using words, for he understood what he had read, or been told, but he could not find words in his mind to bring them consciously to the output stage. Medical science has long had a word for the
inability to use language, aphasia. However, I suspect, from my general scientific reading since, that at this time the recognition that the brain had different centers for verbal input and verbal output was in the forefront of scientific knowledge. In any case, I deduced that my father’s stroke had incapacitated his verbal output center without incapacitating his verbal input center. None of the doctors told me this.

For him, this must have been the supreme disability. Blindness could not have been worse. He knew the thought he wanted to express, but he could not find the words to say it, to write it, or to spell it. He, who had used words for so many of his pleasures. Even in courting girls, he had flattered and attracted them largely by his speech. Now he was reduced to one hand, to the reach and grab of an illiterate farmhand.

Once I had realized that one center of the trouble was in his verbal output center and I observed that there was no further recovery in verbal output, I knew that there was little hope for further recovery
than had been accomplished in a year. This was not a disability to which one could consciously adapt by learning a different way to do a task, as an armless man learns to hold a fork with his toes.

Forty years later I learned that my father’s condition was well known, was indeed the first identified neurological injury, named Broca’s aphasia, about one hundred years before my father’s stroke. Was it medical policy that the relatives were not told? Or was Dorothy told and failed to understand?

I suggested that they move down near me, so my father could visit Jean and me frequently and Dorothy could leave him at times in good hands. My father agreed enthusiastically, particularly with the idea of selling the house. He didn’t seem to care where he moved after that. I was then too ignorant of his past to understand that line of thought. In fact, he refused to be taken to see in advance the apartment that Dorothy had selected. They moved down in the early summer of 1965 to see if they liked it, returned to Berkeley for two months to close the house, then moved down permanently.
When they came south the second time, the house had not been sold, though that was their intent. Dorothy brought furniture for the apartment, and the office desk and chair for me. Of the library, only Cecil’s personal copies of his own works came south. None of his mementoes, except the bronze head of him done about 1934. When the house was sold, nothing else showed up; Dorothy had called in a dealer and asked how much he would pay for everything that remained in it. My father’s leather-bound 1911 Encyclopedia Britannica, a much sought-after edition, to my personal knowledge had been promised to Arthur Turner. He never received it. Nobody I know was asked which of my father’s library books they might wish. The model ships and guns in whose presence George and I had grown up were never offered to us — not even the ships I built myself were returned to me. Cecil had kept some manuscripts of published works. These, so Dorothy admitted, she sold to the University of Texas because they paid the highest prices. Well, my father’s illness had been expensive, and his life
might well be more so. His intent had always been to write for money. If the public were willing to pay for the sentimental value of his handwriting as well as for its printed form, who was I to question?

In Fullerton, my father still entertained visiting ladies. Marian Pridham came all the way from England for her three-week vacation. Knowing that my father and Dorothy could not entertain her entirely as they would have wished, Jean and I planned to show her around as best we could. As far as I was concerned, I had never seen her before — all my childhood memories had faded — but her son had been an interesting visitor some summers before.

We met Marian at Dorothy’s tea soon after her arrival. She was not the lacquered-face girl who couldn’t bear to be without her makeup that my father had long before described to me. She was a middle-aged, somewhat overweight woman of plain complexion but a laughing smile. She and Jean hit it off well. Two days later, Jean telephoned to ask Marian if she would like to go to a women’s lunch down
by the sea. Dorothy answered the telephone and asked Jean what she wanted, as Marian was “busy.” Jean told Dorothy, whereupon Dorothy replied that she was sure that Marian would not want to go. Jean insisted that since her invitation was to Marian, she would hear Marian’s own reply. Marian, when asked, was delighted to accept and enjoyed the outing.

Marian had only two weekends in Fullerton. Just before the last I stopped by on my way home from work to find her washing the apartment windows under Dorothy’s direction. I thought this was no way to treat a visitor from abroad who has so little time, so I determined to partially rectify the situation, even though it meant acting impolitely to Dorothy. At teatime, when Dorothy, my father, Marian, and myself were together, I said that on Sunday I was taking Marian out all day to show her as much of Southern California as I could, and I allowed none of Dorothy’s objections. Marian smiled her pleasure at me as I did so.

I packed lunch and a hot thermos, picked up
Marian and drove her through orange groves and fields to the mountains from which we could look down into the desert. I drove fast, and with the top down the roar of the wind impeded all but the simplest description of the scenery. At Barton Flats we stopped for lunch and had our first chance to converse intimately. Marian told me what she remembered of me, and asked what I remembered of her and of England. I replied that I had forgotten her entirely, that I remembered very few people from England: Gordon Williams, some uncles, aunts, and cousins. By discrete inquiries we found that we had identical opinions of my cousin Stephen, who was my father’s lackey on his trips to England.

“Oh,” said Marian. “Don’t be surprised. Stephen was only the last of the line. Gordon Williams was another, and there are those you never heard of. Your father’s friends were appalling, the biggest collection of boot-licking panhandlers you ever saw. He could never do without them, he always succumbed to their wiles, even though he hated himself for it. Thank God I was never one of them.”
Then, naturally, after that I told her of Hodapp. She answered that it was well that my father had sons instead of lackeys. Looking back now, I realize that the compliment was overdone; even then I was not as self-sufficient as I should have been.

Father and Dorothy participated in our 1965 holiday season entertainments. Father would sit with the company, listening to the conversation and inserting “no’s” and “yes’s” and laugh when he could. He would eat with us, too, though inclined to be embarrassed at the mess he made with his food. Then, with an imperious gesture, given when he grew frustrated at his inability to fully participate, he would demand to be taken away. I steered him to the couch in the room I used as my office, where he would be at ease, while the other guests, one by one, would drift back to visit with him. As always, he took particular delight in the presence of the pretty women. Arthur and Netty Turner, with Netty’s daughter Nadine, were part of one party. Nadine was a pretty redhead, then about twenty five. This
evening, some time after my father had asked to be taken to the back room, I went back to see if he was still comfortable. At that time I had no knowledge of the special relationship between my father and Nadine; I had never even known that Nadine visited him and Dorothy, aside from the times when she accompanied her mother and Arthur. I found my father and Nadine sitting side by side on the bed with my father’s good hand inside Nadine’s blouse. I thought then that if he were able to persuade such a very presentable young woman to share a moment of intimacy with him, more power to him. Seeing that he was obviously comfortable, I returned to the rest of the party.

In that year, I was able to please him by showing him the first printed version of the first book by the new generation, my textbook *Statistical Selection of Business Strategies*. I had a sense of family tradition in doing so, but I did not realize then that that tradition went back almost sixty years to his father. He smiled, and tried the book, but its subject was too
foreign to give him pleasure. He, in his turn, was able to give me a copy of his final complete book. My copy of *The Hornblower Companion* is signed “To” an illegible name, followed by an almost illegible “C S. Forester.” That was as much as he could write.

In early January, 1966, Dorothy took my father to Hawaii again. Before leaving, I asked him if he really wanted to go, to which he gave his “I don’t mind” expression, but after his return he showed he had enjoyed it.

Then on Monday, March 21, I stopped by on my way home from work. Dorothy spoke, while she poured the tea, of their trip to Hawaii, and of how the local bank manager had been trying to seen them since before they went away.

“It’s something about the will. He says he can save a lot on the taxes by using a trust fund. I don’t think he is right; after all, Lyle Cook made the will. Mrs. Bernal added a codicil afterwards, but that didn’t change anything. Lyle certainly knew taxes, don’t you think? Anyway, this man has been most
pressing, and I have arranged to have him come in on Thursday after next to explain it to Father. Father, of course, can’t tell him what he wants, but he can say if he doesn’t want his will changed. The bank man will just have to be satisfied with that, won’t he, dear?”

Father nodded assent to me and waved his left hand limply to me in a gesture of resignation. He would see the man. But that did not happen.

Dorothy said to me, “Father has not been well since we returned. I think he’s had another small stroke. He’s going to see the doctor next week.”

Father nodded to my glance. “Yes … ah … yes.” He extended his left hand with the center three fingers extended. He curled his ring finger. “Ah … ah” The middle finger closed down also to his palm. He then curled his index finger. “No, no.” He shook his head in disgust at not being able to make me understand.

As Dorothy cleared away the tea things, I sat beside the sofa on which he rested. “I’m very sorry to hear you didn’t feel so well, Great Man. You also
thing it was another little stroke?”

He nodded at me slowly, his eyes bright behind his spectacles, and used his left hand to indicate his right side and leg. With his left hand, he lifted his right forearm and rearranged it on the pillow jammed into the crevice between his right side and the sofa back.

Understanding the meaning of the fingers that curled one by one, I said, “It’s just a little at a time, isn’t it?” He nodded. “I’ve heard that’s the way it goes. You always knew that, didn’t you?”

He nodded again. “Yes ... ah ... well.”

“Are you comfortable?”

“Uh ... ah.” He shrugged his shoulders and back indifferently.

“Oh, Great Man, you’ll manage. You’ve done all right this year. And Hawaii was pleasant for you, wasn’t it?”

“Uh-ah.” He shrugged his shoulder again and waved his hand in a gesture of acquiescence. Then he became peremptory, pointing to the bedroom hallway and tilting his beaky Roman nose in that
direction.

“Are you tired?”

“Yes.”

As he swung his left leg onto the floor, I picked up his right and placed it beside the left. I slipped my right shoulder under his left and gripped his torso with my arm. One quick heave and he pivoted upright on his good leg, and we stumbled off to his bedroom together. The scene was not so different from that in which Coxswain Brown helped Lieutenant Bush gain the use of his new-made wooden leg.

The next Monday, March 28, Cecil had his checkup by his heart specialist, Dr. Bates, and showed no signs of any further deterioration. During Tuesday night Jean and I were awakened by a call from Dorothy, saying that Father was not well, and asking us to come down to their apartment.

Father lay in bed, breathing stertorously, his face battleship grey. He had been that way, said Dorothy, since eight-thirty, a long time, and she had not called the doctor. Jean did so immediately. Ambu-
lance, oxygen, heart specialist waiting at the hospital; all was done. Jean and I helped in his hospital room. I set up the suction pump as it was brought in, and held my father’s good arm and head while Dr. Bates fed the suction tube down his trachea to draw out the fluid that was filling his lungs. Three times we thought he had died as we worked over him that night. The third time, Dr. Bates called me into the hall and explained the relative risks of withholding further digitalis until the usual interval or of administering some now, three hours after the last dose.

“If that’s the lesser risk,” I replied, “why certainly. You should be in the best position to know. I understand the situation.” Dr. Bates signalled the nurse to prepare the syringe. I remained in the hall watching through the open doorway. Dorothy cradled Father’s head in her hands, covering it with kisses. This was the way he’d known that death would come, killing him by inches from toe to head.

Realism, he called his clarity of vision, though to some it seemed pessimism. He didn’t flinch, but
stared at death with a clear eye. Piece by piece his body and his mental powers had failed him. I could see one of his warships in my mind’s eye: battered by shells, she cannot maintain her course and speed, and turns out of the line of battle. Water rushing in through holes torn by shells, weeping in through loosened rivets and cracked welds, drives her deeper into the water. Communications gear shot away or burned by fire, she cannot report her plight but is left alone on the sea swept by her enemy. Electric power fails in compartment after compartment, even the soundpower phones fail. Guns fire sporadically, as a few courageous could manage to lead them by hand and the crazily swinging ship brings them into line with a target. Finally, one small incident, a ruptured bulkhead, a burst steam line, or the flash and acrid smoke as the power cable to a pump burns out, and all hope of maintaining stability is gone. She rolls over, propellers turning futilely in the air, belches out great gasps of air, and disappears.

He did not die that night. The second shot of
digitalis kept his heart circulating the blood that carried energy throughout his body; the water rising in his lungs was beaten down; in no further sections of his body did the electrical communication of the nerves fail. By morning he was asleep and past the crisis. Jean took Dorothy to our house, which was near the hospital, while I went to work.

He was moved into the intensive care unit and allowed visits of five minutes. From Wednesday through Friday, I visited him on my way to and from work. He was still exhausted, but he laughed at my comments and was obviously pleased to have company. Because Jean was a nurse, she was allowed to be there more often. She put on her best bedside manner and tried to persuade him to eat his meals, a touchy business because he didn’t want people to see that his handicap had made him a messy eater.

“You’re such a naughty man,” she smiled at him. “You must have been really terrible.”

What unwitting torture for him. What had this hard-hearted she-devil got hold of now? What had she discovered? What did she know? His eyes
opened wide.

“No, no.” He was so obviously agitated by these words that Jean immediately spoke to reassure him.

“Well, here you are. You know you were gone last Tuesday night, you were right up at the pearly gates, but the good Lord wouldn’t take you. He just turned you round and sent you back. You must have been a very naughty man.”

His eyelids crinkled and he laughed quietly.

“Yes.”

Then, very early Saturday morning he died in his sleep, between one routine check and the next, without a sign.

Though he had been failing for a long time, his passing tore a great hole in my life. A boy loves his father; the man he becomes no longer needs that love, but it remains part of the habit of time. Even those who rebel, and I too had my rebellious period, cannot leave that love. They must either accept it or fight it. Man is not made to ignore either his milieu or the family in which he is raised. Reinforcing that natural love was my father’s aura of infallibility, his
reputation as a man of parts, the trust that navies, governments even, placed in him, to say nothing of the general adulation which the average literary buff lay before him.

The formal procedures came next. I knew the routine; I had buried a daughter; so I steered Dorothy through it. Autopsy request: authorized. Notify the undertaker: done. Select casket: knowing my father’s convictions, not conspicuous. Arrange for service: Bob McLaren (the minister and minor author who had met my father at my house). Receive telegrams, then letters, mostly just received and put away for later. The first inquiries of the press: answered. Funeral itself: for me at least, inevitably a re-enactment of my daughter’s. When I stood up at its close and turned away from the casket, I was shocked. The church was empty, two dozen visitors only, all known to me. My daughter, at the age of four, had been so well known by adults, many of whom did not know Jean or me, for them to fill that church. For the Great Man, almost none. In case I had been asked to give some account of his death, I
had the dying warship comparison ready on my tongue, but I was not asked. Then the second round of press inquiries, insistent this time for solid information.

Of greatest concern was my father’s last work, which of course was confused with the final Hornblower story. My father had often enough said in public that he did not want to be in the position of Arthur Conan Doyle, who, having killed Sherlock Holmes as he struggled with Dr. Moriarty on the brink of a waterfall, was forced to invent a means of resurrecting him.

“So,” said my father, “while I have written the final Hornblower story, it is locked in my publisher’s vault as a legacy to my wife and sons.” I explained to one reporter after another the difference between that story, *The Final Encounter*, a short story only, and the unfinished novel, *Hornblower During the Crisis*. Naturally, the next question was whether *The Crisis* could be finished. Did anybody know how it was supposed to end? You know, now, that I knew the plot, and can guess that I felt competent to complete
the novel. If asked that question today, I would reply, "Yes, of course, we had often discussed plots and this one I know. I expect to finish it in three months." Then, I was loyal, and restricted my reply to, "The novel is far enough along that it would be possible to complete it." I was very conscious of saying this in an impersonal way, without any appearance of intrusion or arrogance. Naturally, I was asked again the inevitable question of whether I wrote, and at that time my standard, truthful, reply was "Only a textbook." If the reporters, or his readers, took my comment to mean that I could or would complete *The Crisis*, that was their inference, unjustified by what I had said.

Then there came the question of the will. Dorothy knew its contents, and knew that they must be disclosed. In the emotional storm of the week after my father's death, somehow, Dorothy warned Jean of the consequences.

"You don't know how John will take it; there's always bitterness with wills," she said. "I remember when my parents died, how bitterness flowed over
us all. I had looked after them all my life, and naturally, I was expecting the largest share. When their wills divided everything equally between we three we were thunderstruck. I thought I should get half, and (brother X) [I don’t know one brother from the other] agreed with me, but (brother Y) did not, so there it stuck.”

Because Dorothy did not feel competent to find the office of the executor alone, she asked me to drive her down to Santa Ana. The executor was the trust department of the Bank of America (which explained to me for the first time the persistent attempts of the “bank manager” to see my father in the months before his death. Dorothy had finally permitted an appointment, which was forestalled by the start of his final illness two days before the appointed time.) I drove Dorothy down and escorted her in. The trust officer was a woman. There was the usual introductory talk, then the first vital question.

“Since we now have to decide the proper procedure for handling this estate, do you know, Mrs. Forester, how large it is?”
Dorothy reached into her purse to remove a folded legal document. Handing it to the trust officer, she replied, “Safely over the three hundred thousand dollars mentioned in this.” I don’t know how I looked. I sat there dumbfounded at the confidence in such an enormous sum of money. I had bought a half-acre lot in a posh development and built quite a nice middle-class house for a total cost of $33,000. After all those complaints of having no money, after all the pretense of buying annuities to save him and Dorothy from a penurious old age and being a burden on me, there was wealth like that. I returned somehow to reality. The document was the Will, which the trust officer read.

“I must keep this copy for my files. For you, Mrs. Forester, I will run off a copy, and,” here there was a distinct hesitation as she read some paragraph again, “since you, Mr. Forester, are in the position that some possible residual interest might come to you, with your brother, I will also run off a copy for you.” When she returned with the copies it was obvious that her photocopier was not working. Among

1627
the blurred pages was only one good set, which Dorothy received.

“I’ll have a copy made for you when the machine is better,” the trust officer told me. “You’ll get it in the mail.” It didn’t come; a few weeks later I had to insist that I be sent my copy.

Almost immediately Dorothy became anxious to leave for England. “Father’s friends,” she told me, “are holding a memorial service for him at St. Martin’s in the Fields, which of course I must attend.” Unknown to me, Jean told Dorothy that I had some vacation time accrued, and that she thought that I would like to use it to attend the service. Dorothy’s reply was a tart rejoinder. “Wouldn’t he find it a little beyond his means to fly to England for only a day or two?” Frankly, I would have, but fortunately George had a business assignment in England which he was able to reschedule for the time of the service, so Cecil’s family was represented at the service. George made a point of saying that he

2. This was before Xerox machines were common.
was able to be present only because of his business trip, which outraged Dorothy the more.

Before she left, though, she divided up our father’s clothes between George and me. One item I received was a dark blue jacket by Pope and Bradley, Dover Street, London. The first time I wore it I found two letters in one pocket. Naturally, I read them. The first was without envelope, written in brown ink.

It was an amusing letter from a single London woman who had some contact with television production and literature, and who lived within a long walking distance of her two brothers who lived in Richmond. It was dated December 12, obviously of 1963. She referred to my father in an intimate way.

“Darling, I was so touched, and I may tell you so staggered, at your saying you worried about me.” Then she accepted the date that my father had proposed.

“Really, April the 9th — you mean I’m to put that down in my little red book if anybody gives me one? and all day? If so, I’ll give you a light recherche
lunch because I don’t like two restaurant meals in one day. But in the evening I shall have OYSTERS. A dozen, not six. I can’t have them here, too much trouble to open, & I haven’t had one this winter. Oh, but what nonsense, something will happen & you won’t come. Or if you do, I shall have scarlet fever and not be able to let you in. That’s about the only thing I missed as a kid, we had all the others — not pink-eye, though, you’re one up on me there.

“Yes, you’ve told me I’m a nice woman, & a more tepid and dull description, entirely unworthy of a distinguished writer, I cannot imagine. I’ll never sell your letters for anything worthwhile if you can’t do better than that. I don’t think you are a nice man, you’re an outrageous creature very often, but at least you aren’t like anyone else, I will say. Any more, I won’t say. Or not now.

“M”

What an amusing friend, I thought. And the old guy was going off to spend the day and the evening with her while Dorothy was elsewhere.

The second letter was still in its opened enve-
lope, addressed by typewriter to “C. S. Forester Esq.,/Hotel Sheriton Maui,/Maui, Hawaii,/U.S.A., without return address, but postmarked “Halifax, Yorkshire, 9 Dec. 1963” The letter was typewritten except for the final initial. It was dated Sunday, 8 December, 1963.

It was also from an English woman, obviously a schoolteacher. In the first paragraph she accepted a date for Thursday, 2 April, 1964, in London, in accordance with “all the ponderous details you put in.” She continued in a more intimate style than the first woman.

“I am not a bit envious of where you go or what you do — I’m only envious of time spent apart from you whether you are in Hawaii or Wigan. As I believe I’ve said before — December to me should be cold there should be frost and snow on Christmas Eve and the bells should sound on frosty air. Sunshine is meant for summer — did I sound envious in my letter, I hope not as envy is something I deplore, but I do want to taste the salt water on your skin one day; I should love to do it now, but truly I am not
“Dear, I know it’s only? 4 months now, but what months – the dreariest, hardest months of the year. I hope, with you, that they will go fast as I long for you so much, I am restless and just a little lost. Still, I’ve plenty of hard work ahead that will keep me hard at it until Christmas and next term I have exams in February and leaver’s exams in March. I just want to come to you as you want me to be, so I’ll try not to overdo it.

“So much love,
“B”

Well, this was something else again, and the combination was of far greater import. I sat at my desk in a state of shock mulling over the meaning of the letters. B’s was explicit, openly saying what might not have been intended in M’s. Obviously, my father had been setting up in December, 1963, his schedule for his next visit to England at the end of March, 1964, from which he had returned by freighter the last time I saw him whole. Whatever were M’s and B’s emotions about my father, for him
these were but casual affairs. There was no implication whatever that he was sacrificing anything to see either of them behind Dorothy’s back. Rather, the reverse, for he had written to both simultaneously; B’s return letter had been posted on the 9th, M’s dated the 12th, insufficient time for my father in Hawaii to receive B’s and write to M for her reply of the 12th. He had obviously given each of them a time, both Thursdays, April 2nd and 9th, expecting that they would be able to leave their employment to be with him. If they could, well and good, he’d enjoy himself; and if not, well, that’s tough. This was the man who had prated to me so often about truth and honesty, fair dealing and duty. My God, I was at a loss.

Then there was the will, obtained after much prodding of the trust officer. I sat down at my desk to read that, too. In outline it said: testator was Cecil Scott Forester, or C. S. Forester, or Cecil Louis Troughton Smith. He was married to Dorothy on May 3, 1947, at Croydon, England. He had two sons, John and George, by a previous marriage. The prop-
erty of the estate consisted of two types, that of present monetary value and that which might become valuable in the future (literary rights). Presuming that he died before Dorothy, and the estate was worth more than $300,000, the following 24 persons were to receive $1,000 each. The list was in alphabetical order, except for the last entry. (Kathleen’s name was positioned according to her maiden name of Belcher.) As I read the list I thought of each of those whom I knew.

Miss Charlotte Ballard: *I called her Aunty Lottie, old and penniless, but once my father’s mistress.*

Mrs. Kathleen Lynch: *Born Kathleen Belcher, his first wife, my mother.*

Mr. A. W. Clarke, Welwyn Garden City, England: *Old time friend, I used to stay with him and his family in England as a child. Often traveled with my father. Had visited California. Was an amateur photographer whose pictures I had seen.*
Lyle E. Cook: Father’s lawyer at the time of the divorce, now a judge.
Miss Sarah Cundiff: A Berkeley friend of my father’s — but I had never known of any special relationship.
Mr. Cyril George: Just a bridge-player — colorless, uninviting, why him?
John D. Hodapp: Well, he got something more than what he earned, what rotten luck.
Mrs. Laurance Meynell, Hyde End, England: Her stepdaughter, visiting Father in California, had described her as a minor actress.
Miss Ann Meynell, Hyde End, England: *Had visited both Father and me in California. She was sweet outside, but cold and selfish inside.*

Mr. John Moore, Kemerton, England: *Some kind of literary man my father had known a long time.*

Mrs. Beatrice Shave, Halifax, England: *Who? Halifax, Yorkshire? That’s the author of the letter from B.*

Mr. Will Shaw, Carmel, California: *One of my college friends, the man whose wife wrote the letter about being taken to Hawaii by my father on the excuse that Jean and I could not go.*

Mrs. Eleanora Sawyer, Berkeley, California: *Maid and cook from 1940 to 1964.*

Dr. George R. Stewart, Berkeley, California: *The professor, author of novels and other books.*

Mr. Potter Van Court, Berkeley, California: *Another bridge-player.*
Dr. F. Robert Whateley, El Cerrito, California: Another college friend of mine, an English graduate student in biochemistry, we used to cycle together. Now a professor. Another of those men with attractive domineering wives of whom my father was so fond.

Mrs. Dorothy Wiles, Guerneville, California: My mother’s hockey friend, who owned the cottage on the Russian River that we used to rent. More?


Mrs. Dorothy Bathurst, East Horseley, England: The secretary whose baby was born dead? What is this? Not in alphabetical order, either?

That list was a shocker, both for what it said and for what it did not. Apparently these people I’d never heard of meant much more to my father than people I knew were his friends. And my mother so listed – was this what my father meant when he had promised me that she would be taken care of? I went
on with the will.

George and me, or if dead our children, $5,000 each.

Mrs. Marian Pridham, Walton-on-Thames, England, or if dead her children, $5,000. Marian? Or her children, same clause as George and me? Walton-on-Thames, within a long walk of Richmond? Now no children at home? M of the other letter?

Dorothy all the rest.

As is normal, there was another clause giving the distribution if Dorothy died within six months of his death. All his papers to U.C. Berkeley. (But I had seen the arrangements by which Cecil and Dorothy had already been selling all of them to the University of Texas.) All property with some monetary value to be divided between the descendents of George Foster-Smith except George and me. All property with possible future value to George and me.

I was utterly shaken. The will had no congruence whatever to my relationship with my father, not
as I had seen it myself, for I could have been mistaken, but neither as he had described it to me. It was as if it were the will of somebody else; somebody I had never met.

Funny, Dorothy had been talking about a codicil to the will that Mrs. Bernal had added. There was no codicil here. I read it again, very carefully. Five thousand dollars appears to be the price of a son, right enough, and my mother, it looks like she’s left to the tender mercies of Dorothy, but there was no sign of this document ever having been revised. I’ve done enough document revision to know the signs when new paragraphs are inserted. This had been prepared straight off — one more lie from Dorothy and my father. When did he do it? 10 December, 1963. Neither my relationship with him, nor George’s either, was bad at that time. He must have instructed Mrs. Bernal about the 6th — yes, just the time he was writing the invitations to M and B.

What a farce! I went through hell trying to put the pieces together, trying to understand what this rejection meant.
In my agony, I wrote to Frances Phillips, who immediately replied.

“Have you no strength of character? Of course you were one of his favorite people; he always told me so. Your whining about being not loved is but the immature cover for unsatisfied greed. Besides, what have you to complain of when your father had already provided such a lovely house for you?” The house she knew was the one in Fullerton, paid for by Jean and me. Only then did I learn that my father had been lying about me and my affairs, and even that information was inconclusive. I could not estimate how prevalent his lies had been and was ignorant of the motive.

The revelations changed my demeanor. When I heard from George that Laurence Meynell had given the eulogy at our father’s memorial service in London, I laughed aloud. Laurence Meynell, eulogizing the man who had not remembered him, but had given both his wife and daughter substantial remembrances, for what I guessed were sexual services rendered. The satire of the scene, as if it had

1640
been used in a novel, amused my bitter state of mind.

Dorothy stayed away most of the summer. While she was away, her apartment building was burgled. No, it was not me this time. The burglar knew who was away, and went from one vacant apartment to another in one evening. The police, informed when the first victim returned, examined the other vacant apartments and notified me. Jean and I were asked to go down to see if we could guess what had been taken. The place was turned upside down, the contents of cupboards and writing desk scattered about. We looked for certain things we knew. Typewriter gone. Fur coat — not one remained in the closet, but three, more than we had ever seen Dorothy wear. Jean commented that Dorothy had two sets of clothes — those she wore for us and the swank ones she presumably wore abroad. Jewelry — we didn’t know what she had with her, so we couldn’t estimate what had gone. The desk had been opened and papers scattered about. Dorothy later
said a checkbook had been taken, but we didn’t
know that at the time. I picked up some of the stuff
to put it away. There was a letter to Dorothy from
A. D. Peters, father’s London agent, and friend.
What did he say about my father’s death? I read. He
extended his sympathy, said how much he was sorry
for her over her great loss, one that in a way he too
could understand because he had loved Cecil, too,
as man to man. Then the kicker. He wrote that John
has been quoted by the press as saying that he would
complete *The Crisis*. This must never happen. You
[Dorothy] must never let him have one look at the
manuscript but must get it typed and a copy sent to
England as soon as possible. Peters added that some
unfinished work of Cecil’s might be bungled by
someone else, a circumstances the dishonor of
whose happening must be avoided at all cost.

That letter shook me also, but I could not con-
sider it until later. The intensity of Peters’s state-
ments made me wonder the basis of his emotions.
What had my father told him to have this reaction
come out? The discrepancy between Frances’s reac-

1642
tion and Peters’s suggested that they had been told different stories. Surely, had Peters thought that I was one of Cecil’s favorite persons, he would at least have suggested that I be given a try, which could, after all, be rejected as incompetent if indeed it turned out so, without in any way detracting from the work that my father had done.

I had two acrimonious discussions with Dorothy about my father in the next year. In the first, Dorothy held my father up as a paragon, and I replied bitterly that he had not been. She replied immediately.

“You must not believe the gossip that his enemies throw at him. Every great man has his enemies, and their scurrilous gossip will say anything to bring him down.” In vain did I say that I hadn’t yet heard any gossip, that my information was based only on his own will and letters pulled from his own coat pocket. What could be more concrete? To this day I cannot tell if her denials represent stupidity or calculation. I know how ignorant she is in the simplest of matters; I had to calculate for her the 6% sur-
charge on her overdue property tax, but were she really sophisticated she would realize that consistent denial was almost a minimax strategy — complete denial prevented me from learning anything further.

In the second acrimonious discussion, Dorothy maintained that her ownership of my father’s estate was only temporary, that his instructions to her were that she should leave it to his sons who were the real ultimate beneficiaries. Her words to me were “in trust, morally speaking.” I couldn’t believe that. I had consulted a standard estate planner’s handbook, the kind of text that would be on the shelf of any attorney who dealt with estate planning. From that, I gathered that the cost saving in taxes and fees of the standard procedure of a trust fund for the widow distributed at her death to the children would have been between $20,000 and $50,000. My father, with all his complaints about income taxes and his carefully deferred payment schemes to reduce tax payments to the utmost, missing a saving like that? That, of course, was what the bank manager had been so persistent about just before my
father had died.

“Oh, no,” said Dorothy, “trust funds are so unreliable. Why I know a family who had all their money in trust, and because of one wrong word, just one, it was all taken from them and they hadn’t a penny. There was nothing they could do.” Well, after the milk is spilt it doesn’t do much good to say that the universal standard procedure that works well is to first replace the cap on the milk bottle.

I had the opportunity to call her bluff. I was offered a full time professorship, and I wished to see if I could build a consulting business from my expertise in statistical decision theory. I asked Dorothy to contribute the difference between an assistant professor’s salary and the start-up costs of a new business, maximum $7,000 a year for three years. “If I can make it in three years, it will have been well invested. If not, it will be completely down the drain.” Dorothy took time to ask advice of others, then replied that it would be too risky. “I never minimized the risks but it is no more than you now spend on traveling for pleasure, so it can’t be money
you need for security. Besides, by your own logic, it is my money, and I’m perfectly prepared to risk it now, when I’m young enough to make something of it.” But no, she would not.

During this time, Dorothy gave another example of both her opinion of me and the confusion generated by my father’s stories when she told Jean, “John was a very difficult boy. After all, look at his rebellion in not continuing at St. George’s.” I had graduated from St. George’s, I was acceptable to first-class universities, and I attended one of them. That is everything that a student in a college preparatory school is expected to accomplish, yet here again was the story that I had been supposed to have attended for at least one year more.

My mother wrote to me, remarking that it was entirely in Cecil’s character to include his mention of her in his will as “just another one of all those whores.” She went on to mention Marian Pridham, saying, “I don’t grudge her the money, there’s enough for all, for everybody knows she had a terrible life with her former husband and was a long
time coming out of it. As for Geoffrey, one can’t help feeling sorry for the poor bastard to have been mixed up in it.”

Jean tried to explain to Dorothy that I had not invented my suspicions out of nothing. Jean pointed out that the wording of the Pridham bequest itself raised suspicion, and quoted the lines from Kathleen’s letter to me. Just as she read the part where Kathleen was sorry for Geoffrey Pridham, poor bastard, Dorothy interrupted her.

“You mustn’t say that! You must never mention that because there’s not a word of truth in it! It’s not true at all!”

Startled by Dorothy’s vehemence, Jean dropped the subject. When she and I talked this over we realized that Dorothy’s complaint was not the Pridham bequest but the unintended inference that Geoffrey Pridham was Cecil’s bastard son. Clearly, Dorothy already knew as much, or had had other people’s suspicions already thrown in her face. How could she still remain ignorant?

Yet when she went abroad next time she left me
with her list of people to be notified in case she became ill: her eldest brother and Marian Pridham. That time she went abroad, I rifled her files myself.

I found the file of the literary contracts — they seemed about what I had expected, and I had then too little data to know which points I wanted to verify. Certainly, had I been the careful spy, I would have brought a camera and lots of film, but I had not. I found the investment records: one hell of a lot of stock, some bonds. Not much selling, mostly buying for the long haul, a buying history that went back to my father’s first years in America. In other words, to before those years when my father had been telling me that he had earned only one tenth of what people said, that he had to plan his expenditures very carefully, that he had bought annuities for himself and Dorothy so I needn’t worry about them becoming a burden upon me. I found the previous will, a pair in fact, one for my father and one for Dorothy, dated 1955. Each gave the other everything, and if they died together, my father’s estate was to be divided among his grandchildren. Such a
nice provision when his sons were aged 22 and 25! I found again the first letter Peters had written after my father had died, and a later one. In the later one Peters said how happy Dorothy should be that I was not causing any trouble, and that it was a blessing that George had not been heard from.

I found the watch given my father by Niven Busch in appreciation of his probity in keeping Niven’s money when Niven was going through a divorce. I verified the inscription and the date. What use had Dorothy for a man’s watch? I put it on my wrist and stole it. I have it still.

During a trip I made to the East Coast, I had my last meeting with Frances Phillips. Frances had not believed everything that Cecil had told her. When I mentioned that I thought that the estate was between one-third and one-half a million dollars (based on the will), she commented, “Is that all? In the business we thought it would be much more than that.”

“That is much more than I had ever guessed.”

“Really? How could you have made that mis-
take with Hornblower and The African Queen and all?”

“I believed what he told me. He carefully explained that the press reports were greatly exaggerated. His rule of thumb was that they added a zero, multiplying by ten.”

“You didn’t believe all that rot did you?” was her surprised reply. “Poor mouthing was always Cecil’s way. I knew better than to pay any attention to it.”

“You are criticizing me for believing my father. In whom should I have put greater trust? What better source of information was open to me?”

These conversations convinced Frances that I was “really a little touched,”³ as she wrote to the Liddell Harts. In other letters to them she described more. “Then the boys kicked up so—poor Dorothy. John came on and we had an evening, and he said horrible things about Cecil. So I asked him if he had

³. Frances Phillips to Sir Basil Liddell Hart, 5 Sept 1969
ever felt that way when Cecil was alive and he said no, he idolized him. I think this sweep of five thousand dollar inheritances cut John to the quick: I wish Cecil had left him six thousand. But I was not surprised. When the question of the University of Texas and the manuscripts I have came up I telephoned Cecil and told him that I had intended to leave them to John and George and would do so if he wanted it that way. He said: “Why? They have done nothing to deserve it.”

Basil Liddell Hart replied: “I can now understand why John and George had been upset and causing trouble, as we gathered rather hazily from Dorothy. Perhaps Cecil felt that they caused him so much trouble in the past and also that it might help to ensure their good behaviour to Dorothy, if he left her the bulk of his money outright, leaving her to divide it eventually. In what way have they been maligning Cecil?”

4. Frances Phillips to Sir Basil Liddell Hart, 3 Jan 1967

1651
As to that question, Frances replied: “I am so thankful now that I did not leave the manuscripts to John. I really could not repeat some of the things he said about his father: the mildest thing was ‘a mean bastard.’ Cecil’s niece, Kate, who is my illegitimate goddaughter wrote me the other day—she lives in Australia—that the letters she got from John were very bitter—it amounted to an obsession. She was very fond of Cecil. This is so bad for John and I’d be surprised if he doesn’t talk to his neighbors as well as to his family. He has this extraordinary notion that Cecil’s real nature should be ‘exposed.’ I’m afraid his mother has built it up; but it was Kitty who wanted the divorce to marry Lynch, as you know.”

I knew nothing about these letters until 1996, when Lady Kathleen Liddell Hart gave them to me. Cecil had told Frances for years that his sons were

5. Sir Basil Liddell Hart to Frances Phillips, 24 Jan 1967
6. Frances Phillips to Basil Liddell Hart, 31 Jan 1967

1652
troublesome and despicable incompetents who should have been drowned at birth, that they had done nothing to deserve the gift of any of his manuscripts. She had told me to my face that he was a liar and that I was a fool for believing his words. Also, she had been through her personal troubles with Cecil about the time he married Dorothy. Despite these intimations and contradictions, she attributed all my grief and anger to my not being willed much money, rather than to my realization of how much my father had lied to me and how different he actually had been from the man I “idolized.” Even so perceptive a woman, as Frances was, still believed Cecil’s stories rather than the facts.

Remembering that Dorothy had thought that my father’s estate was over $300,000, I consulted the court records. Final value, $762,000, of which $730,000 was in cash, government bonds, or listed stocks, and $30,000 in deferred royalty payments.

Dorothy returned to Berkeley to be with her Berkeley friends, taking an apartment on Oxford Street. I did not keep in close contact with her. How-
ever, when I next planned to be in Berkeley I called her telephone number to inform her. The number was not in service; she must have changed to an unlisted number. When I reached Berkeley I went to her apartment, but her name was not on the door. I knocked on other doors and asked questions. Dorothy had moved to England some months before.

My mother showed me the letters she had kept, and said that she was going to sell them to the University of Texas with the express proviso that I could have full use of them.

Jean’s mother sent me a newspaper clipping from England, a review by Bernard Conolly of *Long Before Forty*, headlined “What a young scamp was Forester!” It hurts, you know, to be the last to be informed of the publication of one’s father’s autobiography, and then by pure happenstance.

The University of Texas wrote to me that they had an unpublished autobiography of my father that they would like me to edit for them, for publication in their review. I replied that it may be the book published in England as *Long Before Forty*, but if they sent
me a copy I would look at it. I contacted Michael Joseph, publishers, about a copy of *Long Before Forty*, and was told the price and to send my money in the usual way. When I received it I saw that they had published *Long Before Forty* in the same form that the University of Texas had it, except that all mention of myself and most about my mother had been expurgated. All in all, I felt that I had been treated discourteously in this matter. The expurgated portions follow.

“There is no mention at all of my wife, whom I first encountered when I was in the thirteen-year-old coloured-sock-and-handkerchief stage and she was a tiny child who used to climb on my knee,⁷ and whom in later years I used to take out to lunch in grandfatherly fashion when she came up to town for her examinations. In those days there was only the barest suspicion of what was going to happen in the future. I could not foresee even dimly that not very

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⁷. Kathleen was four years younger than Cecil and her maximum height was not quite five feet.

1655
far hence lay the times when we would go crashing side by side down the rapids of the Loire, and go wintering with our child in Corsica; certainly I could not foresee the subsequent period when after years of knocking about Europe I should say to her “Look here, old thing, we’ve got twenty-five pounds to spare in the bank. Can you furnish a flat on that?” and she would do it, competently and comfortably and miraculously, as a penniless author’s wife should do; no author should ever marry a woman who cannot achieve miracles.

“The most efficient piece of work she has done to date perhaps is her arrangement regarding the arrival of John Forester. The ideal future which we visualized at the time under discussion comprised the following—one last winter of county hockey for her; then a summer motor-boat voyage through Germany; then a winter on the Mediterranean with our newly born son; and then another very modest motor-boat trip through English canals as long as the boy was not in need of artificial feeding. Working out dates, it was clear that to fit these in nicely

1656
John had to be born between the 1st and the 20th of October following the German voyage (if you plot out the sequence of dates you will come to agree with us). And John was born on October 7th, with the result that we passed two years of our lives exactly as we had planned at the beginning. She even got John’s sex right.

“That last placid motorboat voyage on the English canals is perhaps the most blissful memory of all. I have written two books about other voyages, but no book is possible about this one, for nothing went wrong—travel books are only interesting when there are dangers or difficulties. But through the glorious sunshine of May and June, 1930, we were steering a well behaved boat along lonely stretches of canals forty feet wide or so, with never a storm or a rapid to annoy us. Young John lay in his perambulator in the stern sheets, with the tan acquired in a Corsican winter rapidly turning to a solid mahogany colour. In the evenings he and his perambulator lay in the sunshine on the bank where the noise of the cooking of dinner on board would not disturb
him. And evening after evening there was a glorious sunset, at its very best at quarter to ten when I went to fetch him in for the night. He would lean against my shoulder and look round at the wonders of the world and say “Oo-oo” breathlessly until he remembered that it was time for his last feed and, changing his mind with a child’s rapidity, protested against further delay. So we came back across England to London, arriving at the beginning of July just as the weather broke, and, very neatly, two days before he had to change from a diet which it was easy to supply to one which could not have been prepared with any ease at all in a twenty-foot motorboat.

“But on the whole the years since the publication of Payment Deferred are still too recent to look back to with any perspective. And the history of the writing of one book is very like the history of the writing of another—to everybody except the author. But if ever it should happen that I write one entitled Soon After Seventy to supplement Long Before Forty I expect I shall by that time have devised enough lies to add pleasing touches of excitement.”

1658
A year or so later, my mother told me that she had found in the public library another recent For-ester publication, *The Man in the Yellow Raft*, which is a set of short stories originally written during World War II. In 1996, after the establishment of the C. S. Forester Society, I discovered that two other books had been published. *Gold From Crete*, another set of short stories written about and during World War II, appeared in 1971 in paperback. *The Shadow of the Hawk* was reprinted in paperback about the same time, under the title *The Daughter of the Hawk*.

I probably had not read *The Shadow of the Hawk* since childhood in England; it was a book that I thought that I would never see again, certainly not find in the United States. Reading it in 1996, after a

8. Cecil referred to this voyage in a letter to Frances, when his niece Judy Foster-Smith sent him a copy of *The Canals of England* by Eric de Mare. “The illustrations [are] perfectly wonderful ... a lot of them show places I went to with John as a breast-fed baby.” CSF-FP 9 November 1950

1659
copy unexpectedly appeared in my mailbox, was like reading it for the first time. As I read my father describing Dawkins’s relationship with his ward Nina, his words contrasted against all that I had since learned about his character. There he was, writing about the activities that I knew he had enjoyed so much, describing with such gusto the activities that cemented the relationship between parent and child. He knew how to be a good parent, just as long as the child was a girl instead of one of his own sons. There was plenty of evidence for that: Hilary Peters, aged seven or so, and Nadine Turner and Patricia Foster-Smith, aged thirteen, had been charmed and comforted by his attentions. For that matter, so had my mother, who had grown up in his sight from a tiny girl child who had sat on his lap, through a stage when he felt a grandfatherly interest in her, to an adult woman who caught one’s eye. Yet he could not bring himself to practice the skill that he knew with his own sons.

The information about the books published and reprinted after his death was largely sent to me
by casually interested strangers. I am, you see, no longer a member of C. S. Forester’s family, to be kept informed. I am openly as distant now as I was, secretly, when my father was alive.
In the months after my father’s death I mulled over what I had discovered. Obviously, I was seeing only a small part of the story, but it was equally obvious that the full story implied by this small part, whatever else it happened to be, completely contradicted the beliefs about my father with which I had grown up. I knew now that he had consistently lied to me. Well, many people tell fibs to bolster their self-esteem and to make them look better in the eyes of others. That is not good, although it is not true evil. However, I could now understand that many of those lies that he had told me were told me to serve his
own secret and selfish purposes. All those lies about his financial affairs kept me from begging from him, possibly a worthy result, but they also protected him from other beggars and enabled him to spend money secretly on his secret life without suspicion.

That business of burning letters under the excuse that some of them contained governmental secrets. Long after seeing him do that I had learned, by having a secret clearance because of what I had to know about our intercontinental ballistic missiles, how governmental secrets were actually handled. After finding the two letters in his jacket pocket, one explicitly sexual and the other implicitly so, and knowing that his story about governmental secrets must have been a lie, I assumed that sexual secrets were the reason for the secrecy.

He certainly had a secret life, a secret sexual life. I had long known about his pornographic library, material that was not socially acceptable, but I had never considered it dirty. I disliked the crude presentations of flagellation for the crudity of their presentation, not specially for their subject
matter, which was sexuality of a particular sort. Sadism would have revolted me; doing harm and causing pain is wrong, but these were not sadistic presentations. I agreed with the presentation of sexually explicit material in a sensitive way, or in a scientific way for that matter. Sex is a very important part of our lives, and it doesn’t do good to pretend that it exists only according to narrow social and religious precepts. However, except for the two years after his divorce (and before marrying Dorothy, although I didn’t know that at the time), I had never seen him lead what I would have considered a happy sexual life. In those years he courted reasonable women (even though nothing permanent resulted) and expressed his sexual desires in reasonable ways. When seeing a pretty woman on the street, he might say to me, “I wonder what she’s doing tonight?” On the other hand, those times might not have been so happy; none of those relationships lasted very long. The women may have seen enough to be warned, or they may have learned of his reputation. Ruth, the woman in California who had known him longest
(except for Kathleen), had rejected him for just that reason. At all other times, his discussion of the sexual side of historic or socially significant events with me was very discrete, as if he were talking to a class of schoolchildren, and when he talked with me of my personal matters (never of his) he exhibited prudishness. One can understand the person who is really prudish; however, my father’s behavior was that of the libertine who deliberately conceals his thoughts and behavior behind a screen of prudery. He had sexual secrets to conceal and he adopted secrecy both to conceal them and as propaganda to make people think that he would never think of doing such things.

After the divorce, he could have led a more open life and nobody would have cared. As far as I was concerned, that would have been eminently suitable, and I think that George would have agreed. As for the general public, few would have cared, and those who did would be as likely to approve as disapprove. However, my father deliberately chose a life of secrecy. He refused to conform to the rules of a
very moralistic part of society, rules whose moral basis he despised. However, since he also refused to be seen disobeying those rules he had no choice but secrecy and the lies that are necessary to support it. He not only lied to conceal his own actions; his lies clothed him with an air of respectability from which he was able to criticize as immoral the unconventional actions of people, such as my mother, who had far higher standards of morality than he had.

Those lies went back a long time; one set of lies was that about his early life. I remembered the difference between his *Long Before Forty*, with the supporting stories that he had told me but not published, and what I could remember of the account that his eldest brother had written. Then, to conceal the fact that he frequently told lies, he prated about the virtues of honesty, reliability, reputation, and the like, insisting to me that he was a reasonable, truthful, honest, modest, capable, understanding, and charitable embodiment of the Enlightenment.

His selfishness and his egotism may not have
been vanity; Lillian described his character as having either vanity or sense of inferiority. Whichever it was, he worried when he was writing autobiography that he was putting in too many I’s. He may have been worrying about disobeying good taste, or about telling too much about his secrets, or about disclosing something ridiculous in his character.

These were choices that he consciously made, but they were guided by emotions that had no conscious cause. The condition of his family could lead a sensitive child to dislike, to even hate, his parents. Having a drunken parent always puts great strain on family life, and for the Smiths that parent was their sole parent for eleven months of the year. Not all the children of George and Sarah Smith came to dislike their parents. The eldest, Geoffrey, was least affected, probably because the conditions did not develop until he was an adolescent. So far as we know, Hugh showed no signs of problems. His disappointment was in not being sufficiently brilliant to win a scholarship to Oxford or Cambridge after being trained for that improbable goal. His subse-
quent life, except for his war experience, was ordinary but satisfactory. Because so many men their age had died in the war, Marjorie and Grace had few marital prospects. Marjorie married and led a quiet life in genteel poverty. Grace, who was only two years older than Cecil, developed so much like Cecil that he told Frances that her bad qualities were Cecil’s seen through a magnifying glass while her brains were his seen through the wrong end of a telescope. She grabbed at an unsuitable marriage to get out of her parents’ house, and later made another unhappy marriage.

Cecil’s particular circumstances could lead a child who disliked and distrusted his parents to question his parentage and, in natural progression, to imagine a much grander ancestry. Those emotions were created not only by his drunken mother’s continual presence, but also by the contrast with the rare appearances of his father, who appeared annually in clouds of glory but, nevertheless, was incapable of controlling Sarah. Those emotions were encouraged by his complexion, darker than his sib-
lings, and by the apparent connection between his birth and his family’s fortunes. So Cecil grew to despise his nominal ancestors and at least one of his siblings, while at the same time hoping for a grander biological father. His sense of being alienated from his society encouraged him to spin comforting fantasies which served, in their turn, to develop his natural talent for storytelling. Cecil’s sense of alienation should not be exaggerated; it was only partial and personal. While he refused to obey particular moral precepts, he accepted and feared the authority of society in establishing those precepts.

Not believing in any god and despising the authority of his society, he saw little to criticize in the actions of the worst of Roman emperors. With sexual maturation, he chose his own precocious way. He had both long affairs with older women and short diversions in which he despised as whores the women whom he seduced while despising as fools those who ran after him. While he sought and read specifically pornographic books, he criticized the depiction of sexual acts in normal literature.
He was lazy, working only when forced. At Alleyn’s School he was forced; at Dulwich College he got by without much work; at Guy’s Medical School he simply did not work at all. He ended up writing because that promised him the freedom to live his own life whenever he was not writing. While he was actually writing, he hated the task and counted the number of his words to be done as intensely as any bored production-line worker counts the minutes remaining in his working day.

On several occasions he had bouts of deep depression, and he was always conscious of the dark side of his own nature. While he played the part of the reasonable man of the Enlightenment, he knew that within him were the Nietzschean emotions of the Dark Romantics who destroyed the Enlightenment, for he described those thoughts and described himself as madder than any hatter.

Cecil combined feelings of inferiority with egotism. He probably felt that he lived in a hierarchical world. Much of the society in which he had been raised despised him, or at least that is what he
thought. He might have been a bastard; his mother was a shameful drunkard; his family was impecunious; his schoolfellows bullied him. Only in imagination could he overcome the insults that he felt. However, rather than living only in an imaginary world, he was able to use his imagination to produce results in the real world. His imagination gave him the means to outsmart those who disdained him and to persuade those who could benefit him. He rose to considerable eminence, yet he could not erase the feeling of inferiority. At the half-way point in his rise, when he needed to ask a favor of someone he considered to be above him, he described his work as “wretched,” but was still careful to remind his desired benefactor that his work had been awarded a prize. Both at the bottom and at the height of his fame he worried that any literary reference he made to himself might be seen to be boasting, yet he desired that his self-praise be published so long as his authorship was concealed. His letters to those he thought his betters, and his advice to me about writing as a student for professors, show one side of his
character, while his letters about his friends and family show the obverse aspect; his strategy was fulsome flattery of his betters and disdainful criticism of his inferiors.

This same blend of vanity, egotism and inferiority showed in his relations with women and in his depictions of sexual relationships. In almost every sexual relationship depicted in his works, the woman controls the man, who generally accepts the subservient position. In *A Pawn Among Kings*, a woman causes Napoleon to make his military mistakes. In *Payment Deferred*, Mr. Marble’s range of actions is limited to a great extent by his wife and his daughter, and his hanging is caused by his wife’s suicide. In *Love Lies Dreaming*, Forester’s most social novel with more relationships than in any other, women control events and practically dictate to their men. In *The Wonderful Week*, Harold Atridge bumbles along, his character formed by a repressed maiden aunt, controlled first by landladies and then
by Marjorie into marriage. In *The Shadow of the Hawk*, although Dawkins thinks of himself as choosing to devote himself to Nina, his life is directed by that child-woman. In *Brown on Resolution*, Brown’s character that controls his actions is formed by his unmarried mother. In *Two and Twenty*, Cyril Leigh, the failed medical student, is restored through the physical, mental, and social efforts of his lady love, Lucia, who bears a strong similarity to Kitty in being a physical education teacher, a serious medical masseuse, and a leading hockey player. In *The Peacemaker*, Pethwick’s actions are motivated by his love for Dorothy, who is the stronger character. In *The African Queen*, Allnutt is an ineffectual wanderer who would have accomplished nothing without Rose’s determined leadership, which in turn had been formed by the older women in her family. While General Herbert Curzon leads on the battlefield, he is worried lest the character of his working-class aunt be discovered and he bows to his wife at home. Hornblower is first maneuvered into an unsatisfactory marriage by his future mother-in-law.
When Lady Barbara comes his way, caution and fear dissuade him. When both he and she are rescued by fate from their marriages, we don’t know which of them proposes, but Barbara takes the lead when Hornblower is ashore. It is clearly the Russian countess who seduces Hornblower, and while Hornblower seduces Marie, in at least the conventional sense, it seems that she has thought it all out before, and later, fighting against the returned Napoleon, she takes a very positive part. In each of the three sexually centered stories in *The Bedchamber Mystery* it is the women who direct the action and control the men. Chief Loa has several wives, and when he is taken by slave traders it is the one he least regarded who manages his escape and assists his establishment of a local empire. Randall blunders along with his life governed by blind fate, but blind fate is materially aided by Muriel, whose machinations first raise him to a pinnacle and then crash him into despair.

In each of the Annie Marble boating books it is Kitty who restores the motor to operation. In
France, it is her adjustment of the carburetor jet at the start that enables the motor to take them away from the pier in the rushing Seine, and in Germany it is her opening of the air vent to the fuel tank that enables the motor to keep going amid the waves of the storm-tossed lake.

Contrariwise, only two of Forester’s major characters are influenced by a father or male mentor. One is Captain Peabody of *The Captain from Connecticut*, driven into puritanism by memories of a father drunkenly quoting hellfire and brimstone from the Old Testament in the manner of Cotton Mather’s sermon about the sinner held by God’s hand over the flaming pit. The other is *The Good Shepherd*’s Commander Krause, whose father was a kindly but strict Lutheran minister whose good qualities shine through in his son’s devotion to duty and to God. Of all that crowd of characters, only one had had the benefit of a good father or male mentor, and in that case the plot demanded such an upbringing.

Forester’s writing reflected his opinions and actions in life. He felt dependent, or he chose to be
dependent, on women for the domestic necessities of life. We don’t know the nature of his relationships with the older women of his youth, but considering their ages it is likely that he received considerable mothering as well as sexual favors. Certainly, in his relationship with Kitty he had found someone who wanted to look after him in the way that he then needed. In Dorothy he found someone who would look after him in the different way he needed when his health was failing.

Feelings of dependency are associated with feelings of inferiority, and both generate feelings of fear that the support might disappear and suspicion to see whether that fear has any basis. Cecil worried that his mother and sisters were reading his mail, and that the women faculty members where Kitty taught were doing the same with his letters sent to her. Of course, years earlier a woman teacher had intercepted and read one of his letters to a different girl, with significant results. Cecil demanded that his mistresses burn his letters, just as he burned theirs. His relationship with Frances Phillips was
different; that was more egalitarian than his others. True, he asked for her literary advice, and he followed some of it, but then she was a well-known editor whose advice was valuable. How he treated his other women is largely unknown. Obviously, he made them happy to love him, at least at first, by telling them the kinds of things that they wanted to hear. Equally obviously, from the two letters that we have, he did not consider them worthy of working out their mutual arrangements on a cooperative basis; he presented them with take it or leave it propositions.

With his upbringing, Cecil could have been sympathetic to children, wishing that they received more loving care than he had had. He recognized such a situation, for he remarked that his brother Geoff was wonderful with children. His description of Dawkins’s relationship with his ward Nina shows that he knew and understood the skill of parenting. Indeed, there is plenty of evidence of Cecil expressing exactly that attitude, either hoping that some
child’s parents would treat their child better or comforting a girl child himself.

Yet when it came to children in his own family, he despised nearly all of them. To his own children he attributed low intelligence, laziness, lying, stealing, unsocial behavior, foolishness, sexual depravity, and he described them to Frances as having horrid genes. He raised his sons as if they were unintelligent miscreants. Once he knew that I might marry Jean Nicholson, he despised her daughter Carolyn. He despised his grandson Geoffrey. Only after his granddaughter Pamela had died did he express any love for her. However, he liked the first two of George’s children (the others were born too late for him to know), taking them to the Merry-Go-Round just over the hill in Tilden Park. He did not tell me of these trips, perhaps because he did not want me, who lived only a few blocks away, to know that he was playing favorites.

Just as with any normal person, Cecil’s personality and character were a mixture of several drives
and many emotions. The events and actions that formed and illustrated his character may be described in the following terms.

1. Family concerns
1.1. He despised his official parents.
1.2. He feared that he was the product of an extramarital affair by his mother.
1.3. He feared that the discovery of this affair would result in scandal.
1.4. He hoped that his biological father was a much grander person than his mother’s husband. Practically from necessity, that would be a prominent Egyptian.
1.5. He disliked having an alcoholic mother.
1.6. He and his siblings frequently practiced deception to conceal the scandal of their mother’s drunkenness.
1.7. Cecil expanded his siblings’ deceit about their mother’s drunkenness into a personal fantasy that encompassed the family as a whole, including his imagined biological father.
2. Deception

2.1. Cecil told the socially acceptable part of his fantasy, concealing the scandalous part about bastardy, in ways that persuaded his listeners that he was telling the truth.

2.2. Cecil extricated himself from several scrapes by telling elaborate lying stories.

3. Social Concerns

3.1. While Cecil despised his official parents, he, with his siblings, was brought up to believe that they, as professionals, occupied a higher social level than the families of workers and tradesmen who surrounded them.

3.2. The events of his life drilled into him the desperate lengths to which his family, and possibly others, went to preserve their class position and the respectability that justified it. Sufficient money was out of their reach. Intellectual attainment in a profession was one support that was significant to the Smiths, but the main support was being seen to conform, without a hint of
scandal, to the mores of a narrow, prudish, and hierarchical society. Perhaps they did not succeed in this, but in any case they tried extremely hard to produce the impression that they did.

3.3 The Smiths were not a religious family; they did not support their mores by claiming that those were ordered by religion.

3.4 Cecil early learned that some people, Roman emperors for example, possessed the power to do as they pleased despite the accepted mores.

3.5 Early in his school years, Cecil was repeatedly teased and bullied; his books dumped in puddles, his trousers torn off him, his clothes tied to railings, and he suffered at least minor physical violence.

3.6 Later in his school years he learned to resist bullying by becoming able to fight back as a member of the boxing team.

3.7 Still later in his schooling, he observed far worse bullying at a school that was supposed to have a higher social standing than Alleyn’s, but whose students were ignorant, hadn’t even the
knowledge to be elevator operators or truckers’ assistants. (They were receiving a classical education, not a scientific or technological one.)

3.8 All of these things taught Cecil to both despise the mores of his society, and also to know how important it was to be seen to conform to them. Obviously, he concluded that bullying was not the way to get ahead in society; he did not become a gangster. Instead, he decided to do what he wanted, to the extent that he was able, regardless of the mores, but to be seen to be conforming to the mores. Intelligent deception would both achieve his desires and would conceal the difference between his actions and the mores.

3.9 Because Cecil was conscious from his early years that he was very intelligent and could think rings around most people, he used that ability to manipulate them.

3.10 While in his later school years Cecil became too physically powerful to be bullied, before this occurred he probably adopted the other strategy
of the bullied victim, clever avoidance. This involves several types of actions: observing and detecting the moods of the bullies to see whether they were in the bullying mood; working out the motives of the bullies, so that either the bullying would not produce the emotional rewards they sought, or the rewards could be produced before the bullying started; talking one’s way out of being bullied by being interesting, by diverting attention, by providing alternate attractions, or other verbal strategies.

4. Other Personal Characteristics
4.1. Cecil knew that he was intellectually brilliant.
4.2. Cecil was a very interesting conversationalist. Friends have remarked that while one might not believe all that he said, it was all great fun. He knew how to entertain individuals or small groups; he knew how to tell people what they wanted to hear. His considerable success with women, long before the fame of being C. S. Forester assisted him, was based on this ability.
4.3 However, this ability was not sympathy; neither was it empathy in the common sense. He did not feel the emotions of his listeners; he and they did not develop the bond of sharing common concepts and emotions so that all could be enthused by shared words and events. Those with this ability frequently become salesmen, preachers, or politicians, and Cecil was conspicuously incapable of being any of these. All that Cecil had was empathy in the strictest technical sense: the intellectual understanding of the feelings and motives of others. As always, while such an intellectual understanding may be accurate as far as it goes, it is also likely to ignore large parts of the personality. Rather than being a bond between two individuals, it is more like the geopolitical analysis of one great power by another.

4.4 Cecil used this intellectual understanding to treat people in the ways that achieved his desires rather than to make them happy. Even when he simply wished to make a person happy, he often
failed because his action was not directed at the unrecognized wellsprings of the recipient’s emotions.

4.5 Cecil recognized that he was both selfish and lazy. That is, while he would work intensely on a writing project, he would never commit to the long-term responsibilities of a regular job, not even to train as a physician, a profession which promised some of the greatest freedom of all. If you want to gloss this over by calling it the desire for freedom and independence, then what he desired was only the freedom or independence that can be had with little work.

4.6 In line with his reluctance to do real work, Cecil skimped whenever he could. He produced the least length of each work that would be accepted in the marketplace and he wrote the least length necessary for the bare bones of the plot. Perhaps he could never have done better work than he did, but he certainly did very little rewriting and revision, which are the methods by which good work is done. Probably most of
his rewriting was done when he had got into difficulties with the plot and had to write a different story than what he had produced so far. That is not improving a given work, it is writing another one. Furthermore, he was not above lying to cover up defects in what he had done, as in the case of some histories.

4.7 As with his plots, Cecil’s literary characters are similarly shallow, but largely because of his merely intellectual understanding of their personalities. In order to carry out the plot, each character had to possess certain characteristics, which Cecil always supplied. However, because he did not have sympathy with his characters, did not have deep understanding of them as people, he did not, could not, write in the other quirks and idiosyncrasies that would have made them rounded personalities. Even the humaneness of Hornblower, his most beloved character, was nearly entirely demanded by the requirements of the plot. We don’t have to deduce this; Cecil explicitly claimed this in The Hornblower
Money was always tight among most of Cecil’s early social circle. While Cecil asserted that he could always manage his financial affairs, in fact in his early years he frequently begged loans from Kitty and from others. In contrast, he denigrated as dolts those others of their circle who had financial difficulties. The combination of early poverty, selfishness, and deception resulted in financial meanness toward others while he was willing to spend considerable money on his secret life, but as unobtrusively as possible.

5. Sexual Concerns

5.1. Puberty brought with it the normal sexual desires, which Cecil tried to satisfy in his own unconventional ways. He climbed into a tree to peek into a girl’s bedroom window but escaped punishment by telling the ridiculous story of his walking stick entangled in its branches.

5.2. Cecil became involved in what became a series of affairs with older unmarried women.
By the standards of that time and society, those had to be kept secret. There is no evidence that his sexual drive was much stronger than average; his precocious intellect, his way with winning words, and his unscrupulousness, together with the wartime shortage of more eligible men, won his way for him.

5.3 With girls of his own age he was probably more conventional, but he inveigled Kitty into delivering a note to another girl in school. The note went astray, was read by a teacher, and produced an uproar resulting in the dismissal of the girl from school.

5.4 These events, together with his disdain for the conventional mores and the lengths taken to appear to follow them, convinced him of the prime necessity of absolute secrecy in sexual matters and therefore of the absolute need, in his opinion, for stealth and deception when participating in them.

5.5 Of course, the sexual affairs in which he chose to participate were those in which stealth and
5.6 His practice of deception in sexual matters lead to morbid fears that he and his partners were being spied upon. Hence his requests to Kitty and to Frances (the only such correspondents we know about today) to burn his letters, and his practice of burning all his sexual correspondence, his fear that his mother and sisters (even when he was over twenty-five) were secretly reading his mail, and his practice of addressing even normally expected letters in disguised handwriting.

5.7 Both of his marriages were secret. There are some excuses for the secrecy: regarding Kitty, married women were not eligible to be schoolteachers - so he said; Dorothy’s parents needed to be kept ignorant so that they would continue to depend on Dorothy as their housekeeper, so he said; Dorothy herself thought that thereby she would get a larger share of the inheritance. However, the degree of secrecy was in excess of
what was required to attain the ostensible goals, and in each case it let Cecil carry on other affairs.

6. Relationships With Children

6.1. Cecil’s experience of systematic school bullying, both as recipient and as observer, inclined him to dislike and distrust boys in general.

6.2. Cecil probably had few lifetime male friends. He boasted of a few friendships with boys that lasted a lifetime. One of these was Bill Clarke, of his own age and school. The other was Sydney Clifford, but who was actually Geoff’s age and friend, and whose father bankrolled Geoff’s education and medical certification. Cecil seemed never to have been special friends with Kitty’s brothers, even though it was through them that he met her and even though he made her mother his surrogate mother.

6.3. Cecil knew his own faults, witness his confession to Frances that he was “madder than any hatter you have ever met.” He believed that the bad characteristics of his family would be inher-
mented by his children, witness the “they have inherited horrid genes” remark. Sure, his children had half of their genes from Kitty, but since Cecil never criticized her side of the family in the way that he did his own side, it is reasonable to believe that he meant that the genes in question more likely came from his side.

6.4 Cecil knew how children should be treated, witness his description of the relationship between Dawkins and Nina, and his success with three female children: Hilary Peters, Nadine Turner, and Patricia Foster-Smith. For that matter, he had success with Kitty when he first knew her, or she would never have married him later. The relationships were not sexual. Even with Kitty, he did not attempt even petting until she was sixteen and he nineteen, as she told me and as the evidence of their first letter shows. While the relationships were not sexual, gender certainly entered into it; parents usually treat girls and boys differently. Perhaps his emotions were motivated by the promise of future
womanhood, or perhaps it was merely that they were not despicable and bullying boys, or a combination of the two.

6.5 However, Cecil would not use his parental skills with his own sons. Presumably this refusal was caused by a combination of several factors: they were boys, they were not girls, they were of his own family, and one of them exhibited similar adverse traits to those that he recognized in himself.

Cecil’s younger son, George, possessed many of the characteristics that Cecil knew about himself. My younger brother, when young, was a smiling liar who got himself into, and talked himself out of, a string of minor scrapes and one major one. In school before college, he selected the minimum curriculum and did the minimum work that would get by. His college career was a bit odd as well. All his life he has promoted a string of ill-considered financial schemes that he thought would bring him much money, but none ever did.
I did not have the characteristics Cecil attributed to me. Certainly, I was probably more sexually active than the average of the times, at least among the educated, but I did so in the context of love. Certainly, I did not exhibit polished behavior; the several conflicting social and intellectual standards to which I had been exposed had caused me to doubt the absolute verity of any one standard, but I had intellectual honesty and I tried to act with reason and kindness. I turned out to be far more the kind of person whom my father had lectured me to be than the person he feared I would be, or like himself. My career shows that I am bright and hard-working, though I admit that I work much harder at tasks I like than those I don’t. I am particularly suited to tasks of intellectual scrutiny, and I tell the results of my analysis in clear and unambiguous terms. Foolishness? I admit to just as much as is normal.

In so many ways that I remember, my father had been mischaracterizing me in the same way that he had failed to understand Nelson’s character when
writing *Lord Nelson*. The most obvious is the failure to recognize that producing a result that upsets society and angers superiors may be far more the result of the desire to do the best job possible than of the desire to irritate or show up those people. Because Cecil had spent so much of his life keeping society and superiors ignorant of his socially unacceptable acts, when others performed proper acts that, because of the maladjustments of their times, produced socially controversial results, he thought their strongest motivation was to stir up the controversy rather than to perform their tasks as perfectly as possible. Satire has this function, but few of us are satirists.

The irony of the situation is that when I turned out to be far more like the person whom my father had lectured me to be, and acted in accordance with his precepts, he then reprimanded me for my foolishness and gave me the only two pieces of psychologically genuine advice (from his viewpoint) he had ever provided. That is, one, nobody will find out and criticize what you do with a woman as long as
you never do it in her bedroom and, two, write whatever your professor wants to be told.

My father’s actions and attitudes affected my relationships with my mother and my brother. From their earliest days, Cecil had considered Kathleen to be coarse, unrefined, poorly spoken, insufficiently respectable, below him in many ways. His letters criticizing her and the ways of her family and friends show those attitudes. It is more accurate to say that Cecil, who knew that his circumstances and actions warranted far stronger criticism, achieved a veneer of high respectability and morality while Kathleen, who was honest and comfortable about her circumstances and in her actions, did not bother to put on such a display.

I did not hear my father criticize my mother until the divorce, although I heard my parents in lengthy arguments over several periods. I now know that the first one followed the lice incident, while the last one was for the year before the divorce. For much of that year they had horrid arguments, but I
did not pay attention to their content. I hid out at the house of my friend Tom Lewis to avoid listening to them. Then, after they had announced the plan for the divorce, my father started to criticize, to me, my mother’s immorality and her foolishness in behaving immorally with an ineffectual slob like Neil. Even at the time, I did not agree with his evaluation that my mother’s behavior warranted the label of immorality, but the criticism still left scars. I did not like Neil, if only because he was dragging my mother into poverty. I thought a man should be able to support his family, and Neil could hardly support himself and showed no inclination to do what he once had had the talent to do. I disliked that poverty when I shared it during visits. It was not until ten years later that I was able to enjoy my mother’s company again, and at about the same time I started to appreciate Neil’s gentleness, his level of thought, and his equanimity.

My brother, George, and I have very different characters; under the best of circumstances, we
might not have remained close. I remember us playing imaginative games in close friendship as late as the year when I was thirteen and he was ten. Then our interests naturally diverged for several years, to partially rejoin when George also became interested in girls. On occasion we double-dated, although largely only when I was able to drive while he was not. Before George and I went to St. George’s, I do not remember my father telling me anything particular about his opinion of George. Neither can I remember him doing anything that would encourage us to be brothers together. On occasion he organized us as a working party, as when, during the war, we went out stealing eucalyptus trees from empty lots for firewood. However, that was for his convenience, not for our own good. Later, from the time of St. George’s, all of my father’s words to me about George were adverse criticisms. He told me once or twice that I was responsible for George’s educational misfortunes, but more often he desired my support in counteracting what he described as George’s misbehaviors. For these and for other rea-
sons, George and I have never since been close.

How then did C. S. Forester achieve his limited degree of success, both socially and professionally? Whether his audience was a desirable woman, or a social group, or the paying readers, he told them what they wanted to hear. He cared little for nearly all of them, so he was not burdened by telling them the truth or by acting honestly toward them. He was sufficiently perceptive, sufficiently cynical, and sufficiently complex, with his blend of rational reason and irrational emotion, to understand what they wanted to hear. Whether orally or in writing, he had the skill to entertain. He used that skill liberally for the results that entertainment would produce: seduction, protection, or money; but he rarely used it to educate, illuminate, or inform. He was not an artist, merely a very competent craftsman and persuader.

Part of Cecil’s success, and a considerable part of his reputation, was based on his wide range of knowledge. Although his breadth was wide, his
depth was shallow. At Alleyn’s he had been given a scientific secondary education that probably lagged some years behind the engineering of the time. However, Cecil misunderstood basic physical concepts such as the difference between momentum and energy, and how the linkage between electricity and magnetism worked both ways. The first of these goes back to the early days of physics, certainly as far as Newton, while the second goes back to the work of Henry and Maxwell sixty years before Cecil’s time. Cecil had little knowledge of the industrial processes and engineering designs of his time.

Cecil was most renowned for his knowledge of the seamanship of the sailing navy. He knew the big

1. In *The Ship* he wrote that the gun’s recoil and the shell’s velocity had equal energies. They have equal momenta.
2. In *The Peacemaker* he failed to recognize that a machine that disabled the spark coils of gasoline engines would also disable the power transformers within its field, causing them to short out in sheets of flame.
picture, such as the difficulty of making distance up wind and the advantages of crossing the enemy’s stern, but his numerous errors in the details show that his knowledge was at the observer’s level rather than the seaman’s level. 4 Even when he had a superficial understanding of the concept, his weakness in understanding the physical principles underlying it produced errors. 5 The level of Cecil’s knowledge in

3. He wrote that the *African Queen* had a water-tube boiler, when all boats like her used fire-tube boilers. He wrote about oxy-hydrogen cutting and welding equipment when oxy-acetylene was universal, being both better and much more convenient.

4. In *Commodore Hornblower* he made several errors in seamanship, such as dropping anchor without coming up to the wind first. In *Hornblower and the Hotspur* his orders for tacking ship would have prevented the ship from tacking at all.

5. Such as moving weights aft in the *Hotspur* to make her turn into the wind more easily, which is the wrong direction to achieve that result.

1700
physical science and its practical application was sufficient to produce the appearance of knowledge without the accuracy or understanding that would be necessary if he had to use that knowledge.

Cecil’s books had strictly limited plots and casts of characters, more like long short stories than novels, and he had trouble making his novels long enough. There was none of the joy in describing people possessed by the great novelists. He wrote into his books only those characters who were necessary to tell the story, and generally limited his descriptions of them to the characteristics that the plot required. While Cecil had a utilitarian knowledge of what interested people and how to attract their interest and what motivated them, a cynical psychology if you will, he was not really interested in them as people.

Perhaps the popularity of the Hornblower series, which is the bulk of his literary work that is still remembered, is due to two reasons beyond the excitement of the action. The first is that the leading character contains so much of what Cecil himself
wanted to be that he wrote more character into the part. The second is that in writing a series of tales about one character in a sequence of composition that differed from the sequence of fictional time, he was forced to pay particular attention to the psychological characteristics that would cause the events to occur, to the psychological development that would result from the events, and to the psychological characteristics necessary for future events that he had already described.

In any case, Cecil’s literary success was due to his ability to tell a story of events that attracted interest and developed suspense and made the reader want to read what happened next. What would happen to William Marble? What would The Gun do next? How would the British cruiser squadron containing HMS *Artemis* deter the Italian fleet? These were the questions in the minds of the readers of those books. *The African Queen*, Cecil’s book next in popularity to the Hornblower series, was the story of a dangerous trip taken by an unlikely pair of people. “Would Rose and Allnutt survive their trip
down the river?” was an important question in the readers’ minds, but just as important was the question of how these people of incompatible upbringings and philosophies could learn to work and love together. Cecil tried to describe both Rose and Allnutt in personal detail, and he told this story from the woman’s point of view, but even so Rose is not a fully-rounded character. She was supposed to be as narrow-minded as the people of Cecil’s youth, but even narrow-minded people have sides as well as fronts. As Kathleen remarked of the scene when Rose accepted Allnutt’s embraces, “Aren’t Cecil’s women characters simply awful?”

Another of Cecil’s literary attributes was a wide historical knowledge of the eras about which he wrote. However, this was not the systematic knowledge of the historian but the scattered knowledge of the enthusiast. He often had to piece together a scattered collection of facts and memories of what might be facts to produce his picture of the time. But that was his peculiar ability. He was able to take a few facts and work them into a story
that conveyed whatever he wanted to convey, whether that was a story written for money or a story told to excuse an action or to seduce a woman.

Cecil’s forte was telling an adventure story, often with supposed historical significance, with just enough characterization to demonstrate that it described the actions of people whom the reader might recognize, and with plenty of contemporaneous detail carefully arranged, not necessarily accurately, but to present a convincing picture of that world. On occasion, he also used that skill for other ends. He foresaw the danger of Nazi Germany and wrote several books that had the subsidiary purpose of encouraging resistance against it. Once war came, he devoted several years to public information work with that direct purpose.

Some may think this an unfair evaluation, but I think both the documents and those people who knew him best support it. Frances Phillips told me, after his death, that his illness changed his character, that he was no longer the happy person that he had been. That may be so, but she did not meet him
until he had attained moderate success; his early letters show at least as much unhappiness as the later, although it must be admitted that they were written under less happy circumstances. Kathleen did not go into details about her understanding of his character, but she told me the facts that she knew. Of those who knew him when young, Lillian probably best understood his personality, and she knew him in later life also. In 1950, she described to Kathleen her understanding of Cecil’s character.

“I know that you don’t agree with me that C’s mind is affected by his illness, but I am convinced that it is. I do not mean that I think his brain is less brilliant or his mind less penetrating, but his vanity (or sense of inferiority) is increased to such a point that he cannot and will not see any view but his own, and all who offend his vanity must be punished and cheapened both in his eyes (which makes their ideas of no value) and in their own (as a punishment for daring to think like this). It is this aspect which has upset me so badly. I don’t want to think ill of C. I want to believe him kind and generous,
but I also want to face the truth. It is good of you to
tell me so much. It has been very helpful to me and
enabled me to fit the pieces into place so I can put
this horrible jigsaw [puzzle] away almost finished. I
have never doubted your truthfulness. That is the
trouble with Cecil. One sometimes doubts when one
should believe, because one is not sure if he is just
playing cat & mouse. When he came to England in
‘46 I was too tired to stand that sort of thing, and
maybe I reacted a little oddly. I too have pride, but I
have lowered it to try and wipe out misunderstand-
ings.”

After Cecil had died, Lillian again wrote to
Kathleen about Cecil’s will. “My first reaction was
surprise at the boys being left out. Then I remem-
bered a conversation I had with Cecil sometime
between 1936 and 1939. He said then, much to my
surprise, that if he had money he would not leave it
to his children. ... this awful clause in the will
whereby if Dorothy does not live six months the
money will go to the Smith family. Cecil cannot

6. Lillian to Kathleen, February 1950

1706
know them well and in any case why not his own family?”  

I did not read either of these letters until 1995, long after I had developed my opinions about his personality. Lillian’s two letters, written sixteen years apart, both say that Cecil’s character remained consistent from when she knew him well, say in his twenties, until his death. She writes that his vanity and sense of inferiority increased over the time of his illness, but to know that they had increased she must have first recognized them when they were engaged and lacerated each other’s soul. Her description of vanity and sense of inferiority agrees with my evaluation that he was ashamed of his ancestors but imagined that he had sprung from greater stock, and that he feared that his descendants would be as bad as his ancestors, and therefore would shame him in turn. This combination of shame and vanity leads to many other characteristics, lying for example, which is but one aspect of

7. Lillian to Kathleen, May 1966

1707
mistreating others to suit one’s own vanity. Lillian clearly describes Cecil as one who enjoyed lying for its own sake and regardless of the pain it caused others. As far as lying to suit his other purposes is concerned, the record is full of such instances, even if Lillian did not recognize such behavior.

When I read, to Nadine, Lillian’s description of Cecil’s character as combining vanity with a sense of inferiority, Nadine replied, “That’s it, exactly!”

When Kitty saw Lottie Ballard for the last time, when Lottie was in her nineties, Lottie told Kitty that, of course, Cecil had told her that Cecil’s family didn’t want her to marry Cecil. Lottie clearly understood this to mean that his family felt that Kitty wasn’t good enough for Cecil, that her accent was too lower-class, that she was a common little girl. Kitty’s long laughter puzzled Lottie. Kitty was thinking that this was just another fantastic example of Cecil’s mendacity. In answer to Lottie’s puzzlement, Kitty said: “That’s absolutely true. But what you don’t know is that his family were thinking of me
and how unhappy he would make me.”

Ruth, who knew Cecil at close range from 1938 to 1945 and continued to be a friend until his death, has read this book in substantially final form. She said that it needed only a very few corrections of particular facts (such as, when we first traveled to San Francisco, my mother went by air to meet my father and only Ruth, George and I traveled by train). Besides those minor corrections, she contributed several details unknown to me that explained incidents that I did know. She agrees that the character that I have drawn of my father is that which she came to understand.

Cecil’s eldest brother, Geoff, did not describe his brother’s character, only a few of the events in his life, but insofar as those events bear on the question of Cecil’s character, both the events themselves and Cecil’s lies about them support my thesis. Whatever Geoff really thought about Cecil’s character he kept to himself, so far as I know.

All of these descriptions of Cecil’s character came from women. That is not surprising; Cecil
devoted much of his time and character to women. I doubt very much whether any of Cecil’s male friends, even those like Bill Clarke or Sydney Clifford who were friends from childhood, really attained much insight into his character. Peculiar, isn’t it, when you consider that while Cecil wrote well about men his writing about women was very shallow. Well, although Cecil was attracted to women he tended to use them rather than love them. Lillian, Kathleen, and Ruth all finally rejected him for that. Nadine was not old enough to be used; she was the exception, both in circumstances and in her memories.

I do not know what Frances finally felt about him. Obviously, she was his mistress from time to time. Equally obviously, she was extremely hurt by him about 1947 (perhaps about his secret marriage to Dorothy) but was reconciled later. She also had her own career in which she did extremely well. She may well have accepted him on his own terms while knowing some of what he did elsewhere. In her conversation with me after his death, which was my last
contact with her, she scolded me for thinking ill of him and told me that I was one of his favorite people. Considering that until the last two of his writing years he had described me to her in most unflattering terms, could she have believed that? I wish that I had maintained contact with her; not only for information, but because she was an exceedingly nice lady. Unfortunately, our circles and our locations were so different that we had no opportunity to easily re-establish the friendship that was once between us, not across the barrier that the information produced by Cecil’s death had erected. I often wonder what would have happened had Cecil married her; but since he would not have reformed, I shouldn’t even wish that upon her.

Cecil’s character was paradoxical. He prated honesty, but lied whenever doing so gave him an advantage. He made people think well of the family from whence he came, but that he despised. He thought that the children of other people deserved loving care, criticizing their parents for not providing that love, while treating his own children as
unintelligent miscreants whose existence burdened his life. He despised his ancestors and feared that his descendants would be as bad. He pretended to be modest, while insisting that his opinions overruled all others. He pretended to the reasonableness and rationality of the Enlightenment, while within him raged the passions of the Dark Romantics. He asserted the high value of society’s rules, while disobeying those that hindered him. All of us have contrary sides to our characters, but he had more than most. Unlike most of us, however, he possessed the ability to invent the stories that made people believe the best of him, whatever he actually had done or planned to do. Such was the life of C. S. Forester, the novelist, The Great Man, the storyteller.
There has been only one other serious study of For- ester and his works. In 1979 or 1980, I was contacted by Sanford Sternlicht, a professor in the Department of Theater at the State University of New York at Oswego, who said that he was writing a biography of my father. I told him of the information that was in the then current version of this book. Sternlicht’s book was published in 1981, but I did not know that and I did not see a copy until 1996. The book is one of a series of instructional books (Twayne’s English Authors) intended for high school and junior college students. It is not a biography, but a literary appreci-
ation with only a summary of its subject’s life. Sternlicht has read all of the works; he summarizes each of them, describes the plot, merits, and defects of each, and Forester’s growth in skill and technique, and gives a careful, although perhaps overly favorable, appreciation of the whole. His comments about the books provide many insights that are suited to the level of the books. Considering that Forester generally chose to write popular novels without the intention of providing a universal philosophic view, these comments are as much as is needed.

I disagree to a small extent with some of Sternlicht’s conclusions about the books and the shape of the literary career, but these are matters on which reasonable men can reasonably disagree. Sternlicht concludes that Forester’s works before 1936 slanted toward pacifism, with an “antiwar, antiofficer” attitude, as did the opinions of many in the 1920s and 1930s. In discussing Brown on Resolution, Sternlicht shudders that a person with Captain Saville-Samarez’s limited view would be promoted to admi-
ral. However, Forester’s description of Saville-Samarez reflects the expert opinion of the time. Before WWI, Winston Churchill had remarked: “There is a frightful dearth of first class men in the [admirals] lists.” After the war, ten years before Forester wrote *Brown on Resolution*, Churchill wrote: “We had competent administrators, brilliant experts of every description, unequalled navigators ... but at the outset of the conflict we had more captains of ships than captains of war.”¹ However, Sternlicht correctly notes that Captain Saville-Samarez is the forerunner of General Curzon of *The General*, written in 1935. Sternlicht concludes that “War, Forester evidently believes at the time, consists of innumerable small actions of individual human beings, which ultimately determine victory or defeat despite the plans of great leaders.” Sternlicht has missed the point that the great leaders of the prewar British

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¹ Quoted in; Keegan, John; *The Price of Admiralty: The Evolution of Naval Warfare*, p107; New York, Viking Press, 1988
Navy had invented, designed, and perfected ships of the type of Saville-Samarez’s ship *Leopard* precisely to catch and sink German ships like the *Ziethen*, they had trained Saville-Samarez just as they had trained Leading Seaman Brown, and the present leaders had dispatched Saville-Samarez on his successful chase. The book praises both Brown’s devotion to duty and the success of the naval system that makes the successful chase possible, despite Saville-Samarez’s limited view. There is another reason for Forester’s description of a typical naval officer: the plot demanded that he be a rather uninteresting person.

Although the naval actions of *Brown on Resolution* are entirely fictional, they reflect actual actions, the battles of Coronel and the Falklands. Because the actions were fictional, Forester did not have to play the game of pretending that the actions of his characters did not change history. That is what was required of *The Gun*, *Death to the French*, and *The African Queen*. By the time of *The General*, the fictional battle of Volkslaagte is just one of innumerable such
encounters in the Boer War, and the Western Front of WW I is so enormous that any character can be said to do anything, except win the war, without changing history.

Neither is *The Peacemaker* of 1934 evidence for Sternlicht’s thesis, and Sternlicht describes this book, correctly, as anti-pacifist. This is a science-fiction story about the inventor of an airplane-stopping ray, a frequent subject of the conjectures of the time.

In *The Happy Return*, Forester told a story that depended on Hornblower’s failure to influence history, and therefore on the failure of individual actions. The plot was admirably suited to Forester’s pre-existing technique, in that the inability to influence history made possible the irony that Forester liked.

Therefore, I disagree with Sternlicht’s thesis that Forester’s earlier works showed a pacifist tendency, or that they showed that Forester felt that wars were won by juniors despite the plans of generals and admirals, until the writing of *The Happy Return* in 1936.
Sternlicht’s other major thesis concerns Forester’s world view. He describes *The Sky and the Forest* as “a triumph of despair,” and characterizes Loa as “Forester’s Everyman. He is vain, ignorant, selfish, cruel, superstitious, and lazy. Yet he can rise to noble stature ... meeting death with courage and dignity.” In discussing *Randall and the River of Time*, Sternlicht writes: “As in *The Sky and the Forest*, Forester’s view of human destiny is highly deterministic. Randall, like Loa, is a prisoner of his culture and the force of history of which he is a mere molecule in flux.”

Sternlicht’s book is no longer in print and the publisher doesn’t want to print any more. Therefore, I quote much of the last page in which Sternlicht discusses Forester’s philosophy.

“Forester’s philosophical novels are not great works of literature. He wrote them as a middle-aged man who had seen, understood, and written about much war and economic upheaval, and he wrote them after a lifelong study of history. His thought and his work led him to a philosophy of history that
was partly historical determinism, partly economic determinism, and partly natural selection. Loa, representing primitive man, and Randall, representing modern civilized man, are both presented as chess pieces in the great, unending game of human destiny referred to retrospectively as history. They feel from time to time that they have the power of decision, but in reality the choices they make are predetermined by their culture, their character, and their history. Furthermore, at any given time in their brief lives, great forces are at work such as Colonialism, Imperialism, Fascism, Communism, Evangelical Christianity, and many others. They roll over mankind. They overlap and interlace. Men and women, great and small, are caught in the currents of history, never fully realizing what is happening to them.

“It’s a pessimistic philosophy. The only optimistic note is that from time to time men and women rise above circumstance, as if they were thrusting head and shoulders out of the river for a brief moment, to perform acts of courage or gener-

1719
osity or intelligence or creativity or love. These acts are surprising because they occur so seldom and are so difficult to do. If life on the surface was very rich for Forester in this period of his work, his mind, nevertheless, was dwelling on the darker side of human experience. Life for Forester was merely a part of the continuum of the existence of the universe. It was not, however, progressive, and the future would seem to offer little hope that mankind would be able to deal more successfully with his ever more complex environment than he dealt with his simpler immediate or remote past.”  

I agree that Sternlicht’s conclusion is an accurate description of my father’s world view. It is, also, a fairly accurate description of the world that exists. The past has great influence on the present, and both have on the future. Presuming that one eliminates the supernatural, either witches or gods, what else is there? One thing missing is the joy of living.

2. Sternlicht, Sanford V.; C.S.Forester; p 141; Twayne, Boston, 1981
We are built to enjoy life; that is in our nature. Because we enjoy life, we strive to perform enjoyable acts. For us, sociable animals that we are, part of the joy of living is in social activities, social admiration, and doing good for our fellow men, women and children. The extent to which the actions of any one of us affect the future depends on our own position in society: social, political, and intellectual. Forester recognized that Napoleon and Hitler were malignant men whose lives produced horrible consequences, but he also recognized that Nelson, Wellington, Churchill, Nimitz and the other leaders against oppression, just as well as Hornblower and Krause, did their part to rectify the consequences. While Forester recognized the consequences of disease, he also knew, from personal experience as well as from education, that many men have succeeded in progressively ameliorating its evil effects. The joy of living and the ability of men and women to beneficially affect the future are missing from Forester’s world view. The fact that in some far-distant day the Earth will no longer support our descendants does
not make life meaningless today. Happy life today and for our immediate descendants is ample justification for the joy of living. My father missed that. He despised his ancestors and several of his siblings, and feared that his descendants, his children, would be as bad.

Sternlicht supposes that my father’s world view developed consistently from his early years. Sternlicht does not know Frances Phillips’s evaluation that my father lost much of his joy of life when his legs gave out, nor my mother’s fear at the same time that my father’s gloominess might produce danger for her. There may be much in these two conclusions. For my part, knowing far more than Sternlicht about my father’s life, I see a consistently selfish character that fits Sternlicht’s description of his presumed world view. It may be that my father did lose much of his joy of living when his legs gave out, but I think that what he lost was just on the surface and did not alter the character within. From his earliest childhood, I see my father as one who thought mainly of himself as one living largely alone in the
purposeless world of his later world view, who fantasized about himself and told lies to suit, all to serve his own selfish desires, but for whom neither the prospect of satisfying desire, nor its satisfaction, produced joy of living.

After I had read Sternlicht’s book in 1996, Sternlicht told me that although he had had some doubts about the accuracy of Forester’s account of his life in *Long Before Forty* and *The Hornblower Companion*, he had followed them, and accounts of interviews with the press, because they were the published sources and his publisher required that he be able to support his assertions with published documents. As he correctly said, he was not writing a life but a literary appreciation, for which the sketch of

3. He had interviewed Kathleen, Dorothy, and me, and he knew of my unpublished biography. However, Dorothy would not have said anything disapproving of Forester, and a divorced former wife and a disenchanted son are likely to incorporate unfavorable biases into their accounts.
the life was merely an introduction to the life and times of the author for the benefit of beginning students of literature.

However, this reliance on Forester’s own words led Sternlicht to several erroneous conclusions. He accepts Forester’s statement about writing his early novels in libraries instead of his “cheerless, fireless room,” and concludes that Forester had broken with his family and lived in a rented room. All the other evidence is against this. When the letters start, Forester is living in his parents’ home, 4 participating in the same social circle that he had occupied since his school days, and writing his novels at the drawing-room table. Cecil’s eldest brother, Geoffrey, never says that Cecil ever lived elsewhere. Furthermore, Cecil never could look after himself; even later he hadn’t the knowledge that would have been required then.

Sternlicht overstates the Smith family’s social

4. The home of George and Sarah Smith, 58 Underhill Road, Dulwich.
standing and finances, never realizing that George Smith was merely a teacher, and not knowing that Forester’s move from Alleyn’s School to Dulwich college and, later, to Guy’s Medical School was financed by the earnings of Geoffrey as a doctor for Shell Oil in Egypt.

Sternlicht repeats Forester’s story about dating the “premier danseuse” with the inferences that such a description implies, without realizing that the dancer, Pally Summers, was a member of the social circle at, and a frequent visitor to, the house of the Belchers, the parents of Cecil’s school friends, whom Cecil had made his surrogate parents, and whose daughter, Kathleen, he would marry. For that matter, Sternlicht does not realize that Cecil met Kathleen when he was twelve and she was nine.

Sternlicht thinks that Forester joined the Chelsea set before he became a novelist, and therefore misses the comic sense of the game of social success for money that Forester played in that set during the autumn of 1926, after writing his first four novels and two histories. That was clearly his first, and
only, venture into the world of intellectual and artistic pretensions that he was not educated for and that he, finally, despised.

Sternlicht states that Forester moved to California in 1932, and then worked, between novels, as a scriptwriter, based, I presume, on the supposed connection with the film of *Payment Deferred*. He missed Forester’s statement in *The Hornblower Companion* that his first trip to Hollywood was near the completion of *Marionettes at Home*, published in 1936. He doesn’t realize that Forester’s entire prewar professional Hollywood experience ran from his arrival on 17 December, 1935, to 3 February, 1936, and he left Hollywood on 12 February. Of course, Sternlicht doesn’t know why Forester fled Hollywood and did not return until 1940 to aid in the British wartime propaganda effort. Sternlicht accepts Forester’s statement that at that time he was working with Irving Thalberg, the wonderboy of MGM and of the entire industry, on a script about Parnell, when a little research would have shown that Forester’s associates, Niven Busch and, in particular, Arthur
Hornblow, were working at Paramount and not MGM.

Sternlicht idealizes Forester’s intellect and education to some extent. He repeats Forester’s story about the early age at which his eldest brother, Geoff, had earned his M.D., a fiction that Geoff corrected in his autobiography. Sternlicht concludes that Forester had an excellent preparatory scientific education that would have given him an easy start at Guy’s Medical School. However, Geoff, ten years earlier, found that his preparation from the same preparatory school was barely adequate for work at the same medical school. While Cecil pretended to have a wide grasp of the science and engineering of the times of his education, his many errors show that he did not.

Sternlicht thinks that Forester’s historical work shows that he would have been a good historian, but he did not know that Forester, with his demonstrated and admitted slipshod methods of historical work, and his habit of lying, was psychologically unfit to be a historian. Consider Geoff’s written
remark that he wrote about the family “because my brother, Cecil, is a far better novelist than historian.”

Sternlicht concludes that Forester’s storytelling talent emerged when he wrote his first articles for the medical school Gazette. Sternlicht did not realize that since childhood Forester had been composing and telling lengthy, full-fledged, and credible, but lying, stories about his life and family.

There remains the question of why Forester wrote Long Before Forty. His own words tell frequently of his hatred for the act of writing, his doing only the minimally required work on each book, and of only two works that he felt impelled to write: his first novel, never published, and The Nightmare. I suggest that Long Before Forty is the third book that he felt impelled to write, because it has little other reason for being. One can understand why, in The Hornblower Companion, he concealed the prospective paternity suit that drove him from Hollywood into the voyage that became the origin of Hornblower, because that would be published immediately. Why did he lie in Long Before Forty, which would not be
published until he could not be worried by the truth?

Sternlicht told me that he thinks that Forester wrote *Long Before Forty* as a pre-emptive strike against future biographers, so that future biographies would tell the story as Forester wanted it told. If that is so, then Sternlicht fell right into the trap, although his task was to produce only a short, noncontroversial summary of Forester’s life sufficient to put his works in historical perspective. Sternlicht’s thesis provides an understandable motive for one who cared about his reputation after death.

My father did not care for such stuff. His world view said that nothing of that sort mattered to the dead, and, later on, he certainly did not care to protect his reputation so that his widow and children would not suffer when others told the truth. He can hardly have thought that if he died soon after writing *Long Before Forty*, his autobiography would provide either social or financial consolation to his widow and son.

He did not mind exposure, provided that it
occurred after his death. He wrote to Frances Phillips about Arthur Turner: “I haven’t any doubt at all that he intends to write my biography; I’m under the microscope all the time I’m with him and I’m sure he writes down every word at the first opportunity. After I’m dead I want you to get hold of him and supply him with some really juicy stuff.”

He was a little more cautious about what he told Arthur while he was alive. A year later, he admitted to Frances that he put on an act for Arthur. “I’m quite worn out with maintaining the pose before my future biographer; he’s a very charming chap but the attitude is a little exhausting.” Having admitted to playing a false part, Cecil then admitted telling Arthur some of the “juicy stuff” himself. “Last night I gave Arthur Turner some succulent details for one of those future chapters — I suffered a second seduction in telling him about my first! He lapped it all up; maybe part of the hell I’m going to will be reading what people write about me.”

5. CSF-FP 16 August 1954
last remark should be taken humorously, not seriously; Cecil denied any concept of an afterlife.

With the evidence as it is, I prefer my conclusion that in *Long Before Forty* he started writing down the account of his life, as adjusted by his own lies, as a record of what he had told people, in particular those who had prepared the publicity for *Payment Deferred*, so that he had a consistent life story and would not be tripped up by contradictions. Certainly, he did more than just that, but he liked telling about himself and he was a writer, so the story grew beyond his initial intention.

6. CSF - FP 18 June 1956

1731
I was extremely hurt by the knowledge that my father had been lying to me so consistently, for so long, to suit his selfishness. I had admired him, first as boys admire their fathers, then as someone excessively admired by the world at large, and I had finally reached, with considerable soul-searching, what I considered to be a reasoned evaluation of him as an artist and as a man. To have this come crashing down was a personal tragedy. I had a very bad two years.

Geoffrey Foster-Smith had traveled to Australia
to be with his daughter Kate, and had died there. I wrote to Kate, asking about her father’s autobiography. She had retyped it and sent me a copy. Using that material and the letters to my mother, over the next two years I wrote some short essays to both sort out my thoughts and to record my version of events, in case anybody would be interested in future years.

I haven’t written before in this book much about my marriage, but, for me, it had been unhappy, almost from the beginning. We had started out under severe difficulties, partly because we had delayed until we thought we would have a better start. Losing one’s job the day after one’s girl accepts and four days before the wedding is not the best of circumstances. However, during that delay while we were living far apart, Jean had taken up with a group of religious fundamentalists. That didn’t bother me at the time, because she and I would be moving away to live in the East. However, instead of that I had to return to California, where I could not politely reject them, although I utterly rejected their point of view. I’ve written a fair
amount about my cycling, and Jean used to cycle to work as a nurse in England, although she did not cycle in America. However, when we moved to a developing area of Fullerton that later attracted wealthier people than we were, Jean decided that any cycling by me jeopardized our social standing. Fortunately (an absurd paradox), ever since college I have had weak cartilages in my knees which from time to time were painful; they particularly caused trouble during my night school years when I got little exercise. The cure is exercise of the particular smooth type provided by cycling. So I bought another touring bicycle from England, and even when Jean objected I had the excuse that I had to keep my knees in shape. Sometimes it was actual pain that put me on my bicycle, but each time the pain went away with a few hours of cycling. I don’t think my neighbors thought the worse of me, but Jean feared that they would. I have written that when I lived in my father’s house I used to give dinner parties with dancing afterwards. Then, while courting, Jean and I danced well together. Once we
were married, Jean insisted that I could not dance, that we danced badly together because I had no sense of rhythm. With nobody else to dance with I had to accept her judgment. Then, during one of Jean’s vacations in England, one of our neighbors gave a wedding anniversary dance at which his amateur jazz combo played. I carefully asked each woman in turn to dance, and danced well with every one. I knew then that dancing was not my problem. These small irritants were but indicators of much larger problems between us for which we could not work out a solution.

These problems started very early in the marriage. Geoffrey was born prematurely, and he went down to two pounds before starting to gain weight. When I returned from work one evening and was told of the unexpected birth, I knew that he had only a fifty percent chance of survival. I told myself that if he dies, that is the time to end the marriage. He lived and our marriage continued for another thirteen years, the years of my life that were the most sexually unsatisfying. However, after the death
of, first, a much loved daughter and, later, the man who used to be my much loved father, I reappraised my life. Damn it, it’s my life, and I need to live some of it for myself. Therefore, I left Jean; I asked Geoffrey to come with me, but he chose to stay with his mother and half-sister, and the family in England they represented. Jean remarried as soon as she legally could and left the state, and lives in more expensive surroundings than I was ever able to give her.

I had been teaching part-time at California State University at Long Beach because I enjoyed teaching and working out new knowledge. In my specialty of statistical decision theory I organized the field, showing that all of its cases fit one pattern and were susceptible to one solution method. That was the content of my book. I was offered a full-time professorship, but before I could arrange to take it Reagan’s anti-intellectual governorship cut the university budgets and killed that opportunity.

About two years later I was working on a very high-technology project for Xerox Corporation in
Pasadena. What happened both illustrates the character I had developed from my father and how I came to write the first version of this book. I had the task of designing the production methods and the factory to produce machines that would perform a mix of specified tasks, and had been given a prototype machine as an example of what had to be produced and an estimated cost of production. In the course of doing my work, I became unpopular because I didn’t follow the party line. I concluded that while the prototype could perform each one of the specified tasks, it could not perform the mix of tasks in random sequence that it was required to perform, and could not reach the required production rate with that mix of tasks. I stated that a machine that would perform that mix of tasks at the required rate would look somewhat different and would be about three times as expensive as projected. Nobody wanted to hear that conclusion. However, as the design drawings came down from engineering, the machine that the engineers had designed looked more and more like the machine
that I had postulated. The final estimated cost was quite close to what I had estimated from the performance specification alone.

The mechanical machine problems that worried me were not the only ones; the machine was intended to perform chemical tests, and there was some doubt about the accuracy of the new methods required for several of those. Xerox sent in a new manager to see what was going on and, once he had reported what he had learned, Xerox secretly closed the project in a morning. We went to work as usual one morning, but by nine o’clock the offices were all locked up with the proprietary information inside, and before noon we were all home again awaiting instructions for reassignment or termination.

In that sudden enforced leisure, I decided to examine my father’s letters to my mother, to try to understand the events and the reasons for them. I arranged the letters in date sequence and read through them, comparing what I read to the other sources I had available. I contacted my mother and asked about certain aspects of the people and events
mentioned, and she gave me some more information. I spoke to Ruth also. I wrote the first version of this book then, partly between jobs and partly in the evenings once I had another job. I wrote with pen and ink, and had the manuscript typed for me.

One copy of the typescript I sent to the Library of the University of Texas at Austin, because I knew that other Forester papers were stored there. I felt that that copy would give the other side of the story to those researchers who go beyond the printed record. The other copy I offered around to a list of publishers, but I did not find anyone interested.

Over the years since that time, George also divorced his wife, Barbara. He married again, and lives now, after spending some time in England, near Portland, Oregon. He has always had some project in sight, most of them, I think, overly optimistic, but he works as a consultant and is happy.

Kathleen continued to live near Vacaville, California, running a small machine development company, training George’s eldest son John Scott
Forester in machine work, playing field hockey into her seventies and then retiring to umpiring. She was killed in a car crash in 1987 as she drove to her regular folk dance group.

Ruth, who looked after George and me as children, has continued to be a friend and now lives in Cotati, California, where I visit her occasionally. She has read a slightly earlier version of this book, and reported that, as far as her experience goes, it is as accurate as it needs to be.

When I left Jean, I determined that I would involve myself only with those people who already did the things that I liked doing. My mother had taught me the essentials of cycling in England, folk dancing in Berkeley, and had arranged the mountain trips on which I had learned the essentials of mountaineering and ski mountaineering. My mother had also arranged that Henry Sammett teach us shop skills in our own workshop, and had taught me to cook, starting with a camp stove on trips. Reflecting on these, I realized how many of
the skills I use in everyday life I owed to my mother rather than to my father.

I had continued cycling, had always done a bit of mountaineering of the easy kind, but I had dropped folk dancing as an adolescent when I discovered that I was dancing with old ladies instead of girls of my own age. After my divorce, I returned to folk dancing, club cycling, and Sierra Club mountaineering in Los Angeles, and found I was good at all of them and greatly enjoyed them.

At the end of 1972 I was the manager of the industrial engineering department of one of the high-tech firms of Silicon Valley, near Palo Alto in the San Francisco Bay Area. I had returned to bicycle racing and did very well as a veteran over the mountainous courses of the area. On a cycling event I had met (to be accurate, she had met me) a wonderful woman visiting from Minneapolis. Dorris Taylor, with her two daughters, two cats, and four bicycles, moved out to live with me. She is a biochemist, and has worked for a large multi-disciplinary research organization ever since. I took her
to my advanced folk dance group without any preparation, and she fitted right in. Having been an amateur classical clarinetist, she understood musical structure and used that skill to understand the structure of the dances.

During 1972, various government agencies started to set up regulations about bicycle design, new traffic laws, and new highway designs that were bad for cyclists. The traffic laws and highway designs came to an evil head in Palo Alto, and I became heavily involved in defending cyclists against governmental restrictions that were falsely promoted as methods of making cycling safe. I also had a difference of opinion with my employer about whether my engineers were supposed to be looking far ahead or just to the next quarter’s profits. We parted company and I decided to rectify government’s errors by putting cycling transportation on a scientific basis. I thought it would take me two years, after which I would return to industrial engineering.

It hasn’t worked that way. For over twenty-five years I have been very active in cycling affairs: put-
ting cycling transportation on a scientific basis, doing research, writing articles and books, developing training programs, participating in national-level committees, working on the standards for bicycle design and design of bicycle facilities, leading cycling organizations at the state and national level. It has been a very satisfying experience, and I can honestly write that I am better known in my field than my father was in his.

I have mulled over the contributions that my father and my mother made to my present character and situation. They both came from teaching families, and I have enjoyed teaching, and been good at it, both in person and through writing. My initial aptitude with and interest in words presumably came from my father, although he actively discouraged my use of it, warning me that literary ability was rarely inherited and the practice of literature was rarely profitable. He was so intent on keeping me out of literature, and so disdained my abilities, that he never suggested the other uses to which a facility with the written word can be put: journalism,
technical writing, editing, and the like. Perhaps my mechanical aptitude came from my mother; it certainly did not come from my father. Equally certainly, all my early training in practical skills and most of my early training in recreational activities, even much of my skill in handling small boats, came from my mother’s efforts. My father had few nautical skills; his knowledge was of a literary rather than practical nature. Despite my father’s frequent pedagogical references to honesty and reason, I have concluded that the emotional honesty that I like to believe I have came more from my mother than from my father, and a large portion of my intellectual honesty as well. It was she who insisted on being honest to one’s beliefs, even when they were not what society believed. In contrast, although my father talked frequently about his honesty and reasonableness and his desire that I follow his example, the few pieces of actual advice he gave me were different. Then, he told me I was a fool for following my beliefs and that I should act to suit the prejudices of society and write to suit the prejudices of
my professors, advice that I rejected.

However, I also recognize the profound, but largely unintended, effects that my father’s actions and attitudes have had upon me. Just as the fans of Cecil’s novels appear to be concentrated along the boundary between literature and technology, so my career has developed along the same lines. I have spent my time understanding technology and explaining it to industrial managers, workers, and, now, to cyclists, traffic engineers, and urban planners. Had my father not interfered with my education for his own convenience, I might have become a competent experimental physicist. Had his anti-intellectual bias toward literature not rubbed off on me, I might have become a professor of English literature. As it is, I use my skill with words to explain technology and science.

Over this time that I developed my writing skills by constant use, other people invented ways of making writing and publishing much easier. My last book about cycling for the MIT Press was printed directly from masters made by the publishing pro-
gram in my personal computer.

Over the years since I have known her, Dorris has been of inestimable assistance. As a good cyclist, she understood the subject. As a scientist, she understood how to study and present knowledge about the subject. As an intelligent reader, she spotted difficult transitions and rough sentences. As it became easier to revise literary work, she took to reading much of my significant work before I considered it ready for the publisher’s editor. She read the last revision as I went along, providing interesting and valuable suggestions. Since I started this twenty-five years ago, more documents have arrived at the University of Texas. With more information, with easier processes for composition and editing, and with Dorris’s intelligent criticism, this book progressed from a tired, rather faded, typescript to an easily revised set of files in a publishing program.

However, over the years, Dorris and I grew emotionally apart, and have now parted, and I live in Lemon Grove, near San Diego, California.
Plain Murder.................................................................1930
Long Before Forty,  
written 1930, published 1967 ...............................1930
Two and Twenty .................................................................1931
U-97 (play)........................................................................1931
Death to The French ......................................................1932
The Gun ..............................................................................1933
Nurse Cavell (play) ............................................................1933
The Peacemaker .................................................................1934
The African Queen .............................................................1935
The General ..................................................1936
Marionettes at Home.................................1936

The Pursued,
written 1935, pub 2012...............................1935
The Happy Return ......................................1937
A Ship of the Line ......................................1938
Flying Colours ...........................................1938
The Earthly Paradise .....................................1940
The Captain from Connecticut ..................1941
Gold From Crete .........................................1940-41
Poo-Poo and the Dragons .........................1942
The Ship ....................................................1943
The Man in the Yellow Raft ......................1942-44
The Bedchamber Mystery ............................1944
The Commodore .........................................1945
Lord Hornblower .......................................1946
The Sky and the Forest ..............................1948
Mr. Midshipman Hornblower ....................1950
Randall and the River of Time ...................1950

1748
Lieutenant Hornblower .......................... 1951-2
The Adventures of John Wetherell............1953
The Nightmare..............................................1953
Hornblower and the Atropos.....................1953
The Good Shepherd ............................... 1955
The Age of Fighting Sail..........................1956
The Barbary Pirates .............................. 1956
Admiral Hornblower .............................. 1957-8
Sink the Bismark...........................................1959
Hornblower and the Hotspur....................1962
The Hornblower Companion....................1964
Hornblower and the Crisis.........................1966
Long Before Forty, with Personal Notes from The Hornblower Companion
(I use this when referencing H.C.).........1967
The information in quotation marks is quoted directly from Kathleen’s notes.

Allen, Harold & Ethel; “a very sporting young couple.” Cecil and Kathleen spent two weeks with them punt camping on the Thames.

Artesani, Lillian; see Lillian

Ascroft, Eve; girl student where Kathleen taught; introduced Kathleen to her well-off family.
Ballard, Jack, Nancy, Charlotte. Family home was the Abbey House in Ledbury, Herefordshire. Jack, whose wife died early, taught art in Folkestone. We spent most Christmases at Abbey House and I called Charlotte “Auntie Lottie.”

Basse, Ruth Krarup; Danish au paire girl who came to England in 1938 and then came to America with Cecil and Kathleen. Married Harold Watkins, divorced, married Douglas Millar.

Bathurst, Dorothy; husband Maurice. Cecil’s secretary in New York who stayed with Kathleen in Berkeley to conceal birth of extramarital child.

Beach, Jack; wife Kath, daughter Hilary. Lived at Riverside.

Beale, Dorothy; mistress of Cecil in Dulwich. Killed in air raid in WW II. “She was nice, too.”
Belcher, Frank; brother to Kathleen, wife was nicknamed Peter. Peter, Dolly Fitter and Bessie Fitter were sisters.
Belcher, George (1944), wife Florence (1953). Kathleen’s parents.
Belcher, Geoff; brother to Kathleen, married Eve.
Belcher, John, ‘Jack’; brother to Kathleen, married Audrey, children Bridget, Michael, Peter and Robin.
Binks; nickname of Kathleen’s youngest brother, 10 years younger than his closest siblings.
Bowie, Jean; college friend of John, Scottish. Studied horticulture at Berkeley, married Bob Whately.
Brandt, Erd; editor of Cecil’s works at his American publisher, Little, Brown & Co. Brown, Curtis; Cecil’s literary agent in 1925 Bundle, see Sydney Clifford Busch, Niven; screenwriter who was assigned to collaborate with Cecil during his first Hollywood assignment. Later novelist. Friend of Cecil’s until Cecil’s death. Died about 1993. Clarke, Bill; wife Gladys, daughters Diana Margaret and another. Old Alleyn’s School friends of Belchers and Smiths. Bill became a telecommunications expert for British government, later was one of the Commissioners of the Rhine. Amateur photographer, took some of the photographs herein.
Clifford, Sydney (Bundle); Old Alleyn’s School friend of Geoffrey Foster Smith, claimed by Cecil to be a friend of his also. Chemist, became managing director of Waterlow’s, firm that made inks.

Dollibar-John, Mrs.; heiress of Singer Sewing Machines. She gave Sunday night informal musical parties. Once introduced, one was always welcome to her parties.

Eve; see Belcher, Geoff

Eve; see Ascroft, Eve

Forester, George; Cecil’s second son, born 1933. Married Barbara Church; children John Scott, David, Adrienne, and Sarah. Divorced. Married Rosemary; children Shelagh, Tesilya.

Foster-Smith, Geoffrey, M.D.; (1889-1974) wife Molly, children Peter, Anne, Judy, Kate. Cecil’s eldest brother

Foster Smith, Grace; (1897-?) sister of Cecil, married first Victor Hobbes, then Anglin Johnson.

Foster Smith, Hugh; (1892-1944) brother of Cecil, wife Dollie, children Stephen and Paddy.

Foster Smith, Marjorie; (1894-)sister of Cecil, became Mrs. Haskell, son became automo-
tive engineer.
Foster-Smith, Stephen; (c1920-) son of Hugh, RAF officer, later dentist; one of CSF’s hangers-on, later Dorothy’s business manager.

Fitter, Harold; married Bessie, members of Belcher set.

Fitter, Ray; married Dolly, members of Belcher set. The Fitter brothers married sisters.

Foster, Dorothy; brothers Norman, and another. Member of Alleyn’s Old Boys Women’s tennis and hockey teams. Cecil had a flutter with her in 1926, and married her in 1947.

Grethe; see Larson, Grethe

Guildford, Nannette: former or fading opera singer who charged Cecil with making her pregnant. “There was more to that affair than Cecil wrote about.”

Janet; John’s first girl friend, first in 1945, then during first college years. Broke up with John because her parents objected to For- ester alliance.

Joseph, Michael; Cecil’s English publisher from about 1929 on.

Kastner, Karl Heinz; German photographer and canoeist. Was on prewar canoe trips with Kathleen. Took some of the photographs in Kathleen’s album.

Kitty; see Belcher, Kathleen

Knight, Max; Jewish refugee from Austria, fled through Russia and China, stayed with Cecil and Kathleen 1941-2, married Charlotte, editor at University of California Press.
Konopka, Netty; college friend of John. Polish baroness, graduate student at Berkeley, with daughter Nadine. Second marriage to Arthur Turner.

Larson, Grethe; Danish au pair who came to England in 1937, preceding Ruth. After WW II came to California, then married a Danish engineer and returned to Denmark.

Lawson, Mary; operated a commercial art studio. She and Cecil tried to use each other for lucrative contacts.

Lewis, Arthur; wife Evelyn, son Tom; lived diagonally across Keeler Avenue from Foresters in Berkeley. Tom was John’s best friend, a year younger. Evelyn was member of Berkeley marionettes group, sewed all the marionette’s clothing, later nurses aid in charge of the well baby clinic and worked with premature babies. Arthur was a marine engineer.
Liddell Hart, Capt. Sir Basil; military writer and thinker. Advocated mechanized strategy of movement and indirect approach. Michael Joseph engaged him to review the typescript of *The General.*

Lillian; the first woman to whom Cecil was engaged to be married, later married Artesani.

Manus, Marjorie; managed a bridge parlor at which Cecil played professionally in the early 1920s. Became Cecil’s housekeeper in 1945, remained until Cecil’s marriage to Dorothy was revealed.

Owen, A. E., ‘Bob’; Old Alleyn’s School friend of Belchers and Smiths. Married Dorothy Raney, who was daughter of old friends of George and Flo Belcher.

Peter; nickname for wife of Frank Belcher.

Peter Foster Smith; son of Geoffrey Foster Smith.
Peters, A. D.; Cecil’s English agent from about 1929.

Phillips, Frances; editor of William Morrow & Co, never married, daughter of high-ranking Army medical officer. Cecil met her in 1938. She was his mistress at least from 1945 to 1947, and was his great friend and valued literary advisor until his stroke. John liked her very much. Died about 1985.

Pridham, Marian Sefang; member of the Dulwich group and the Sydenham marionette group. Cecil’s mistress about 1935. Married Pridham later, son Geoffrey born about 1943. Visited Cecil and Dorothy in Southern California in Cecil’s last year of life.

Raines; family who were members of the Belcher circle. They “made a fortune out of real estate, but our circle just the same.”
Railton, Reid; wife Audrey. Friend of Cecil’s in Berkeley. Designer of Railton cars in England, of world’s fastest car and boat of the time, consultant to Hudson Motor Car Co. and to Hall Scott motors in Oakland.

Ruth; see Basse, Ruth

Shaw, Will; college friend of John, officer US Navy in WW II, studied architecture at Berkeley, married Virginia Bassett, college friend of John who studied English literature at Berkeley. Will practices architecture in California, was divorced about 1964.

Smith, George; (1863-1947) Cecil’s father, schoolteacher in Egypt, auxiliary armed forces in Egypt in WW I, closed career as professor in teacher’s college in Egypt. Wife was Sarah Medhurst Troughton (1867-1949). Children Geoff, Hugh, Marjorie, Grace, Cecil.
Stewart, George R., wife Theodosia ‘Ted’. Professor of English literature at U.C. Berkeley, author of *Ordeal by Hunger*, *Storm*, etc.

Summers, Pally; “ballerina of fame,” member of Belcher set.

Sutro, Barbara; photographer from San Francisco, came from famous SF family, met Cecil when traveling by ship from Hollywood.


Wagner, Jerry, M.D.; New York doctor whom Cecil met in Hollywood. Wife had been an actress. Nannette Guildford was a patient of Wagner’s.

Wilkinson, Ethel; “a great friend of Flo & George Belcher. Fairly wealthy (a change in our circles at that time).”

Williams, Gordon; “Cecil’s great friend, also a member of the Savage Club and a renowned bridge player. He did his best to teach Kitty to play bridge while Cecil was away—no success—she was a rotten player.” He was a hanger-on of Cecil’s, who often made the arrangements for Cecil’s trips to England.

Places
58 Underhill Road, E. Dulwich, London; home of George and Sarah Smith. Brick, semi-detached. Cecil lived there much of the time until he was 31. Still there.

34 Hawarden Grove, Herne Hill, London; home of George and Florence Belcher. A brick row home, with fancy columns decorating the front, just 2 miles from 58 Underhill Road with no useful connection by public transport. Still there.

Abbey House, Ledbury, Herefordshire. The family home of the Ballards, ranging from medieval to Victorian. We spent most Christmases there, and Kathleen, John, George and Ruth were evacuated there at the start of the war.

36 Longton Avenue, Upper Sydenham, London. Cecil and Kathleen’s second apartment, 1932-1937. Demolished about 1960, when the land was turned back to the surrounding Sydenham Wells Park.


28 Longton Avenue, Upper Sydenham. Cecil and Kathleen’s only owned house, but on leased land. Given to Kathleen in divorce, but demolished about 1960 when the land was turned back to the surrounding Sydenham Wells Park.

1020 Keeler Ave., Berkeley, Calif.; house Kathleen rented in March 1940 when she first arrived in California. Owners needed the house and evicted Cecil in August, 1945.
1570 Hawthorne Terrace, Berkeley, Calif.; house Cecil bought in 1945 and lived in until 1954.

1066 Park Hills Rd, Berkeley, Calif.; house Cecil first rented, then had to buy, at top of Berkeley hills. He lived here from 1954 until his stroke in 1964.

Winchelsea Camp, Flo’s Camp. “Camp started very simply just after the first world war when we were able to buy old army bell tents. Each year it became more popular as Flo Belcher was a marvellous manager & all the young people had a good carefree holiday at a ridiculously low cost. It was at Winchelsea near Rye & Hastings on the South Coast—still unspoiled—63 very hard cycling miles from south London where we all lived. No one ever had any money to spare & it was a continual ‘wangle’ to get there and back.”
Tennis Clubs
Alleyn’s Old Boys Club had tennis, soccer, hockey, and rugby. “Dorothy Foster and Kitty Belcher were the mainstays of the A.E.O.B. Women’s Hockey Team.”
Ruskin Manor; “a first-class club in the top tennis set just below Wimbledon standard. We all played as a kind of junior set, getting a kind smile now and then and a set of tennis once a season with the elite. [Kathleen’s] father, George Belcher, was the club captain for years.”

Men’s Clubs
Atheneum, in London, a club whose members were typically from the learned professions. Cecil became a member about 1952. Armchair Strategists, in Berkeley, an informal group of friends who met monthly after America entered WW II to discuss the progress of the war and make predictions about future events. Savage Club, in London, a club whose members were typically in the arts. Cecil was a member from about 1930.
Index

A
Admiral Hornblower in the West Indies 1401
African Queen, boat 1213
    promised to John 1211
African Queen, The 539
    CSF first combines history, society, love 540
    different endings, CSF on 541
African Queen, The film
    analysis 1444
    CSF’s initial hopes 1211
    CSF’s opinion 1442
    initial arrangements 1441
Agee, James 1211

1768
Alcoholism, mother’s 40
Alexandria 29
Alleyn’s School 33, 60, 1372
bullying 61
America
contraceptive equipment available 657
cost of living in Hollywood 572
family moving to 778, 782, 784, 791
family voyage to 792
first family transcontinental trip 795
hugh appetites for food 634
language conventions 582
women’s slacks, suits 587
Anne Foster-Smith, visit to Berkeley 1092
Annie Marble 443
first thoughts 344
Annie Marble in Germany 466
Annie Marble, boat 444
Aquitania, steamship 555
Armchair Strategists 950
final meeting 1045
Atherosclerosis 976, 991
CSF’s symptoms explained 995

1769
opinions about, Kathleen vs CSF 993

B
Ballards 472
Barbara Sutro 867
*Barbary Pirates* 1377
Bathurst, Maurice 929
Battle of Britain 850
Beatrice Shave 1470
*Bedchamber Mystery* 1293
Betty Brown 1021, 1032, 1050
  CSF fires her 1498
  George’s allowance vs CSF extravagancies 1287
  husband dies 1497
  John’s first kisses 1121
Big Bang 52
*Big Ben* 1429
Binks Belcher
  CSF recommends harsh treatment 256
Bissell, Celia
  "most dangerous woman in Berkeley" 1145
*Blue Angel, The*, CSF’s opinion 1355
Bogart, Humphrey
  *Good Shepherd*, to star in 1394

1770
Bomb ketches 980
Boy Naturalists 845
Bridget Belcher 790
British Information Service 784, 823, 860
  New York office, John tours 883

Brown on Resolution
  atonement for bastardy, cf CSF 461
  beginning of CSF’s later style 457
  CSF as CSF might have been 460
  film version 462

Buccaneer
  film plot 567

Bullock, Alan, Hitler, A Study in Tyranny 1380
Bundle 384

Busch, Niven 608, 828, 1078
  CSF’s part in divorce suit 804
  honeymoon while writing 611
  lies by CSF, recognizes 997
  opinion of this book 807
  reads The Gun and The African Queen 623

C
Cairo 27
Camberwell 32
Canal travel in England 473

*Captain Blood*
  just released 613
  makes production of *The Buccaneer* unlikely 634

*Captain D* 874
  similar to CSF 832

*Captain from Connecticut*
  analysis 820
  research for 808

*Captain Horatio Hornblower* film
  CSF’s opinion, and royal premiere 1355

Censorship, literary
  California has books banned in England 603

Chandler, Raymond 93

Charlotte Ballard
  Smiths’ opposition to Kathleen marrying CSF 1707

Chicago Tribune 847
  attacks CSF 872

*Chin P’ing Mei* 1296

*Chinese Room* 1296

Christ’s Hospital School 38

Christie, Ralph, Adm USN 1389
  *Good Shepherd*, dispute over 1394
Churchill, Winston
   British Navy, remarks about 1714
   CSF lunches with 1358
Cold War stalemate, CSF’s prediction of 1297
Collected works, not a milestone but a tombstone 1357
Collier, John 568, 569, 575, 580, 615, 881, 1211
   marriage 633
*Commandos Strike at Dawn, The* 886, 888, 926, 929
*Commodore Hornblower* 979
Condouris 217
   memoir 202
Cornering the Market 273
Coronel, battle of 483
CSF
   abortion story when medical student 122
   accent snobbery 343
   actual dates of early work 137
Admiralty offer to write official history 885
adultery, accused of 989
Alleyn’s School 58
American language, learning 557
Annie Marble’s engine, can’t get it to run 446
appearance 30

1773
arguing with publisher about money 190
atherosclerosis 385
    onset 975
automobile driving, ignorant of 464
automobiles owned 519, 1447
bastardy, emotions about 919
Bathursts, opinions about 933
**Bedchamber Mystery**, reading to John’s guests 1258
birth 27
boxing at school 62, 63
bridge 302
bridge and money 166
bridge in CSF’s life 131
bridge professional 130
burning letters in incinerator 1214
business, impressions of 228, 237
C. S. Forester name
    creation of 132
    first officially used 446
camping in August, 1918 108
Celia Bissell, fears her social power 1145
character, analysis of 1677
character, paradoxes described 1710
clothes allowance for George 1233
cocktail party routine 1478
coitus, first 71
comedy vs tragedy, opinion 304
comments about his family, 1946 1062
comparison of his and George’s educations 1206
competition with Geoff’s reputation 105
complaining about holidays 1139
condom
   buying 351
condom, unused, returning 211
conservatorship terminated 1600
conspicuous consumption, opinion of 841
creativity 395
creativity theorizing 294, 295
cripples, horror of 115
crippling, fear of 347
cycling 382, 386
daily routine, America 835
daily schedule, 1946 1049
dark side, analysis of 1117
death, opinion on 842
desired daily routine (1925) 258
desired daily routine, 1926 288
desired postwar lifestyle 1027
despises Jean’s parents 1553
despises sons 1676
details of life not to be published 316
discussing writing at lunchtime 1316
disease 976
divorce announcements 1013
divorce settlement 1008
Dorothy
marriage to Dorothy Foster decided upon 1081
early letters characterized 144
Egyptian blood, confesses to 1477
employment condition fantasies 222
estate, value of 1652
exaggerated account of early work 133
extravagancies, early 332
fame 1355, 1357
Father, must always be addressed as 969
father’s death, comment on 1079
fathers, few in CSF’s works 1674
fear

1776
crippling 385
discovery even on deathbed 1620
discovery, of 1288
exposure by father’s gossip 321
heights, afraid of 1093
John will panhandle from him 1274
lest John see his luxury 1448
that his books offend his friends and family 335, 338, 349
final illness & death 1617
financial advice to John 1208, 1236
financial concealment 1452
financial stability at time of John’s birth, claim of 1096
Frances
leaves her 1082
says he should have fathered only daughters 1093
friendships, source of 531
funeral 1622
Geoffrey
discovers that CSF is not attending Guy’s 114
family history, CSF’s opinion of 1569
gold medal, displaying as his own 117
George
CSF sends to psychiatrist 1234
CSF throws him out 1288
prohibits CSF from seeing Barbara in his absence 1548
run from Cornell, letter of complaint about 1276
getting people to do his will 1535
girl’s bedroom, peeking into 69
golf 226
passion for 451, 522
Gordon Willliams, death 1079
grandchildren
  can rot in Hell 1552
  miserly presents for 1551
  nasty about possible 1533
Greek Island tour 1465
Guy’s
  pretending to attend 113
  tries again 117
happier stories, CSF had no experience to use as source 478
harsh treatment for boy like himself (Binks Belcher) 256

1778
Hawaiian trip with John’s college friends 1546
heart attack of 1948 1094
historical accuracy, CSF’s opinions 1396
historical accuracy, spurious 1313
homosexuality question 1481
Hornblower, similarity to 1306
Hornblower’s early career, working out the stories of 1316
household rule 1134
income, 1946 1308
innocence, opinion of 340
inspiration, contradictions about 200
intellectuals, dislike of 364
job fantasies 171
John

avoiding vacations with John 1545
blames John for George’s educational problems 1204
character, complaints about 1268
gives John extra money for English trip 1565
John reading last will 1632
John’s lady friends, attitude toward 1115
John’s sexual education 966

1779
last visit with John 1578
laziness, more lies saying 1239
literary advice to John 1255
meets John’s university friends 1256
sexual advice to John 1206
sexual education 968
tells John he will go to St. George’s 1150
visits John in Fullerton 1574
warns John against academic laziness at St George’s 1152
John and George, names CSF considers vulgar 1270
John’s assistance in small matters, asks for 1544
joy of life missing 1719
Kathleen
adultery, uses hers to influence sons 1015
CSF leaving on holiday without waiting for Kathleen, tells story of 1135
demands that Kathleen write to him frequently 417
first love for 119
first love letter to Kathleen 119
lies to, about John’s reaction to her adultery 1012
looking forward to Kathleen’s return 324
love letter to Kathleen 253
meets 63
pornography, asks her to write 1481
reaction to Kathleen’s statement that she merely
pitied him at first 419
refuses money to Kathleen 1109
reliance on Kathleen 334
renews love for Kathleen 140
self-descriptive last letter to Kathleen 1508
start of correspondence with Kathleen 143
starts on holiday without Kathleen 327
urges to be his mistress 1017
using secrets to wall off Kathleen from friends 1469
knighthood expectations 891, 1003, 1077
knowledge, breadth of 840
legs unable to stand a day at sea 1461
letters
  burning 177
  burning those received 1023
camouflaged 175
early, analyzed 186
first scandal 68

1781
lice incident 858
lies
about George and inheritance 1536
about giving John a house 1539
about his personal life in *Annie Marble in Germany* 467
about investment in Wm Morrow, to John 883
about knowing Latvian 1113
about national secret mail 1215
about prep school for sons 1162
about Sir Walter Scott and building castles 1025
about visiting women in Berkeley 969
about war service 99
to Jean about his finances 1530
to Kathleen about John’s reaction to her adultery 1010
to Kathleen to keep K & Lillian apart 142
Lillian, engaged to 139
literary works analyzed 1698
living arrangements 169
*Long Before Forty* and letters, contrast between 143
love in letters 163

1782
love life, early 72
lunchtime quizzes 839
magazine writing, CSF on (in Two and Twenty) 482
marital discord 857
mechanical incompetence 386
medical rejection for army service 89
medical school, second year 109
memorial service in London 1627
money now no worry, 1942 886
money worries 166, 209, 224
money worries cancel weekend with Kathleen 241
mother’s death 1111
musical performance, introduction to 989
needs very careful looking after 1067
novel writing, in Love Lies Dreaming 314
office politics 237
official list of books 428
Pamela’s death, reaction to 1563
Paris, in, early years 126
personal changes in 1946 1063
petty annoyances 289
political dreams 252

1783
pornographic library 1296, 1307
pornography 1483
portrait at completion of *Payment Deferred* 157
postwar years, summary of 1288
pretence of being well-to-do 169
professorship application 354
promotion, always expecting 892
psychiatrist, consulting for symptoms of insanity in
describing Captain Sawyer 1349
punctuality 1135
rationalizing three lady friends 183
reading, early 39
reputation, bad in Berkeley 1017, 1112, 1225
Rich Uncle Cecil from America, family calls him 1063
Roman emperors 40
scholarships 58
school buddies 62
scornful of probably fatal illness of Carolyn’s boyfriend 1561
screenwriting, initial ignorance of 570
secrecy
when in England, postwar 1468
when traveling 1462, 1576
secrecy when traveling 1466
seductions attempted in Mendocino 1036
self-reliance, lack of, always being looked after 345
sexual secrets 174
short story writing fantasies 362
similarities with Hornblower 1318
Smith and Forester, using both names 232
Smith background in America, concealing 785
Smith name, reasons for discarding 132
snobbish criticism of Flo’s camp 342
social life, Berkeley postwar 1290
sons
disciplining sons 1147
educating his sons, plan for 1122
educational decisions for sons 1205
explains to Kathleen need for sons 1155
lies about prep school 1162
prep school plan changing 1165
reward promised for son’s neither drinking nor smoking 1210
starting to write 125
strategy, games of, disliked 1459

1785
stroke
  incapacitating 1586
  injury extent 1605
  recovery from 1601
success, reasons for 1697
successful people, first contact with (Annie Marble in Germany) 467
talents described 1697
teacher, tormenting 63
teen-aged Americans, stories about 1149
truthfullness required by 1137
typewriter borrowing troubles 302
Ulysses, purchase of 211
unAmerican affairs, investigated for 1339
Underhill Rd, life at 128
very clever man 837
visiting ladies for tea 265
will, last 1624
will, last, John reading it 1632
women
  Berkeley, courting 1051
dependency on 1674
domination by women in his books 1671
fools or whores 105
relationship to women 413
women controlling men 314
workplaces 146
World War I
  end of, effect on medical training 109
  opinion of 102
would-be author living at home 124
writing fatigue 232
Curtin, Michael, *Lord Chesterfield's Letters* 956
Cuthbert Wilkinson, CSF tutoring son 251
D
dead camps, CSF sees films of 1379
*Death to the French* 496
  belonging to society, sense of, first 498
  compared to *Brown on Resolution* 496
Dollibar-John, Mrs.
  finances studio 370
Donovan, Col. William 888
Dorothy 187, 397, 414, 521, 1060
  apartment burgled 1640
  believed John should have continued at St George’s. 1645

1787
believes George a constant thief 1535
compared to Lady Emily Curzon 1085, 1089
CSF takes her to dance instead of Kathleen 393
defends CSF’s memory 1642
description in 1949 1106
dissatisfaction over inheritance 1091
father asks whether CSF has sufficient money to be a father 470
first appearance 336
reaction to implication that Geoffrey Pridham was CSF’s son 1645
returns to England without telling John 1652
says CSF’s money in trust for sons 1643

Dorothy Bathurst
attractive to CSF 936
Berkeley rumors about 921
Berkeley visit to bear child 894
birth of son 921
CSF tells of dead baby to those who knew it was alive 922
CSF very curious about 931
CSF’s reaction to dead baby story 894
first appearance 884

1788
naked summer 896
penultimate appearance 938
secrecy precautions 903
true story 898
Dorothy Beale 181, 186, 261, 340
poverty 263
Dorothy Dale 855
Dorothy Lamb 1030
Drunkenness, CSF’s horror of 1479
Dulwich College 83
authors from 93
Dunne, Irene, described as ex-film-star 585
E
Eagle Squadron 800
Earthly Paradise, The 778
Egg for the Major, An 829
Egypt 25
Eichelberger, General 1043
Esquire
CSF adopts style of 522
F
Falkland Islands, battle of 484
Farson, Negley 1462, 1463

1789
Father’s Tales, American Scholar, Autumn 1997

Fay, Alice

Fidelity, Kathleen’s essay on

Final Encounter, The

at time of CSF’s death

Fleming, Ian

Flo Belcher

CSF’s history with her

CSF’s protestations about her visit to California

visits California

Flying Colours
used material from the voyage of Annie Marble 448
Folk dancing 817
Fontaine, Joan 1035
Forester fans, John’s description 1579
Frances Phillips 824, 1043
  break with CSF 1312
  correspondence with Liddell Hart regarding John 1649
  criticism of *Mr. Midshipman Hornblower* 1320
CSF breaks with her 1082
CSF doesn’t mention Dorothy to her 1459
early relationship with CSF 1023
editorial advice 1292
estranged from CSF 1063
first appearance 777
John, last meeting with 1648
John’s attraction for 1054, 1080
rejects CSF’s love 1101
says CSF should have fathered only daughters 1093
shows John New York 882
tells John to stop whining about CSF’s will 1639
visits CSF in Berkeley 1022, 1053
*Frenchman’s Creek* 1034

1791
From Here to Eternity, CSF’s opinion 1351
Furies, The 1315
Furniture repossession 74

G
Gateson, Marjorie 1052
phonograph recording 833

General, The 543
Analysis 548
distributed to British staff in France 869
finest work in many ways 544
historical effects of 551

Geoffrey Forester
birth 1542
CSF despises 1555

Geoffrey Foster-Smith 8, 1059
CSF’s comments on his family history 1075
CSF’s inflation of his reputation 105
death 1731
education 53
Guy’s Medical School studies 106
hyphenates name 53
inquires at Guy’s about CSF’s progress 114
John’s visit 1962 1566

1792
marriage 87
medical practice in Egypt 76
paying for CSF at Guy’s 100
Shell oil, doctor for 78
shows family history to John 1567
visit to Berkeley 1075
war service 87
Geoffrey Pridham 1558
Jean compares him to CSF, to John’s detriment 1560
George
allowance checks, doubled, receiving 1283
banished from CSF’s sight 1534
birth 473
broken collarbone 621
cabinetmaking 1534
can again visit CSF 1550
career, later 1738
clothes allowance 1233
concerned about CSF conservatorship 1594
Cornell, runs from 1276
CSF dislikes him 1228
CSF throws him out 1288
CSF’s college plans for 1266

1793
described 1229
Dorothy believes him a constant thief 1535
enters Cornell School of Hotelkeeping 1268
John, relationship with, affected by CSF 1695
marriage 1512
psychiatrist, sent to 1234

*Goldsmiths Journal*
articles 355, 381

*Good Shepherd, The*
analysis 1388
Korean War, delayed by 1340
Krause, character of 1391

Gordon Williams 532, 555, 1060, 1063, 1461
death 1079

Grace, CSF sister 1490
CSF’s opinion of 1029

Grant, Cary 1400

Great Man, The, CSF as 1050

Greek Islands, CSF tours, 1958 1465

*Group, The*, CSF’s opinion 1487

Guilford, Nannette 592, 595, 604, 607
accuses CSF of impregnating her 667
attorney’s letter 643

1794
loves CSF 636
moves into Villa Carlotta 637
second attorney’s letter 660

Gun, The 499
  attempt to sell to Hollywood, 1936 634
  reflects Suetonius, Roman emperors, foreshadows El Supremo and Nazi Germany 503

Gun, The film 1400
  CSF’s opinion 1401
Guy’s Medical School 100

H
Halifax, Lord 1003
Harris, Frank, My Lifir and Loves 1307
Heart attack 1094
  recovery from 1098
Henry Sammett 817
Hepburn, Katherine
  African Queen, proposed sequel 1443
  CSF’s opinion 1441
Hildegard Quandt 1020, 1380
History must not be changed
  Death to the French 498
  The African Queen 541

1795
The Gun 502
The Peacemaker 504
History, false, in Commodore Hornblower 987
Hodapp, John Dale 1426
acts while conservator 1595
care concern for CSF after stroke 1592
dismissed 1600
Good Shepherd rewriting 1393
hired 1500
Hollywood
CSF intends to stay 6 months 590
CSF’s lies about his experiences 678
drinking, not much 592
eight-week contract worries 606
indecision about return 655, 658, 661, 662, 663, 668
indecision about return plans 622, 650
job dreams 659, 666
Lake Norconian resort 598
last day at Paramount 662
leaving in hurry 669
long-term contract dreams 632
love letter home 653
low-rent district, can’t live in 610
money sent home 594, 601, 603, 610, 645, 650
naked dancers 619
nightclub dinner 618
office routine 630
option cancelled 654
option worries 641, 646, 651
people 573
return voyage 674
salary 590
studio organization 589
Trocadero restaurant, Christmas party 594
Trocadero restaurant, naked dancers 605
Trocadero restaurant, prices 604
wartime 801
wild party 627

*Hollywood Boulevard* 614
Horatio Hornblower

names from Hollywood and the voyage home 691
Hornblow, Arthur 588, 596, 604
Hornblower

Colliers, 6 short stories 782
first black-and-white film 800
political importance 781
short stories in Sat Eve Post 780

**Hornblower and the Atropos**
analysis 1373

**Hornblower and the Crisis**
plot discussed 1582

**Hornblower and the Hotspur**
analysis 1414
Kathleen’s opinion 1507

**Hornblower Companion, The** 554, 979, 1401
CSF’s embarrassment about 1426
secrecy concerns about 1505
signed by CSF after stroke 1614

**Hornblower During the Crisis** 1429
completion asked about 1623
final part written 1586
potential use in CSF’s rehabilitation 1604
writing schedule 1434
writing started 1578

**Hornblower’s London**
CSF hiding his early life 1397

**Hornblower’s Temptation** 1337, 1345

Housing
1020 Keeler Ave 800, 808
forced out of 1025
1066 Park Hills Rd 1455
envy aroused by 1456
forced purchase of 1458
1570 Hawthorne Terrace 1038, 1133
CSF buys 1026
CSF disposes of 1453
description 1041
28 Longton Ave 751
36 Longton Ave 494, 692
7 Longton Ave 694
Berkeley, motivation for living there 803
CSF about building 1025
CSF’s compares two house purchases as the beginning and end of WW II 1039
Gramercy Park Hotel 776, 793, 824
Kathleen & CSF live with her parents 444
Kathleen & CSF live with his parents 457
Malt House 494
Mark Hopkins Hotel 798
Mt Adon Place 472
plan to live in Connecticut 782, 786

1799
San Francisco, Kathleen instructed to 795
Villa Carlotta, Hollywood 571, 574, 586, 801
*Howl*, and *The Statement of Erica Keith*, CSF dodges testimony 1484
Hoyt, Norris Dresser 1186
Hugh Troughton-Smith
deed & allowance 1491
education 55
jobs 56
hurricane story, CSF’s tour de force 1407
Huston, John 1211
*African Queen* film 1441
Hutchinson, R. C., CSF wants Hutchinson to write propaganda in USA 871
Huxley, Aldous, weekend at Hearst’s castle 683
I
*I Can’t Walk* 1297
Imperial Advertising Agency 187, 219
CSF fired 228, 243
CSF’s impressions 228
dismal prospects 236
office politics 237
probationary employment 225

1800
Isabel Sullivan
   letter to Kathleen re Hollywood 625

J
Jack Ballard 471
Jackson, Joseph Henry 950
Janet Parker 1128, 1200, 1218
   leaves John 1224
   parental opposition 1129, 1220
Japan, CSF in 1042
Jaqueline 1159, 1178, 1195
Jean Forester 1517, 1531
Jerome Wagner 564, 575, 580, 607, 794
   finds apartment for CSF 571
   next door in Hollywood 583
   trying to cure W. C. Fields’ alcoholism 634

John
   asks for investment in consulting firm 1644
   assists CSF in small matters 1544
   baths with cold-water rinse 537
   baths, CSF painfully inspecting for dirt 537
   Berkeley schools 812
   bicycle transportation engineering 1741
   birth 469
boyhood projects 963
British vs American schools 959, 1151
canal travelling in England 474
career plans, rethinking 1245
career, later 1735, 1739
character, contributions by father and by mother 1742
Christmas 1941 w/CSF in New York 881
concern for CSF’s financial needs after stroke 1590
concerned about conservatorship 1596
CSF assigns extra schoolwork 959
CSF biography, first writing 1737
CSF explaining burning of letters 1214
CSF visits when ship calls at Long Beach 1434
CSF warns against academic laziness at St. George’s 1152
CSF, opinion of 1554
CSF, relationship with, analysis 1692
CSF’s attitude toward John’s lady friends 1115
CSF’s literary status, thoughts about 1247
CSF’s will, reading 1632
cycle tour, Mendocino 1131
cycling, first trips 790
denied raises because of rich father 1494
discovers letters from CSF’s mistresses 1628
does not recognize George’s banishment 1534
Dorothy’s files, examines 1646
dreams, unpleasant, about St. George’s 1184
duel, challenged to 1180
ever university years 1223
England, first return to 1564
finds people ignorant of Hornblower 1502
first job, publishing 1527
first kisses 1121
Frances, last meeting with 1648
Geoff’s family history, represses memory of 1572
George Smith, visits to 533
George, relationship with, affected by CSF 1695
Gray’s *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* 956
high school social life 1144
home workshop instruction 817
industrial engineer 1538
industry, starts in 1533
Janet Parker, first love 1128
Kathleen, relationship with, affected by CSF 1694
Kathleen’s adultery, John’s reaction 1004
literary essays, Berkeley High 1141
literature, theory of criticism of 1249
*Lord Chesterfield’s Letters* 955
marriage 1531
mathematics, failure in 1239
military service, initial attitude about 1275
naval models for CSF, builds 1557
naval service 1518
parting from Jean 1732
physicist, decision for 1143
preparation for life in America 791
professor, becomes 1573
puberty 967
punctuality, enforced by CSF 1135
railroad trips 1160
schooling in Berkeley High 1140
schools, Berkeley 1126
St. George’s, informed of enrollment 1150
St. George’s, misconceptions on entry 1166
*Statistical Selection of Business Strategies*, shows CSF 1613
summer job, first 1242
train trip to George Smith’s house 534
tricycle trip to George Smith’s house 535
truth demanded by CSF 1137
twenty-first birthday party, CSF present 1260
UC Berkeley, enrolls at 1200
UC Berkeley, graduation from 1268
*Victory at Sea*, offers his assistance 1365, 1369
walking from garage with CSF 520
women’s shapes, recognized difference made by clothing 897
wrote to CSF in Hollywood 635

Jones, James
CSF’s opinion 1351

*Josephine* 146
accepted with advance 168
cavalier finish to book 147
worries about length 146

K
Kathleen
A. G. West, engaged to 138
addressing letters to A. G. Smith 270
adultery, CSF’s, told of 989
adultery, hers 1004
CSF can’t get Annie Marble’s engine to run 446
CSF demands that she write frequently 417
CSF says why prep school for sons 1155
CSF stays weekend at Flo’s house 241
CSF’s early lies & intrigues, recognizes 331
CSF’s family warns her not to marry CSF 328
CSF’s first courting 119
CSF’s last letter 1508
CSF’s letters, shows to John 1653
death 1738
discovers letters from CSF’s mistresses 973
divorce settlement 1008
divorce tells true friends 1017
divorce, reasons for 1017
effect of overwork and worries 426
farm, asks for 1109
first job 143, 159
first refuses CSF 121
Guildford, Nannette, notes on 678
hockey for Kent 521
John, relationship with, affected by CSF 1694
jump from bedroom window, preparing for 992
laughs at CSF’s female characters 300

1806
leaves CSF 1008
letter and essay about love and trust 421
love letter from CSF 253
marital discord 857
motorcycling 390
naked in summer films, shown by CSF 1031
Neill, why attracted to 1007
Nurses Aid training 893
pornography, writes for CSF 1481
remembers CSF studying at her house 117
Smiths’ opposition to marriage to CSF 1707
start of correspondence with CSF 143
starts loving CSF 140
stimulates CSF’s writing 220, 395
suggests that CSF get job 213
supplies money for CSF 324
teaching contract not renewed because of accent 343
upset by description of Maria Hornblower 1507
Kayaking 530
Keyes, Adm. of Fleet, Lord 1002
Kind Hearts and Coronets, CSF’s opinion 1354
Knickerbocker, H. R., distributed The General to British staff in France 869

1807
Knights, Max & Charlotte 1552
Korean War 1349

L

Last Encounter, The 1309
Lauren, Sophia 1400
Le Guin, Ursula K. 1127
Ledbury
   Abbey House 787
   icy Christmas drive 621
Lee’s Lieutenants, CSF’s opinion 1306
Lice
   Commodore Hornblower 985
   CSF’s 986
Liddell Hart, Capt. B. H. 547, 549, 829
   correspondence with Frances Phillips regarding John 1649
   keeps CSF’s early notes, CSF horrified 1504
Lieutenant Hornblower
   analysis 1344
   analysis, by CSF to Frances 1343
   CSF doesn’t want to write 1342
Life of a Transgressor 1463
Lillian Artesani 139, 179, 411, 1061

1808
analysis of Cecil’s second marriage

CSF

second marriage, Lillian’s views 1090

comments about CSF’s behavior 1061

CSF warns Kathleen that Mr. Artesani might be insane 529

CSF’s callous rejection of her 142

CSF’s character, described by 1704

final break from CSF 265

final resolution 412

Lindbergh, Charles 861

Loire, River, CSF kayaks down 531

Lolita, CSF’s opinion 1488

Long Before Forty 46, 50, 57, 72, 83, 123, 130, 139, 554

Alleyn’s School 60

CSF on human anatomy 481

eyearly work, exaggerated account of 133

expurgated portions about John and Kathleen 1654

French waterfront brawl 126

initial germ 317

John learns of publication 1653

similarity with The Wonderful Week 407

1809
University of Texas typescript shows John and Kathleen, eliminated from published version 1653

*Lord Hornblower*, analysis 1297

*Lord Nelson*

Analysis 428

Trafalgar campaign, in *Hornblower During the Crisis* 1431

Los Angeles 567, 578, 580

blimp tour 632

clear air 579, 582

first impression 566

Lake Arrowhead 607

Lake Norconian 607

rainstorm 651

scenery 582

*Louis XIV* 408

length worries 410

*Love Lies Dreaming*

analysis 308

bridge 313

Dorothy Beale approves 300

fear of being indecent 298
first thoughts 295
Kathleen laughs at it 300
length worries 300
progress 307
proposed schedule 304
reflects CSF’s circle 314
started 298
women controlling men 314
love, CSF’s few stories about 1410
loyalty oath at UC 1338
Lyndhurst Grove School 33
M
M.G.M.
job dreams 664, 665
no offer 670
Mahan, A. T. 1430
Mansfield, Katherine
CSF’s opinion 214
Marder, Arthur 1426
Margaret Johnson, ship 674
Marian Pridham 521, 1471
CSF continues relationship 529
CSF criticizes unpunctuality 527

1811
CSF warns Kathleen that Mr. Pridham might be insane 528
marriage 528
visits after CSF’s stroke 1609
Marionettes 159, 522
America, in 818
*Marionettes at Home* 524
finished in Hollywood 583, 602, 606
Marjorie Manus 1048
auto collisions 1136
expecting to marry CSF 1075
failing to learn to drive 1066
marriage expectations 1098
new housekeeper 1133
tells Frances about CSF’s marriage plans 1106
Marjorie Smith (Haskell) 1570
Marjorie, CSF sister 1491, 1567
Marriage
first secret 351
pretend ceremony to acknowledge 427, 443
second secret 416, 1084
analysis of decision 1084
CSF informs Frances 1099

1812
CSF informs John 1095
explanations for Dorothy’s delay in joining CSF 1104
formal announcement 1105
Marsh, Wendy 825, 884
Marx, Groucho, CSF on his show 1493
Marx, Zeppo 666
    CSF’s agent in Hollywood 659
Mary Lawson 187, 357
Masefield, John
    in Hollywood 1936 640
    tea in Ledbury 789
Maugham, Somerset 1292
McCarthy, Mary 1487
McCormick, (Col) Robert R. 847
Memoirs of Hecate County, CSF’s opinion 1353
Mendocino, summer holiday 1032
Methuen
    delay in royalties for Josephine 210
Meynell, Ann 1561
Meynell, Laurence, eulogizes CSF 1639
MGM, CSF hopes for work with 642
Michael Joseph, publishers 551

1813
Middleton Murry
   CSF’s errors 215
   CSF’s opinion 214
Millis, Walter 825
Morgan, Charles 890
Moseivitch, Benno 532, 1217
Mother
   alcoholism 40
   death 1111
   housework 42
Motor Boat, articles in, paid for French tour 445
Motorboating
   false article about motorboating across France in Vanitie 398
   promoting a boat, dreams of 398
Mountbatten, Lord Louis 868, 891
Mr. Midshipman Hornblower
   first intimations of 1308
   Frances criticizes 1320
Muni, Paul 886
N
Nadine Turner 1475
   CSF tells her confidences 1476

1814
CSF’s character, described by 1707
Nazi Germany
  compared to Suetonius on Roman emperors 1386
  CSF’s opinions 1380
Neil Lynch 1006
  John’s opinion of 1695
New Criticism 1251
**Nightmare**
  analysis 1382
  CSF’s enthusiasm for writing 1378
Nurses Aids 892
O
Olive Matthews 189, 198
**Ordeal by Hunger** 816
**Orion** (British cruiser) 819
Orwell, George, CSF’s opinion 1489
P
Pacifism
  CSF observes accurately (in *The Peacemaker*) 518
  CSF’s opinions on 510
**Paid Piper, The**, published and reviewed 149
Pally Summers 123, 126, 186, 260
Palm Springs 616

1815
Pamela Forester
  birth 1553
  death 1563

Parkinson, C. Northcote
  gives CSF *Life of Pellew* 1497
  meets CSF 1495

Patricia Troughton-Smith 1476
*Payment Deferred*
  accepted by John Lane 226
  completed 157
  effect of National Strike 328
  first mention 146
  further rejections 193
  good copy editing 245
  hoped-for schedule 152
  information from Hugh 149
  John Lane considering 222
  Mrs. Wilkinson approves 263
  plot outline 150
  pre-publication tasks 188
  publicity for 316
  published and reviewed 328
  rejected by Jonathan Cape 196
rejected by Methuen 190
writing schedule 152

Peacemaker, The 503
Pearl Harbor attack 876

Penelope, British cruiser 929, 942, 943
Peninsula War 497, 499
   novels, first mentioned 194

Peters, A. D., literary agent 551
   Hollywood visit 649, 655
   prohibits John from completing Hornblower During the Crisis 1641

Phyllis Callaghan 181, 186
   jealous of Dorothy Beale 262

Plain Murder 228, 475
   compared with Payment Deferred 475
   elements from CSF’s current life 476
   murder technique based on Kathleen’s motorcycle 475

Poo Poo and the Dragons 834
pornography 1483
Pride and the Passion, The See Gun, The

Priestley, J. B. 568
Priscilla Dean 1499

1817
Publicity
details of life not to be published 316
fears of exposure 314
Publishers, family knowledge of 50
Pullman Co. brochure 322
Punt camping 352
R
Radar, airborne 848
    stolen secret 853
railroad trips 1160
Railton, Reid 950
Randall and the River of Time
    analysis 1320
    finished 1336
Recorder playing 989
Red-hot shot 1346
    CSF’s error 1347
River Thames 160
Ruth Krarup Basse 1032
    career, later 1739
    CSF proposes marriage 1076
    CSF says she will be Lady Forester 1077
    CSF’s character, agrees with my description 1708

1818
refuses CSF 1078

S

*Sailing Across Europe* 1464
Sailing tour, England to Egypt, proposed 1462
Savage Club 486
   CSF joins 499

Schools
   British 35
   British vs American 812
   skepticism about teachers 812

Science
   limitations of CSF’s knowledge 504

Seamanship
   CSF’s knowledge of 1414

*Seconds*, bought by Esquire 601
Secrecy separating Kathleen’s friends 1469
Senior family 19
sexual explicitness, CSF’s development 997

Sexual scandals
   Alleyn’s School 68
   Dulwich College 96

*Shadow of the Hawk, The* 286, 448
   analysis 448

1819
John rereading in 1996 1658
most personal of CSF’s works 448
reveals CSF’s real life experiences 456
Sharp, Margery, CSF wants her to write propaganda in USA 871
Ship models 38
Ship of the Line, A
working out the plot 1310
Ship, The 933, 943
analysis 946
Captain like CSF 945
Jerningham like CSF 944
Sierra Club 843
Sinatra, Frank 1400
Sinking of the Bismarck, The 1395
Sky and the Forest, The 1216, 1308, 1310
analysis 1313
Social customs, British vs American 815
Social Success for Money, planned 367
Some Personal Notes 554
Sound and the Fury, The, CSF’s opinion 1354
Spenger’s, CSF’s lunchtime 1534
Stephen Troughton-Smith 1063

1820
Marian’s opinion of 1611 sees to CSF’s arrangements 1461
Stephenson, Sir William 888
Sternlicht, Sanford
  bio of CSF 1712
  errors in CSF bio 1723
  restricted sources for CSF bio 1722
Stewart, George R. 816, 950, 1291
  loyalty oath at UC 1338
Straeter, Joan, actress, tries to seduce CSF 628
Suetonius
  CSF reading 40
  CSF’s childhood description compared to Nazi Germany 1386
Summer camp 127
Surcouf, French submarine 854
T
Tank warfare 545
  H. G. Wells in 1904 546
  Winston Churchill 547
TBR 219
Technology
  CSF’s limited knowledge 542

1821
Temiss, Norma, later Mrs. Wagner 581

Theory of the Leisure Class 842

CSF’s Christmas gift to John 1193

Trafalgar campaign

Hornblower’s part in 1429, 1430

Tropic of Cancer, CSF’s opinion 1353

Trouble with Travel, The, CSF’s lies about 1399

Troughton family 22

Turner, A. C. 1472

CSF lying to 1729

CSF thinks will write a biography of CSF 1473

CSF’s compulsion to write The Nightmare 1385

Two and Twenty 479

autobiographical elements 479

literature, CSF’s opinions about bad 485

Typewriter

borrowed from Geoff 163

mechanical troubles 305

Typewriting 161, 217

Typhus, in Commodore Hornblower 983

U

Untermyer, Louis

Hornblower Companion, opinion of 1428

1822
V
Veblen, Thorstein 842
*Victor Emmanuel* 218, 223, 232, 236
  completed 250
  contract 226
  failure to correct errors 268
  length worries 247
  sprinting through it 246
*Victory at Sea* 1358
  CSF’s opinion 1371
W
Walpole, Hugh 584, 590, 633
  recommends CSF to Paramount Pictures 553
Wellington, Duke, meets CSF 1503
Wells, H. G.
  model for *Randall and the River of Time* 1330
West, A. G., John learns of him from Geoffrey’s family history 1570
Whately, Robert 1472
Wheelchair 996
Wheeler-Bennett, Sir John 826, 864
  *Nemesis of Power* 1380
William Morrow & Co 824

1823
investment in 875
Windsor, Duke of 868, 869
Wodehouse, P. G. 93
Wolfe, Thomas 1226
Women
  as controllers
    *The Peacemaker* 519
CSF’s unsatisfactory situation in 1946 1081
*Wonderful Week, The* 397
  analysis 403
  completed 408
  length worries 401
  similarity with *Long Before Forty* 407
  starting 399
  unplanned plot 399
  writing schedule 400
World War I 86
  CSF’s opinion of 95
  effect of end on medical training 109
  start of 79
    *The General* 544
World War II
  Air-raid precautions, American West coast 879

1824
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American isolationism</td>
<td>860</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American neutrality</td>
<td>777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Neutrality Act</td>
<td>778</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American schoolchildren’s early opinions</td>
<td>813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British generals similar to The General</td>
<td>869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditions end of 1941</td>
<td>878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSF a secret agent of British govt</td>
<td>784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSF in Aleutian campaign</td>
<td>971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSF lectures</td>
<td>826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSF registers as British agent in America</td>
<td>866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSF speaking engagements</td>
<td>780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSF’s assignment</td>
<td>862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>end approaching</td>
<td>1019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ends</td>
<td>1132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>family in Ledbury after start</td>
<td>786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hollywood</td>
<td>795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan, invasion of, preparations</td>
<td>1001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The General</em></td>
<td>544</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Wars</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>different effects on veterans</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1825