VINTAGE **HUXLEY**

ANTIC HAY

VINTAGE

CONTENTS

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ABOUT THE BOOK

WITH A FOREWORD BY DAVID LODGE

When inspiration leads Theodore Gumbril to design a type of pneumatic trouser to ease the discomfort of sedentary life, he decides the time has come to give up teaching and seek his fortune in the metropolis. He soon finds himself caught up in the hedonistic world of his friends Mercaptan, Lypiatt and the thoroughly civilised Myra Viveash, and his burning ambitions begin to lose their urgency…

Wickedly funny and deliciously barbed, the novel epitomises the glittering neuroticism of the Twenties.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aldous Huxley came to literary fame in 1921 with his first novel, *Crome Yellow*. With the novels *Antic Hay*, *Those Barren Leaves* and *Point Counter Point*, Huxley quickly established a reputation for bright, brilliant satires that ruthlessly passed judgement on the shortcomings of contemporary society. In later life, exploration of the inner life through mysticism and hallucinogenic drugs dominated Huxley‘s writing, including his first-person account of experiencing mescaline in *The Doors of Perception*. Aldous Huxley died in 1963.

ALSO BY ALDOUS HUXLEY

Novels

Crome Yellow
Antic Hay
Those Barren Leaves
Point Counter Point
Eyeless in Gaza
After Many a Summer
Time Must Have a Stop
Ape and Essence
The Genius and the Goddess
Island

Short Stories

Limbo
Mortal Coils
Little Mexican
Two or Three Graces
Brief Candles
The Gioconda Smile
(Collected Short Stories)

Biography

Grey Eminence
The Devils of Loudun

Travel

Along the Road
Jesting Pilate
Beyond the Mexique Bay

Poetry and Drama

The Burning Wheel Jonah
The Defeat of Youth Leda
Verses and a Comedy
The Gioconda Smile

Essays and Belles Lettres

On the Margin
Proper Studies
Do What You Will
Music at Night
Texts and Pretexts
The Olive Tree
Ends and Means
The Art of Seeing
The Perennial Philosophy
Science, Liberty and Peace
Themes and Variations
The Doors of Perception
Adonis and the Alphabet
Heaven and Hell
Brave New World Revisited
Literature and Science
The Human Situation
Moksha

For Children

The Crows of Pearblossom

ALDOUS HUXLEY

Point Counter Point

WITH A BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION BY
David Bradshaw

VINTAGE

My men like satyrs grazing on the lawns
Shall with their goat-feet dance the antic hay

MARLOWE

FOREWORD

Antic Hay was one of the first adult modern novels I read. I still possess the vermilion and white Penguin edition, published in 1948 at one shilling and sixpence, that I bought secondhand two or three years later, when I was a sixth-former at a Catholic grammar school, preparing to take A levels and nourishing secret literary ambitions of my own. Huxley's novel made a powerful impression on me, and I carried bits of it in my head for the next forty-odd years: the joke about the key to the Absolute, for example, and Gumbril's inflatable trousers, and the image of Rosie, pink and naked on Coleman's bed, glimpsed by her surprised former lover from the open front door of Coleman's flat.

It was probably the sexual promiscuity of Huxley's characters, so different from the moral climate of the lower middle class Catholic subculture in which I grew up, that most excited my adolescent imagination. Though reticent by today's fictional standards, *Antic Hay* seemed almost as daring in the late Forties and early Fifties as it must have done in 1923 when it was first published. The character of Coleman, inventively blaspheming, and insisting on the essential degradation of the sexual instinct even in the act of satisfying it, was a particularly exciting component of the novel; and on reacquaintance his seduction of Rosie, at once funny and erotic still seems one of its high points.

But I learned about more than just the sexual mores of London's Bohemia in the Twenties from *Antic Hay*. I learned about modern art and French literature and Wren's architecture and many other things. I greatly extended my vocabulary. Re-reading the novel in middle age, I found it still stimulated and stretched the mind, and had me reaching several times for the dictionary. No doubt much of

it was over my head in adolescence, but I was entertained even when I did not fully understand. Huxley was always a formidably clever writer, but in *Antic Hay* (and in its precursor *Crome Yellow)* he carried his learning more lightly than in his later novels.

Antic Hay is not a strongly plotted novel. It holds the reader's attention by the energy and wit of its prose, and the extravagant behaviour of its characters. Their dissipation, ennui and despair are observed with such cool detachment and sparkling humour that the effect is exhilarating rather than depressing. One of the best things ever written about the novel was by Evelyn Waugh, in a symposium published in the *London Magazine* in 1955. 'It is placed in London in springtime,' Waugh wrote. 'The weather, page after page, is warm and airy and brilliant … No character in *Antic Hay* ever uses the telephone. They write letters, they telegraph, they call, and there are always servants to say "not at home" to bores. It is Henry James's London possessed by carnival. A chain of brilliant young people linked and interlaced winds past the burnished front doors in pursuit of happiness. Happiness is growing wild for anyone to pick, only the perverse miss it.'

Waugh slightly discounted the philosophical and moral pessimism which underlies the euphoric high spirits and frantic partying of *Antic Hay* – what one might call its Wastelandism', remembering that T.S. Eliot's poem had appeared just a year before. Perhaps Waugh was anxious to stress its difference from his own early novels, like *Decline and Fall* and *Vile Bodies*, for the resemblances are very clear: there is the same mixture of satire and farce, of culture and anarchy, and the same metropolitan setting where high society, bohemia and the bourgeoisie mingle and collide. The early novels of Iris Murdoch (especially *Under the Net)* and of the Amises *père et fils* also remind one intermittently of *Antic Hay*. Huxley's novel made a

seminal contribution to one of the most cherishable strains in English fiction – the intelligent comic novel.

ALDOUS HUXLEY (1894–1963)

ON 26 JULY 1894, near Godalming in Surrey, Aldous Leonard Huxley was born into a family which had only recently become synonymous with the intellectual aristocracy. Huxley's grandfather, Thomas Henry Huxley, had earned notoriety as 'Darwin's bulldog' and fame as a populariser of science, just as his own probing and controversial works were destined to outrage and exhilarate readers and non-readers alike in the following century. Aldous Huxley's mother was a niece of the poet and essayist Matthew Arnold, and he was a nephew of the redoubtable Mrs Humphry Ward, doyenne of late-Victorian novelists. This inheritance, combining the scientific and the literary in a blend which was to become characteristic of his vision as a writer, was both a source of great pride and a burden to Huxley in his formative years. Much was expected of him.

Three traumatic events left their mark on the young Huxley. In 1908 his mother died of cancer, and this led to the effective break-up of the family home. Two years later, while a schoolboy at Eton, Huxley contracted an eye infection which made him almost completely blind for a time and severely impaired his vision for the rest of his life. The suicide of his brother Trevenen in August 1914 robbed Huxley of the person to whom he felt closest. Over twenty years later, in *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936), Huxley's treatment of the death in the main character's mother and his embodiment of 'Trey' in the novel as the vulnerable Brian Foxe give some indication of the indelible pain which these tragic occurrences left in their wake. To a considerable degree, they account for the darkness, pungency and cynicism which feature so prominently in Huxley's work throughout the inter-war period.

Within months of achieving a First in English Language and Literature at Balliol College, Oxford in 1916, Huxley published *The Burning Wheel*. Huxley's first collection of verse, and the three which followed it, *Jonah (1917), The Defeat of Youth* (1918) and *Leda* (1920), reveal his indebtedness to French symbolism and *fin de siècle* aestheticism. Also discernible, however, beneath the poetry's triste and ironic patina, is a concern with the inward world of the spirit which anticipates Huxley's later absorption in mysticism. These volumes of poetry were the first of over fifty separate works of fiction, drama, verse, criticism, biography, travel and speculative writing which Huxley was to produce during the course of his life.

Unfit for military service, Huxley worked as a farm labourer at Lady Ottoline Morrell's Garsington Manor after he left Oxford. Here he met not only D.H. Lawrence, Bertrand Russell, Clive Bell, Mark Gertler and other Bloomsbury figures, but also a Belgian refugee, Maria Nys, whom he married in 1919. By then Huxley was working for the *Athenaeum* magazine under the adroit editorship of Middleton Murry. Soon after he became the first British editor of *House and Garden*, worked for *Vogue* and contributed musical criticism to the *Weekly Westminster Gazette* in the early 1920s.

Limbo (1920), a collection of short stories, preceded the appearance of *Crome Yellow* in 1921, the novel with which Huxley first made his name as a writer. Inspired by, among others, Thomas Love Peacock, Norman Douglas and Anatole France, Huxley's first novel incorporated many incidents from his sojourn at Garsington as well as mischievous portraits of its chatelaine and his fellow guests. More blatantly still, *Crome Yellow* is an iconoclastic tilt at the Victorian and Edwardian mores which had resulted in the First World War and its terrible aftermath. For all its comic bravura, which won acclaim from writers such as Scott Fitzgerald and Max Beerbohm, *Crome Yellow* may be read,

along with Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* (1918) and Huxley's second novel *Antic Hay* (1923), as an expression of the pervasive mood of disenchantment in the early 1920s. Huxley told his father that *Antic Hay* was 'written by a member of what I may call the war-generation for others of his kind'. He went on to say that it was intended to reflect 'the life and opinions of an age which has seen the violent disruption of almost all the standards, conventions and values current in the previous epoch'.

Even as a schoolboy Huxley had been an avid browser among the volumes of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and it did not take long for him to acquire a reputation for arcane eclecticism. Moreover, as his prestige as a debunker and an emancipator grew, so Huxley was condemned more roundly by critics of the old guard, such as James Douglas of the *Daily Express*, who denounced the explicit discussion of sex and free thought in his fiction. *Antic Hay* was burned in Cairo, and in the ensuing years many of Huxley's books were censured, censored or banned at one time or another. Conversely, it was the openness, wit, effortless learning and apparent insouciance of Huxley's early work which proved such an appetising concoction for novelists as diverse as Evelyn Waugh, William Faulkner, Anthony Powell and Barbara Pym. Angus Wilson called Huxley 'the god of my adolescence'.

From 1923 onwards Huxley lived abroad more or less permanently, first near Florence and then, between 1930 and 1937, at Sanary on the Cote d'Azur. In *Along the Road* (1925), subtitled 'Notes and Essays of a Tourist', Huxley offered a lively and engaging account of the places and works of art he had taken in since his arrival in Italy, and both the title story of his third collection of tales, *Little Mexican* (1924), and his third novel, *Those Barren Leaves* (1925), are set in that country. According to Huxley, the theme of *Those Barren Leaves* is 'the undercutting of everything by a sort of despairing scepticism and then the

undercutting of that by mysticism'. For W.B. Yeats, *Those Barren Leaves* heralded the return of philosophy to the English novel, but it was with his fourth novel, *Point Counter Point* (1928), that Huxley cemented his reputation with the reading public as a thought-provoking writer of fiction. *Point Counter Point* is Huxley's first true 'novel of ideas', the type of fiction with which he has become most closely identified. He once explained that his aim as a novelist was 'to arrive, technically, at a perfect fusion of the novel and the essay', arguing that the novel should be like a holdall, bursting with opinion and arresting ideas. This privileging of content over form was one of the many things he had in common with H.G. Wells; it was anathema to the likes of Virginia Woolf. Huxley was fascinated by the fact that 'the same person is simultaneously a mass of atoms, a physiology, a mind, an object with a shape that can be painted, a cog in the economic machine, a voter, a lover etc', and one of his key aims in *Point Counter Point* was to offer this multi-faceted view of his principal characters.

Huxley's more sombre mood in the late 1920s was epitomised by *Proper Studies* (1927), the most important of the four volumes of essays he published during the decade, and the one in which he first set himself unequivocally against what he regarded as the vulgarity and perversity of mass civilisation. Between September 1925 and June 1926 Huxley had travelled via India to the United States, and it was this visit to America which made him so pessimistic about the cultural future of Europe. He recounted his experiences in *Jesting Pilate* (1926). 'The thing which is happening in America is a revaluation of values,' Huxley wrote, 'a radical alteration (for the worse) of established standards', and it was soon after visiting the United States that Huxley conceived the idea of writing a satire on what he had encountered. *Brave New World* (1932) may be read as Huxley's contribution to the widespread fear of Americanisation which had been current in Europe since the

mid-nineteenth century, but this humorous, disturbing and curiously ambivalent novel offers much more than straightforward travesty. Similarly, although *Brave New World* has become, with Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, one of the twin pillars of the anti-utopian tradition in literature and a byword for all that is most repellent and 'nightmarish' in the world to come, it was written with Huxley's gaze very much on the crisis-torn present of Britain in 1931. When placed alongside *Brief Candles* (193 a), a well-received collection of short stories, *Music at Night* (1931), a typically energetic and wide-ranging volume of essays, and *Texts and Pretexts* (1932), a verse anthology with commentaries designed to show that even in the highly-charged political atmosphere of the early 1930s 'they also serve who only bother their heads about art', Huxley's polygonal appeal as a novelist, thinker and pundit is brought home. In 1934 he published *Beyond the Mexique Bay*, an account of his travels in the Caribbean and Central America, and in 1936, *Eyeless in Gaza*. Stimulated by his conversion to pacifism in November 1935, Huxley's sixth novel imbricates the fears, foibles, prejudices and dissensions of the age with a fictionalisation of his own history. A commitment to questions which are essentially religious, rather than political or philosophical, is evident in Huxley's work for the first time.

When Huxley left Europe for the United States in April 1937 he was at the height of his fame as a novelist and the Peace Pledge Union's leading celebrity. Ironically, he was by now far more concerned with the virtues of non-attachment, anarchism, decentralisation and mystical salvation than with the failings of contemporary society, the role of pacifism in national politics or the art of fiction. If Huxley had been intent on exposing the meaninglessness of life in the 19 zos, from the mid-1930s he was preoccupied with seeking the meaning of existence. *Ends and Means* (1937), in which Huxley tried 'to relate the problems of domestic and

international politics, of war and economics, of education, religion and ethics, to a theory of the ultimate nature of reality', signalled his departure for the higher ground of mystical enlightenment where he would remain encamped for the rest of his life.

It was to lecture on the issues which dominate *Ends and Means* that Huxley and his friend and guru Gerald Heard had travelled to the United States. Huxley had every intention of returning to Europe, but his wife's need to live in a hot, dry climate on health grounds and the lucrative prospect of writing for the movies contrived to keep the Huxleys in America until it was too unsafe to return. Huxley's reaction to Hollywood and its cult of youth finds mordant expression in *After Many a Summer* (1939), the story of a Citizen Kane-like character's life of grandiose illusion. The materialist excesses of Jo Stoyte are counterpointed by the ascetic convictions of Propter, a modern-day anchorite modelled on Heard. Huxley and Hollywood were not compatible, and his failure to write a popular play in the inter-war years was mirrored in his largely unsuccessful efforts to write for the movies. Walt Disney's widely reported rejection of Huxley's synopsis of *Alice in Wonderland* on the grounds that he 'could only understand every third word' was symptomatic of Huxley's problem. His natural bent was for the leisurely and allusive development of an idea; above all else the movie moguls demanded pacey dialogue. His disenchantment with the world of the film studios is evident in the opening pages of *Ape and Essence* (1948), Huxley's ghastly and graphic projection of Los Angeles as a ruinous, sprawling ossuary in the aftermath of the atomic Third World War. While the threat of global nuclear conflict has receded for the present, Huxley's discussion of the rapid deforestation, pollution and other acts of ecological 'imbecility' which preceded the self-inflicted apocalypse he describes in the novel, is still chillingly topical.

Huxley spent most of the war years in a small house at Llano in the Mojave Desert in Southern California. In 1926 he had dismissed meditation as ‘the doze’s first cousin’, but it was to a life of quietistic contemplation that Huxley now devoted himself. This phase of his career resulted in the excellent *Grey Eminence* (1941), a biography of Father Joseph, adviser to Cardinal Richelieu; *Time Must Have a Stop* (1944), a novel set in Florence in 1929 in which, to borrow Huxley’s words, ‘a piece of the *Comedie Humaine* … modulates into a version of the *Divina Commedia*’; and *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945), a profoundly influential anthology of excerpts and commentaries illustrating what Huxley called ‘the highest common factor of all the higher religions’. He went on to say with typical humour and humility, ‘The greatest merit of the book is that about forty per cent of it is not by me, but by a lot of saints, many of whom were also men of genius.’ *The Devils of Loudun*, a compelling psychological study of sexual hysteria in seventeenth-century France, which was subsequently turned into a successful film, appeared in 1952. In the same way that Huxley’s astringent social satires caught the mood of the 1920s, so, in the years during and following the Second World War and the enormity of the Jewish Holocaust, his personal concern with spiritual and ethical matters and his consternation at the accelerating arms race, reflected both the tone and unease of the zeitgeist.

Huxley also acquired new readers through his support of the marginal and unconventional, and his detractors, hitherto exercised by what they saw as his immorality or preachiness, began to pour scorn on his alleged faddism. In 1942 he published *The Art of Seeing*, a passionate defence of the Bates method of eye training which aroused a storm of protest from the optometrist lobby. Even more outrageous, for many, was his suggestion in *The Doors of Perception* (1954) and its sequel, *Heaven and Hell* (1956), that mescalin and lysergic acid were ‘drugs of unique

distinction' which should be exploited for the 'supernaturally brilliant' visionary experiences they offered to those with open minds and sound livers. *The Doors of Perception* is indeed a bewitching account of the inner shangri-la of the mescalin taker, where 'there is neither work nor monotony' but only 'a perceptual present made up of one continually changing apocalypse', where 'the divine source of all existence' is evident in a vase of flowers, and even the creases in a pair of trousers reveal 'a labyrinth of endlessly significant complexity'. Not surprisingly, *The Doors of Perception* became a set text for the beat generation and the psychedelic Sixties, The Doors naming their band after the book which also earned Huxley a place on the sleeve of The Beatles' *Sergeant Pepper* album.

Maria Huxley died in February 1955, shortly before Huxley published his penultimate novel, *The Genius and the Goddess*, in which John Rivers recounts the brief history of his disastrous involvement, when he was a 'virgin prig of twenty-eight', with the wife of his colleague Henry Maartens, a Nobel Prize-winning scientist. Not for the first time, Huxley's theme is the havoc which ensues when a man with an idealistic misconception of life born of a cloistered and emotionally deprived upbringing experiences the full, sensual impact of human passion.

Huxley married Laura Archera, a practising psychotherapist, in March 1956. Two years later he published *Brave New World Revisited*, in which he surveyed contemporary society in the light of his earlier predictions. Huxley's knack of keying in to the anxieties of the moment was as sharp as ever, and this touch is also evident in a series of lectures on 'The Human Situation' which he gave at Santa Barbara in 1959, published in one volume in 1977. Both books address problems which are no less pressing today, such as overpopulation, the recrudescence of nationalism and the fragility of the natural world. Huxley's last novel, *Island*, was published in 1962, the year in which

he was made a Companion of Literature, and the year after his Los Angeles home and most of his personal effects had been destroyed in a fire which, Huxley said, left him ‘a man without possessions and without a past’.

Island is the story of how the offshore utopia of Pala, where population growth has been stabilised and Mutual Adoption Clubs have superseded the tyranny of the family, and where *maithuna*, or the yoga of love and *moksha*, an hallucinogenic toadstool, ensure that the Palanese have little reason to feel disgruntled, falls victim to the age-old menaces of material progress and territorial expansionism. *Island* is perhaps Huxley’s most pessimistic book, his poignant acknowledgement that in a world of increasing greed, mass communication, oil-guzzling transport, burgeoning population and inveterate hostility, a pacific and co-operative community like Pala’s ‘oasis of freedom and happiness’ has little hope of survival. Soon after *Island* was published Huxley commented that the ‘weakness of the book consists in a disbalance between fable and exposition. The story has too much weight, in the way of ideas and reflections, to carry.’ But, while some readers would agree with this criticism, for others *Island* exemplifies Huxley’s particular contribution to twentieth-century letters. In his early days the highbrow incarnate and a reluctant lecturer for the Peace Pledge Union, Huxley became for many a companionable polymath, a transatlantic sage at large, whose unending quest for synthesis and meaning in an ever-more perplexing and violent world provided a paradigm for their own search for peace and understanding.

Before his eyesight was damaged, Huxley’s ambition was to specialise in the sciences, and it is significant that in his last published work, *Literature and Science* (1963), he pleads yet again for a *rapprochement* between the two cultures, arguing passionately against the contemporary stress on their dichotomy. The book begins by emphasising the wide-ranging erudition of T.H. Huxley and Matthew

Arnold. Their descendant, one of the most stimulating and provocative writers of the twentieth century, proved himself a worthy inheritor of their abilities over the course of his long and varied career.

Huxley died of cancer at his home in Hollywood on 22 November 1963, unaware that President J.F. Kennedy had been assassinated earlier that afternoon in Dallas. In 1971 his ashes were returned to England and interred in his parents' grave at Compton in Surrey.

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Worcester College, Oxford
1993

CHAPTER I

GUMBRIL, THEODORE GUMBRIL Junior, B.A. Oxon., sat in his oaken stall on the north side of the School Chapel and wondered, as he listened through the uneasy silence of half a thousand schoolboys to the First Lesson, pondered, as he looked up at the vast window opposite, all blue and jaundiced and bloody with nineteenth-century glass, speculated in his rapid and rambling way about the existence and the nature of God.

Standing in front of the spread brass eagle and fortified in his convictions by the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy (for this first Sunday of term was the Fifth after Easter), the Reverend Pelvey could speak of these things with an enviable certainty. 'Hear, O Israel,' he was booming out over the top of the portentous Book: 'the Lord our God is one Lord.'

One Lord; Mr Pelvey knew; he had studied theology. But if theology and theosophy, then why not theography and theometry, why not theognomy, theotrophy, theotomy, theogamy? Why not theophysics and theo-chemistry? Why not that ingenious toy, the theotrope or wheel of gods? Why not a monumental theodrome?

In the great window opposite, young David stood like a cock, crowing on the dunghill of a tumbled giant. From the middle of Goliath's forehead there issued, like a narwhal's budding horn, a curious excrescence. Was it the embedded pebble? Or perhaps the giant's married life?

'… with all thine heart,' declaimed the Reverend Pelvey, 'and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.'

No, but seriously, Gumbril reminded himself, the problem was very troublesome indeed. God as a sense of warmth about the heart, God as exultation, God as tears in the eyes, God as a rush of power or thought – that was all right. But

God as truth, God as z + z = 4 – that wasn't so clearly all right. Was there any chance of their being the same? Were their bridges to join the two worlds? And could it be that the Reverend Pelvey, M.A., foghorning away from behind the imperial bird, could it be that he had an answer and a clue? That was hardly believable. Particularly if one knew Mr Pelvey personally. And Gumbril did.

'And these words which I command thee this day,' retorted Mr Pelvey, 'shall be in thine heart.'

Or in the heart, or in the head? Reply, Mr Pelvey, reply. Gumbril jumped between the horns of the dilemma and voted for other organs.

'And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.'

Diligently unto thy children... Gumbril remembered his own childhood; they had not been very diligently taught to him. 'Beetles, black beetles' – his father had a really passionate feeling about the clergy. Mumbo-jumbery was another of his favourite words. An atheist and an anti-clerical of the strict old school he was. Not that, in any case, he gave himself much time to think about these things; he was too busy being an unsuccessful architect. As for Gumbril's mother, her diligence had not been dogmatic. She had just been diligently good, that was all. Good; good? It was a word people only used nowadays with a kind of deprecating humorousness. Good. Beyond good and evil? We are all that nowadays. Or merely below them, like earwigs? I glory in the name of earwig. Gumbril made a mental gesture and inwardly declaimed. But good in any case, there was no getting out of that, good she had been. Not nice, not merely *molto simpatica* – how charmingly and effectively these foreign tags assist one in the great task of calling a spade by some other name! – but good. You felt the active radiance of her goodness when you were near her...

And that feeling, was that less real and valid than two plus two?

The Reverend Pelvey had nothing to reply. He was reading with a holy gusto of ‘houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not.’

She had been good and she had died when he was still a boy; died – but he hadn’t been told that till much later – of creeping and devouring pain. Malignant disease – oh, *caro nome!*

‘Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God,’ said Mr Pelvey.

Even when the ulcers are benign; thou shalt fear. He had travelled up from school to see her, just before she died. He hadn’t known that she was going to die, but when he entered her room, when he saw her lying so weakly in the bed, he had suddenly begun to cry, uncontrollably. All the fortitude, the laughter even, had been hers. And she had spoken to him. A few words only; but they had contained all the wisdom he needed to live by. She had told him what he was, and what he should try to be, and how to be it. And crying, still crying, he had promised that he would try.

‘And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes,’ said Mr Pelvey, ‘for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day.’

And had he kept his promise, Gumbril wondered, had he preserved himself alive?

‘Here endeth the First Lesson.’ Mr Pelvey retreated from the eagle and the organ presaged the coming *Te Deum*.

Gumbril hoisted himself to his feet; the folds of his B.A. gown billowed nobly about himself as he rose. He sighed and shook his head with the gesture of one who tries to shake off a fly or an importunate thought. When the time came for singing, he sang. On the opposite side of the chapel two boys were grinning and whispering to one another behind their lifted Prayer Books. Gumbril frowned at them ferociously. The two boys caught his eye and their

faces at once took on an expression of sickly piety; they began to sing with unction. They were two ugly, stupid-looking louts, who ought to have been apprenticed years ago to some useful trade. Instead of which they were wasting their own and their teacher's and their more intelligent comrades' time in trying, quite vainly, to acquire an elegant literary education. The minds of dogs, Gumbril reflected, do not benefit by being treated as though they were the minds of men.

'O Lord, have mercy upon us: have mercy upon us.'

Gumbril shrugged his shoulders and looked round the chapel at the faces of the boys. Lord, indeed, have mercy upon us! He was disturbed to find the sentiment echoed on a somewhat different note in the Second Lesson, which was drawn from the twenty-third chapter of St Luke. 'Father, forgive them,' said Mr Pelvey in his unvaryingly juicy voice; 'for they know not what they do.' Ah, but suppose one did know what one was doing? suppose one knew only too well? And of course one always did know. One was not a fool.

But this was all nonsense, all nonsense. One must think of something better than this. What a comfort it would be, for example, if one could bring air cushions into chapel! These polished oaken stalls were devilishly hard; they were meant for stout and lusty pedagogues, not for bony starvelings like himself. An air cushion, a delicious pneu.

'Here endeth,' boomed Mr Pelvey, closing his book on the back of the German eagle.

As if by magic, Dr Jolly was ready at the organ with the *Benedictus*. It was positively a relief to stand again; this oak was adamantine. But air cushions, alas, would be too bad an example for the boys. Hardy young Spartans! it was an essential part of their education that they should listen to the word of revelation without pneumatic easement. No, air cushions wouldn't do. The real remedy, it suddenly flashed across his mind, would be trousers with pneumatic seats. For all occasions; not merely for church-going.

The organ blew a thin Puritan-preacher's note through one of its hundred nostrils. 'I believe …' With a noise like the breaking of a wave, five hundred turned towards the East. The view of David and Goliath was exchanged for a Crucifixion in the grand manner of eighteen hundred and sixty. 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.' No, no Gumbril preferred to look at the grooved stonework rushing smoothly up on either side of the great east window towards the vaulted roof; preferred to reflect, like the dutiful son of an architect he was, that Perpendicular at its best – and its best is its largest – is the finest sort of English Gothic. At its worst and smallest, as in most of the colleges of Oxford, it is mean, petty, and, but for a certain picturesqueness, almost wholly disgusting. He felt like a lecturer: next slide, please. 'And the life everlasting. Amen.' Like an oboe, Mr Pelvey intoned: 'The Lord be with you.'

For prayer, Gumbril reflected, there would be Dunlop knees. Still, in the days when he had made a habit of praying, they hadn't been necessary. 'Our Father…' The words were the same as they were in the old days; but Mr Pelvey's method of reciting them made them sound rather different. Her dresses, when he had leaned his forehead against her knee to say those words – those words, good Lord! that Mr Pelvey was oboeing out of existence – were always black in the evenings, and of silk, and smelt of orris root. And when she was dying, she had said to him: 'Remember the Parable of the Sower, and the seeds that fell in shallow ground.' No, no. Amen, decidedly. 'O Lord, show thy mercy upon us,' chanted oboe Pelvey, and Gumbril trombone responded, profoundly and grotesquely: 'And grant us thy salvation.' No, the knees were obviously less important, except for people like revivalists and housemaids, than the seat. Sedentary are commoner than genuflectory professions. One would introduce little flat rubber bladders between two layers of cloth. At the upper end, hidden when one wore a coat, would be a tube with a

valve: like a hollow tail. Blow it up – and there would be perfect comfort even for the boniest, even on rock. How did the Greeks stand marble benches in their theatres?

The moment had now come for the Hymn. This being the first Sunday of the Summer term, they sang that special hymn, written by the Headmaster, with music by Dr Jolly, on purpose to be sung on the first Sundays of terms. The organ quietly sketched out the tune. Simple it was, uplifting and manly.

One, two, three, four; one, two THREE – 4.
One, two-and three-and four-and; One, two THREE – 4.
ONE – 2, THREE – 4; ONE – 2 – 3 – 4, and-ONE – 2, THREE – 4;
ONE – 2 – 3 – 4.
One, two-and three, four; One, two THREE – 4.

Five hundred flawed adolescent voices took it up. For good example's sake, Gumbril opened and closed his mouth; noiselessly, however. It was only at the third verse that he gave rein to his uncertain baritone. He particularly liked the third verse; it marked, in his opinion, the Headmaster's highest poetical achievement.

(f) *For slack hands and* (dim.) *idle minds*
(mf) *Mischief still the Tempter finds*.
(ff) *Keep him captive in his lair*.

At this point Dr Jolly enriched his tune with a thick accompaniment in the lower registers, artfully designed to symbolize the depth, the gloom and general repulsiveness of the Tempter's home.

(ff) *Keep him captive in his lair*.
(f) *Work will bind him*. (dim.) *Work is* (pp) *prayer*.

Work, thought Gumbril, work. Lord, how passionately he disliked work! Let Austin have his swink to him reserved! Ah, if only one had work of one's own, proper work, decent work – not forced upon one by the griping of one's belly! Amen! Dr Jolly blew the two sumptuous jets of reverence into the air; Gumbril accompanied them with all his heart. Amen, indeed.

Gumbril sat down again. It might be convenient, he thought, to have the tail so long that one could blow up one's trousers while one actually had them on. In which case, it would have to be coiled round the waist like a belt; or looped up, perhaps, and fastened to a clip on one's braces.

'The nineteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, part of the thirty-fourth verse.' The Headmaster's loud, harsh voice broke violently out from the pulpit. 'All with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.'

Gumbril composed himself as comfortably as he could on his oaken seat. It was going to be one of the Headmaster's real swingeing sermons. Great is Diana. And Venus? Ah, these seats, these seats!

Gumbril did not attend evening chapel. He stayed at home in his lodgings to correct the sixty-three Holiday Task Papers which had fallen to his share. They lay, thick piles of them, on the floor beside his chair: sixty-three answers to ten questions about the Italian Risorgimento. The Risorgimento, of all subjects! It had been one of the Headmaster's caprices. He had called a special masters' meeting at the end of last term to tell them all about the Risorgimento. It was his latest discovery.

'The Risorgimento, gentlemen, is the most important event in modern European history.' And he had banged the table; he had looked defiantly round the room in search of contradictors.