

THE WINNER

R. H. MOTTRAM

HE BEGAN by beating us—the C mess of divisional headquarters—completely. It was no mean feat. We were perhaps the most hard-bitten, deeply stained set you could find. Higher appointments fell to great skill, great influence, or great impertinence. But the sort of technical specialist who got pulled out of the infantry and attached to divisional headquarters, and messed in C mess, was a survivor of so much, chosen by the gods from among so many of his equals and betters. Why “Uncle” should have been so chosen, and how he arrived among us, we never discovered. But there he sat, one gloomy evening of 1916, with the Somme fiasco grumbling all along the horizon. He volunteered no information. He did not look the sort of man one could catechize. He just sat and smoked, and drank a good deal of whisky, not attempting to ingratiate himself, nor even to be agreeable. He beat us from the start. He went on sitting, smoking and drinking. He won. We adjusted ourselves to him, as he had not to us. He became a feature, then a boast, finally a byword. His outward appearance gave no clue to his personality. It was prosaic in the extreme. Bald, with a dirty gray mustache, of the kind which Tenniel attributed to the Walrus, broadish for his medium height,

astonishingly spare, hard and agile for his years, which appeared to be nearer sixty than fifty; his maple-leaf badges showed the number of one of the battalions of the First Canadian Division and the rank of captain. His name was Dakers. Beyond these vague indications he was a mystery. But he became an institution. We took to calling him Uncle. It does not matter who first thought of it, or why. It suited him exactly. There is something of authority and responsibility connected with the title Father. But Uncle—that semi-detached relationship in which one can be kind without condescension, and humorously affectionate above the clash of antipathetic generations! Now, no one would have dreamed of receiving an order from Uncle. He never gave such a thing. On the other hand we all contracted the habit of going to him for advice. This added immensely to his reputation. For whatever reason, good, or probably bad, he had been given the post of clearance officer at divisional headquarters, it was soon discovered that Uncle was a man of parts. When everything failed, as it did, in those increasingly enormous and useless offensives, about once a week, Uncle always had some expedient ready. The further we departed from all the known rules of war, the better he grew. At his own job of

clearance officer he was pretty useless—anyhow he left it all to young Skene, his second in command. But he was on surer ground when called in to help the deputy assistant director of veterinary services with sick mules, or the assistant provost marshal with colonials. And when the worst happened, when we had to retreat ten miles and the whisky ran out, his efforts were remarkable, were crowned with success, and met with the fullest recognition (for by the middle of 1917 whisky was one of the few things one was still certain of wanting in a crumbling world).

Thus from being a mystery he became an institution. His fame spread far beyond our little C mess. Very high personages, who could not ask his advice, obtained his opinion by circuitous means. It was owing to some mumbled remark of his that the Australians were taken right back after the massacres of Passchendaele. It was because he said, "You 'ave been a long while thinking of it," that the new mark-VIII, non-galling ammunition-carriers were served out to all the machine-gun units for their teams.

He was entirely unconscious of the weight he carried. He never smiled when, as was fitting, he was eventually enshrined in an epigram.

It was young Kavanagh, that brilliant Irish schoolmaster, who said it. When rest had fallen upon us, and the last excuse for the irksome discipline and bewildering boredom of soldiering was gone, Uncle still sat in the mess, always smoking a pipe, and perhaps drinking a little more. One by one, as we exhausted the few poor alleviations of our lot—for there was not even enough work

to occupy our minds, risk had been eliminated, and the amusements available to us had been worn to the bone—we dropped in, found that there was still an hour before they would bring us our tinned dinner, and sat down beside him. Kavanagh came in last, swallowed his drink at a gulp, coughed, stared, and burst out, "There sits Uncle, looking like a prairie!" None of us knew what a prairie looks like. But if unlimited and perpetual sameness is its characteristic, the simile is apt indeed. He had changed less than any of us in these four years or so. He did not blink on hearing the description, but suggested, in his voice, hoarse, as Kavanagh also had said, from drinking out of damp glasses, that we should play one of those childish gambling games in which he excelled, and which enabled him to pay his spirit-laden mess-bill. In this, as in everything else, he had us beat.

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This concludes the direct evidence about him. As has been shown elsewhere, the increasing disintegration of the fourth year removed him from our little mess, which broke up shortly after, as if he had been its central rivet. We went off to do our special jobs in special holes and corners; he went with Skene, who discovered that there were real nephews of his in France, justifying his sobriquet. But more than that, not even Skene discovered.

Yet the student of human nature can make a few shrewd deductions. How did the man come to be what he was? He had a reputation as wide as that of most generals and far more creditable. But he was an obscure insignificant old fellow. People

called him ignorant, but Skene said: No, primitive rather. It was not merely that he understood horses. The A. D. Veterinary Services did that. Uncle very nearly was a horse. He looked at things from a horse's point of view. He understood the tongue-tied, pocket-full-of-money insolence of colonial troops. He understood a Massey-Harris reaper and binder. From the way he spoke to French mechanics who mishandled these almost human machines, one might almost say that Uncle looked at things from the Massey-Harris point of view. What sort of man has these thoughts, so rudimentary that they rank next to dumb instinct? Well, one must suppose some one born in and bred up to agriculture, leaving England at the earliest possible age, long before sophistication, and spending forty years without a break in Canada. Now the most primitive, entirely agricultural county in England is Wiltshire. It has no big town, not even a port. Its people have a slowness of speech and breadth of face that rather fitted Uncle's. As he never alluded to his childhood, never went to England on leave, never wrote to any one, one may assume that he left in disgrace and never cared, perhaps never was able to go back. But that he was not Canadian born is pretty certain. He had no accent. His attitude toward the war was too instinctive. He had no

imperialism. Nothing less than August, 1914, could ever have brought such a truant home to the mother he had saddened. If she has a consciousness, that queer mother of us all, that sits between Ireland and the Channel and the North Sea, she must think that he made good.

Most of us never knew of his death until years later. Then one or two came together, with Skene, and he told us. Then it was that one of us thumped the table with his fist crying, "By Gad, he always won!"

We knew what was meant. We had been comparing notes, trying to make out how, after a war so bad, the peace could possibly be so much worse. We had admitted that for the best part of 1917 and 1918 the real enemy had been not the Germans but the War. It beat most of us, but not Uncle. Just as he had always won at cards and drunk up his winnings, so had he swallowed the Armistice, lain down, and died, of flu. Certainly, he was unbeatable.

And amid the toppling of crowns and thrones, and creaking of new nationalisms, there glimmered our admiration for him. Of all the old and shaky and the new and gimcrack forms of civilization that may not outlast a decade, the England of which Uncle was a specimen will survive. Who else could hang on with so little fuss, and pass out so quietly?

A QUARTER-CENTURY OF PSYCHOLOGY

A Science That Has Only Just Been Born

H. A. OVERSTREET

IT SOUNDS a little amusing to hear some belated pessimist talk of "this materialistic age." An age is materialistic whose interest centers in material things. But any one who is at all alert knows that the interest of the present age is precisely not in material things but in something far more important, far more precarious. Things, after all, are comparatively harmless, compliant affairs. We can do pretty much what we please with them. They neither answer back nor stir up trouble. What really gives us concern is people. Men and women, we discover, are the stuff out of which most of life is made. If they are politicians, they have the fate of millions in their hands. If they are parents, they can make or wreck the lives of their offspring. If they are teachers, they can twist and darken the souls of their young charges, or can build them straight and luminous. If we marry them we soon discover they can make heaven or hell. Things, of themselves, are singularly impotent. It is men and women that mostly count.

We are learning that at last. If you go into any fair-sized bookshop in Europe or America, you see that the books which to-day stand out most are those about people.

I do not mean biographies of the old-fashioned sort, which give dates and lineages and recite complimentary anecdotes. It is a different kind of book about people that is capturing attention to-day. It is books about ourselves—our child and grown-up selves; our normal and sick selves; ourselves in inner or outer conflict; ourselves in our illogicalities, confusions, and self-delusions; ourselves as individuals and as crowds; as workers, employers, citizens, and patriots; ourselves as demanding human beings.

The spirit of the age, in short, has turned psychological. There is need enough for this, Heaven knows. The historic follies committed in the name of reason have been sufficient to put us all to the blush. Not only man's inhumanity to man, but man's naïve ignorance about most of his human relationships, gives ground for the conviction that if we are to get on a bit more successfully, we must handle ourselves at least as effectively as we now handle automobiles and seven-tubed radios.

Human beings have psychologized about themselves, of course, throughout the ages. They have wrestled with their sinful souls and meditated upon the workings of their minds. There have even been commanding