

QUITE, QUITE

I HAVE decided at last upon a profession. I am going to set up as a quorister.

It had been a busy morning with me at the office, and I felt annoyed at first on being interrupted. I had been engaged for about twenty minutes in preparing a draught by putting the office copy of the *Times* over the fireplace, where two lukewarm pieces of coke had been laid. I had just got them to spark nicely when the paper suddenly went up with a loud roar into Victoria Street by way of the chimney. The only thing to do was to paste the edges of a number of spare minute sheets together in order to form a substitute, and I was just accomplishing this when Enderby burst in.

'You're wanted at once in Room 1005,' he said.

'What for?' I asked nervously and gluing myself rather badly on the left sleeve.

'The committee are sitting,' he said; 'you've got to make a quorum.'

'I'm awfully sorry,' I said, 'but I never got beyond quadratic equations; besides —'

'It's perfectly easy,' he told me; 'you've to take Anderson's place. You'll only have to sit there and say nothing and look wise. The secretary will introduce you as acting for Mr. Anderson.'

'Lend me your spectacles and your spats, then,' I stipulated.

He did so, and when I had adjusted these I went down immediately to a long dark room, in which several kind-looking and sleepy old gentlemen and one extremely young and alert one sat about a table covered with green baize and furnished with more pink blotting-paper than I had ever seen before in the whole of my life.

As soon as I came in I was intro-

duced to the chairman, and the alert young man began to read out in a quick clear voice a number of entirely unintelligible sentences, and every time he stopped for breath the chairman looked round rather timidly and said, 'I think we all agree with that, gentlemen.' Thereupon the old gentlemen frowned a little over their spectacles and said, 'Quite, quite,' and I frowned a little over Enderby's spectacles (it is, as a matter of fact, extraordinarily hard to frown under them), and kicked my spats with each toe in turn to make sure they were there and said, 'Quite, quite,' too.

Every now and then I felt an irresistible temptation to say, 'Quack, quack,' but I checked it in time, feeling somehow that it was better to follow the normal procedure. By degrees something about the authoritative manner or the sonorous quality of my 'Quite, quite's' made such an impression that one by one the old gentlemen began to leave off quite-quiteing and relinquish the whole business to me. And when, toward the end of the meeting, I was able to produce a box of matches and light the cigar of the old gentleman on my right and the cigarette of the old gentleman on my left, it was clear that they regarded me as a man of profound administrative capacity and skill in worldly affairs.

It was after this that I made my momentous decision. I am about to rent an office and engage a typist with gold hair and gray suede shoes and a bag with a powder-puff in — a typist of the kind that makes tea at eleven o'clock in the morning and three o'clock in the afternoon, and spells 'customary' with an 'e'; and I am going to put a brass plate outside the door with 'H. Jenkinson, Quorister' engraved upon it, and underneath this, 'Business, professional, and political quora ready-made or bespoke.' And

people will ring me up on the telephone or write letters to me asking me to make a quorum, and the letters will be filed by the quorum and I shall go out and make quora and charge two guineas a time.

I am well aware that at first I shall have a good deal of opposition to encounter. People will say that I cannot sit on committees of which I am not a member. But when one thinks of the number of cold mornings when it is nice in bed, or of bright mornings when it is nice in the country, the advantages of having a professional quorum-constituter always ready to oblige will soon become clear. I shall attend and hand in my card with the name of the member I am representing underneath it to the clever and competent young secretary, and, as soon as the meeting has started, the perfect timbre of my 'Quite, quite' will reassure any malcontent there may be; and, if any member does lodge an objection, I shall frown at him a little over my spectacles, which will not be Enderby's but my own, and rimmed with the most expensive tortoiseshell.

And in time, perhaps, I shall establish quoristry as a profession and obtain a charter for it, and there will be schools in which students and associates will be taught to wear spats and to say, 'Quite, quite,' in a properly authoritative manner, and nobody will have to go to committees at all, except the chairman and the alert young secretary and a quorum of quite-quitters from the Associated Institute of Quoristers. And the fees of members who have advanced in the profession will of course become higher and higher. Men such as these will attend only very important committees and will be able to say, 'Quite,' with an intonation so perfect that it will go far toward settling the doubts of a deputation of bargees and lightermen. I

reckon that our fees for a Cabinet Meeting will be about a hundred guineas.

Punch

THE CLASSICS FOR THE NURSERY

BY REBECCA WEST

No parent whose memory goes back to the pinafore age will buy this new edition of *Tanglewood Tales** that Messrs. Blackie have issued, for it has been edited most grown-uppishly. W. K. L., who was surely born in a state of middle-age, announces in a prefatory note that he has compressed 'some of the exuberantly full diction of the original text,' forgetting that in those days we might be bored by piousness, but never by prolixity. So long as it was the right kind of story, with courage flashing bright weapons under dark towers and villainy working a twenty-four-hour day, we did not mind how long it took in the way. In those days we would read the worst and dullest Dumas as nowadays we could hardly read the best, and Eugène Sue's *The Wandering Jew*, which it is inconceivable that any adult could now get through except in prison, seemed the most fluent and colored of stories.

Most modern children's books are actively hostile to this tendency of the child mind and give these sharp little mental teeth the softest of predigested pap. And the mischief done leaves its mark on literature, for the child brought up on the standard British 'juvenile gift-book' about a little girl who goes into a wood and falls asleep and dreams of insipid fairies, certainly grows up into the Tired Business Man. It is, therefore, a shame, a serious

* *Tanglewood Tales*. By Nathaniel Hawthorne. 'Blackie's Library for Boys and Girls.' Blackie, 256 pages. 1s. 9d. net.