



SUSPENSE

A NAPOLEONIC NOVEL

By

Joseph Conrad

Copyright by Doubleday, Page & Co., 1925.

I

A DEEP red glow flushed the fronts of marble palaces piled up on the slope of an arid mountain whose barren ridge traced high on the darkening sky a ghostly and glimmering outline. The winter sun was setting over the Gulf of Genoa. Behind the massive shore the sky to the east was like darkening glass. The open water too had a glassy look with a purple sheen in which the evening light lingered as if clinging to the water. The sails of a few becalmed feluccas looked rosy and cheerful, motionless in the gathering gloom. Their heads were all pointing towards the superb city. Within the long jetty with the squat round tower at the end, the water of the harbour had turned black. A bigger vessel with square sails, issuing from it and arrested by the sudden descent of the calm, faced the red disc of the sun. Her ensign hung down and its colours were not to be made out; but a lank man in a shabby sailor's jacket and wearing a strange cap with a tassel, who lounged with both his arms thrown over the black breech of an enormous piece of ordnance that with three of its monstrous fellows squatted on the platform of the tower, seemed to have no doubt of her nationality; for to the question of a civilian in a long coat and Hessian boots and with an ingenuous young countenance above the folds of a white neckcloth he answered curtly, taking a short pipe out of his mouth but not turning his head.

"She's Elban."

He replaced his pipe and preserved an unsociable air. The elegant young man with the pleasant countenance, (who was Cosmo, the son of Sir Charles Latham of Latham Hall, Yorkshire), repeated under his breath, "Elban," and remained wrapped up in still contemplation of the becalmed ship with her undistinguishable flag.

It was not till the sun had sunk beneath the waters of the Mediterranean and the undistinguishable flag had been hauled down on board the motionless ship that he stirred and turned his eyes toward the harbour. The nearest prominent object in it was the imposing shape of an English line-of-battle ship moored on the west side not far from the quay. Her tall spars overtopped the roofs of the houses and the English ensign at her flagstaff had just been hauled down and replaced by a lantern that looked strange in the clear twilight. The forms of shipping crowded towards the head of the harbour were merging into one another. Cosmo let his eyes wander over the circular platform of the tower. The man leaning over the gun went on smoking with indifference.

"Are you the guardian of this tower?" asked the young man.

The other gave him a sidelong glance and made answer without changing his attitude and more as if speaking to himself:

"This is now an unguarded spot. The wars are over."

"Do they close the door at the bottom of this tower at night?" enquired Cosmo.

"That is not a matter worth consideration especially for those like you, for instance, who have a soft bed to go to for the night."

The young man put his head on one side and looked at his interlocutor with a faint smile.

"You don't seem to care," he said. "So I conclude I need not. As long as you are content to stay here I am safe enough. I followed you up the stairs, you know."

The man with the pipe stood up abruptly. "You followed me here? Why did you do that, in the name of all the saints?"

The young man laughed as if at a good joke. "Because you were walking in front of me. There was nobody else in view near the Mole. Suddenly you disappeared. Then I saw the door at the bottom of the tower was open and I walked up the stairs onto this platform. And I would have been very surprised if I hadn't found you here."

The man in the strange cap ornamented with a tassel had taken his pipe out of his mouth to listen. "That was all?"

"Yes, that was all."

"Nobody but an Englishman would behave like that," countered the other to himself, a slight appearance of apprehension passing over his features. "You are an eccentric people."

"I don't see anything eccentric in what I've done. I simply wanted to walk out of the town. The Mole was as good as any other part. It is very pleasant here."

A slight breeze touched the two men's faces, while they stood silent, looking at each other. "I am but an idle traveller," said Cosmo easily. "I arrived this morning by land. I am glad I had the idea to come out here to behold your town glowing in the sunset and to get a sight of a vessel belonging to Elba. There can't be very many of them. But you, my friend . . ."

"I have as much right to idle away my time here as any English traveller," interrupted the man hastily.

"It is very pleasant here," repeated the young traveller, staring into the dusk which had invaded the platform of the tower.

"Pleasant?" repeated the other. "Yes, perhaps. The last time I was on this platform I was only ten years old. A solid round shot was spinning and rattling all over the stone floor. It made a wondrous disturbance and seemed a living thing full of fury."

"A solid shot!" exclaimed Cosmo, looking all over the smooth flagstones as if expecting to see the traces of that visitation. "Where did it come from?"

"It came from an English brig belonging to Milord Keith's Squadron. She stood in quite close and opened fire on us. . . . Heaven only knows why. The audacity of your people! A single shot from one of those big fellows," he continued, slapping the enormous bulging breech of the gun by his side, "would have been enough to sink her like a stone."

"I can well believe it. But the fearlessness of our seamen has ceased to astonish the world long ago," murmured the young traveller.

"There are plenty of fearless people in the world, but luck is even better than courage. The brig sailed away unscathed. Yes, luck is even better than courage. Surer than wisdom and stronger than justice. Luck is a great thing. It is the only thing worth having on one's side. And you people have always had it. Yes, signore, you belong to a lucky nation or else you would not be standing here on this platform looking across the water in the direction of that crumb of land that is the last refuge of your greatest enemy."

COSMO leaned over the stone parapet near the embrasure of the gun on the other side of which the man with the short pipe in his hands made a vaguely emphatic gesture: "I wonder what thoughts pass through your head," he went on in a quiet detached tone. "Or perhaps you are too young yet to have many thoughts in your head. Excuse my liberty, but I have always heard that one may be frank in speech with an Englishman; and by your speech there can be no doubt of your being of that nation."

"I can assure you I have no thoughts of hatred. . . . Look, the Elban ship is getting farther away. Or is it only the darkness that makes her seem so?"

"The night air is heavy. There is more wind on the water than up here, where we stand; but I don't think she has moved away. You are interested in that Elban ship, signore."

"There is a fascination now about everything connected with that island," confessed the ingenuous traveller. "You have just said that I was too young to think. You don't seem so very much older

than myself. I wonder what thoughts you may have."

"The thoughts of a common man, thoughts that could be of no interest to an English milord," answered the other, in a grimly deprecatory tone.

"Do you think that all Englishmen are lords?" asked Cosmo, with a laugh.

"I didn't think. I went by your appearance. I remember hearing an old man once say that you were a lordly nation."

"Really!" exclaimed the young man and laughed again in a low, pleasant note. "I remember hearing of an old man who called us a nation of traders."

"*Nazione di mercante*," repeated the man slowly. "Well, that may be true too. Different men, different wisdoms."

"This didn't occur to me," said Cosmo, seating himself with a little spring on the stone parapet of the tower. He rested one foot on the massive gun-carriage and fixed his clear eyes on the dark red streak on the western sky left by the retreating sun like a long gash inflicted on the suffering body of the universe. . . . "Different men, different wisdoms," he repeated, musingly. "I suppose it must be. People's lives are so very different. . . . And of what kind was the wisdom of your old man?"

"THE wisdom of a great plain as level almost as the sea," said the other gravely. "His voice was as unexpected when I heard it as your own, signore. The evening shadows had closed about me just after I had seen to the west, on the edge of the world as it were, a lion miss his spring on a bounding deer. They went away right into the glow and vanished. It was as though I had dreamed. When I turned round there was the old man behind me no farther away than half the width of this platform. He only smiled at my startled looks. His long silver locks stirred in the breeze. He had been watching me, it seems, from folds of ground and from amongst reed beds for nearly half a day, wondering what I might be at. I had come ashore to wander on the plain. I like to be alone sometimes. My ship was anchored in a bight of this deserted coast a good many miles away, too many to walk back in the dark for a stranger like me. So I spent the night in that old man's ranch, a hut of grass and reeds, near a little piece of water peopled by a multitude of birds. He treated me as if I had been his son. We talked till dawn and when the sun rose I did not go back to my ship. What I had on board of my own was not of much value, and there was certainly no one there to address me as 'My son' in that particular tone—you know what I mean, signore."

"I don't know—but I think I can guess," was the answer whose light-hearted yet earnest frankness was particularly boyish and provoked a smile on the part of the older man. In repose his face was grave. His English interlocutor went on after a pause. "You deserted from your ship to join a hermit in a wilderness simply because the tone of his voice appealed to your heart. Is that your meaning?"

"You have guessed it, signorino. Perhaps there was more in it than that. There is no doubt about it that I did desert from my ship."

"And where was that?"

"On the coast of South America," answered the man from the other side of the big gun, with sudden curttness. "And now it is time for us to part."

But neither of them stirred and for some time they remained silent, growing shadowy to each other on the massive tower, which itself, in the advancing night, was but a gray shadow above the dark and motionless sea.

"How long did you stay with that hermit in the desert?" asked Cosmo. "And how did you leave him?"

"Signore, it was he who left me. After I had buried his body I had nothing more to do there. I had learned much during that year."

"What is it you learned, my friend? I should like to know."

"Signore, his wisdom was not like that of other men and it would be too long to explain to you here on this tower and at this late hour of the day. I learned many things. How to be patient, for instance. . . . Don't you think, signore, that your friends or the servants at the inn may become uneasy at your long absence?"

"I tell you I haven't been much more than two hours in this town and I have spoken to nobody in

it till I came upon you, except of course to the people at the inn."

"They may start looking for you."

"Why should they trouble their heads? It isn't late yet. Why should they notice my absence?"

"Why? . . . Simply because your supper may be ready at this time," retorted the man impatiently.

"It may be, but I am not hungry yet," said the young man casually. "Let them search for me all over the town if they like." Then in a tone of interest, "Do you think they would think of looking for me here?" he asked.

"No. This is the last spot anybody would think of," muttered the other as if to himself. He raised his voice markedly, "We must part indeed. Good-night, signore."

"Good-night."

The man in the seaman's jacket started for a moment, then with a brusque movement cocked his cap with the strange tassel more on the side of his head. "I am not going away from this spot," he said.

"I thought you were. Why did you wish me good-night then?"

"Because we must part."

"I suppose we must some time or other," agreed Cosmo in a friendly voice. "I should like to meet you again."

"We must part at once, this moment, on this tower."

"Why?"

"Because I want to be left alone," answered the other after the slightest of pauses.

"Oh, come! Why on earth do you want to be left alone? What is it you could do here?" protested the other with great good humor. Then as if struck by an amusing notion, "Unless indeed you want to practise incantations," he continued lightly, "and perhaps call the Evil One to your side." He paused. "There are people, you know, that think it can be done," he added in a mocking tone.

"They are not far from wrong," was the other's ominous reply. "Each man has a devil not very far from his elbow. Don't argue, signore, don't call him up in me! You had better say no more and go in peace from here."

The young traveller did not change his careless attitude. The man in the cap heard him say quietly, almost in a tone of self-communion:

"I prefer to stay in peace here."

IT was indeed a wonderful peace. The sound of their quiet voices did not seem to affect it in the least. It had an enormous and overpowering amplitude which seemed rather to the man in the cap to take the part of the Englishman's calm obstinacy against his growing anger. He couldn't repress an impulsively threatening movement in the direction of his inconvenient companion but it died out in perplexity. He pushed his cap still more on one side and simply scratched his head.

"You are one of those people that are accustomed to have their own way. Well, you can't have your way this time. I have asked you quietly to leave me alone on this tower. I asked you as man to man. But if you won't listen to reason I . . ."

Cosmo, putting the palms of his hands against the edge of the parapet, sprang lightly nearly to the middle of the platform and landed without a stagger. His voice was perfectly even.

"Reason is my only guide," he declared. "But your request looks like a mere caprice. For what can you possibly have to do here? The sea birds are gone to sleep and I have as much right to the air up here as you. Therefore . . ."

A thought seemed to strike him. "Surely this can't be your trysting place," he commented in a changed tone through which pierced a certain sympathy.

A short scornful laugh from the other checked him and he muttered to himself soberly, "No. Altogether unfit . . . amongst those grim old guns." He raised his voice. "All I can do is to give you all the room." He backed away from the centre of the platform and perched himself this time on the massive breech of a sixty-pounder. "Go on with your incantations," he said then to the tall and dim figure whose immobility appeared helpless for a moment. It broke the short period of silence, saying deliberately:

"I suppose you are aware that at any time since we have begun to talk together it was open to me to

fling myself upon you unawares as you sat on the parapet and knock you over to the bottom of this tower?" He waited a moment, then in a deeper tone, "Will you deny it?" he said.

"No, I won't deny it," was the careless answer. "I hadn't thought to be on my guard. But I can swim."

"Don't you know there is a border of big blocks of stone there? It would have been a terrible death. . . . And now, will the signore do what I ask him and return to his inn which is a much safer place than this platform?"

"Safety is not a great inducement; and I don't believe for a moment you ever thought of attacking me in a treacherous manner."

"Well," the tall shadowy figure crowned by the shape of the strange cap admitted reluctantly. "Well, since you put it in those words, signore, I did not."

"You see! I believe you are a fine fellow. But as it is I am under no sort of obligation to listen to you."

"You are crafty," burst out the other violently. "It's in the blood. How is one to deal with people like you?"

"You could try to drive me off," suggested the other.

THERE was no answer for a time, then the tall figure muttered reflectively to itself.

"After all—he's an Englishman."

"I don't think myself invincible on that account," observed Cosmo calmly.

"I know. I have fought against English soldiers in Buenos Ayres. I was only thinking that, to give the devil his due, men of your nation don't consort with spies or love tyranny either. . . . Tell me, is it true that you have only been two hours in this town?"

"Perfectly true."

"And yet all the tyrants of the world are your allies," the shadowy man pursued his train of thought half aloud.

The no less shadowy traveller remarked quietly into the gathering night:

"You don't know who my friends are."

"I don't, but I think you are not likely to go with a tale to the Austrian spies or consort with the Piedmontese *sbirri*. As to the priests who are poking their noses everywhere, I . . ."

"I don't know a single soul in Italy," interrupted the other.

"But you will soon. People like you make acquaintances everywhere. But it's idle talk with strangers that I fear. Can I trust you as an Englishman not to talk of what you may see?"

"You may. I can't imagine what unlawful thing you are about to commit here. I am dying from curiosity. Can it be that you are really some sort of sorcerer? Go on! Trace your magic circle if that is your business, and call up the spirits of the dead."

A low grunt was the only answer to this speech uttered in a tone between jest and earnest. Cosmo watched from the breech of his gun with intense interest the movements of the man who objected so strongly to his presence but who now seemed to pay no attention to him at all. They were not the movements of a magician in so far that they certainly had nothing to do with the tracing of circles. The figure had stepped over to the seaward face of the tower and seemed to be pulling endless things out of the breast pocket of his jacket. The young Englishman got down from the breech of the gun, without ceasing to peer in a fascinated way, and moved closer step by step till he threw himself back with an exclamation of astonishment. "By heavens! The fellow is going to fish." . . . Cosmo remained mute with surprise for a good many seconds and then burst out loudly:

"Is this what you displayed all this secrecy for? This is the worst hoax I ever . . ."

"Come nearer, signore, but take care not to tangle all my twine with your feet. . . . Do you see this box?"

The heads of the two men had come together confidentially and the young traveller made out a cylindrical object which was in fact a round tin box. His companion thrust it into his hand with the request, "Hold it for me a moment, signore," and then Cosmo had the opportunity to ascertain that the lid of it was hermetically sealed. The man in the strange cap dived into the pocket of his

breeches for flint and steel. The Englishman beheld with surprise his lately inimical companion squeeze himself between the massive tube of the piece of ordnance and the wall of stone and wriggle outwards into the depth of the thick embrasure till nothing of him remained visible but his black stockings and the soles of his heavy shoes. After a time his voice came deadened along the thickness of the wall:

"Will you hand me the box now, signore?"

Cosmo, enlisted in these mysterious proceedings, the nature of which was becoming clear enough to him, obeyed at once, and approaching the embrasure thrust the box in at the full length of his arm till it came in contact with the ready hand of the man who was lying flat on his stomach with his head projecting beyond the wall of the tower. His groping hand found and snatched away the box. The man was attached to the box and at once its length laid on the platform began to run out till the very end disappeared. Then the man lying prone within the thickness of the gun embrasure lay still as death and the young traveller strained his ears in the absolute silence to catch the slightest sound at the foot of the tower. But all he could hear was the faint sound of some distant clock striking somewhere in the town. He waited a little longer, then in the cautious tone of a willing accomplice murmured within the opening:

"Got a bite yet?"

The answer came hardly audible:

"No. But this is the very hour."

Cosmo felt his interest growing. And yet the facts in themselves were not very exciting, but all this had the complexion and the charm of an unexpected adventure, heightened by its mystery, playing itself out before that old town towering like a carved hill decorated with lights that began to appear quickly on the sombre and colossal mass of that lofty shore. The last gleam had died out in the west. The harbour was dark except for the lantern at the stern of the British ship of the line. The man in the embrasure made a slight movement. Cosmo became more alert but apparently nothing happened. There was no murmur of voices, splash of water, or sign of the slightest stir all round the tower. Suddenly the man in the embrasure began to wriggle back on to the platform and in a very few minutes stood up to his full height facing the unexpected helper.

"She has come and gone," he said. "Did you hear anything, signore?"

"Not a sound. She might have been the ghost of a boat—for you are alluding to a boat, are you not?"

"Si. And I hope that if any eye on shore had made her out it had taken her for only a ghost. Of course that English vessel of war rows guard at night. But it isn't to look out for ghosts."

"I should think not. Ghosts are of no account. Could there be anything more futile than the ghost of a boat?"

"You are one of the strong-minded, signore. Ghosts are the concern of the ignorant—yet who knows? But it does sound funny to talk of the ghost of a boat, a thing of brute matter. For wouldn't a ghost be a thing of spirit, a man's soul itself made restless by grief or love, or remorse or anger? Such are the stories that one hears. But the old hermit of the plain, of whom I spoke, assured me that the dead are too glad to be done with life to make trouble on earth."

"You and your hermit!" exclaimed Cosmo in a boyish and marvelling tone. "I suppose it is no use me asking you what I have been just helping you in."

"A little smuggling operation, signore. Surely, signore, England has custom houses and therefore must have smugglers too."

ONE has heard of them of course. But I wouldn't mind a bet that there is not one of them that resembles you. Neither do I believe that they deal with packages as small as the one you lowered into that ghostly boat. You saw her of course. There was a boat."

"There was somebody to cut the string, as you see, signore. Look, here is all that twine, all of it but a little piece. It may have been a man swimming in the dark water. A man with a soul, fit to make a ghost of . . . let us call him a ghost, signore."

"Oh yes, let us," the other said lightly. "I am sure that when I wake up tomorrow all this will

seem to me a dream. Even now I feel inclined to pinch myself."

"What's that for, in Heaven's name?"

"It's a saying we have in our country. Yes, you, your hermit, our talk, and this very tower, all this will be like a dream."

"I would say 'nothing better' if it was not that most people are only too ready to talk about their dreams. No, signore, let all this be to you of less consequence than if it were a tale of ghosts, of mere ghosts in which you do not believe. You forced yourself on me as if you were the lord of this place, but I feel friendly enough to you."

"I didn't ask for your friendship," retorted the young traveller in a clear voice so void of all offence that the other man accepted it for a mere statement of a fact.

"Certainly not. I spoke of my own feelings, and though I am, you may say, a newcomer and a stranger in my own native city, I assure you it is better to have me for a friend than for an enemy. And the best thing of all would be to forget all about me. It would be also the kindest thing you could do."

"Really?" said Cosmo in a tone of sympathy. "How can you expect me to forget the most extraordinary thing that ever happened to me in all my life?"

"In all your life! H'm! You have a long life before you yet, signorino."

"Oh, but this is an adventure."

"That's what I mean. You have so many marvellous adventures before you, signorino, that this one is sure to be forgotten very soon. Then why not at once?"

"No, my friend, you don't seem somehow a person one could easily forget."

"I—God forbid. . . . Good-night, signore."

No sooner were the words out of his mouth than the man in the cap bounded across the platform, dived into the black square opening on its landward side, and ran down the steps so lightly that not a sound reached the ears of the other. Cosmo went down the winding stair, but cautiously in the profound darkness. The door at the bottom stood open and he stepped out on to the deserted jetty. He could see on it nothing in the shape of a fleeting shadow.

On the very edge of the shore a low little building with three arcades sent a dim gleam of light through its open door. It seemed to be a sort of guardroom, for there was a sentry, an Austrian soldier apparently, in a white coat. His duty, however, seemed to be concerned with the landing-steps in front of the guardhouse, and he let the young traveller pass on as though he had not seen him at all. Dark night had settled upon the long quay. Here and there a dim street lamp threw a feeble light on the uneven stones which the feet of the young traveller with his springy walk seemed hardly to touch. The pleasurable sensation of something extraordinary having happened to him accelerated his movements. He was also feeling very hungry and he was making haste towards his inn to dine first and then to think his adventure over, for there was a strong conviction within him that he certainly had had an adventure of a nature at the same time stimulating and obscure.

II

COSMO LATHAM had an inborn faculty of orientation in strange surroundings, most invaluable in a cavalry officer, but of which he had never made much use, not even during the few months when he served as a cornet of horse in the Duke of Wellington's army in the last year of the peninsular campaign. There had been but few occasions to make use of it for a freshly joined subaltern. It stood him in good stead that night, however, while making his way to his inn in a town in which he was a complete stranger, for it allowed him, with but little concern for the direction he took, to think of his home which he loved for itself, every stone and every tree of it—and of the two people he left there, whom he loved too, each in a different way: his father, Sir Charles, and his sister Henrietta.

Latham Hall, a large straggling building showing traces of many styles, flanked by a romantic park and commanding a vast view of the Yorkshire hills, had been the hereditary home of Lathams from the times before the Great Rebellion. That it escaped confiscation then might have been the effect of the worldly prudence of the Latham of the time. He

probably took good care not to shock persons of position and influence. That, however, was not the characteristic of the later Lathams down to Sir Charles, Cosmo's father.

Sir Charles's unconventional individuality had never been understood by his country neighbours. Born endowed with a good intellect, a lively imagination, and a capacity for social intercourse, it had been his fate, owing to the idiosyncrasies of his own father, to spend his early youth in the depths of Yorkshire in surroundings not at all congenial to his tastes. Later he served for a time in the Guards; but he very soon left the army to make an extended tour in France and Italy. In those last days before the Revolution *le chevalier* Latham obtained a great social recognition in Paris and Versailles amongst the very best people, not so much by his brilliance as by the depth of his character and the largeness of his ideas. But suddenly he tore himself away from his friendships and successes and proceeded to Italy. There, amongst the members of the English colony in Florence, he met the two Aston girls and, for some reason or other, became a great favourite with their widowed mother. But at the end of some months he suddenly made up his mind to return home. During a long, sleepless night, which he spent pacing up and down in the agony of an internal struggle with himself in the magnificent rooms of his lodgings in Florence, he concluded that he would go home by sea. It was the easiest way of avoiding coming near Paris. He had heard not long before that the best friends he had made in the brilliant society he had frequented in France, the Marquis and the Marquise d'Armand, had a daughter born to them. At Leghorn on the very eve of embarking he had another struggle with himself—but he went by sea. By the time when, after a long sea passage, he put his foot on native soil he had renounced the idea of hurrying on north to shut himself up in his country home. He lingered in London, disdainful and idle, and began reluctantly to fall into the ways of a man about town, when a friend returning from Italy brought him news that Miss Aston was going to marry a Tuscan nobleman of mature years, and, as a piece of queer Florentine gossip, that if the younger sister, Miss Molly Aston, had refused two suitors in quick succession it was because she regarded herself in some way as being engaged to him, Charles Latham.

WHETHER stung by his conscience or urged by indignation Sir Charles started impulsively for Italy, travelling across the south of France. It was a long road. At first he had been amazed, confounded, and angry; but before he came to the end of his journey he had time to reflect upon what might easily become an absurd and odious situation. He said to himself that a lot of bother of one sort and another would be saved by his marrying Dolly Aston. He did so, to the applause of all right-minded people, and at the end of two years spent abroad came home with his wife to shut himself up in his ancestral hall commanding the view of a wide and romantic landscape, which he thought one of the finest in the world.

Molly Aston had been beautiful enough in her time to inspire several vagrant poets and at least one Italian sculptor; but as Cosmo grew older he began to understand that his mother had been a nonentity in the family life. The greatest piece of self-assertion on her part was his name. She had insisted on calling him Cosmo because the Astons counted, far back in the past, an ancestress of Florentine origin, supposed to have been a connection of the Medici family. Cosmo was fair, and the name was all about him that he had received from his mother. Henrietta was a type of dark beauty. Lady Latham died when both her children were still young. In her life she adorned Latham Hall in the same way as a statue might have adorned it. Her household power was limited to the ordering of the dinner. With habits of meticulous order and a marvellously commonplace mind she had a temperament which, if she had not fallen violently in love at the age of eighteen with the same man whom she married, would have made her fond of society, of amusement, and perhaps even of dissipation. But her only amusement and dissipation consisted of writing long letters to innumerable relations and friends all over the world, of whom after her marriage she saw but very little. She never complained. Her hidden fear of all initiative and the secret ardour of her temperament found their fulfilment in an absolute submission to Sir Charles's will. She

would never have dreamed of asking for horses for a visit in the neighbourhood, but when her husband remarked, "I think it would be advisable for you, my lady, to call at such and such a house," her face would light up, she would answer with alacrity, "Certainly, Sir Charles," and go off to array herself magnificently indeed (perhaps because of that drop of Medici blood), but also with great taste.

AS the years went on Sir Charles aged more than he ought to have done, and even began to grow a little stout, but no one could fail to see that he had been a very handsome man in his time and that his wife's early infatuation for him was justified in a way. In politics he was a partisan of Mr. Pitt rather than a downright Tory. He loved his country, believed in its greatness, in its superior virtue, in its irresistible power. Nothing could shake his fidelity to national prejudices of every sort. He had no great liking for grandees and mere aristocrats, despised the fashionable world, and would have nothing whatever to do with any kind of "upstart." Without being gentle he was naturally kind and hospitable. His native generosity was so well known that no one was surprised when he offered the shelter of his Yorkshire house to a family of French refugees, the Marquis and the Marquise d'Armand and their little daughter Adèle. They had arrived in England in a state of almost complete destitution but with two servants who had shared the dangers and the miseries of their flight from the excesses of the Revolution.

The presence of all these people at Latham Hall which, considered at first as a temporary arrangement, was to last for some years, did not affect in the least Lady Latham's beautifully dressed, idle equanimity. Had not the D'Armands been Sir Charles's intimate friends years ago, in France? But she had no curiosity. She was vaguely impressed by the fact that the Marquis was a god-daughter of the Queen of Naples. For the rest it was only so many people more in the servant's hall, at the dinner table, and in the drawing room where the evenings were spent.

High up on one of the walls a lamp with a shaded reflector concentrated its light on the yellow satin coat on the half-length portrait of a rubicund Latham in a white coburg, which but for the manly and sensitive mouth might have been the portrait of his own coachman. Apart from that spot of beautiful colour the vast room with its windows giving on a terrace (from which Sir Charles was in the habit of viewing sunsets) remained dim with an effect of immensity in which the occupants, and even Sir Charles himself, acquired the appearance of unsubstantial shadows uttering words that had to travel across long, almost unlighted distances.

On one side of the mantelpiece of Italian marbles (a late addition designed by Sir Charles himself) Lady Latham's profuse jewellery sparkled about her splendid and restful person posed placidly on a sofa. Opposite her, the Marquise would be lying down on a deep couch with one of Lady Latham's shawls spread over her feet. The D'Armands in their flight from the Terror had saved very little besides their lives, and the Marquise D'Armand's life had by this time become a very precarious possession.

Sir Charles was perhaps more acutely aware of this than the Marquis her husband. Sir Charles remembered her gentle in her changing moods of gaiety and thought, charming, active, fascinating, and certainly the most intelligent as she was the most beautiful of the women of the French court. Her voice reaching him clear but feeble across the drawing room had a pathetic appeal; and the tone of his answers was tinged with the memory of a great sentiment and with the deference due to great misfortunes. From time to time Lady Latham would make a remark in a matter-of-fact tone which would provoke something resembling curtness in Sir Charles's elaborately polite reply, and the thought that that woman would have made the very Lord's Prayer sound prosaic. And then in the long pauses they would pursue their own thoughts as perplexed and full of unrest as the world of seas and continents that began at the edge of the long terrace graced by gorgeous sunsets; the wide world filled with the strife of ideas and the struggle of nations in perhaps the most troubled time of its history.

From the depths of the Italian chimneypiece the firelight of blazing English logs would fall on Adèle d'Armand sitting quietly on a low stool near her mother's couch. Her fair hair, white complex-

ion, and dark blue eyes contrasted strongly with the deeper colour scheme of Henrietta Latham, whose locks were rich chestnut brown and whose eyes had a dark lustre full of intelligence rather than sentiment. Now and then the French child would turn her head to look at Sir Charles, for whom in her silent existence she had developed a filial affection.

In those days Adèle d'Armand did not see much of her own father. Most of the time the Marquis was away. Each of his frequent absences was an act of devotion to his exiled Princes, who appreciated it no doubt but found devotion only natural in a man of that family. The evidence of their regard for the Marquis took the shape mainly of distant and dangerous missions to the courts of north Germany, and northern Italy. In the general disruption of the old order those missions were all futile, because no one ever stopped an avalanche by means of plots and negotiations. But in the Marquis the perfect comprehension of that profound truth was mingled with the sort of enthusiasm that fabricates the very hopes on which it feeds. He would receive his instructions for those desperate journeys with extreme gravity and depart on them without delay, after a flying visit to the Hall to embrace his ailing wife and his silent child and hold a grave conference with his stately English friend from whom he never concealed a single one of his thoughts or his hopes. And Sir Charles approved of them both; because the thoughts were sober and absolutely free from absurd illusions common to all exiles, thus appealing to Sir Charles's reason and also to his secret disdain of all great aristocracies—and the second, being based on the Marquis's conviction of England's unbroken might and consistency, seemed to Sir Charles the most natural thing in the world.

They paced a damp laurel-bordered walk together for an hour or so; Sir Charles lame and stately like a disabled child of Jupiter himself, the Marquis restraining his stride and stooping with a furrowed brow to talk in measured, level tones. The wisdom of Sir Charles expressed itself in curt sentences in which scorn for men's haphazard activities and shortsighted views was combined with a calm belief in the future.

"Suspense" will be continued in the next issue.

Rules of the Conrad Contest

1. Five cash prizes will be paid by *The Saturday Review of Literature*, as follows:

First Prize	\$500
Second Prize	250
Third Prize	50
Fourth Prize	50
Fifth Prize	25

Fifty prizes consisting each of any one volume of the limp leather edition of Conrad's works which the winners may choose.

2. Beginning in the June 27th issue and continuing until September *The Saturday Review* will publish serially Joseph Conrad's last, unfinished novel, "Suspense." For the best essays on the probable ending of "Suspense" *The Saturday Review* offers \$1,000.00 in prizes as specified in Rule No. 1.

3. Do not submit any essays until after the last instalment has appeared in September (the definite date will be announced later). At the conclusion of the contest all manuscripts should be sent to *The Saturday Review* Contest Editor, 236 East 39th Street, New York, N. Y. Your full name and complete address must appear on the manuscript.

4. It is not necessary to be a subscriber or reader of *The Saturday Review* in order to enter the contest. Copies of *The Saturday Review* may be examined at the Public Libraries. The contest is open to anyone except employees of the paper. Reviewers and contributors to the pages of the *Review* are eligible for all except the second prize, which is open only to non-professional writers.

5. The essays should be about 500 words in length, although they may run to 2,000 words.

Decision as to the merits of the essays will be made not only on the basis of the plausibility of the suggested ending, but also its plausibility as the ending of a characteristic Conrad novel. In awarding the prizes the literary quality of the essay will be taken into consideration as well as the ingenuity of the solution.

It must be clearly understood that the article submitted cannot be an actual conclusion to "Suspense," but must take the form of a discussion of what that conclusion might have been. Mrs. Conrad has emphatically refused to permit the publication of any end to the novel.

6. The judges will be Captain David W. Bone, Joseph Hergesheimer, and Professor William Lyon Phelps. Their decision will be final.

7. The contest will close on October 1, 1925. Manuscript must be in the office of *The Saturday Review* before midnight of that date.

Books for the Journey

By ALDOUS HUXLEY

ALL tourists cherish an illusion, of which no amount of experience can ever completely cure them; they imagine that they will find time, in the course of their travels, to do a lot of reading. They see themselves, at the end of a day's sight-seeing or motoring, or while they are sitting in the train, studiously turning over the pages of all the vast and serious works which, at ordinary seasons, they never find time to read. They start for a fortnight's tour in France, taking with them "The Critique of Pure Reason," "Appearance and Reality," the complete works of Dante and the "Golden Bough." They come home to make the discovery that they have read something less than a chapter of the "Golden Bough" and the first fifty-two lines of the "Inferno." But that does not prevent them from taking just as many books the next time they set out on their travels.

Long experience has taught me to reduce in some slight measure the dimensions of my travelling library. But even now I am far too optimistic about my powers of reading while on a journey. Along with the books which I know it is possible to read, I still continue to put in a few impossible volumes in the pious hope that some day, somehow, they will get read. Thick tomes have travelled with me for thousands of kilometers across the face of Europe and have returned with their secrets unviolated. But whereas in the past I took nothing but thick tomes, and a great quantity of them, at that, I now take only one or two and for the rest pack only the sort of books which I know by experience can be read in a hotel bedroom after a day's sight-seeing.

The qualities essential in a good travelling book are these. It should be a work of such a kind that one can open it anywhere and be sure of finding something interesting, complete in itself, and susceptible of being read in a short time. A book requiring continuous attention and prolonged mental effort is useless on a voyage; for leisure, when one travels, is brief and tinged with physical fatigue, the mind distracted and unapt to make protracted exertions.

Few travelling books are better than a good anthology of poetry in which every page contains something complete and perfect in itself. The brief respites from labor which the self-immolated tourist allows himself, cannot be more delightfully filled than with the reading of poetry, which may even be got by heart; for the mind, though reluctant to follow an argument, takes pleasure in the slight labor of committing melodious words to memory.

In the choice of anthologies every traveller must please himself. My own favorite is Edward Thomas's "Pocket Book of Poems and Songs for the Open Air." Thomas was a man of wide reading and of exquisite taste, and peculiarly gifted moreover to be an anthologist of the Open Air. For out of the huge tribe of modern versifiers who have babbled of green fields, Thomas is almost the only one who one feels to be a "nature poet" (the expression is somehow rather horrible, but there is no other) by right of birth and the conquest of real sympathy and understanding. It is not everyone who says Lord, Lord, that shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; and few, very few of those who cry Cuckoo, Cuckoo shall be admitted into the company of nature poets. For proof of this, I refer my readers to the various volumes of Georgian Poetry.

Equally well adapted, with poetry, to the traveller's need, are collections of aphorisms or maxims. If they are good—and they must be very good indeed; for there is nothing more dismal than a "Great Thought" enunciated by an author who has not himself the elements of greatness—maxims make the best of all reading. They take a minute to read and provide matter upon which thought can ruminate for hours. None are to be preferred to La Rochefoucauld's. Myself, I always reserve my upper left hand waistcoat pocket for a small sexto-decimo reprint of the "Maximes." It is a book to which there is no bottom or end. For with every month that one lives, with every accession to one's knowledge both of oneself and of others, it means something more. For La Rochefoucauld knew almost everything about the human soul, so that practically every discovery one can make oneself, as one advances through life, has been anticipated by him and formulated in the briefest and most elegant phrases. I say advisedly that La Roche-

foucauld knew "almost" everything about the human soul; for it is obvious that he does not know all. He knew everything about the souls of human beings insofar as they are social animals. Of the soul of man in solitude,—of man when he is no more interested in the social pleasures and successes which were to Rochefoucauld so all-important,—he knows little or nothing.

Hardly less satisfactory as travel books are the aphoristic works of Nietzsche. Nietzsche's sayings have this in common with La Rochefoucauld's, that they are pregnant and expansive. His best aphorisms are long trains of thought, compressed. The mind can dwell on them at length because so much is implicit in them. It is in this way that good aphorisms differ from mere epigrams, in which the whole point consists in the felicity of expression. An epigram pleases by surprising; after the first moment the effect wears off and we are no further interested in it. One is not taken in twice by the same practical joke. But an aphorism does not depend on verbal wit. Its effect is not momentary, and the more we think of it, the more substance we find in it.

Another excellent book for a journey—for it combines expansive aphorisms with anecdotes—is Boswell's "Life of Johnson" which the Oxford Press now issues, on Indian paper, in a single small octavo volume. (All travellers, by the way, owe much to the exertions of Henry Frowde, of the Oxford Press, the inventor, or at least the European reinventor, of that fine rag paper, impregnated with mineral matter to give it opacity, which we call India paper.) What the aphorism is to the philosophical treatise, the India-paper volume is to the ponderous editions of the past. All Shakespeare, perfectly legible, gets into a volume no bigger than a single novel by the late Charles Garvice. All Pepys, or as much of him as the British public is allowed to read, can now be fitted into three pockets. And the Bible, reduced to an inch in thickness, must surely be in danger of losing those bullet-stopping qualities which it used, at any rate in romantic novels, to possess. Thanks to Henry Frowde one can get a million words of reading matter into a rucksack and hardly feel the difference in its weight.

India paper and photography have rendered possible the inclusion in a portable library of what in my opinion is the best traveller's book of all—a volume (any of the thirty-two will do) of the twelfth, half-size edition of the Encyclopædia Britannica. It takes up very little room (eight and a half inches, by six and a half by one is not excessive), it contains about a thousand pages and an almost countless number of curious and improbable facts. It can be dipped into anywhere, its component chapters are complete in themselves and not too long. For the traveller, disposing as he does only of brief half hours, it is the perfect book, the more so, since I take it that, being a born traveller, he is likely also to be one of those desultory and self-indulgent readers to whom the Encyclopædia, when not used for some practical purpose, must especially appeal. I never pass a day from home without taking a volume with me. It is the book of books.

That one does not oneself go mad, or become, in the process of reading the Encyclopædia, a mine of useless and unrelated knowledge is due to the fact that one forgets. The mind has a vast capacity for oblivion. Providentially; otherwise, in the chaos of futile memories, it would be impossible to remember anything useful or coherent. In practice, we work with generalizations, abstracted out of the turmoil of realities. If we remembered everything perfectly we should never be able to generalize at all; for there would appear before our minds nothing but individual images, precise and different. Without ignorance we could not generalize. Let us thank heaven for our power of forgetting. With regard to the Encyclopædia, they are enormous. The mind only remembers that of which it has some need. Five minutes after reading about mountain spinach, the ordinary man, who is neither a botanist nor a cook, has forgotten all about it. Read for amusement, the Encyclopædia serves only to distract for the moment; it does not instruct, it deposits nothing on the surface of the mind that will remain. It is a mere time-killer and momentary tickler of the mind. I only use it for amusement on my travels; I should be ashamed to indulge so wantonly in mere curiosity at home, during seasons of serious business.