

taste of the jam round the satiric pill. I have sought to show that his abiding value is neither creative nor truly critical, since his characters are not fully formed, his central purpose neither constructive nor consistent, and his satire irregularly aimed; he is Mr. Facing-both-ways, and today when he who is not for us is keenly suspected of being against us, Mr. Facing-both-ways is on unsafe ground. Yet there is one salutary quality in his satire: it is, if absorbed warily, a splendid corrective. Classical to the core, he steered his middle course throughout. Retrogressive reaction he bullied until it was over-ruled, hot-headed idealism he pricked until it burst. He was a man who hated extremes, and while it is not easy to see in these days whether anything but a considered extremism will ever infuse the necessary recreative faith into a collapsed society, it will be well for the hot-heads to correct themselves in mid-venture with a dose of this thermostatic humour of which Peacock is so efficient and delightful a provider. To regard his aggravating inconsistencies in this light may help us to come to easier terms with this excellent minor novelist. The restricted circle who read him now will, I hope, continue to do so; but I hope, too, that they will be joined by others whose critical discrimination will examine his satire against a wider background and his importance in relation to deeper and more enduring values; and it will be these who will come in time to give him his due.

## DENTON WELCH

# WHEN I WAS THIRTEEN

WHEN I was thirteen, I went to Switzerland for the Christmas holidays in the charge of my eldest brother, who was at that time still up at Oxford.

In the hotel we found another undergraduate whom my brother knew. His name was Archer. They were not at the same college, but they had met and evidently had not agreed with each other. At first my brother William would say nothing about Archer; then one day, in answer to a question of mine, he said: 'He's not very much liked; although he's a very good swimmer'.

As he spoke, William held his lips in a very firm, almost pursed, line which was most damaging to Archer.

After this I began to look at Archer with a certain amount of interest. He had broad shoulders but was not tall. He had a look of strength and solidity which I admired and envied. He had rather a nice pug face with insignificant nose and broad cheeks. Sometimes, when he was animated, a tassel of fair, almost colourless, hair would fall across his forehead, half covering one eye. He had a thick beautiful neck, rather meaty barbarian hands, and a skin as smooth and evenly coloured as a pink fondant.

His whole body appeared to be suffused with this gentle pink colour. He never wore proper ski-ing clothes of waterproof material like the rest of us. Usually he came out in nothing but a pair of grey flannels and a white cotton shirt with all the buttons left undone. When the sun grew very hot, he would even discard this thin shirt, and ski up and down the slopes behind the hotel in nothing but his trousers. I had often seen him fall down in this half-naked state and get buried in snow. The next moment he would jerk himself to his feet again, laughing and swearing.

After William's curt nod to him on our first evening at the hotel, we had hardly exchanged any remarks. We sometimes passed one another on the way to the basement to get our skis in the morning, and often we found ourselves sitting near Archer on the glassed-in terrace; but some Oxford snobbery I knew nothing of, or some more profound reason, always made William throw off waves of hostility. Archer never showed any signs of wishing to approach. He was content to look at me sometimes with a mild inoffensive curiosity, but he seemed to ignore William completely. This pleased me more than I would have admitted at that time. I was so used to being passed over myself by all William's friends, that it was pleasant when someone who knew him seemed to take a sort of interest, however slight and amused, in me.

William was often away from the hotel for days and nights together, going for expeditions with guides and other friends. He would never take me because he said I was too young and had not enough stamina. He said that I would fall down a crevasse or get my nose frost-bitten, or hang up the party by lagging behind.

In consequence I was often alone at the hotel; but I did not

mind this; I enjoyed it. I was slightly afraid of my brother William and found life very much easier and less exacting when he was not there. I think other people in the hotel thought that I looked lonely. Strangers would often come up and talk to me and smile, and once a nice absurd Belgian woman, dressed from head to foot in a babyish suit of fluffy orange knitted wool, held out a bright five-franc piece to me and told me to go and buy chocolate caramels with it. I think she must have taken me for a much younger child.

On one of these afternoons when I had come in from the Nursery Slopes and was sitting alone over my tea on the sun-terrace, I noticed that Archer was sitting in the corner huddled over a book and munching greedily and absent-mindedly.

I, too, was reading a book, while I ate delicious rum-babas and little tarts filled with worm-castles of chestnut purée topped with caps of whipped cream. I have called the meal tea, but what I was drinking was not tea but chocolate. When I poured out, I held the pot high in the air, so that my cup, when filled, should be covered in a rich froth of bubbles.

The book I was reading was Tolstoy's *Resurrection*. Although I did not quite understand some parts of it, it gave me intense pleasure to read it while I ate the rich cakes and drank the frothy chocolate. I thought it a noble and terrible story, but I was worried and mystified by the words 'illegitimate child' which had occurred several times lately. What sort of child could this be? Clearly a child that brought trouble and difficulty. Could it have some terrible disease, or was it a special sort of imbecile? I looked up from my book, still wondering about this phrase 'illegitimate child', and saw that Archer had turned in his creaking wicker chair and was gazing blankly in my direction. The orchestra was playing 'The Birth of the Blues' in a rather remarkable Swiss arrangement, and it was clear that Archer had been distracted from his book by the music, only to be lulled into a day-dream, as he gazed into space.

Suddenly his eyes lost their blank look and focused on my face. 'Your brother off up to the Jungfrau Joch again, or somewhere?' he called out.

I nodded my head, saying nothing, becoming slightly confused. Archer grinned. He seemed to find me amusing.

'What are you reading?' he asked.

'This,' I said, taking my book over to him. I did not want to call out either the word 'Resurrection' or 'Tolstoy'. But Archer did not make fun of me for reading a 'classic', as most of William's friends would have done. He only said: 'I should think it's rather good. Mine's frightful; it's called *The Story of My Life*, by Queen Marie of Roumania.' He held the book up and I saw an extraordinary photograph of a lady who looked like a snake-charmer in full regalia. The head-dress seemed to be made of white satin, embroidered with beads, stretched over cardboard. There were tassels and trailing things hanging down everywhere.

I laughed at the amusing picture and Archer went on: 'I always read books like this when I can get them. Last week I had Lady Oxford's autobiography, and before that I found a perfectly wonderful book called *Flaming Sex*. It was by a French woman who married an English knight and then went back to France to shoot a French doctor. She didn't kill him, of course, but she was sent to prison, where she had a very interesting time with the nuns who looked after her in the hospital. I also lately found an old book by a Crown Princess of Saxony who ended up picnicking on a haystack with a simple Italian gentleman in a straw hat. I love these "real life" stories, don't you?'

I again nodded my head, not altogether daring to venture on a spoken answer. I wondered whether to go back to my own table or whether to pluck up courage and ask Archer what an 'illegitimate child' was. He solved the problem by saying 'Sit down' rather abruptly.

I subsided next to him with 'Tolstoy' on my knee. I waited for a moment and then plunged.

'What exactly does "illegitimate child" mean?' I asked rather breathlessly.

'Outside the law—when two people have a child although they're not married.'

'Oh.' I went bright pink. I thought Archer must be wrong. I still believed that it was quite impossible to have a child unless one was married. The very fact of being married produced the child. I had a vague idea that some particularly reckless people attempted, without being married, to have children in places called 'night clubs', but they were always unsuccessful, and this made them drink, and plunge into the most hectic gaiety.

I did not tell Archer that I thought he had made a mistake,

for I did not want to hurt his feelings. I went on sitting at his table and, although he turned his eyes back to his book and went on reading, I knew that he was friendly.

After some time he looked up again and said: 'Would you like to come out with me tomorrow? We could take our lunch, go up the mountain and then ski down in the afternoon.'

I was delighted at the suggestion, but also a little alarmed at my own shortcomings. I thought it my duty to explain that I was not a very good skier, only a moderate one, and that I could only do stem turns. I hated the thought of being a drag on Archer.

'I expect you're much better than I am. I'm always falling down or crashing into something,' he answered.

It was all arranged. We were to meet early, soon after six, as Archer wanted to go to the highest station on the mountain railway and then climb on skis to a nearby peak which had a small rest-house of logs.

I went to bed very excited, thankful that William was away on a long expedition. I lay under my enormous feather-bed eiderdown, felt the freezing mountain air on my face, and saw the stars sparkling through the open window.

I got up very early in the morning and put on my most sober ski socks and woollen shirt, for I felt that Archer disliked any suspicion of bright colours or dressing-up. I made my appearance as workmanlike as possible, and then went down to breakfast.

I ate several crackly rolls, which I spread thickly with dewy slivers of butter and gobbets of rich black cherry jam; then I drank my last cup of coffee and went to wax my skis. As I passed through the hall I picked up my picnic lunch in its neat grease-proof paper packet.

The nails in my boots slid and then caught on the snow, trodden hard down to the basement door. I found my skis in their rack, took them down and then heated the iron and the wax. I loved spreading the hot black wax smoothly on the white wood. Soon they were both done beautifully.

I will go like a bird, I thought.

I looked up and saw Archer standing in the doorway.

'I hope you haven't put too much on, else you'll be sitting on your arse all day,' he said gaily.

How fresh and pink he looked! I was excited.

He started to wax his own skis. When they were finished, we

went outside and strapped them on. Archer carried a rucksack and he told me to put my lunch and my spare sweater into it.

We started off down the gentle slopes to the station. The sun was shining prickingly. The lovely snow had rainbow colours in it. I was so happy I swung my sticks with their steel points and basket ends. I even tried to show off, and jumped a little terrace which I knew well. Nevertheless it nearly brought me down. I just regained my balance in time. I would have hated at that moment to have fallen down in front of Archer.

When we got to the station we found a compartment to ourselves. It was still early. Gently we were pulled up the mountain, past the water station stop and the other three halts.

We got out at the very top where the railway ended. A huge unused snow-plough stood by the side of the track, with its vicious shark's nose pointed at me. We ran to the van to get out our skis. Archer found mine as well as his own and slung both pairs across his shoulders. He looked like a very tough Jesus carrying two crosses, I thought.

We stood by the old snow-plough and slipped on our skis; then we began to climb laboriously up the ridge to the wooden rest-house. We hardly talked at all, for we needed all our breath, and also, I was still shy of Archer. Sometimes he helped me, telling me where to place my skis, and, if I slipped backwards, hauling on the rope which he had half playfully tied round my waist.

In spite of growing tired, I enjoyed the grim plodding. It gave me a sense of work and purpose. When Archer looked round to smile at me, his pink face was slippery with sweat. His white shirt above the small rucksack was plastered to his shoulder-blades. On my own face I could feel the drops of sweat just being held back by my eyebrows. I would wipe my hand across my upper lip and break all the tiny beads that had formed there.

Every now and then Archer would stop. We would put our skis sideways on the track and rest, leaning forward on our sticks. The sun struck down on our necks with a steady seeping heat and the light striking up from the snow was as bright as the fiery dazzle of a mirror. From the ridge we could see down into two valleys; and standing all round us were the other peaks, black rock and white snow, tangling and mixing until the mountains looked like vast teeth which had begun to decay.

I was so tired when we reached the long gentle incline to the

rest-house that I was afraid of falling down. The rope was still round my waist, and so the slightest lagging would have been perceptible to Archer. I think he must have slackened his pace for my benefit, for I somehow managed to reach the iron seats in front of the hut. I sank down, still with my skis on. I half shut my eyes. From walking so long with my feet turned out, my ankles felt almost broken.

The next thing I knew was that Archer had disappeared into the rest-house. He came out carrying a steaming cup.

'You must drink this,' he said, holding out black coffee to me, which I hated. He unwrapped four lumps of sugar and dropped them in the cup.

'I don't like it black,' I said.

'Never mind,' he answered sharply, 'drink it'.

Rather surprised, I began to drink the syrupy coffee. 'The sugar and the strong coffee will be good for you,' said Archer. He went back into the rest-house and brought out a glass of what looked like hot water with a piece of lemon floating in it. The mountain of sugar at the bottom was melting into thin Arabian Nights wreaths and spirals, smoke-rings of syrup.

'What else has it got in it?' I asked, with an attempt at worldliness.

'Rum!' said Archer.

We sat there on the terrace and unwrapped our picnic lunches. We both had two rolls, one with tongue in it, and one with ham, a hard-boiled egg, sweet biscuits, and a bar of delicious bitter chocolate; tangerine oranges were our dessert.

We began to take huge bites out of our rolls. We could not talk for some time. The food brought out a thousand times more clearly the beauty of the mountain peaks and sun. My tiredness made me thrillingly conscious of delight and satisfaction. I wanted to sit there with Archer for a long time.

At the end of the meal Archer gave me a piece of his own bar of chocolate, and then began to skin pigs of tangerine very skilfully and hand them to me on his outstretched palm, as one offers a lump of sugar to a horse. I thought for one moment of bending down my head and licking the pigs up in imitation of a horse; then I saw how mad it would look.

We threw the brilliant tangerine peel into the snow, which immediately seemed to dim and darken its colour.



Archer felt in his hip pocket and brought out black, cheap Swiss cigarettes, wrapped in leaf. They were out of a slot machine. He put one between my lips and lighted it. I felt extremely conscious of the thing jutting out from my lips. I wondered if I would betray my ignorance by not breathing the smoke in and out correctly. I turned my head a little away from Archer and experimented. It seemed easy if one did not breathe too deeply. It was wonderful to be really smoking with Archer. He treated me just like a man.

'Come on, let's get cracking,' he said, 'or, if anything happens, we'll be out all night.'

I scrambled to my feet at once and snapped the clips of the skis round my boot heels. Archer was in high spirits from the rum. He ran on his skis along the flat ridge in front of the rest-house and then fell down.

'Serves me right,' he said. He shook the snow off and we started properly. In five minutes we had swooped down the ridge we had climbed so painfully all morning. The snow was perfect; new and dry with no crust. We followed a new way which Archer had discovered. The ground was uneven with dips and curves. Often we were out of sight of each other. When we came to the icy path through a wood, my courage failed me.

'Stem like hell and don't get out of control,' Archer yelled back at me. I pointed my skis together, praying that they would not cross. I leant on my sticks, digging their metal points into the compressed snow. Twice I fell, though not badly.

'Well done, well done!' shouted Archer, as I shot past him and out of the wood into a thick snowdrift. He hauled me out of the snow and stood me on my feet, beating me all over hastily to get off the snow, then we began the descent of a field called the 'Bumps'. Little hillocks, if manoeuvred successfully, gave one that thrilling sinking and rising feeling experienced on a scenic railway at a fun fair.

Archer went before me, dipping and rising, shouting and yelling in his exuberance. I followed more sedately. We both fell several times, but in that not unpleasant, bouncing way which brings you to your feet again almost at once.

Archer was roaring now and trying to yodel in an absurd, rich contralto.

I had never enjoyed myself quite so much before. I thought

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him the most wonderful companion, not a bit intimidating, in spite of being rather a hero.

When at last we swooped down to the village street, it was nearly evening. Early orange lights were shining in the shop windows. We planked our skis down on the hard, iced road, trying not to slip.

I looked in at the *patisserie*, *confiserie* window, where all the electric bulbs had fluffy pink shades like powder-puffs. Archer saw my look.

'Let's go in,' he said. He ordered me hot chocolate with whipped cream, and *croissant* rolls. Afterwards we both went up to the little counter and chose cakes. I had one shaped like a little log. It was made of soft chocolate, and had green moss trimmings made in pistachio nut. When Archer went to pay the bill he bought me some chocolate caramels, in a little birds-eye maple box, and a bar labelled '*Chocolat Polychrome*'. Each finger was a different-coloured cream: mauve, pink, green, yellow, orange, brown, white, even blue.

We went out into the village street and began to climb up the path to the hotel. About half-way up Archer stopped outside a little wooden chalet and said: 'This is where I hang out'.

'But you're staying at the hotel,' I said incredulously.

'Oh yes, I have all my meals there, but I sleep here. It's a sort of little annex when there aren't any rooms left in the hotel. It's only got two rooms; I've paid just a bit more and got it all to myself. Someone comes every morning and makes the bed and stokes the boiler and the stove. Come in and see it.'

I followed Archer up the outside wooden staircase and stood with him on the little landing outside the two rooms. The place seemed wonderfully warm and dry. The walls were unpainted wood; there were double windows. There was a gentle creaking in all the joints of the wood when one moved. Archer pushed open one of the doors and ushered me in. I saw in one corner a huge white porcelain stove, the sort I had only before seen in pictures. Some of Archer's ski-ing gloves and socks were drying round it on a ledge. Against another wall were two beds, like wooden troughs built into the wall. The balloon-like quilts bulged up above the wood.

'I hardly use the other room,' said Archer. 'I just throw my muck into it and leave my trunks there.' He opened the connecting

door and I saw a smaller room with dirty clothes strewn on the floor; white shirts, hard evening collars, some very short pants, and many pairs of thick grey socks. The room smelt mildly of Archer's old sweat. I didn't mind at all.

Archer shut the door and said: 'I'm going to run the bath'.

'Have you a bathroom too—all your own?' I exclaimed enviously. 'Every time anyone has a bath at the hotel, he has to pay two francs fifty to the fraulein before she unlocks the door. I've only had two proper baths since I've been here. I don't think it matters though. It seems almost impossible to get really dirty in Switzerland, and you can always wash all over in your bedroom basin.'

'Why don't you have a bath here after me? The water's lovely and hot, although there's not much of it. If you went back first and got your evening clothes, you could change straight into them.'

I looked at Archer a little uncertainly. I longed to soak in hot water after my wonderful but gruelling day.

'Could I really bath here?' I asked.

'If you don't mind using my water. I'll promise not to pee in it. I'm not really filthy you know.'

Archer laughed and chuckled, because he saw me turning red at his coarseness. He lit another of his peasant cigarettes and began to unlace his boots. He got me to pull them off. I knelt down, bowed my head and pulled. When the ski boot suddenly flew off, my nose dipped forward and I smelt Archer's foot in its woolly, hairy, humid casing of sock.

'Would you just rub my foot and leg?' Archer said urgently, a look of pain suddenly shooting across his face. 'I've got cramp. It often comes on at the end of the day.'

He shot his leg out rigidly and told me where to rub and massage. I felt each of his curled toes separately and the hard tendons in his leg. His calf was like a firm sponge ball. His thigh, swelling out, amazed me. I likened it in my mind to the trumpet of some musical instrument. I went on rubbing methodically. I was able to feel his pain melting away.

When the tense look had quite left his face, he said, 'Thanks', and stood up. He unbuttoned his trousers, let them fall to the ground, and pulled his shirt up. Speaking to me with his head imprisoned in it, he said: 'You go and get your clothes and I'll begin bathing.'

I left him and hurried up to the hotel, carrying my skis on my shoulder. I ran up to my room and pulled my evening clothes out of the wardrobe. The dinner jacket and trousers had belonged to my brother William six years before, when he was my age. I was secretly ashamed of this fact, and had taken my brother's name from the inside of the breast pocket and had written my own in elaborate lettering.

I took my comb, face flannel and soap, and getting out my toboggan slid back to Archer's chalet in a few minutes. I let myself in and heard Archer splashing. The little hall was full of steam and I saw Archer's shoulders and arms like a pink smudge through the open bathroom door.

'Come and scrub my back,' he yelled; 'it gives me a lovely feeling.' He thrust a large stiff nailbrush into my hands and told me to scrub as hard as I could.

I ran it up and down his back until I'd made harsh red tramlines. Delicious tremors seemed to be passing through Archer.

'Ah! go on!' said Archer in a dream, like a purring cat. 'When I'm rich I'll have a special back-scratcher slave.' I went on industriously scrubbing his back till I was afraid that I would rub the skin off. I liked to give him pleasure.

At last he stood up all dripping and said: 'Now it's your turn.'

I undressed and got into Archer's opaque, soapy water. I lay back and wallowed. Archer poured some very smelly salts on to my stomach. One crystal stuck in my navel and tickled and grated against me.

'This whiff ought to cover up all remaining traces of me!' Archer laughed.

'What's the smell supposed to be?' I asked, brushing the crystals off my stomach into the water, and playing with the one that lodged so snugly in my navel.

'Russian pine,' said Archer, shutting his eyes ecstatically and making inbreathing dreamy noises. He rubbed himself roughly with the towel and made his hair stand up on end.

I wanted to soak in the bath for hours, but it was already getting late, and so I had to hurry.

Archer saw what difficulty I had in tying my tie. He came up to me and said: 'Let me do it.' I turned round relieved, but slightly ashamed of being incompetent.

I kept very still, and he tied it tightly and rapidly with his ham-like hands. He gave the bows a little expert jerk and pat. His eyes had a very concentrated, almost crossed look and I felt him breathing down on my face. All down the front our bodies touched featherily; little points of warmth came together. The hard boiled shirts were like slightly warmed dinner-plates.

When I had brushed my hair, we left the chalet and began to walk up the path to the hotel. The beaten snow was so slippery, now that we were shod only in patent leather slippers, that we kept sliding backwards. I threw out my arms, laughing, and shouting to Archer to rescue me; then, when he grabbed me and started to haul me to him, he too would begin to slip. It was a still, Prussian-blue night with rather weak stars. Our laughter seemed to ring across the valley, to hit the mountains and then to travel on and on and on.

We reached the hotel a little the worse for wear. The soles of my patent-leather shoes had become soaked, and there was snow on my trousers. Through bending forward, the studs in Archer's shirt had burst undone, and the slab of hair hung over one of his eyes as I had noticed before. We went into the cloak-room to readjust ourselves; then we entered the dining-room.

'Come and sit at my table,' Archer said; then he added:

'No, we'll sit at yours, as there are two places there already.'

We sat down and began to eat Roman *gnocchi*. (The proprietor of the hotel was Italian-Swiss.) I did not like mine very much and was glad when I could go on to *œufs au beurre noir*. Now that my brother was away I could pick and choose in this way, leaving out the meat course, if I chose to, without causing any comment.

Archer drank Pilsner and suggested that I should too. Not wanting to disagree with him, I nodded my head, although I hated the pale, yellow, bitter water.

After the meal Archer ordered me *crème de menthe* with my coffee; I had seen a nearby lady drinking this pretty liquid and asked him about it. To be ordered a liqueur in all seriousness was a thrilling moment for me. I sipped the fummy peppermint, which left such an artificial heat in my throat and chest, and thought that apart from my mother who was dead, I had never liked anyone so much as I liked Archer. He didn't try to interfere with me at all. He just took me as I was and yet seemed to like me.

Archer was now smoking a proper cigar, not the leaf-rolled cigarettes we had had at lunch-time. He offered me one too, but I had the sense to realize that he did not mean me to take one and smoke it there before the eyes of all the hotel. I knew also that it would have made me sick, for my father had given me a cigar when I was eleven, in an attempt to put me off smoking for ever.

I always associated cigars with middle-aged men, and I watched Archer interestedly, thinking how funny the stiff fat thing looked sticking out of his young mouth.

We were sitting on the uncurtained sun-terrace, looking out on to the snow in the night; the moon was just beginning to rise. It made the snow glitter suddenly, like fish-scales. Behind us people were dancing in the salon and adjoining rooms. The music came to us in angry snatches, some notes distorted, others quite obliterated. Archer did not seem to want to dance. He seemed content to sit with me in silence.

Near me on a what-not stand stood a high-heeled slipper made of china. I took it down and slipped my hand into it. How hideously ugly the china pom-poms were down the front! The painted centipede climbing up the red heel wore a knowing, human expression. I moved my fingers in the china shoe, pretending they were toes.

'I love monstrosities, too,' said Archer, as I put the shoe back beside the fern in its crinkly paper-covered pot.

Later we wandered to the buffet bar and stood there drinking many glasses of the *limonade* which was made with white wine. I took the tinkly pieces of ice into my mouth and sucked them, trying to cool myself a little. Blood seemed to rise in my face; my head buzzed.

Suddenly I felt full of *limonade* and lager. I left Archer to go to the cloak-room, but he followed and stood beside me in the next china niche, while the water flushed and gushed importantly in the polished copper tubes, and an interesting, curious smell came from the wire basket which held some strange disinfectant crystals. Archer stood so quietly and guardingly beside me there that I had to say:

'Do I look queer?'

'No, you don't look queer; you look nice,' he said simply.

A rush of surprise and pleasure made me hotter still. We clanked over the tiles and left the cloak-room.

In the hall, I remembered that I had left all my ski-ing clothes at the chalet.

‘I shall need them in the morning,’ I said to Archer.

‘Let’s go down there now, then I can make cocoa on my spirit-lamp, and you can bring the clothes back with you.’

We set out in the moonlight; Archer soon took my arm, for he saw that I was drunk, and the path was more slippery than ever. Archer sang *Stille Nacht* in German, and I began to cry. I could not stop myself. It was such a delight to cry in the moonlight with Archer singing my favourite song; and William far away up the mountain.

Suddenly we both sat down on our behinds with a thump. There was a jarring pain at the bottom of my spine but I began to laugh wildly; so did Archer. We lay there laughing, the snow melting under us and soaking through the seats of our trousers and the shoulders of our jackets.

Archer pulled me to my feet and dusted me down with hard slaps. My teeth grated together each time he slapped me. He saw that I was becoming more and more drunk in the freezing air. He propelled me along to the chalet, more or less frog-marching me in an expert fashion. I was quite content to leave myself in his hands.

When he got me upstairs, he put me into one of the bunks and told me to rest. The feathers ballooned out round me. I sank down deliciously. I felt as if I were floating down some magic staircase for ever.

Archer got his little meta-stove out and made coffee—not cocoa as he had said. He brought me over a strong cup and held it to my lips. I drank it unthinkingly and not tasting it, doing it only because he told me to.

When he took the cup away, my head fell back on the pillow, and I felt myself sinking and floating away again. I was on skis this time, but they were liquid skis, made of melted glass, and the snow was glass too, but a sort of glass that was springy, like gelatine, and flowing like water.

I felt a change in the light, and knew that Archer was bending over me. Very quietly he took off my shoes, undid my tie, loosened the collar and unbuttoned my braces in front. I remembered thinking, before I finally fell asleep, how clever he was to know about undoing the braces; they had begun to feel so tight

pulling down on my shoulders and dragging the trousers up between my legs. Archer covered me with several blankets and another quilt.

When I woke in the morning, Archer was already up. He had made me some tea and had put it on the stove to keep warm. He brought it over to me and I sat up. I felt ill, rather sick. I remembered what a glorious day yesterday had been, and thought how extraordinary it was that I had not slept in my own bed at the hotel, but in Archer's room, in my clothes.

I looked at him shamefacedly. 'What happened last night? I felt peculiar,' I said.

'The lager and the lemonade, and the *crème de menthe* made you a bit tight, I'm afraid,' Archer said, laughing.

'Do you feel better now? We'll go up to the hotel and have breakfast soon.'

I got up and washed and changed into my ski-ing clothes. I still felt rather sick. I made my evening clothes into a neat bundle and tied them on to my toboggan. I had the sweets Archer had given me in my pocket.

We went up to the hotel, dragging the toboggan behind us.

And there on the doorstep we met William with one of the guides. They had had to return early, because someone in the party had broken a ski.

William was in a temper. He looked at us and then said to me: 'What have you been doing?'

I was at a loss to know what to answer. The very sight of William had so troubled me that this added difficulty of explaining my actions was too much for me.

I looked at him miserably and mouthed something about going in to have breakfast.

William turned to Archer fiercely, but said nothing.

Archer explained: 'Your brother's just been down to my place. We went ski-ing together yesterday and he left some clothes at the chalet.'

'It's very early,' was all William said; then he swept me on into the hotel before him, without another word to the guide or to Archer.

He went with me up to my room and saw that the bed had not been slept in.

I said clumsily: 'The maid must have been in and done my



room early'. I could not bear to explain to William about my wonderful day, or why I had slept at the chalet.

William was so furious that he took no more notice of my weak explanations and lies.

When I suddenly said in desperation, 'I feel sick,' he seized me, took me to the basin, forced his fingers down my throat and struck me on the back till a yellow cascade of vomit gushed out of my mouth. My eyes were filled with stinging water; I was trembling. I ran the water in the basin madly, to wash away this sign of shame.

Gradually I grew a little more composed. I felt better, after being sick, and William had stopped swearing at me. I filled the basin with freezing water and dipped my face into it. The icy feel seemed to bite round my eye-sockets and make the flesh round my nose firm again. I waited, holding my breath for as long as possible.

Suddenly my head was pushed down and held. I felt William's hard fingers digging into my neck. He was hitting me now with a slipper, beating my buttocks and my back with slashing strokes, hitting a different place each time, as he had been taught as a prefect at school, so that the flesh should not be numbed from a previous blow.

I felt that I was going to choke. I could not breathe under the water, and realized that I would die. I was seized with such a panic that I wrenched myself free from William and darted round the room, with him after me. Water dripped on the bed, the carpet, the chest of drawers. Splashes of it spat against the mirror in the wardrobe door. William aimed vicious blows at me until he had driven me into a corner. There he beat against my uplifted arms, yelling in a hoarse, mad, religious voice: 'Bastard, Devil, Harlot, Sod!'

As I cowered under his blows, I remember thinking that my brother had suddenly become a lunatic and was talking gibberish in his madness, for, of the words he was using, I had not heard any before, except 'Devil'.

CHARLES FLETCHER COOKE

## SENT BY AMERICA

THE verb 'to send' has taken on another meaning. Mr. Frank Sinatra, the singer, 'sends' ten million Americans twice a week. The idiom may be used in the passive. Instead of swearing that 'Frankie sure can send', one of his audience may simply announce 'I have been sent'.

This example should be enough to indicate the new meaning of the verb. Obviously, it derives from the German *senden*, to transmit. It implies in the sender a power of inducing in the victim a complete acceptance, overwhelming all rational criticism. There can be no analysis, no debate. Whether Sinatra has a better voice than Crosby is not in point, and no one who was sent by either would even argue it.

Its use is not confined to singing. After Sinatra, Mr. Churchill can send better than anyone. Mr. Roosevelt can send, but not as well as Mr. Churchill. No one knows whether General MacArthur can send. Mr. Willkie once had the power. About the only disqualification possessed by Governor Dewey is that he cannot send at all. So important is the gift that it may yet undo the sterling Governor.

It seems as though the concept can be expanded very widely. Not only individuals, but nations can or cannot send. Indeed, in passing judgments on foreign countries, individuals show themselves childishly susceptible to this peculiar power. For example, quite a disproportionate number of your readers have been sent by France. On the other hand, it would be an understatement to say that America did not send your contributor, Mr. Antony Bourne. His impressions, beautifully described, boil down to two small facts. New York he found expensive and Los Angeles crackpot. These truths have been ascertained before. But since the omission of other, more important truths amounts to a *suggestio falsi*, and since it is imperative for the fair name of this journal that Americans should see him answered, common honesty demands an early admission from this writer that in six short weeks America sent him more completely and more unreservedly than anyone except apparently Mr. Hilary Saunders.