

# What I Believe

by GERTRUDE LAWRENCE

**I** DON'T KNOW anything about writing an article, but, since the Editor of *THE FORUM* has asked me to tell his readers something about my philosophy of life, I'm just going to put down my thoughts as though I were writing a letter and probably end it, "Yours affectionately." And I'll pray that somebody will do something about the punctuation before it gets into print.

If one's personal philosophy could all be summed up in a few words, mine would follow pretty closely the old proverb —

To look up and not down,  
To look forward and not back,  
To look out and not in — and  
To lend a hand.

There is a simplicity and directness about these lines that never fails to have a tonic effect on me, and there is fearlessness and self-discipline, too.

Many things have happened to me since that evening in 1908 when, as a more or less trembling child actress, I made my bow to an audience in company with eleven other rather grubby little children in a Christmas pantomime. Like most theater people, I grew up in a home of modest circumstances which made working a necessity for me and my parents. I chose the theater because I was "of" the theater and many times went hungry. Thus, versatility was born of the necessity to keep in work.

I can't remember that at any particular age I determined I was one day going to be a well-known actress, but whatever success I may have achieved is the result of hard schooling, severe criticism, and bitter and varied experience.

There was the time when I was playing with a touring company in Shrewsbury and the manager skipped — and you know what that means (or, rather, for your own sake, I hope you don't). In this case it meant that we were

left flat, without even enough money to pay our hotel bills.

Life looked pretty gloomy to fifteen-year-old me, but the landlady, a kindly soul, said I might stay on till something turned up, provided I'd lend a hand in the bar — which I was very glad to do.

Of course I was chaffed a good deal by the men, because my training for the stage hadn't included pulling beer-pump handles as beer-pump handles ought to be pulled; and I used to fill the glass three-parts full of froth, so that the customers would say, "I'll need a ladder to get down to me drink, miss." But they were very good-natured about it, and I managed to get by.

The next company reached the town (touring was a more flourishing venture in those days) with *The Rosary*. They wanted a girl to sing "My Rosary" in front of the curtain before the show, and someone said: "There's a pretty nifty little barmaid down at the Red Lion. She's had stage experience; why not get her?"

So they got me, and I put on a nun's habit and sang "My Rosary" before each performance and then scampered back to my bar; and the whole audience used to come down to the Red Lion after the show to see the actress pulling beer handles — which was good for trade. I don't suppose I enjoyed that experience as much as I should now; but it's marvelous to look back on, and it's only one of dozens.

## II

**I** DON'T KNOW why it is that many people who have "got on" in the world are so anxious to forget their humble beginnings. Quite often I meet someone I've known for years and I say, "Oh, how are you, darling?" and receive in return a cold, "How do you do?" And I feel like saying, "Dear, *don't* be like that with me! Haven't we practically scrubbed floors together

## WHAT I BELIEVE

in the theater?" But she's forgotten it because she doesn't want to remember.

I don't want to lose any of my memories. I want to retain not only the charming and lovely ones but the harsh and ugly and bitter ones too. I've heard it said that one reason why the English are such a stable race is their attics. Every house has one, and every one is crammed full of things that are finished with, outgrown, demoded, put aside, in all probability never to be used again, but which their owners wouldn't part with for anything. They're usually a link with some more prosperous period or a humbler but happier time or with a dead relative or perhaps merely with a sentiment.

It all looks like lumber to other people, but to the owner it's treasure. My memories might seem like lumber to you, and yours to me, but I shouldn't part with mine, good and bad, for anything in the world.

You know what fun it is to look at a family album, to say, "Heavens, didn't I look a funny little shrimp in those days! — but it was when I was wearing that frock that I ate my first oyster, and I wouldn't have changed places with the Shah of Persia or even the woman selling balloons in Kensington Gardens."

I want my memory to be like a family album, as complete and as easy to get at. I want to be able to draw on it for quietness and certainty at anxious moments, for healing at painful moments, for hope in moments of despair. And that's where the harsher memories prove useful: Your first real lover's quarrel — a terrible, calamitous thing, that looks slightly ridiculous now, about the size of a molehill (funny how it's shrunk), and the terrible sinking feeling in your middle when you realized that you didn't know where the next meal was coming from. And finding that someone you trusted had been disloyal to you.

Of course I don't believe in resurrecting all these for the sake of tormenting oneself with the tiny stabs of pain they give (some of them

dulled almost to nothing now). I believe in keeping them to use as a surveyor uses his survey marks, to get your sense of proportion right, so that, when you're faced with a situation that you feel you can't bear another minute, you suddenly remember some equally trying experience that happened years ago and that now looks insignificant and unimportant, and then somehow or other the current problem seems to shrink into more reasonable proportions.

But don't imagine that I want to live in the past. On the contrary, I want the past to live in me and I want to reach out into the future to collect always more memories to sustain me when my collecting days are over.

To my mind there is no old age so pleasant as the kind summed up in the phrase *lavender and old lace* — when all experiences are blended into a misty, fragrant whole, a thing of half-tones and pastel shades and subtle flavors and sweet dignity.

And at the end I want to be like the dying French marquise who settled herself back in her pillows, crossed her ivory hands on her breast, and sighed, "Well, it's all been very interesting!"

Many of you readers will, no doubt, think my philosophy trivial or inadequate. But so far it has been enough to sustain me in a fairly active and crowded life. When your editor asked me about the stars and the flowers and the atoms and all that, I said that I accepted them but did not comprehend them. But I do know a little about human beings, whom I love, and the attitude that makes the human mind healthy and happy. Religion is to me the forward-looking, active, hopeful, helpful attitude toward one's fellow creatures. So let me repeat again the old proverb:

To look up and not down,  
To look forward and not back,  
To look out and not in — and  
To lend a hand.

**In an early issue:**

**"Adjusting Yourself to Yourself,"**

**By Winfred Rhoades**

# The Forum Quiz

Most people get pleasure out of testing themselves to see how many odd facts they know. This monthly quiz, designed especially for FORUM readers, is aimed to please them but not necessarily to measure their intelligence. The questions should not be difficult for the average person to answer, and the editors will change the form of the questions — for variety's sake — from time to time. A good score this month, counting 2½ points for each question correctly answered, is 65 (answers on page X of advertising section).

1. If you were to meet Tommy the Cork on the street, you could make conversation by saying:
  - (1) "Has Governor Lehman signed your pardon yet?"
  - (2) "Done any long-distance swimming lately?"
  - (3) "What's the President going to do next?"
2. Any Burns lover should be able to finish this last line as easily as Bobby could finish a tankard:
 

O, my luve is like a red, red rose  
That's newly sprung in June.  
O, my luve is like the melodie  
.....

  - (1) That comes from the bassoon
  - (2) To thee, I sweetly croon
  - (3) That's sweetly play'd in tune
  - (4) But I look like Heywood Broun
3. The national income of the country in 1938 will total approximately:
  - (1) \$65,000,000,000
  - (2) \$85,000,000,000
  - (3) \$1.98
4. When polo enthusiasts talk about the high-goal player who has been on top the longest, only one name comes to mind:
  - (1) Cecil Smith
  - (2) Tommy Hitchcock, Jr.
  - (3) Jock Whitney
5. In cultural circles, Jesse Stuart has been praised as:
  - (1) composer of the "War Dance for Wooden Indians"
  - (2) the only left-wing writer with a sense of humor
  - (3) a young Kentuckian who writes of the hill country
6. If you have read your Bible, you will recall that when Jesus fed the five thousand he needed only:
  - (1) 5 loaves and 2 fishes
  - (2) 3 loaves and 12 fishes
  - (3) 2 loaves and 5 fishes
7. One potent reason why William Randolph Hearst used to be able to buy so many castles, paintings, tapestries, and objects of art was:
  - (1) all his newspapers made money
  - (2) inherited shares in the Homestake mine
  - (3) his exploitation of the newsreels
8. A hellbender is:
  - (1) an amphibian common to the U. S.
  - (2) any Yale man on a spree
  - (3) the steelworker who shapes huge ingots
  - (4) a poisonous snake of the Southwest
9. Don't condemn Hollywood too quickly. A lot of good ideas have originated there, such as:
  - (1) the modern supermarket
  - (2) the uplift brassière
  - (3) knee-action wheels
10. Perhaps you can identify this stanza of a well-known poem:
 

(Bass drum beaten loudly)  
Booth led boldly with his big bass drum —  
(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)  
The Saints smiled gravely and they said: "He's come."  
(Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?)

  - (1) "Gen. Wm. Booth Enters Into Heaven," by Vaccai Lindsay
  - (2) "The Blessed Damsel," by Dante Gabriel Rossetti
  - (3) "A Farmer Remembers Lincoln," by Witter Bynner
11. It ought to be easy to pick out the one misspelled word among these three:
  - (1) connoisseur
  - (2) barass
  - (3) Phillippines
12. Look for the one true statement here:
  - (1) Milton wrote "Paradise Regained" before he wrote "Paradise Lost."
  - (2) Henry Fielding was primarily a poet.
  - (3) James Joyce once taught at Bryn Mawr.
  - (4) Dr. Johnson edited one of the first dictionaries.
13. It'll be higher in a year or two, but the present land speed record is:
  - (1) 357 mph
  - (2) 440 mph
  - (3) 226 mph
14. There's a lot of discussion, but the fact remains that in the United States the birth rate is:
  - (1) declining in the country as a whole
  - (2) remaining just about where it has always been
  - (3) increasing through the lean years since 1929
15. Think twice before you decide who the author of this immortal poem is:
 

My candle burns at both the ends;  
It will not last the night;  
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends —  
It gives a lovely light!

  - (1) Sara Teasdale
  - (2) Elinor Wylie
  - (3) Edna St. Vincent Millay
16. One of these statements about our Thanksgiving Day festival is true:
  - (1) The Pilgrims first thought of a harvest festival.
  - (2) Harvest festivals are as old as civilization.
17. It doesn't make much sense to the editors either, but we must Keep Up with swing. Now, when a man plays well on the trombone, any jitterbug would say he was:
  - (1) a keen push-piper
  - (2) hot on the slush pump
  - (3) at home on the woodpile