

Crosse marks the spot

Written for "The Listener"

By

"ETAOIN"

IF there is any truth in Holy Writ, Mr. Crosse is going to be a big landowner some day. In fact, he is so meek that I am sure he would prefer, when his turn comes, to die under an assumed name and escape the publicity of his own obituary notice. You see, he is, as it were, not only meek in his own right, but also by force of circumstances, the circumstances in his case being marriage with Mrs. Crosse, who, not content with being three inches taller than he and several square yards more extensive, hedges him about with a protective instinct as effective as the bulges on a battle-cruiser. Not that I wish to suggest that there is anything of the battle-cruiser about Mr. Crosse, whatever one might think about his good wife.

Of course, like very many people in like circumstances, Mr. Crosse did not realise how meek he was. He was quite sure that in his own home he wore the trousers, and Mrs. Crosse, being wise after the fashion of possessive women-kind, did not disturb this illusion, though anyone who saw them in their home-circle could not fail to realise that if Mr. Crosse wore any trousers at all (in the spiritual sense, I mean), they were three-cornered ones.

Under the influence of his wife, Mr. Crosse ate raw carrots and drank cod liver oil. He also consumed large quantities of raw spinach until Mrs. Crosse heard over the radio that it did unmentionable things to the oesophagus or the proscenium or something, and thereafter Mr. Crosse ate parsley and no doubt would have gone so far as Nebuchadnezzar if that had been required of him. To visitors, Mr. Crosse would remark apologetically that the only way to a woman's heart was through one's own stomach, which wasn't a bad epigram when he first thought of it as a newly-

married husband but was getting a bit tarnished after the hard usage entailed by thirty years of wedlock.

BUT the fact remained that like all meek individuals, Mr. Crosse had subconscious longings for adventure. And he found that longing to a certain extent satisfied in detective stories. I would be willing to wager that if you asked him why he liked them he would talk about their intellectual appeal. Your weakling always goes in for intellect in a big way. But the truth is that Mr. Crosse, who couldn't see a mouse in a trap and a bead of blood on its whiskers without feeling faint, glugged a ghoulish, or perhaps masochistic soul by wallowing in tales of murder, sudden death, and worse, at 3d a time (Special Editions, 6d) from the local circulating library.

COMING out of the said library the Friday evening after daylight-saving came in, with sixpence worth of intellectual exercise under his arm, Mr. Crosse paused on the pavement and told himself that Spring was here. He had, it is true, made the same inane remark to each member of the staff at the office, and also to the blonde who had just wrapped up his books for him, but the novelty had not worn off yet, and when he got on to the 'bus he decided that he would alight at the third section and walk home across the golf links, instead of going on to the fourth and home via the prosaic asphalt path at Peachblossom Avenue. It would still be light enough, and the exercise, he felt sure, would give him sufficient appetite to deal adequately with the evening blitz of vitamins.

It was as well, reflected Mr. Crosse, as he got off the 'bus and climbed the

stile at the roadside, that he was wearing goloshes. Agnes had a phobia about wet feet and chills, and was convinced that health had to be insulated with gutta-percha. He walked over the springy turf twirling his umbrella. Spring was indeed a gladsome season. He essayed the opening bars of Mendelssohn's "Spring Song," which he interpreted with such verve on the pianola, but cracked badly on the first high note and smothered it with a loud "Har-hum," looking round hastily to see if anyone had overheard him.

But there was no one in sight, save a distant foursome, busy holing out on the last green. The close-cut fairways rolled smoothly away before him like the long combers of a vast green sea, their infinity broken only here and there by eddies of longer grass swirling around small patches of broom and gorse which seemed like half-tide rocks in the waning light.

Mr. Crosse marched doughtily onwards towards home and the apotheosis of the vitamin. Even now the faithful Agnes would be warming his slippers by the dining-room fire, shredding his carrots, slicing lettuce. Mr. Crosse panted slightly, not as a hart after the water-brooks but because the going was a little steeper from the fourth fairway to the tenth, around the patch of broom where the longer hitters came to grief so often.

IT was just as he was rounding the top of the rough that he noticed something which seemed out of place at the edge of the broom-bushes. Curiosity bent his steps a little closer, then sudden shock froze him in his tracks. For what Mr. Crosse saw protruding from beneath one of the bushes were the extremities of a pair of khaki trousers, and a pair of ammunition boots (obviously occupied) protruding from the trousers.

O dear me, O dear me, a Body! thought Mr. Crosse, and sweated profusely, his stomach rumbling with horror and emptiness. And a member of His

Majesty's Forces, at that. Wild speculation raced through his mind. This was Fifth Column work, or, worse still, there might be parachute troops about. He glanced hastily upwards but there was nothing to be seen in the twilight sky save a couple of seagulls wheeling aimlessly. And seagulls, reflected Mr. Crosse, while they might be troublesome on rare occasions, were not lethal.

Secretly, Mr. Crosse was rather surprised that he was not more panicked at the sight of death. Rather did he exult within him. This was War and the path of duty opened wide before him, the Man of Action. Duty nobly done, he would be in a position to put the office in its place to-morrow morning.

JUST what steps he should take along the path of duty Mr. Crosse did not quite know. He stood and pondered. Were he Lord Peter Wimsey no doubt he could have summed the situation up in an appropriate Shakespearean quotation, but Mr. Crosse knew more about Lord Peter than he did about Shakespeare. He had, moreover, no moustaches to twiddle, like Hercule Poirot, no meersch-chaum or pocket magnifying-glass, no camera with which to record the exact position of the corpus delicti.

Mr. Crosse, on tip-toe in his goloshes, dithered for perhaps two minutes, then he did something which I have no doubt neither Wimsey, nor Poirot, Holmes, Thorndyke, nor Gethryn would have dreamed of doing.

He stepped forward gingerly and prodded the leg of the corpse with the ferrule of his respectable umbrella. The result was staggering. The green bushes splayed drunkenly as the corpse leaped to its feet.

"What the hell?" it inquired, "What the perishing hell?"

Mr. Crosse blanched, then crimsoned dusily in his confusion.

"Oh, I-I beg your pardon," he gulped, "and the lady's."



Sad Tale of a Shipwreck Survivor

A survivor from a shipwreck, invited to broadcast by the BBC, shyly refused because he had lost his teeth.

No time or opportunity to obtain a duplicate set, so the BBC man composed a script entirely omitting "s," "t," and "th."

Alas for his ingenuity — they couldn't find time for the broadcast after all.