

CONTEMPORARY ALFREDS

By Donald Ogden Stewart

II: ALFRED SWIFT

With a Sketch by Herb Roth



I am not really a humorist."

It was a curious remark for Alfred Swift to make. I scented a joke. I didn't know Swift very well; but I scented a joke. I had been fooled before by these humorists with their "serious statements". It always seemed to me a rather poor way to get a laugh. I don't like practical jokes. And I don't like the humorist who leads you into a serious discussion only to wriggle out with a laugh—at your expense.

"I am not really a humorist."

Swift *was* a humorist. At least, he was rapidly acquiring a literary reputation as such. And I liked Swift—what little I had seen of him. I liked him well enough to wish that he wouldn't try to "kid" me. Our acquaintanceship had not really reached the "kidding" stage—especially as I was somewhat older than he. Besides, he was my guest. It was really quite fresh of Swift to begin his luncheon with a joke on his host. One usually felt out one's ground a little—especially with an older man. I was a little disappointed.

Of course there was the possibility that Swift was not trying to be funny with me at all. Certainly he did not, at this particular moment, look like a humorist. His thin face had on it that

expression which I have observed men often adopt when they are listening to a recitation of "Gunga Din" or a red seal graphophone record. I had seen that same pathetic look recently somewhere else—neither in a vaudeville theatre nor a drawing room. Where? I remembered—with a smile. It was at a dinner party. I glanced hastily at Swift's plate. But no—his oysters were untouched. Swift, his oyster fork held limply in his hand, was gazing sadly out of the window.

It was a melancholy day. The late fall days usually are. There is something about the approach of winter that induces a rather pleasant indulgence in the "blues". At least I enjoy it, with somewhat the same pleasure with which I listen in a cabaret to old waltzes. The pleasurable enjoyment of vague indefinite sorrow for vague indefinite lost things—it is an autumn emotion. I fell for a minute into Swift's mood. It was pleasant, sitting up in the many mirrored dining room of the Croton Club, to look down over the city. It was warm in the Croton Club; it was cold in the city. Snow—the first snow—was drifting down. Drifting—

"I am not really a humorist."

What did the young man want? Was he merely fishing for praise? Certainly he had been told often enough, in the past two months, that "Blaa!" was one of the funniest books of the year

and that its author was a humorist "of the first water"—whatever, as one reviewer had said, that may mean. I had enjoyed "Blaa!". And having met the author several times I had asked him to have lunch with me. And here we were. Or where were we?

I had had enough experience with literary people to know that there is often a sad discrepancy between the author and his work. My constant and enthusiastic companion on my excursion to all available prizefights, for example, is the man who makes his living by writing children's bedtime stories; the one occasion in my life when I was overwhelmed with perfumery and disgust was when talking—for the first and last time—to the author who has gained a fortune as the writer of what are described as "red-blooded stories for red-blooded men". Still more recently I had read of the marital difficulties—excessive cruelty, drunkenness, infidelity, etc.—of one of our leading "poets of the hearth and home". But Alfred Swift's case was somewhat different. Here was a young man on the threshold of what promised to be a great career gazing sad-eyed out of the window and telling me that he wasn't something everyone was praising him for being. It occurred to me that perhaps the fellow was merely modest. Sincerely modest. It was a new trait to discover in an author. Still, Alfred was quite young . . . and he hadn't been an author long.

"The chicken hash here is delicious," I suggested. "And I recommend the pumpkin pie." I handed him the menu card with a smile. He glanced at it and returned it. He also returned the smile. That was one of the things I liked about Swift. He seemed such a perfectly respon-

sive young fellow. He actually appeared to be aware of the existence of other human beings. On the few occasions I had seen him I had been impressed with the fact that here was an author who didn't insist on dominating the canvas with his own personality, his own mood. He was sensitive to the desires of others.

"I'll take the chicken hash", he said, "and the pumpkin pie." He was silent for a moment—then he added, "You don't believe me, do you?"

I laughed. "Believe you?" I said. "I believe you so much that I'm going to order the same thing myself. Henry"—it somehow pleases me immensely to call the older Croton Club waiters by their first names. And Henry has been with the club a long time—"Henry, bring us two orders of chicken hash. And Henry, I want you to bring this gentleman the largest piece of pumpkin pie you have ever served in eighteen years."

"Nineteen," corrected Henry; "nineteen, sir, last month." Dates are Henry's hobby. "Will you have coffee with your lunch or—?"

I looked at Swift. Swift looked at me.

"Demitasse," I said.

"Demitasse," said Swift.

"Yes sir," said Henry, disappearing toward the kitchen with our empty oyster dishes.

When I glanced at Swift again, he was once more gazing out of the window. I offered him a cigarette.

"You really don't believe me, do you?" he said.

He seemed somewhat embarrassed. He grew even more embarrassed when he discovered that he had taken what he thought was my last cigarette. He refused to light it until I had produced another box.

"I ought to be ashamed of myself

for smoking such cheap cigarettes," I said, avoiding his question, but 'de gustibus—'

"I like them," said Swift. He was silent. He seemed to be waiting for me to say something.

"That last thing of yours in 'Vogue'," I began.

"'Vanity Fair'," corrected Swift, somewhat defiantly.

"'Vanity Fair'," I agreed—"was wonderful. It was a scream. I was almost put off a street car for laughing so loudly. I'm sure they thought I was crazy."

Swift blushed. "I'm glad you liked it," he said.

"Liked it," I cried; "why Swift if you can keep on, it won't be long before they'll begin comparing you to Irvin Cobb—"

I remember that when a boy I once, at the suggestion of another boy, called an Italian fruit dealer a certain name, of the meaning of which I was then and am to this day in complete ignorance. The result, however, surprised and bewildered me. And so, at this precise moment, did Swift.

"Cobb!" said he. "Oh my God."

"Why yes," I replied; "what's the matter? Cobb is certainly one of our leading humorists."

"Yes," said Alfred—somewhat bitterly, I thought; "Cobb is certainly one of our leading humorists."

"Well then—man alive," I said, "I should think that you would feel pretty complimented at being mentioned with him—"

Henry and chicken hash interrupted us.

"It's early for snow, isn't it Henry?" I remarked.

"Yes sir," said Henry. "We didn't have any last year until the first of December. You remember of course, sir, the big storm that day?"

"I certainly do," I replied.

"I think", said Swift, "that your big storm was on November thirtieth. In fact, I'm sure of it."

It was an unexpected contradiction. I writhed, for an instant, internally. Henry is extremely sensitive about his memory for dates. But he is also, above everything else, a waiter. He is proud of his calling. And a good waiter never argues.

"Yes sir," said Henry, but addressing me. "Yes sir."

He left us with great dignity. I felt a certain resentment against my guest.

"I'm afraid I've hurt his feelings," said he. "I hate to hurt people's feelings." My resentment vanished. Once more it came home to me that Swift was possessed of a remarkably appreciative regard for the feelings of others.

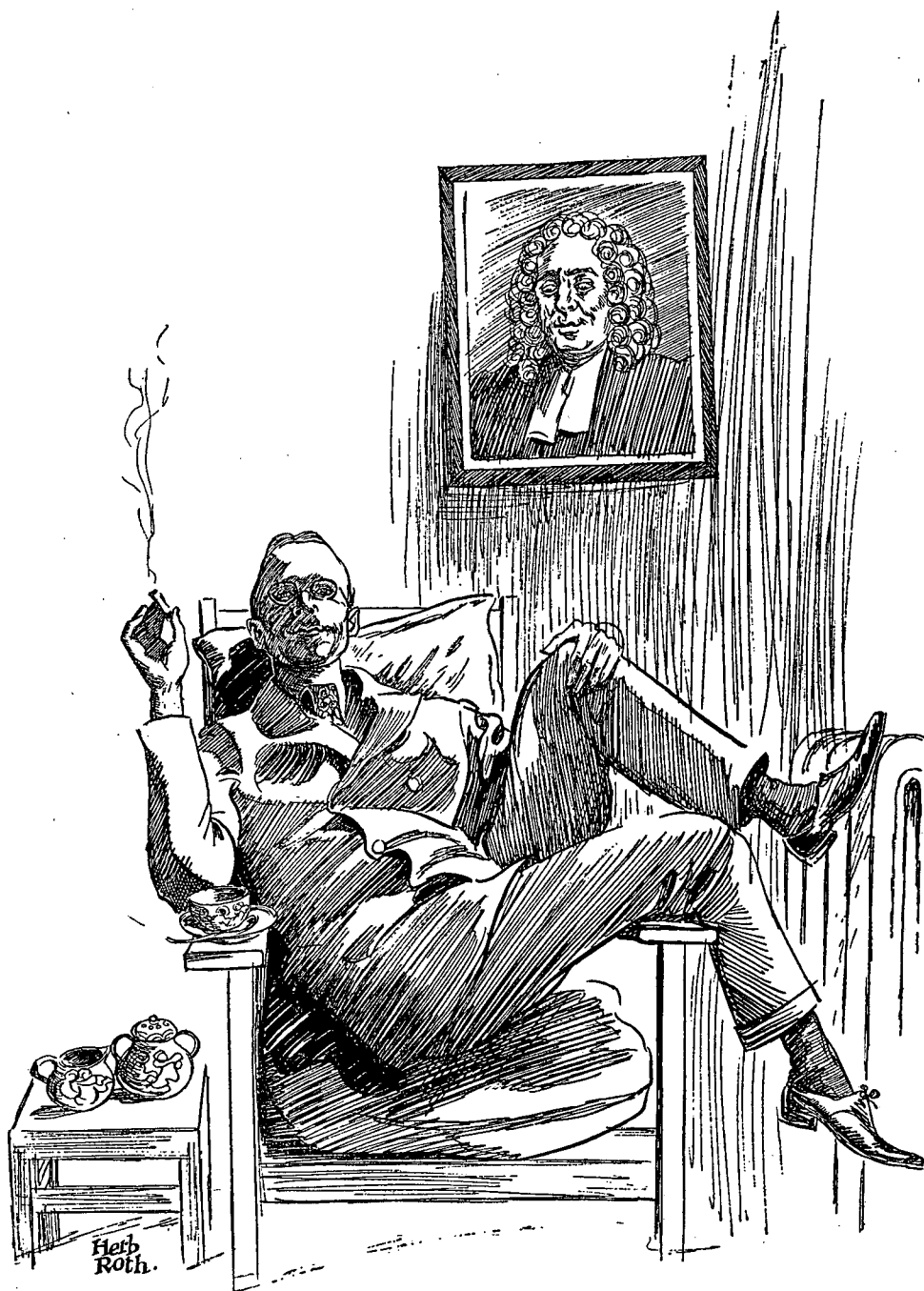
"You see", he went on, "I remembered the date of that storm because it was on my birthday. I spent that whole long day in the house—reading. Say, I'm awfully sorry I hurt that old waiter's pride in his memory. He looked as if he wanted to die."

"Oh Henry's all right," I said—and then, to change the subject: "Reading? What were you reading?"

He hesitated a minute. "Swift," he replied. As he said it I received the curious impression that he had pronounced the name with the same hushed intonation that my Aunt Julia uses when mentioning Woodrow Wilson.

"Swift," I said. "Old Jonathan Swift? That's a strange taste. What on earth—"

"Why you see", he said, "it's Swift's birthday, too — November thirtieth—sort of sentimental, isn't it?" He darted a quick glance at me—almost as if he were searching



for some sympathy—or feared some ridicule.

"Why no," I replied. "I wish more young men would read him. And I wish to heaven that America would produce a Swift—"

"Why, that's just—" began Alfred. Then he stopped. He blushed. "The Swift is not always to the race," he said.

"Oh wonderful," I cried; "priceless. Did you just make that up?"

"That's an unfair question," replied Swift, laughing. "It's a pretty good one, though, isn't it?"

Henry arrived with the pumpkin pie—a cold silent Henry with two cold and diminutive pieces of pie. We were rebuked—after Henry's fashion. Swift looked at him and smiled.

"Say, I'm not so terribly sure about the date of that storm last year," said he. "Quite probably you were right."

Henry looked at him for the first time.

"Yes sir," he said; "will you have coffee sir?" The breach was healed. Henry was appeased. I breathed more freely. And I am sure that Swift did.

"I sort of don't feel comfortable, if I think I've offended someone," he said, after Henry had retired. "Especially someone I don't know."

I agreed with him. We discussed friendships. The conversation turned from friendships to clubs—to hobbies—thence quite naturally to books and authors.

"Sort of funny, isn't it," said Swift, "my being born on the same day and having the same name." Again that timid, questioning glance of his.

"Yes," I replied. I lighted a cigar. "Any relationship?"

Swift shook his head. "I couldn't find any." Then he added, quickly,

"Of course I didn't look into it. Very much."

"Swift was a great man," I said. It was the kind of remark one should be permitted to make only after the age of forty. So I added, "A great hater—a great scourge—"

"Don't you think", said Swift, "that he possessed certain qualities which are rather lacking in modern American writers?"

"Most assuredly", I said, "although I'd except from your statement certain of our younger critics—"

"I was thinking", said Swift, "more of our—our older writers—men for example like—like—well, say Irvin Cobb—"

We were practically alone by this time in the dining room. Occasional laughs reached us now and then from the three or four waiters gathered together at the other end of the hall. A solitary white-bearded member sat reading a paper and sipping coffee at one of the east windows.

"I'm planning a book," said Alfred; "it's sort of a satire."

"Satire," I cried. "Good! I've often wondered why none of our young men were writing satire—it's a glorious field."

"You know", said Swift, "I'm not really a humorist."

I glanced at him. I puffed at my cigar. So that was it. Swift wasn't a humorist because—Swift was a satirist. Or was he?

"Tell me", I said, "about your book."

"You won't be bored?" he asked.

"If I am", I said, "I'll tell you."

"Well, in the first place", he began, "the title is to be 'Lilliput Revisited'—"

I was not bored by Swift's prospectus of his satire. Quite the contrary.

I was fascinated. It seemed to me, as he outlined the general plan, that there was the possibility for a great piece of work. I became enthusiastic. So did Swift. I smoked another cigar. The shams of American society, the cheapness of American politics, the hypocrisy of American morality—all were to be mercilessly satirized in "Lilliput Revisited". And as for American literature—

"The fellows I want to get", said Swift—and his voice rose higher and higher with excitement, "are these literary log-rollers—these fellows who pat-each-other-on-the-back-even-unto-the-fifth-and-sixth-editions. I want to lay low these men who bring into the profession of literature the tactics of the insurance salesman and the advertising representative. I want to tear to pieces these young authors who think that literature is a question of getting mentioned in some daily column or gossip box—these literary 'Town Topics' heelers. I want to make ridiculous these fellows who tag around after critics—these prostitutes of the 'lunch and tea' schools. I want to smash them all—the fakes!"

It was exciting. It was inspiring. When Swift finished, I reached over and shook him by the hand.

"God give you strength," I said with emotion.

"I'm afraid", he replied, "that we have kept those waiters here long past their time." It seemed rather an anticlimactic remark—somewhat as though Dante were to conclude a reading of the "Divine Comedy" by apologizing for having worn his old clothes. And yet it was in keeping with Swift's character. He was sensitive—extremely sensitive—to the feelings of others.

II

I did not see Alfred Swift again for two or three months. This was not entirely my fault. For several weeks I made unsuccessful efforts to engage him for luncheon. We never seemed able to find a day on which he was free. On my last attempt I chided him in a joking manner about his annoying "popularity"—annoying in that it made it impossible for me to see anything of him. That was a mistake. For fifteen minutes I listened at the telephone while Swift explained, with great seriousness, that he was not "popular", and that he was working very hard. He confirmed this, as they say in the business world, by mail in the morning. His "apologia" was convincing.

I had various reports of his progress, however, from divers sources. This person had seen him at luncheon with Smith, the critic for the "Sun"; so and so had met him at tea at the home of Billings, the publisher. My friend Miss Brown, who conducts the weekly book page for the "Times", told me that she thought he was one of the most charming men she had ever met. Apparently everybody liked him—and apparently everybody was being given ample opportunity to do so. I was delighted.

And yet I was, in a way, disappointed. I was jealous of my friendship for this young man. It somehow seemed to me that he and I shared a secret. I often felt like saying, when I saw his name mentioned by this or that columnist or literary editor, "What do you know about this man Swift, after all?" I took a keen delight in smiling to myself whenever I saw him referred to as a "humorist". I got into the habit of searching through newspapers and magazines for some announcement of the

plans for "Lilliput Revisited". "Lilliput Revisited" was never mentioned. But Alfred Swift was. Quite often.

I had a chance to see him, but only for a few moments, at a dinner given in February by the Gog and Magog Club in honor of some visiting celebrity. The Gog and Magog—or G. and M., as it is called—is composed chiefly of authors, actors, artists, musicians, editors, and more or less revolves around the polished and charming personality of "Gus" Murphy—a curious name for such a thorough gentleman—one-time editor of THE BOOKMAN. As his friend of many years' standing, I am occasionally asked to attend the dinners—stag and otherwise—with which the club honors and entertains various well-known personages. The lion of this particular evening happened to be, I believe, an English author—I remember very little about him except that he was short and his speech wasn't. After the speeches we adjourned to another of the club rooms, at one end of which was an improvised stage where "Gus" had arranged for various "stunts" by G. and M. members—charades, burlesque opera, etc. During the preparations for the first of these I managed to squeeze into a seat near the place where Swift was engaged in telling a story—an amusing story, apparently—to Heyward Brown, the critic on the "Journal". When he had finished, he told him another. Then he noticed me.

"Hello there," he said, grabbing my hand enthusiastically. "I'm glad to see you. Will you pardon me a minute—there's somebody over there I want to speak to. I'll be right back."

He didn't come right back. But he came back after he had spoken to five or six gentlemen whom I recognized

as more or less well-known figures in the literary world.

"Now", he said, "let's have a quiet chat. You don't know how I hate all this. Hello there Tom—good evening, Mr. Canfield." He waved to two men in another corner of the room. "That's Canfield", he explained, "of the 'Post'."

"Oh," I said.

That was about as far at first as our quiet chat got. No sooner would I begin a sentence than Swift would discover someone to whom he hadn't spoken. I got the impression that in some manner the whole success of the party rested on his shoulders. The strain must have been terrific. Finally he seemed to quiet down.

"How is 'Lilliput' coming?" I asked.

"Oh fine," he said. "Perfectly fine. Perfectly fine." He seemed to be listening for something. A voice in front had called, "How about 'Gunga Din'?" Someone else cried, "We want 'Gunga Din'!"

"Perfectly fine," repeated Swift, smiling inanely. "Perfectly fine."

"Come on Alfred—please let's have 'Gunga Din' old man"—this from suave "Gus" Murphy himself, standing on the stage.

Swift arose. "Excuse me," he whispered to me. "It's a silly stunt they want me to do. I'll come back."

It wasn't a silly stunt. It was quite amusing. I laughed. Swift's imitation of an eight year old girl's attempt to recite Kipling's ballad was funny—"You may talk o' gin and beer", etc.—funny as the deuce. I almost forgave him for all the irritation his nervous behavior had caused me. Besides, I remembered his sensitivity to the desires of others. That was it. That explained the amazing difference between Swift alone and Swift in a

crowd. I went home determined to see him again—alone.

I did not get my wish for many weeks. And then one day I happened for the first time in many months to be lunching at the Algonick Hotel. It is at the Algonick that one may meet many of the city's more conspicuous dramatic and literary figures. And it was there that I met Swift.

He was taking lunch with one of the leading "columnists"—or rather he had just finished, for as I entered the dining room his friend got up and said goodby. Swift saw me and beckoned. I went.

"Please sit down," said he, rising and greeting me enthusiastically. "I'm just finishing my coffee."

I sat down. I ordered my lunch.

"The apple pie is good today," said Swift.

"Thanks," I said, and added it to my order. "I don't really come here often enough to—"

"Neither do I," said Swift, quickly. Very quickly. Almost too quickly.

We were silent.

"Well how are things going?" I offered. Somehow I did not feel that it was the time for me to mention "Lilliput".

"Pretty good," he said, lighting a cigarette. "Except that I haven't had much chance to work on 'Lilliput'—at least as far as the actual writing of it goes." Evidently it was on his mind. I was glad.

"But I'm getting a lot of material for it—especially as regards these literary log-rollers—these self-advertisers. Lord, you don't know how they disgust me."

"They must," I said. He glanced at me quickly. "They certainly must," I added, with conviction.

"Are you going to the G. and M. Friday—the 'younger generation'

night?" he asked. I remembered having received an invitation from "Gus" Murphy that morning—his letter had mentioned an evening devoted to speeches by the younger writers.

"I hardly think so," I said; "I have another engagement."

"Well", said Swift, "I'm on the program—"

"Gunga Din'?" I asked, smiling.

He blushed. "No," he said. "I'm going to make a speech. And I'm going to 'shoot the works'."

"Shoot the works?" I queried.

"I mean", said Swift, "that I'm going to tell these would-be literary 'great ones' just what I think of their cheap advertising methods. Do you remember what I said about them when we discussed 'Lilliput Revisited'?"

"I certainly do," I replied.

"Well", he said, "that's what I'm going to say Friday night. I'm going to 'shoot the works'."

"Great!" I said. Then I added—and I watched him closely as I said it, "It will take courage."

His jaws came together with a click; he looked me straight in the eye.

"Of course it will," he said. "Of course it will."

We discussed the details. When my luncheon arrived, Swift got up to leave.

"I'm sorry you aren't going to be there," he said, as we shook hands. Then he added, "I suppose I'll hurt a lot of people's feelings."

"What do you care?" I said, squeezing his hand.

"I don't," he said. "I don't care." His last words as he left me, were, "I suppose I won't have a friend left in the world when I get through."

"Yes you will," I called after him. I do not think he heard me.

III

I canceled my other engagement and went to the Gog and Magog Club on Friday night. I went partly to give Swift the benefit of my moral support, and partly, I shall admit, to dispel certain doubts which were beginning to arise in my mind concerning this young man and his projected visit to Lilliput.

Swift was not at the club when I arrived. But a great many other men in evening clothes were. I found myself in a whirl of chattering authors, critics, editors, journalists. I grasped a cocktail and edged my way over to a corner where I might escape the nerve-shattering bombardment of puns, wit, jokes, and literary gossip. I also wanted to keep an eye out for Swift in order that I might give him a few words of encouragement.

Swift arrived. He did not at first appear particularly worried. He was soon the centre of a noisy group of laughers. I lighted a cigarette and wandered casually over toward where he was talking. When he looked up and saw me I smiled encouragingly. For once he did not immediately return my smile.

"Good luck tonight, Swift," I said. "I'm with you."

"Oh", said he, "I thought you said you weren't coming." Then he added quickly, "I'm awfully glad to see you."

"I wouldn't miss this for the world, man", I said, "and you've got just the crowd you want—"

"Yes," said Swift, but with a certain lack of enthusiasm, "just the crowd I want."

We drifted into dinner. I found my place card after the usual lengthy search, near the end of the table which extended the length of the large room. At right angles to this long

table—or, rather, forming the top side of a long white "T"—was the speakers' table, where sat "Gus" Murphy, toastmaster and host, flanked on both sides by somewhat nervous members of the "younger generation" of writers. And among the least calm, least self-possessed of these prospective speakers was Alfred Swift. It may have been the light thrown on his face by the candles—tall yellow candles on the table—which made him appear so pale. As the dinner progressed this pallor actually seemed to take on a greenish tinge somewhat the color of the walls. But I was at the farther end of the room, and candle light is deceptive.

I didn't enjoy that dinner particularly myself. My partner was one of the four ladies present—a fact which might have been considered a compliment. It was a doubtful compliment. Miss Bernice Burns was middle-aged and verbose, almost to silliness. But she was literary editor of the "Argus"—and the literary editor of the "Argus" could not well have been omitted from this particular dinner.

On my left was Professor Taylor Trask. I had known Trask several years. I did not like him. He was, is, and always will be, a Pollyanna. He is enthusiastic about everything. He is therefore one of the country's most prominent critics and book reviewers. His hearty endorsement and enthusiastic praise is to be found, I am sure, on the covers of some 250,000 different books 249,975 of which I am equally sure are now out of print. Perhaps I exaggerate. At any rate, I don't like him.

As the dinner progressed I grew more and more disgusted. It seemed to me that "Gus" Murphy had been guilty of a distinctly unfriendly act in placing me where he did. I decided

that I would never again attend one of his literary dinners. Literary dinners—why, the real literary people never bothered about dinners. It was just as young Swift said—literature had degenerated. Your prominent literary figure was now a combination politician and advertising man. I grew impatient for the moment when Swift would hit out at these shams. I longed to “shoot the works” myself. But Swift would do it better. I had confidence in him.

“Do you know young Alfred Swift?”—it was Miss Burns talking. She was always talking. This time it was to me. I dropped a lump of sugar into my demitasse.

“Slightly,” I said. I did not feel particularly like disclosing to her the bond which united Swift and me.

“I wonder what sort of a speech he will make tonight,” said she. “I do hope he does well.”

“I think”, I said, “that he will surprise everybody.” I smiled to myself at the particular nature of the surprise.

“Oh I hope so,” babbled Miss Burns. “I think he is so attractive. I had the nicest cosiest chat—a regular tête-à-tête—with him the other day—Wednesday—no, Thursday—no, Wednesday. Do you know, I’ll tell you something about Alfred Swift.”

“Yes?” I said, taking a cigar from the box offered by the waiter, and preparing to light it.

“He isn’t really a humorist.”

I put the cigar down unlighted. I looked at Miss Burns. I did not speak.

“I don’t mean”, she went on, “that he isn’t funny. I think his articles are perfectly screaming. And the stunts he does, too. Have you seen him recite ‘Gunga Din’?” She paused to light a cigarette.

“Yes”, I replied, “I have seen him do ‘Gunga Din’.”

“You know, it’s the most remarkable thing in the world that—that—” There she stopped. It was a conversational characteristic of Miss Burns that when she forgot completely what she was talking about she would invariably start out with, “You know, it’s the most remarkable thing in the world”—which usually gave her time to remember her old subject or invent a new one.

“We were discussing”, I said, “Alfred Swift.”

“Oh yes,” she said. “You know, he’s not really a humorist.”

“So you said,” I replied, somewhat savagely.

“No,” said she, “he’s not.”

“How did you discover that?” I asked.

“Well, to tell you the truth”, replied Miss Burns, “he told me so himself. You see, I happened to mention to him that I thought he was every bit as funny as Stephen Leacock—and my dear man, he then and there proceeded to have a dozen fits. You see, Leacock is a humorist, and Swift—”

“Is a satirist,” I supplied. “Like Jonathan Swift.”

“Exactly,” she said; “and the remarkable thing is that his birthday and Jonathan Swift’s both come on the same day.”

“You don’t tell me?” I said. “Isn’t that a coincidence?”

We were interrupted by the toastmaster introducing the first speaker—a young poet named Stephen Walters. I did not hear any of Stephen Walters’s speech. I was thinking about Alfred Swift.

“You know—” said Taylor Trask on my left, putting his arm affectionately around the back of my chair when the applause for young Walters’s effort

had died down, "you know, I'm mighty anxious to hear what Alfred Swift will say tonight."

"You've got nothing on me," I said glumly.

"You know", went on Trask, "I've had several corking talks with that young man. And I'll tell you something about him."

"I think I've already heard it," I replied.

"No", he said, "you haven't. It's simply this. Swift is not, my dear fellow, a humorist at all."

"You surprise me," I said, chewing savagely on my cigar.

"I thought I would," said Trask. "You see Swift and I happened to be talking about contemporary writers, and I compared him to—"

"Irvin Cobb," I suggested.

"No," said he.

"Stephen Leacock," was my next offer.

"No," replied Trask. "Robert Benchley. You see, the difference between Swift and Benchley—as Swift himself pointed out—is that Benchley is a humorist, whereas Swift is not really a funny man at all."

I burst somewhat unexpectedly into a laugh. "Oh yes he is," I said. "He's the funniest man I have ever known."

"That's just where you're wrong," said Trask, patting me on the knee. "My dear fellow, Swift is a satirist, like his namesake."

"You'll be telling me next", I said, "that his birthday comes on the same day."

Trask's face lighted up. "My dear fellow", he began—"as a matter of fact—"

The next speaker was a twenty-four year old Harvard novelist. His speech had something to do with style and form. I also think he mentioned

Flaubert and Remy de Gourmont. I smoked another cigar. I did not applaud.

The toastmaster arose. "Our young writers", he began, "are not serious enough. One detects in their novels—their essays—a lamentable tendency toward humor. Readers of their works are occasionally seen to laugh. This is regrettable, ladies and gentlemen. Literature is a serious thing. Literature, like matrimony, is not lightly to be entered into. One does not read to be amused or to laugh. No. One reads to be made serious. Now our next speaker is just such a serious young man. His first book—'Blaa!'—brought gloom to thousands. Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you the real hero of Hugo's great romance—'L'homme qui jamais rit'—the most serious young man in the world—Alfred Swift."

Of course, everybody roared with laughter—that is, everybody except myself and Swift. It was an amusing introduction; "Gus" Murphy's introductions always are. But it somehow hardly put the audience in the mood for a bitter satirical tirade.

And yet, when he stood up, I thought he was going to do it. His face was pale, his jaw set. He did not acknowledge the applause. He stood there, trembling a little.

"I have", he began, "a serious speech to make tonight."

Everybody laughed. Swift stopped, surprised.

"I have", he said again, but more weakly, "a serious speech to make."

The laughter was even louder than before. Swift stopped, hesitated—

"You may talk—" he began. It was a fatal sentence.

"O' gin and beer," cried someone.

"That's it, Alfred!" cried another. "Give us 'Gunga Din'."

"'Gunga Din'! 'Gunga Din'! Please, Alfred."

And then Swift smiled. It was a smile of relief. It was the smile of relief of a man who is extremely sensitive to the desires of others—and extremely relieved to be able to satisfy those desires. I did not stay to hear "Gunga Din".

IV

It has been seven years since that night. I have not as yet read "Lilliput Revisited". Possibly it has not as

yet been written—at least by Alfred Swift. He has, I understand, done extremely well—financially. Not so well perhaps as that other great American who bears the name of the famous Dean. But literature can never be expected to equal meat-packing as a source of income. Alfred has done well. I have read several of his books. They all show the traces of his particular genius—they are all, I should say, the work of a man who is really a humorist.

TO A CHILD IN DEATH

By Charlotte Mew

YOU would have scoffed if we had told you yesterday
 Love made us feel, or so it was with me, like some great bird
 Trying to hold and shelter you in its strong wing:—
 A gay little shadowy smile would have tossed us back such a solemn word,
 And it was not for that you were listening
 When so quietly you slipped away
 With half the music of the world unheard.
 What shall we do with this strange summer, meant for you,—
 Dear, if we see the winter through
 What shall be done with spring — ?
 This, this is the victory of the grave; here is death's sting,
 That it is not strong enough, our strongest wing.

But what of His who like a Father pitieth?
 His Son was also, once, a little thing,
 The wistfulest child that ever drew breath,
 Chased by a sword from Bethlehem and in the busy house at Nazareth
 Playing with little rows of nails, watching the carpenter's hammer swing,
 Long years before His hands and feet were tied
 And by a hammer and the three great nails He died,
 Of youth, of Spring,
 Of sorrow, of loneliness, of victory the King,
 Under the shadow of that wing.