



**MY FATHER AND
MYSELF**

J. R. ACKERLEY

**INTRODUCTION BY
W. H. AUDEN**

J. R. ACKERLEY (1896–1967) was for many years the literary editor of the BBC magazine *The Listener*. His works include three memoirs, *Hindoo Holiday*, *My Dog Tulip*, and *My Father and Myself*, and a novel, *We Think The World of You* (all available as New York Review Books).

W. H. AUDEN (1907–1973) was born in York, England and studied at Oxford. He established a reputation as a brilliant poet with radical political sympathies on the publication of his first book in 1930 and proceeded to travel widely, visiting and writing about such troubled spots as Berlin, China, and Spain. With the advent of World War II, he emigrated to America, where he became a citizen and rediscovered the Anglican religious beliefs of his childhood. Universally recognized as one of the dominant figures in twentieth-century English poetry and criticism, Auden spent his later years with his companion Chester Kallman and divided his time between Austria and New York.

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INTRODUCTION

MY FIRST REASON for wishing to review this book is that it gives me an opportunity to make public acknowledgment of a debt which not only I but many writers of my generation owe to Mr. Ackerley. He informs us that he became Literary Editor of *The Listener* in 1935, but of his work there he says not a word. Those of us, however, who were starting our literary careers at the time have very good cause to remember how much he did for us: *The Listener* was one of our main outlets. More surprisingly, he says nothing about his intimate friends in the literary world, of whom there were many, including E. M. Forster. He says that he went to work for the BBC because he felt he had failed in his ambition to become a writer himself. On first reading this statement seems absurd: though he published only four books in his lifetime, all were enthusiastically received by the reviewers, and are just as good reading today as when they first appeared. I think, though, I understand what he means, namely, that he discovered that he could not create imaginary characters and situations: all his books were based on journals, whether written down or kept in his head.

In *My Father and Myself*, Mr. Ackerley strictly limits himself to two areas of his life, his relations with his family and his sex-life. His account of the latter, except for its happy ending, is very sad reading indeed. Few, if any, homosexuals can honestly boast that their sex-life has been happy, but Mr. Ackerley seems to have been exceptionally unfortunate. All sexual desire presupposes that the loved one is in some way "other" than the lover: the eternal and, probably, insoluble problem for the homosexual is finding a substitute for the natural differences, anatomical and psychic, between a man and a woman. The luckiest, perhaps, are those who, dissatisfied with their own bodies, look for someone with an Ideal physique; the ectomorph, for example, who goes for mesomorphs. Such a difference is a real physical fact and, at least until middle age, permanent: those for whom it is enough are less likely to make emotional demands which their partner cannot meet. Then, so long as they don't get into trouble with the police, those who like "chicken" have relatively few problems: among thirteen- and fourteen-year-old boys there are a great many more Lolas than the public suspects. It is when the desired difference is psychological or cultural that the real trouble begins.

Mr. Ackerley, like many other homosexuals, wanted his partner to be "normal." That in itself is no problem, for very few males are so "normal" that they cannot achieve orgasm with another male. But this is exactly what a homosexual with such tastes is unwilling to admit. His daydream is that a special exception has been made in his case out of love; his partner would never dream of going to bed with any other man. His daydream may go even further; he may secretly hope that his friend will love him so much as to be willing to renounce his normal tastes and have no girl friend. Lastly, a homosexual who is, like Mr. Ackerley, an intellectual and reasonably well-off is very apt to become romantically enchanted by the working class, whose lives, experiences, and interests are so different from his own, and to whom, because they are poorer, the money and comforts he is able to provide can be a cause for affectionate gratitude. Again, there is nothing wrong with this in itself. A great deal of nonsense has been spoken and written about the sinfulness of giving or receiving money for sexual favors.

No, the real difficulty for two persons who come from different classes is that of establishing a sustained relationship, for, while a sexual relationship as such demands "otherness," any permanent relationship demands interests in common. However their tastes and temperaments may initially differ, a husband and wife acquire a common concern as parents. This experience is denied homosexuals. Consequently, it is very rare for a homosexual to remain faithful to one person for long, and, rather curiously, the intellectual older one is more likely to be promiscuous than his working-class friend. The brutal truth, though he often refuses to admit it, is that he gets bored more quickly.

For many years, Mr. Ackerley was a compulsive cruiser:

In spite of such adventures, if anyone had asked me what I was doing, I doubt if I should have replied that I was diverting myself. I think I should have said that I was looking for the Ideal Friend. Though two or three hundred young men were to pass through my hands in the course of years, I did not consider myself promiscuous. It was all a run of bad luck.... What I meant by the Ideal Friend I doubt if I ever formulated, but now, looking back, I think I can put him together in a negative way by listing some of his disqualifications. He should not be effeminate, indeed preferably normal. I did not exclude education, but did not want it, I could supply all that myself and in the loved one it always seemed to get in the way; he should admit me but no one else; he should be physically attractive to me and younger than myself—the younger the better, as closer to innocence; finally he should be on the small side, lusty, circumcised, physically healthy and clean: no phimosis, halitosis, bromidrosis.... The Ideal Friend was always somewhere else and might have been found if only I had turned a different way. The buses that passed my own bus seemed always to contain those charming boys who were absent from mine; the ascending escalators in the tubes fiendishly carried them past me as I sank helplessly into hell.... In the “thirties” I found myself concentrating my attention more and more upon a particular society of young men in the metropolis which I had tapped before and which, it seemed to me, might yield, without further loss of time, what I required. His Majesty’s Brigade of Guards had a long history in homosexual prostitution. Perpetually short of cash, beer, and leisure occupations, they were easily to be found of an evening in their red tunics standing about in the various pubs they frequented, over the only half-pint they could afford or some “quids-in” mate had stood them. Though generally larger than I liked, they were young, they were normal, they were working-class, well drilled to obedience; though not innocent for long, the new recruit might be found before someone else got at him; if grubby they could be bathed, and if civility and consideration, with which they did not always meet in their liaisons, were extended to them, one might gain their affection.

Frank as he is, Mr. Ackerley is never quite explicit about what he *really* preferred to do in bed. The omission is important because all “abnormal” sex-acts are rites of symbolic magic, and one can only properly understand the actual personal relation if one knows the symbolic role each expects the other to play. Mr. Ackerley tells us that, over the years, he learned to overcome certain repugnances and do anything to oblige but, trying to read between the lines, I conclude that he did not belong to either of the two commonest classes of homosexuals, neither to the “orals” who play Son-and/or-Mother, nor to the “anals” who play Wife-and/or-Husband. My guess is that at the back of his mind, lay a daydream of an innocent Eden where children play “Doctor,” so that the acts he really preferred were the most “brotherly,” Plain-Sewing and Princeton-First-Year. In his appendix, he does tell us, however, that he suffered, and increasingly so as he got older, from an embarrassing physical disability— premature ejaculation with the novel and impotence with the familiar. O dear, o dear, o dear.

But then, when he was nearly fifty, a miracle occurred. He acquired an Alsatian bitch named Tuli (Had Fate sent him an *Aureus* dog instead of a *Lupus*, there would have been no miracle.)

She offered me what I had never found in my sexual life, constant, single-hearted, incorruptible, uncritical devotion. She placed herself entirely under my control. From the moment she established herself in my heart and my home, my obsession with sex fell wholly away from me. The pubs I had spent so much of my time in were never revisited, my single desire was to get back to her, to her waiting love and unstaling welcome. I sang with joy at the thought of seeing her. I never prowled the London streets again, nor had the slightest inclination to do so. On the contrary, whenever I thought

it, I was positively thankful to be rid of it all, the anxieties, the frustrations, the wastage of time and spirit. The fifteen years she lived with me were the happiest of my life.

Very fittingly, *My Father and Myself* is dedicated to her.

In considering the story of his relationship to his father, let me begin by making two chronological lists.

ROGER ACKERLEY			JOE ACKERLEY		
Date	Event	Age	Date	Event	Age
1863	Born in Liverpool.		1896	Born.	
75	Father financially ruined.	12	c. 1906	At school at Rossal.	10
76	Leaves school and goes to work as a clerk.	13			
79	Runs away to London and enlists in the Royal House-Guards. Makes friends with Fitzroy Paley Adams (aged 33) who starts to educate him.	16			
			1914	World War One. Enlists.	18
82	Service in Egypt where he may have contracted syphilis. Discharged.	19			
83	Adams dies, leaving him a legacy of £500. Re-enlists in the Life Guards. Makes friends with Comte James Francis de Gallatin (aged 30).	20	16	Wounded.	20
84	Discharged. Goes to work for a wine-merchant in Liverpool. Lends his legacy to de Gallatin at 20 percent interest.	21			
85	Father dies. Makes friends with Arthur Stockley (aged 20).	22	18	Again wounded and a P. O. W. Soon after interned in Switzerland. (Copy for <i>Prisoners of War</i> .) Peter Ackerley killed in action.	22

1886	De Gallatin engages him to run a pony farm. They travel together in Italy.	23	1919	Cambridge.	23
					25
88	At de Gallatin's house, meets Louise Burkhardt, a visitor from Switzerland. They become engaged. Quarrel with de Gallatin, ending in a law-suit.	25	21	Lives at home on an allowance of £350 a year.	25
89	Marries L. B.	26	23	Visits India (Copy for	27
			24	<i>Hindoo Holiday</i>).	
92	His wife dies. Receives an allowance from her parents of £2000 a year. Meets the future mother of Joe (a legitimate actress, aged 28) on a Channel boat. Goes into a fruit business, started by Arthur Stockley.	29	25	Leases flat in Hammer-smith from Arthur Needham, an old acquaintance of de Gallatin.	29
95	Peter "Ackerley" born.	32	28	Joins Talks Department of B.B.C.	32
96	Joe born.	33	29	Father dies.	33
98	A daughter by Joe's mother.	35			
			34	Takes flat in Maida Vale.	38
			35	Becomes Literary Editor of <i>The Listener</i> .	39
1910	Twin daughters by another woman, Muriel.	47			
12	A third daughter by Muriel.	49			
			45	Acquires Tulip. (Copy or for <i>My Dog Tulip</i> and	50
19	Marries Joe's mother.	56	46	<i>We Think the World of You</i> .)	
			59	Retires from B.B.C.	63
29	Dies from the effects of tertiary syphilis.	66	c. 1960	Tulip dies.	64
			67	Dies in his sleep of a coronary.	71

Needless to say, it was only by degrees that the son discovered some of the more startling facts about the father's life. He tells us that he learned of his illegitimacy (curiously enough, his maternal grandmother was also illegitimate) from his sister, who had heard it from his mother, but he does not say if this discovery was made before or after the marriage. There was, on the face of it, no reason to suspect such a thing. The children were given the name Ackerley and even Roger's business partner Stockley, believed there had been a registry-office marriage. Though for the first few years, he seemed to have been a "week-end father," who only paid them occasional visits, he set up house with them in 1903 and was as attentive and generous to both the children and their mother as they could possibly have wished.

Of his father's second family, Mr. Ackerley only learned from a letter he left to be opened after his death, requesting his son to make certain financial provisions for them. For Muriel's children he had shown less paternal concern.

The birth of the twins was registered by him under an assumed name, he borrowed the name of his mistress; the youngest girl was never registered at all. They were all stowed away in a house near Barnes Common in care of a Miss Coutts. Through dietary ignorance or a desire to save his pocket, she fed them so frugally and injudiciously that they all developed rickets. They had no parental care, no family life, no friends. Their mother whom they did not love or even like, for she had less feeling for them than for her career and reputation, seldom appeared; the youngest girl does not remember having seen her at all until she was some ten years old. But three or four times a year a relative of their

whom they knew as Uncle Bodger and who jokingly called himself William Whately, the University Provider, would arrive laden with presents. This gentleman, almost their only visitor, they adored. He would come in a taxi with his load of gifts (sometimes with a dog named Ginger, who had perhaps provided him with a pretext for the visit: "I'm taking the dog for a walk," and who, since he was on the dog, was also therefore another conspirator in my father's affairs, had he but known it.

Then, even after learning from his landlord, Arthur Needham, that the Comte de Gallatin was not only queer but a bold cruiser of Guardsmen, it was only after his father's death that he began to wonder about this friendship and its break-up. It must have been odd to realize that, had some Time Machine monkeyed with their time-spans, it might well have been a thirty-year-old Joe who picked up a twenty-year-old Roger in a bar, and for a short while believed he had found the Ideal Friend.

The Fruit Business did extremely well, so that the household enjoyed every comfort. There was a butler, a gardener, and, evidently, a very good table. Ackerley Senior had an Edwardian appetite for food and drink with all the risks to health which that implies. Like King Tum-Tum, he had to take the waters every year, in his case at Bad Gastein.

As a father, aside from a distressing habit of telling dirty stories, for which he must be excused because it was the convention among his business colleagues, he seems to have been all that a son could reasonably hope for. To begin with, he was good-tempered.

Even in family quarrels, he seldom intervened, he did not take sides and put people in their places. Whatever he thought, and it was easily guessed, for the faults were easily seen, he kept to himself until, later, he might give it private expression to me in some rueful comment.

Unintellectual businessmen who find they have begotten a son who wants to become a writer are apt to be bewildered and resentful, but he gave his own a liberal allowance and never attempted to make him go into the family business or even take some regular job.

Then he was unshockable. In 1912 he told his two sons that

in the matter of sex there was nothing he had not done, no experience he had not tasted, no scrape he had not got into and out of.

At the same time, and this seems to me to have been his greatest virtue, he was never nosy. It is quite obvious, for example, that he knew perfectly well what his son's sexual tastes were. In view of some of the characters the latter brought to the house, he could hardly have helped knowing.

There was a young actor who rendered my father momentarily speechless at dinner one evening by asking him, "Which do you think is my best profile, Mr. Ackerley"—turning his head from side to side—"this, or this?"; there was an Irishman with a thin, careful curled cylindrical fringe of moustache and black paint around the lower lids of his eyes, who arrived in a leather jacket with a leopard-skin collar and pointed purple suede shoes; and an intellectual policeman. "Interesting chap," said my father afterwards, adding, "It's the first time I've ever entertained a policeman at my table."

I don't think Mr. Ackerley ever fully appreciated this aspect of his father's character. Speaking for myself, I would say that between parents and their grown-up children, the happiest relation is one of mutual affection and trust on the one hand, and of mutual reticence on the other; no indiscreet confidences on either side. In the following dialogue, it is the father, surely, who shows the greatest wisdom and common sense.

“I’ve got something to tell you, Dad. I lied to you about Weybridge. I didn’t go there at all.”

“I know, old boy, I knew you were lying directly I asked you about the floods.”

“I went to Turin.”

“Turin, eh? That’s rather farther. I’m very sorry to have mucked up your plans.”

“I’m very sorry to have lied to you. I wouldn’t have done so if you hadn’t once said something about me and my waiter friends. But I don’t mind telling you. I went to meet a sailor friend.”

“It’s all right, old boy. I prefer not to know. So long as you enjoyed yourself, that’s the main thing

Like all of us, Mr. Ackerley had his cross to bear, but I simply do not believe he was as unhappy as his habit of glooming led him to imagine. How many people have had so understanding a father? How many have found their Tulip? How many have written four (now five) good books? How many have been in the position to earn the affectionate gratitude of a younger literary generation? No, he was a lucky man.

—W. H. AUDEN

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My father and myself

FOREWORD

THE APPARENTLY HAPHAZARD chronology of this memoir may need excuse. The excuse, I fear, is Art. It contains a number of surprises, perhaps I may call them shocks, which, as history, came to me rather bunched up towards the end of the story. Artistically shocks should never be bunched, they need spacing for maximum individual effect. To afford them this I could not tell my story straightforwardly and have therefore disregarded chronology and adopted the method of ploughing to and fro over my father's life and my own, turning up a little more sub-soil each time as the plough turned. Looking at it with as much detachment as I can command, I think I have not seriously confused the narrative.

—J. A.

I WAS BORN in 1896 and my parents were married in 1919. Nearly a quarter of a century may seem rather procrastinatory for making up one's mind, but I expect that the longer such rites are postponed the less indispensable they appear and that, as the years rolled by, my parents gradually forgot the anomaly of their situation. My Aunt Bunny, my mother's younger sister, maintained that they would never have been married at all and I should still be a bastard like my dead brother if she had not intervened for the second time. Her first intervention was in the beginning. There was, of course, a good deal of agitation in her family then; apart from other considerations, irregular relationships were regarded with far greater condemnation in Victorian times than they are today. I can imagine the dismay of my maternal grandmother in particular, since she had had to contend with this very situation in her own life. For she herself was illegitimate. Failing to breed from his wife, her father, whose name was Scott, had turned instead to a Miss Buller, a girl of good parentage to be sure, claiming descent from two admirals, who bore him three daughters and died in giving the last one birth. I remember my grandmother as a very beautiful old lady, but she was said to have looked quite plain beside her sisters in childhood. However, there was to be no opportunity for later comparisons, for as soon as the latter were old enough to comprehend the shame of their existence they resolved to hide it forever from the world and took the veil in the convent at Clifton where all three had been put to school. But my grandmother was made of hardier stuff; she faced life and, in course of time, buried the past by marrying a Mr. Aylward, a musician of distinction who had been a Queen's Scholar at the early age of fourteen and was now master and organist at Hawtrey's Preparatory School for Eton, at Slough. Long before my mother's fall from grace, however, he had died, leaving my grandmother so poor that she was reduced to doing needlework for sale and taking in lodgers to support herself and her growing children. What could have been her feelings to hear the skeleton in her family cupboard, known then only to herself, rattle its bones as it moved over to make room for another?

Nevertheless, it seems to have been left to my Aunt Bunny, her younger daughter, to exhibit the deepest sense of outrage at my father's behavior and to administer the sternest rebuke. This, to anyone who knew my aunt, might be thought strange, for she was the jolliest, cleverest and least conventional member of an unconventional family. She was, in fact, at this time its main financial support by her engagements as a vocalist, a mezzo-soprano of concert platform and operatic standard, though her great promise was soon to collapse and reduce her to light opera and musical comedy, understudying Connie Ediss at the Gaiety Theatre, and provincial touring companies in anything that offered. But her moral position did not lack strength, for she had lately, in 1890, contracted an orthodox union with a gambler named Randolph Payne; moreover she was always a formidable champion of the rights of her own sex. However, she failed, as everyone else failed, to persuade my father to make an honest woman of my mother and punished him by declaring that she would never speak to him again. Nor did she for ten years; but then, since her hostile attitude was seen to be as inconvenient as it was ineffective, she relented, a reconciliation took place and she and my father became firm friends. Besides, the test of time had already made it ironically clear that while my father and mother had attained happiness, fortune and good repute without the blessing of the Church, holy wedlock with Uncle Randolph had brought my aunt nothing but shame and privation.

At the time of her second intervention, in 1919, she was, of course, a middle-aged woman and, on all aspects can sit, the moral aspects of the matter had taken a back seat. She was concerned now, more practically, for my mother's financial future and what, in this respect, would happen to her in the event of anything happening to my father; taking advantage, therefore, of a pleasant opportunity which she was dining with him alone, she summoned up her courage, for he was a king, if only a banan

king, and an authoritative sort of man, and asked him boldly whether, in fairness to my mother and their two surviving children, he had not better marry her after all. Much to her surprise and relief, he “very sweetly” accepted her advice. This historic event occurred at Pegwell Bay in the spring of the year, and my aunt, full of her triumph, urged my mother to hold him to his promise without further loss of time, in case he changed his mind, or, since his blood pressure was known to be high, something less disputable happened to him. But my mother, who was liable to inconvenient Eastern superstitions, announced that she had always wished to be married on October the thirteenth, her lucky day, and no other date would do. The ceremony was therefore postponed until then and involved my aunt, who was to be one of the witnesses, in a troublesome railway journey, for she was touring with Cyril Maude in *Lord Richard in the Pantry* and had to come up from Cardiff during the run of the play. The wedding took place quietly at St George’s, Hanover Square, in the presence of my aunt and her second husband, an inebriate named Dr. Hodgson Chappell Fowler, who were now the only shareholders in my parents’ guilty secret.

There were, as it happened, far more cogent reasons for this tardy rectification of their relationship than my aunt was aware of at the time. They were not to be known by her, or any member of the family, until after my father’s death ten years later, by my mother, who survived him seventeen years and never at all, and the irony of this situation appeared in the last decade of my mother’s life when my aunt, widowed for a second time and again left penniless, became a poor pensioner upon her charity and lived with her in some disharmony and was occasionally made to feel the dependence of her position. It sometimes then suited her *amour-propre* to remind my mother of the signal service she had rendered her twenty years ago; but although she was free to recall her intervention as a successful piece of diplomacy, she was unfortunately morally precluded from revealing the facts that had come to her knowledge since and lent to her intervention, in retrospect, so momentous a character. The crippled claim to importance brought her no reward more visible than self-satisfaction; the last thing my mother wished in alcoholic and eccentric old age was to acknowledge any obligation to her sister. After attempting, therefore, to challenge the truth of the story, a maneuver my aunt stoutly resisted, she would dismiss it with “Oh well, he would have married me in his own time anyway,” to which my aunt, who was also addicted to the last word, replied, “Yes, I don’t think!”

But the subject, beyond providing one of the several battle-fields between the two old ladies, was not otherwise mentioned, and I might never have known that I was for so many years a social outcast if my mother had not once, in a moment of vexed self-pity, rashly disclosed the fact to my sister who, though pledged to secrecy, promptly passed it on to me. I was, of course, delighted. My mother, who I had seldom been able to take entirely seriously, now acquired in my eyes heroic proportions; but unhappily it turned out that she was far from taking so romantic a view of herself, for when she learned that I too was in possession of her secret she became very agitated, vehemently denied the whole thing and implored me, unless I wished to make her ill, never to speak of it again. I was then unable to discuss it with her, which I should greatly have liked to do, until, many years later, she herself brought it out one evening, quite casually and without a trace of embarrassment as one might talk about the weather; but by that time unfortunately she had almost completely lost her memory and could recall of her past no more than that now somewhat mechanical repertoire of anecdotes with which, from constant repetition, I was already over-familiar. She could not therefore satisfy my curiosity about her early life with my father, and such information as I possess is derived from other sources, principally from my Aunt Bunny who outlived her.

THEIR FIRST ENCOUNTER was in the autumn of 1892. My mother was going over to Paris to stay with some friends and was being seen off at Victoria Station by her mother, Aunt Bunny, and Charles Santon the singer. Upon the platform also, sauntering up and down, was a tall, handsome, elegantly tailored young man, of military bearing, with a fine fair mustache and a mourning band round one arm, who regarded my mother with noticeable attention. Certainly she was attractive, pretty, petite, and vivacious, and, according to my aunt, by no means unaware of the existence of young men. The handsome gentleman was also bound for the Continent, but first class; my mother, whose family had fallen upon hard times, was travelling third—only, added my aunt drily, because there was no fourth.

This is *her* version of the original encounter which was later to be of such consequence to myself; my mother modestly preferred to ignore Victoria Station. She staged the first moment of mutual awareness a trifle more romantically, in mid-Channel, when she was looking about for a steward to bring her a dry biscuit and some lemon as a preventive of sea-sickness. The sea was calm, and if my mother was failing to attract the attention of a steward, she was not failing, as she “gradually noticed to attract that of a handsome, soldierly young man, with a fine fair mustache, who was pacing the deck before her and casting in her direction glances of unmistakable interest. At length he was emboldened to approach her, and addressed her in so chivalrous a manner that it was impossible to take offence at his actual words, according to my mother, being “I see you are in difficulties. If I can be of any assistance, pray command me.”

Such a gentlemanly speech (which, in years to come, my mother delighted to recount at dinner parties, in sentimental and dramatic tones, while my father looked selfconsciously down his nose) was reassuring, he was sent for the biscuit and lemon and permitted to escort her on to Paris, which was his own destination. How the difference in their classes was adjusted my mother could not recollect, but it remained in her memory that he possessed an exceedingly beautiful travelling-rug which he solicitously wrapped about her, for the air in the Channel had been fresh. During the journey she learnt that his name was Alfred Roger Ackerley, that he was twenty-nine, a year older than herself, that he was lately bereaved of his wife, a Swiss girl who had died only a few months previously after scarcely two years of married life, and that the object of his journey to Paris was to visit his in-laws, who lived there. He seemed much affected by his loss; my mother used to say in later years, “He came to me a broken man,” and I think it may have been for him a severe blow, for he rarely spoke to us about that period of his life or mentioned his first wife’s name, which was Louise Burckhardt. She was a friend of Sargent’s, and a portrait of her by him, “The Lady with the Rose,” is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. It seems unlikely therefore that my father fell in love with my mother so soon after his bereavement, but he clearly found her attractive—and indeed, from her photographs at that time and her appearance and character as I remember her, she must have been a charmer. He called upon her at her friend’s house several times, leaving cards and flowers, for she was always out, and, without having found her again, sent more flowers to await her at the train by which he learnt she was leaving at the conclusion of her visit.

Their second meeting took place in the early summer of the following year, again upon water, this time the fashionable reaches of the river Thames. My mother was staying at Chertsey with her mother, Aunt Bunny, and Bunny’s first ne’er-do-well husband, Randolph Payne, and they were all boating one day through Shepperton, Bunny at the oars, when a voice hailed them from a passing punt. What should it be but Alfred Roger Ackerley, who was living, it appeared, a comfortable bachelor’s life in a house in Addlestone. To describe this second meeting thus, as my mother used to describe it, invested it with the romance of happy coincidence; actually they had been in correspondence in the interval and

young Mr. Ackerley had already paid luckless calls and left cards upon her in her Chertsey lodging. My mother had by now quite an accumulation of his cards and was “overcome by confusion,” she said when he discovered that she had preserved them all.

Calls were exchanged and Bunny was taken one day to tea with him at the Addlestone house, a visit which, according to her, was not an unqualified success, for their host paid her (whom he had nicknamed “the Boy” because of her prowess with the sculls and the punt pole and her general independence of spirit) rather more attention than my mother liked and recriminations between the two young ladies ensued during their homeward journey. But my mother need not have upset herself. She was not to be neglected. Eighteen months later, in the spring of 1895, she was pregnant and my father was declining to marry her. The reason he gave was indeed substantial; he was receiving a princely allowance of £2000 a year from his in-laws, Mr. and Mrs. Burckhardt, who regarded him more as a son than a son-in-law, and this allowance, which was to be perpetuated in Mr. Burckhardt's will, might well cease with his re-marriage. However, this excuse, though weighty at the time, was scarcely valid for a quarter of a century, the less so since Mr. Burckhardt died suddenly and intestate at the end of this very year, so that my father's expectations came to nothing—nor apparently did they satisfy Aunt Bunny. She, indeed, was in a position to take of my father's conduct and character a more objective view than was available to my mother, for she had, with regard to him, inside information confidentially supplied by my Uncle Randolph, confidentially supplied to him by my father, with whom he had become pally, that at this same period my father was amusing himself with other women elsewhere: there was a certain Mrs. Carlisle, who lived vaguely, but appropriately, “in the North,” and he had also informed Randolph that two of the barmaids at the Chertsey Bridge Hotel were “all right.

AUNT BUNNY USED to say that there was a strong streak of coarseness in my father's nature—and who should be better able than she to recognize it? It was specially evident, she said, in some of his ideas about women. In fact, as I remember him, his social manners towards women were admirable, always courteous, indeed gallant; it is also true that in male company he was liable to refer to pleasing specimens of the female sex who caught his eye in the street as “plump little partridges.” This predatory, gastronomic approach to women would certainly not have suited my aunt; in spite of her gay spirits and general camaraderie, in spite of her ready and robust sense of humor, in spite of her being a “jolly good sport” and “the Boy,” she was, I believe, fundamentally virtuous, she drew the line, and in her own reminiscences all the unfortunate men, except the two duds she chose to marry, who attempted to overstep it and take liberties towards herself or her particular girl friends, were always described as “dirty” or “nasty” old men, who got what they deserved from her fist, her nails, or her foot. She was something of a Mae West in her character, with an extraordinarily infectious chesty laugh, which I used to call her Saloon Bar laugh, a fund of amusing, risqué stories and ditties, and a staunch loyalty to all her men and women friends; but I have a suspicion that she, and my mother too for that matter, never found the sexual act agreeable or hygienic.

It is necessary to know about my father that he had been a guardsman. He was born on April 1863, the seventh of a large family of three boys and five girls, in Prospect Cottage, Rainhill, a village near Liverpool. His father, who described himself as a share-broker, came a financial cropper in 1871 and had to remove his family to a smaller cottage nearby and send the children out to work. The girls took jobs as teachers, the boys were put to trades, my father left school at the age of thirteen and went as clerk to a firm of auctioneers in Liverpool. His schooling therefore was of the briefest.

Height was one of the distinctive features of this family, transmitted to the children from both sides; they were all uncommonly, in the case of the girls unbecomingly, tall and, with the sole exception of my father, uncommonly plain. Three of his sisters, Emily, Susan, and Sally, survived into my early middle age; unfortunate creatures, kind though they were their appearance was so grotesque that it is difficult to suppose they could ever have known romance or believed themselves destined for anything but the lifelong spinsterhood which was their lot. Over six feet in height, gaunt and flat-chested, with harsh voices and large hands and feet, Emily and Sally could easily have masqueraded in the clothes of their youngest brother, my Uncle Denton, without the imposture being detected or their prospects in life improved. This leathery-skinned, equine uncle, who outlived the rest of his family, told me that his father was a good-looking man. If so the only photograph of him I ever saw did not do him justice. Be that as it may, if there were good looks about, my father got them all; he was not merely better looking than the rest, he was a strikingly handsome man.

In 1879, when he was sixteen years old and already nearly six feet tall, he ran away to London and joined the Army. I know of no special reasons for this step, reasons stronger than might drive an spirited youth cramped up with a large family in a small cottage on restricted means to go off in search of life and adventure. It is true that his father was something of a disciplinarian (“My old Dad had a very heavy hand. I can feel it still.”), but he respected him and was on good terms with his brothers and sisters. His mother he had scarcely known; she died when he was two years old, after Denton's birth.

He enlisted at Regent's Park Barracks as a private in the Royal Horse Guards, the Blues, giving his age as nearly eighteen. In this regiment he served for three-and-a-half years, of which eighty days were spent campaigning in Egypt, where he took part in the Battle of Tel-el-Kebir. In 1882 he purchased his discharge for £28. Nine months later, July, 1883, he re-enlisted in the Second Li

Guards: Trooper Alfred Ackerley. From this regiment he purchased his discharge less than a year later, in 1884, for £18. Throughout his service with these two units he refused all promotion. There was a brief moment in Alexandria when his colonel compelled him to “take the tabs,” and reduced him back to the ranks within twenty-four hours for being carried back to camp by the drunks he had been detailed to bring in. It was an anecdote he liked to recall in later life, as he liked also to recall some of his conquests. The conquests were not, of course, military conquests; to the Battle of Tel-el-Kebir I don’t recollect that he ever referred; they were amorous exploits, his own or some crony’s, such as how he was almost caught *in flagrante delicto* with his color-sergeant’s young wife. I have forgotten these tales now, but he would sometimes regale me with them in the ’twenties when, the ladies having retired to the drawingroom leaving him and me together, he would circulate the port and brandy and, his Gentleman’s cigar in his mouth, reach an unbuttoned stage of mellowness and ease.

The Household Cavalry are a fine body of men, much admired for their magnificent physique and the splendor of their accoutrements, but it will hardly be claimed for them that they are—or at any rate were—refined in their tastes and habits. Conscription and improved rates of pay may have brought some alteration to the scene, but in my father’s young days and on into my own, sex and beauty and the constant problem of how to obtain these two luxuries in anything like satisfactory measure were almost invisible means—in his day the Queen’s shilling—represented the main leisure preoccupation of many guardsmen and troopers. Nor is this surprising. Healthy and vigorous young men, often, like my father, the merest boys, suddenly transplanted from a comparatively humdrum provincial or country life into a London barrack-room, exercised and trained all day to the bursting point of physical fitness, and let loose in the evening, with little money and large appetites, to prowl about the Monkey Walk in Hyde Park, the pubs, or West End streets, in uniforms of the most conspicuous and sometimes provocative design—it is hardly surprising that their education in the seductions and pleasures of the world should take rapid strides. The tall handsome youth from the village of Rainham, seated with drawn sword upon his charger in Whitehall, arrayed in plumed helmet, glittering cuirass and white buckskin breeches, and gaped at by admiring spectators who sometimes dropped coins into his highly polished top boots, certainly found life very much to his taste. Unhappily my knowledge of that life and of the years that followed is meager.

At his final discharge he brought away a good conduct badge, a second-class certificate of education, and the War Medal and Bronze Star of the Egyptian Campaign. He brought away two other things, the seeds of success in life and the seeds of death. I will come to the latter in its due place. So far as the former is concerned, something has to be found to account for the transformation of Trooper Alfred Ackerley with his second-class certificate of education and impecunious family background in 1884, into the cultivated, urbane, travelled and polished young man of the world with £2000 a year who picked up my mother on a Channel boat in 1892 and was later to become one of the directors of Elders and Fyffes, fruit merchants, earning £12,000 a year and the title of Banana King when he died.

THE ANSWER LIES with two wealthy gentlemen whom my father met in London during his five years of soldiering. How he met them I do not know; so far as my information goes he had no friends in London when he first arrived there in 1879. One of them he must have met soon after his enlistment in the Blues when he was sixteen years old. Of this gentleman I can give only the briefest sketch. His name was Fitzroy Paley Ashmore and he called himself a barrister. He was a friend of Mr. Justice Darling, and a married man with four children. My father seldom mentioned him except to remark on occasion that he owed to Ashmore everything he knew. My father wrote a beautiful hand and was a faultless speller, he took a pride in his knowledge of English and never failed to look up in the dictionary the words he did not understand when he was reading. This self-discipline in education, which he often recommended to our inattentive ears, he attributed wholly to Mr. Ashmore's training. Yet their friendship was short, this friendship of a rich, cultivated man in his early thirties with an uneducated boy-soldier of sixteen or seventeen, for Ashmore died, aged thirty-seven, in 1883. The whole episode was therefore contained within four years.

Ashmore lived at 18 Radnor Place, Hyde Park, and it seems to have been given out that my father acted as his secretary. His son, Major-General E. B. Ashmore, CB, CMG, MVO, told me, however, that since his father, who had substantial independent means (he died worth £28,000), did no work at all, it was surprising to learn that he needed a secretary. General Ashmore knew nothing about my father (so he said) and not much about his own who had died when he himself was eleven; what little he did know he was in no mind to praise. His father's only interest in life, said he, was to enjoy himself gamble and go to parties; he was so unpleasant to his wife that she was more relieved than afflicted to find herself a widow, and all his children, including himself, were terrified of him. But if Mr. Ashmore cared not a fig for his wife and children, he took a fancy to my teen-age father and gave considerable pains to educate him. On August 3, 1882, probably a few days before my father sailed for Egypt, Ashmore drew up a codicil to his will leaving him a legacy of £500, a gift that was to lead to trouble in the end. It was to be held in trust for him by his own father until he reached the age of twenty-one. On October 30, directly after his return from Egypt, he purchased his discharge. Did he go and live at Radnor Place as his benefactor's secretary? I have no information about this period. In the following year, on June 12, Ashmore had a heart attack and died. Three weeks later my father re-enlisted.

The educational and refining processes begun upon him by Mr. Ashmore were continued by the Count James Francis de Gallatin, my father's other wealthy friend. Whether he was met through Ashmore or independently I don't know, but he now supplied Ashmore's place in my father's young life. A Count of the Holy Roman Empire and descendant of a famous Swiss-American family, he kept two establishments, one in Mount Street, Berkeley Square, the other in Old Windsor, a house called The Hermitage. Doubtless considerably altered it still stands. He was a bachelor, aged thirty-one, and lived with his mother. He took to my soldier father in a big way; soon, indeed, he could hardly bear to let him out of his sight.

I have said that my father twice purchased his discharge from the Army; it is more probable that he was bought out, first by Mr. Ashmore and now, in February, 1884, through the persuasions and help of the Count de Gallatin. The indications are that by this time they were close friends and that familiar introductions, my father to Mme. de Gallatin in Mount Street and Old Windsor, the Count to my father's family in Rainhill, had been established. Two more basic reasons for this second and sudden retirement of my father from the Army suggest themselves: his old father had been taken ill with cancer of the tongue, and in the April of that year my father would be twenty-one and come in

possession of his legacy. He returned to Liverpool and took a job as traveller in the business of his brother-in-law, John Graham, a wine merchant. His legacy fell due to him on his birthday, April 1; he did not spend it but “lent” it to the Count. Other records say he gave it to the Count to keep for him. De Gallatin was a generous man as we shall see (a little later he was to take trouble to help Denton gain a foothold in South Africa by introducing him to titled and influential people), and one can hazard a guess at the actual circumstances of this transaction, for he undertook to pay my father the large interest of 20% on the “loan.” It is the kind of thing a rich man might do to help out, delicately as possible, a friend of whom he was fond and who was short of cash. This £100 a year and whatever commission he earned from his travelling was all the money my father had.

Early in the following year, 1885, old Mr. Ackerley died. The doctors had gradually cut away more of his tongue (radium treatment was not then known), but the cancer had moved to his stomach. At this time occurred another important event in my father’s life: he met and quickly palled up with a local youth named Arthur Stockley, aged twenty.

In the spring of that same year de Gallatin, perhaps to be near my father, rented for the summer a furnished house in the district in New Brighton, Cheshire, and invited him to stay and bring with him any friend he liked. My father took Stockley. There was a fourth member of the party, a friend of the Count’s, another very handsome youth named Dudley Sykes, of whom I know nothing. In the words of Stockley he was “very good-looking, charming and quite harmless and never did a day’s work in his life.” He was not a guardsman. I have included a photograph of this quartet, taken in this time and place. They are sitting in the garden grouped beneath a tree on a tatty lion-skin rug spread on the grass. Bold and roving-eyed¹ Mr. Sykes is bare-headed, the rest wear boaters. Excepting Stockley all sport mustaches in the custom of the period; the Count’s is particularly heavy. They are dressed in open-necked shirts and their flannel trousers are supported by dark cummerbunds. A shaggy dog with a beard like Kruger’s lolls among them. The Count was fond of dogs. Behind them, along the sill of an open window, potted plants are ranged. Would that I had been able to peep and eavesdrop through the window and discover their secrets, if any. But I was not yet born.

What did they do? Stockley, who, I feel sure, had no interesting secrets, went off to Liverpool every day on whatever business he was engaged in, perhaps the fruit trade in which he was to end; my father still in the employ of Graham, doubtless travelled locally too, trying to gain sales; young Mr. Sykes idled about. In the evenings and at weekends they came together, bathed, played poker and whatever athletic games were available to them (I have a photo of my father and Stockley sparring in boxing gloves). The Count, who paid for everything (“We lived there in considerable luxury,” writes Stockley), had a smart dogcart and cob, in which they probably rattled about. Mme. de Gallatin was not present, and Stockley says they had no female society of any sort. They “created quite a sensation,” he says. The local residents were not used to, were suspicious and perhaps jealous of, so strange a household which contained a rich foreign nobleman with rather poppy eyes and two strikingly handsome young men, and some busybody wrote to Stockley’s mother in Worcestershire to warn her that her son was rapidly “being ruined by an adventurer and his confrères.” “However, that did not trouble me, as I knew it was entirely untrue.”

My father, aged twenty-two, seated in a chair, looks very attractive, more solid and serious than Mr. Sykes with his rather theatrical d’Artagnan face, and the Count by now was clearly bowled over by him. When the party broke up he did not want my father to return to Liverpool; unable to prevent that he went with him and accompanied him upon his commercial errands. I have a dashing punctuated letter of his to Stockley, from the Queen’s Hotel, Stockton, written on a Sunday in November, 1885:

“Here we are at the most awful place I have ever seen—Durham was quite charming and I was sorry we did not stop there for Sunday. We get on like a house on fire, the only thing is poor old Rog

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