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AT ALL CHEMISTS IN A TIN 20.9

The Poet's Progress

Oblations and Rebuffs.

5. The ship berthed at Tilbury, whence the train took me to Waterloo, where I left all my luggage excepting a small suitcase. I had received a letter at the ship from some very distant relations in Hampshire, inviting me to stay there; and my book being finished (the second book of my Progress, *Present Without Leave*, as I said before), I had decided to go there at once. But first of all I had to visit the Bank of New Zealand, which is in the City, and the New Zealand Government Office, which is in the Strand; and my suitcase being somewhat heavy, I went by Underground so far as the Strand and there took a taxi, mainly for the pleasure of so doing, since I might almost as easily have gone on by bus. It was a bright, sunny day of early summer, in the year 1938. I had been away for seven years, and the Underground, with its many improvements, bewildered me for a moment. But emerging in the sunlight, I was not a little excited as I was driven along the Strand in a taxi to pay my two calls. I had only twenty-five pounds in all the World, but the one fatal thing would have been to pay any regard to this fact, more than my immediate needs compelled me.

6. I was kindly received in Hampshire. The weather continued fine, and my hosts' cottage being somewhat small, I proposed and was permitted to camp in a small and as yet unused hen-house near by, equipped with a mattress, some blankets and a bottle of sherry, where I went on with my writing every morning and often far into the night, cycling into Petersfield and other neighbouring places for exercise of an afternoon. I paid them for my food, and I otherwise handled my few pounds very carefully, buying only a little wine for making oblations in the woods and for a sleeping draught now and then. The oblations proved ineffectual very soon, and I was since inclined to believe that only bad omens are decipherable by me in England, as only good omens are in New Zealand and at sea, like those of the hawk, the hare and the herring, of which I wrote in Book Two. But perhaps I did wrong to ask for a favourable outcome for my book by making oblations, seeing on what other great matters the Fates were just then engaged. The war which broke out a year later was expected that summer, and Caldicot, my host, was in charge of Civil Defence for that neighbourhood, issuing gas-masks of an evening and instructing the frightened inhabitants in their use. Thousands were already fleeing from London into the country, although houses and lodgings were nowhere to be had. I took no part in these matters, but went on with my book.

The second of several extracts from the unpublished *Third Volume (1939-1950)* of D'ARCY CRESSWELL'S Autobiography. Copyright is reserved.

7. My first visit to London was to repay him what I had borrowed and to tell him about my book, whose opening chapters on New Zealand he had greatly admired when they appeared in the *Christchurch Press* there some six or seven years before. But when, some weeks after, I sent him the completed typescript, to my great disappointment he returned it unread, saying he had just promised to read the typescript of James Agate's *Ego*, and he doubted if I could wait until he had done so. I well knew what this meant. I knew, as he knew, that to wait a few weeks for his aid would still be far better for me than to proceed without it; and I saw by this I could hope for no more assistance from him.

8. I had other, if less damaging, rebuffs from former friends in England very soon. Jim Ede, who had invited me to visit him in Tangier on my way from New Zealand, was in England just now. I had half expected, from the warmth of his letters, he would meet the ship; but now, although he was visiting in Hampshire quite near me (as I had delighted to do in more prosperous days) he would not come to see me, and we never met for five years. And Cooie Lane, when I visited her in Chelsea, seemed offended and cold, although our friendship was quickly resumed. Such sensitive and highly-civilised persons are difficult for a half barbarous New Zealander to know. If he give up too much of his birthright to appease them he is in danger of resembling them too closely and of failing in that public aim which was whereby he first came to know them. They cultivate their exquisite feelings in private, where their sensibilities are fed on nothing but what artists and poets provide them with; after which pattern, by reason of the leisure and security they enjoy, they fashion the fine manners and forbearing relations with each other which artists, whose warfare is in public, have neither the leisure nor the security to do, and might expect, when they come among these fine persons, not a little indulgence for the mud and dust which is on them; unless, indeed, they are found to prefer it, as some artists do



who are insensible of what and where they are. For an artist must remember what and where he is in polite company (it is the mark of a mere Bohemian not to do so) and not, by discrediting himself with them, taint the source of all politeness. As they in turn must allow him every singularity of his hazardous calling, and pay

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